ARTICLES
Paul Marchbanks: From Caricature to Character: The Intellectually Disabled In Dickens's Novels (Part One) 3
Arthur J. Cox: The Drood Remains Revisited: The Title Page 14
Robert Tracy: Jasper's Plot: Inventing The Mystery of Edwin Drood 29

REVIEWS
Robert Tracy on Janice M. Allen, ed.: Charles Dickens's Bleak House: A Sourcebook 39
Gill Ballnger on Gail Turley Houston: From Dickens to Dracula: Gothic Economics, and Victorian Fiction 44
Francis O'Gorman on Peter Brooks: Realist Vision 47

ANNOUNCEMENTS 000

THE DICKENS CHECKLIST—Elizabeth Bridgham 000

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS 000

Dickens Quarterly is produced for the Dickens Society with assistance from the English Departments of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and the College of General Studies, Boston University. Printed in Northampton, Massachusetts by Tiger Press.

DQ

Copyright 2006 by the Dickens Society
David Paroissien, General Editor
Trey Philpotts, Review Editor       Stas Radosh, Production Editor
Elizabeth Bridgham, Bibliographer

Dickens Quarterly is edited by David Paroissien, Emeritus Professor of English, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Articles and Notes for publication and all editorial correspondence, including queries about advertising rates, should be sent to the editorial address supplied below:

Professor David Paroissien
100 Woodstock Road
Oxford OX2 7NE, England
Email address: <paroissien@english.umass.edu>

Contributors: Please follow Walter S. Achtert and Joseph Gibaldi, The MLA Style Manual (1985) and submit two typescript copies to the editorial address above. Typescripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope and the cost of return postage, either in pounds sterling or in International Reply Coupons. Every effort will be made to decide on acceptances as soon as possible.

Reviews: The review pages are edited by Professor Trey Philpotts, Department of English, Arkansas Tech University, Russellville, AR 72801. Book reviews are commissioned and it is unlikely that we will accept unsolicited contributions.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of a specific client, is granted by the Dickens Society, provided that the base fee of U.S. $5.00 per copy, plus U.S. $0.05 per page is paid directly to Copyright Clearance Center, 27 Congress Street, Salem, Massachusetts 01970 USA. For those organizations that have been granted a photocopy license by CCC, a separate system of payment has been arranged. The fee code for all users of the Transactional Reporting Service is 0742-5473/93 $5.00 + $0.05.

The full text of Dickens Quarterly is available electronically through Chadwyck-Healey's Literary Journals Index Full Text (LIFT) and LiteratureOnline (LION) products. Contact or <marketing@chadwyck.com> or Tel. 800-521-0600.
FROM CARICATURE TO CHARACTER: 
THE INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED 
IN DICKENS’S NOVELS 
(PART ONE) 

PAUL MARCHBANKS 
(University of North Carolina) 

Yet the reliance upon disability in narrative rarely develops 
into a means of identifying people with disabilities as a 
disenfranchised cultural constituency. The ascription of 
absolute singularity to disability performs a contradictory 
operation: a character ‘stands out’ as a result of an attributed 
blemish, but this exceptionality divorces him or her from a 
shared social identity. (Narrative Prosthesis 55) 

David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder’s primary plaint in 
Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse 
(2000) is that Victorian and early modern literatures habitually 
spin disability into a spectacle, into a flashing sign or symbol meant to 
attract attention to something other than itself. Fictional disability often 
functions as a crutch or prosthesis upon which characterization, plot, 
theme, and tone may lean, little attention being drawn to the larger 
disabled population represented by the single, imaginary example. 
The physically disabled character’s very distinctiveness can lead, not only 
to isolation from those other fictional persons who react with distancing 
pity or disgust, but to a kind of representational disconnect from those 
real-world individuals with disabilities whose numbers—recognized within 
the boundary of the novel or short story—would strip the character’s 
exceptional disability of its rhetorical power. Mitchell and Snyder suggest 
that Victorian literature is highly dependent upon such “static languages,” 
that it predicates itself on predictably “sterile” and delimiting formulae of 
narrative-making (142). The question of whether this generalization 
can be justly applied to the work of one of Victorian England’s most 
prolific writers serves as the governing impetus for this essay. 

Charles Dickens seems an intuitive choice for literary defender of the 
intellectually disabled, a manifestly humanitarian author likely to carve 
out in his fiction that welcoming, inclusive space so wanting in a Victorian 
milieu increasingly preoccupied with education, industry, and self-reliance. 
Dickens’s first three novels bespeak a ready advocate for victims of many 
kinds of social injustice. The Pickwick Papers (1836–7), Oliver Twist 
(1837–9), and Nicholas Nickleby (1838–9) together establish what will
become life-long, very loud sympathies for the destitute, the orphaned, the poorly educated, and the imprisoned debtor. Like his friend and collaborator Wilkie Collins, Dickens also manifests an enduring interest in the physically disabled, especially those whose vision impairment, faulty hearing, mobility difficulties, or visible disfigurement are compounded by class inequities and poverty. Intellectually disabled characters provide an even more severe indictment of Dickens's society: the author ties the origins of figures like Smike, Mr. Dick, and Maggy right back to contemporary medical, educational, and social problems.

And yet, while Dickens often appears sympathetic to the plight of these various groups, his body of work complicates any attempt to cast him as a consistent progressive. As Peter Akroyd notes in his biography of Dickens, the novelist “was a radical by instinct rather than by ideology,” a disjunction that results in curiously disparate approaches to the same oppressed populations as one moves from novel to novel (137). Dickens’s representations of the intellectually deficient are, like his renderings of the physically disabled, tonally complex and, occasionally, ethically suspect. Only gradually does the maturing author move from old stereotypes that operate in traditionally limiting—often internally inconsistent—ways, towards more stable and three-dimensional configurations of the idiot and imbecile. Notably, as these disabled figures grow more nuanced and less bound to one-dimensional role-plays that functionally ostracize them from their peers, they also become both more peripheral to the plot and more easily absorbed into the communities of their respective novels.

Dickens's fiction provides disability studies with plenty of fertile ground in which to cultivate its embodied concerns, particularly as the popular Victorian novelist seems to move mischievously back and forth between what modern sensibilities would consider politically assailable and more politically correct portraiture. His steady attention to corporeal difference can manifest itself in a gothic fascination with grotesquerie, concentrated compassion towards a visibly disadvantaged social group, or an even-handed approach that considers the disabled as in no intrinsic way different from anyone else. His books in the late 30s and early 40s, for instance, often rely on old pseudo-philosophical equations linking physical appearance or disability with a surplus of either virtue or vice. Dickens deploys egregiously physiognomic formulae to forecast the malevolence of both Nicholas Nickleby’s schoolmaster Wackford Squeers and Daniel Quilp of The Old Curiosity Shop (1840–1), giving the former a suspiciously solitary eye and the latter the stunted stature of a classically villainous dwarf. He builds the temperaments of the crippled Tiny Tim and Nicholas Nickleby’s partially paralytic Newman Noggs atop an equally simplistic, albeit conversely figured foundation, awarding both disabled heroes intensely virtuous, altruistic sensibilities. Elsewhere, Dickens interrogates all such simplistic character formulae. Towards the end of
Our Mutual Friend (1864–5), for instance, he allows the mobility impaired Jenny Wren to display a vindictive streak, a surprise in one hitherto constructed as routinely compassionate. In similar fashion, the blind and poor Stagg of Barnaby Rudge (1841), a greedy companion of Barnaby Rudge's murderous father, is allowed to debunk outright the facile equation Dickens appears to rely on elsewhere—that a disabiling condition somehow, necessarily generates moral character.

Few critics have yet begun to excavate Dickens's configurations of intellectual disability, let alone bring them into the light of social psychology. Dickens scholars may praise the author's genius in creating such comically naïve characters as the bumbling spendthrift Mr. Micawber and the child-like Harold Skimpole, but they seem comparatively uninterested in those other secondary characters with more profound intellectual deficiencies. Contemporary critics who do venture into such territory tend to read intellectually disabled characters in metaphorical or mechanical ways. Critics like Patricia Pucinelli treat the "idiots" of American novels as mere plot devices enacting the predictable, limited roles prescribed by literary tradition, such as the moral yardstick against which other characters are measured, or the reliable plot catalyst. Others, including Martin Halliwell, cast literary idiots and imbeciles as endlessly multivalent, ultimately unmappable sites containing all manner of symbolic associations. Few, however, consider characters like Smike, Barnaby Rudge, Mr. Dick, Maggy, and Sloppy in terms of successful or failed mimesis, as representations of an actual, disabled population in uneasy dialogue with society.

Dickens's constructions of intellectual disability actually cover as broad a range as his portrayals of physical difference. Early figures like Smike and Barnaby Rudge slip easily into the snug garments laid out by convention, playing synthetic, perfunctory roles that disqualify them from full participation in their respective communities. Later characters like Mr. Dick and—to an even greater degree—Maggy and Sloppy, largely avoid such typecasting. While it would be difficult to demonstrate a strictly linear progression from functional caricature towards more nuanced characterization across Dickens's collected works, his increasingly empowering portraits of the intellectually disabled do suggest a writer more and more attuned to the social and intellectual prejudices working against this population. In her recent Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture (2004), Martha Stoddard Holmes suggests that such a maturation process informs Dickens's rendering of physically disabled characters as he invests successive disabled female characters with growing sexual and relational power. My discussion here tracks a similar pattern, using close readings to map a path from those principal characters in the 1830s and 40s whose intellectual disability compels them to serve predictably limited functions, towards those later, peripheral characters who somehow evidence greater practical and
relational agency than their more visible antecedents. This cartographic process will not preoccupy itself with nosologies, with hasty attempts to lay contemporary medical and legal distinctions atop Dickens’s changing constructions of intellectual disability. Forcibly employing such distinctive, diagnostic signposts would over-simplify our investigation of Dickens’s work, preempting closer consideration of both those earlier narratological strategies that seem to have demanded ultra-flexible characterizations of imbecility, and those more stable and socially viable configurations which followed in the 50s and 60s. Determining, for instance, that Barnaby Rudge resembles imperfectly and inconsistently the figure of an “idiot,” that Maggy’s behavior and language are faithfully “imbecilic,” and that the (anachronistic) category of “feeble-minded” best describes young Sloppy would provide a deceptively convenient, incomplete picture of Dickens's changing practice over time. At least as important as the growing technical accuracy and internal consistency of his sequential portrayals of intellectual disability are the rhetorical and ideological means serviced by these characters within the socio-imaginary bound by each of Dickens’s novels.

Smike Nickleby: A Pitiful Case

Mr. Dick and Barnaby Rudge may constitute the two “most prominent” examples of the Dickensian natural fool (Schmidt 93), but Nicholas Nickleby's closely orbiting satellite, Smike, is without a doubt Dickens's best-known simpleton. Nicholas Nickleby remains one of Dickens's most popular novels to this day, an admiration demonstrated most recently by two able film adaptations released in the last four years. The friendship between the morally expert, hard-working Nicholas and the crippled, emotionally debilitated, and intellectually compromised Smike constitutes the most compelling relationship amidst a narrative replete with romances, antagonisms, and comic entanglements. While their friendship's unabashedly maudlin texture accounts in part for its attraction, this pairing so beloved by the public deserves further analysis, its recognizable sentiment belying Dickens’s curiously complicated depiction of Smike and his disability. For example, while Dickens roots Smike's weak intellect in the toxic soil of Wackford Squeers's Yorkshire school—the boy's deficiency is clearly the result of the “care” provided by Wackford and his wife—Dickens simultaneously configures Smike's impediments as insurmountable in the same way that congenital idiocy limits mental improvement. Likewise, the tonal quality of Dickens's characterization shifts vertiginously. At moments Smike seems accepted by his community, at others, sidelined and removed. Smike alternately assumes the roles of pathetic victim, courageous runaway, slapstick theatre entertainer, sad romantic, and terminally ill invalid, a fluidity of function that limits more than it enables. While humorous
encounters with Vincent Crummles and Mrs. Nickleby leaven the melancholy atmosphere that hangs about Smike, the air he breathes remains thick with his neighbors’ pitying exhalations. Ultimately, this pity brings a new kind of isolation, then death—the very act of condescending kindness effectively divides and separates, removing Smike from the close-knit band into which he has ventured. In the final analysis, the reader's fondness for Smike cannot rescue the character from the partition prescribed for him well outside community—a bounded, remote space akin to that relegated the idiot by Victorian society and an older, well-established literary tradition.

Smike appears first as but one of a horde of degraded products turned out by Squeers's educational machine. The squalid environment of Dotheboys Hall stunts the intellectual and physical development of all its young denizens, the desperate spectacle of which stuns Nicholas when he first steps into the boys' classroom:

Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meager legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offsprings. (97; ch. 8)

Smike himself lacks the conspicuous physiognomy of some malformed peers, but his partial lameness and that haggard countenance so fancied by theatre-master Crummles do mark him as the archetypal, much to be pitied, victim. In a depraved society where “the world [rolls] on from year to year, alike careless and indifferent” to frequent examples of “injustice, and misery, and wrong,” Smike serves as one of many inevitable, irrefutable results of society’s sins (653; ch. 53).

Smike's defects, then, result not from the hereditary or gestational conditions usually implicated in developmental disability, but from the abuse that follows abandonment. Smike’s delicate health and damaged frame are the direct result of “brutality and hard usage” at the hands of Mr. Squeers; even the soft-spoken and sanguine Nicholas recognizes in Smike the “wreck” of a human being, blaming his condition on years of ill-treatment in a most “loathsome den” (247; ch. 20, 557; ch. 45). Dotheboys Hall not only constricts the young imaginations of its students—in a fashion that anticipates Mr. Gradgrind's utilitarian school in Hard Times (1854)—it squeezes out any hopes of better treatment and effectively squashes the boys’ dreams of being one day reclaimed by friends or family. The hazardous domiciliary of Dotheboys cramps Smike's natural growth, misshaping his body and mind into a mockery
of what they would have otherwise become. Smike’s guardians, that is, create his slowness, despite Ralph Nickleby’s claims to the contrary. Still unaware of their kinship, Smike’s wealthy father labels the boy an “imbecile” and claims Smike has been “of weak and imperfect intellect” from birth (562; 557; ch. 45). The evidence, however, contravenes this assertion. Just days before Smike escapes from Dotheboys, the villainous Mrs. Squeers herself comments on Smike’s mental degeneration, noting to her husband that Smike appears to be “turning silly” (90; ch. 7). Predictably, neither she nor her husband trace the boy’s condition back to their own faulty care, tender mercies which also appear to have compromised Smike’s memory. After years of living anxiously in the present to avoid the punishments that presumably followed slowing down to reflect, Smike has lost the ability to retain substantial chunks of information. Smike demonstrates the degree to which his once strong memory has faded by forgetting, mere hours after meeting Nicholas, whether his new friend was living at Dotheboys when a fellow student died (267; ch. 22; 106; ch. 9). When fate brings the escaped Smike across Squeers’s path in London, the headmaster is implicated yet again in Smike’s enervated state. The narrator explains that “such mental faculties as the poor fellow possessed…utterly deserted him,” that the boy freezes, “stunned and stupefied” (472–3; ch. 38). Smike’s reaction denotes a pathological learned helplessness, an inability—now and during John Browdie’s rescue attempt hours later—to recognize his agency in the face of Squeers’s intimidating will (481–2; ch. 39). “Stupefied” in the above passage also reiterates a second, more serious and lasting consequence of Squeers’s attentions. Smike has not only been crippled, but has been literally made stupid by “rigour and cruelty in childhood…years of misery and suffering lightened by no ray of hope,” resulting in the current “night of intellect” (476; ch. 38). That Dickens intends the benighted Smike to function at least in part as an imbecile or simpleton is underscored by Frank Stone’s accompanying illustrations; one illustration in chapter twenty-five depicts an ungainly, stringy-haired Smike with goggle-eyes and open mouth.

On the other hand, Smike cannot be simply classed as a paradigmatic intellectual degenerate. The narrator’s description of him as a “half-witted creature” (105; ch. 8) testifies, perhaps unwittingly, to the complexity—even inconsistency—of Smike’s portrayal. He is indeed a half-wit, but more in the sense that he demonstrates a normal wit only half the time than that he sports only a fraction of a normal person’s intuition and cognitive powers. At moments, Smike appears uncannily perceptive, his language becomes unusually eloquent, and he demonstrates a mature and noble willingness to sacrifice himself to defend his protector. Like one of Shakespeare’s court fools, Smike often sees to the heart of the matter. He recognizes Nicholas’s increasing paleness,
thinness, and financial concerns despite the latter's attempts to hide the truth, and, notwithstanding his eloquently stated desire to “go with [Nicholas]—anywhere—everywhere—to the world’s end—to the churchyard grave,” considers abandoning his friend to spare him the burden of providing for a fellow traveler (162; ch. 13; 251; ch. 20). Recaptured by Squeers, Smike demonstrates the real seriousness of his commitment to Nicholas's well-being, preferring to resume the old psychological and physical suffering than betray to Squeers anything that could compromise his new benefactor. But then, before the reader can grow accustomed to the new and improved, rational and heroic Smike, Dickens complicates his character once more. In this particular situation, the narrator undermines Smike’s courage immediately upon describing it with all possible pathos:

a confused and perplexed idea that his benefactor might have committed some terrible crime in bringing him away, which would render him liable to heavy punishment if detected, had contributed in some degree to reduce him to his present state of apathy and terror...Such were the thoughts—if to visions so imperfect and undefined as those which wandered through his enfeebled brain, the term can be applied—which were present to the mind of Smike, and rendered him deaf alike to intimidation and persuasion...(475; ch. 38)

Dickens appears unable, or unwilling, to present a coherent portrait of Smike's mental faculties. Here, the narrator prevents unequivocal praise of Smike's heroic intentions by mixing proof of his valor with doubt about whether the boy's scattered “thoughts” are even worth the name. Other inconsistencies emerge if one considers the former evidence of Smike's faulty memory in conjunction with his surprising ability to navigate London's winding streets, not only those walked multiple times with Nicholas, but those he has never traversed except in a state of panic (471; ch. 38, 483–5; chs. 39–40). Smike’s ability to acquire new knowledge and skills appears similarly irregular. Though he successfully learns a number of lines for his role as apothecary in Crummle’s production of Romeo and Juliet, elsewhere he “[pores] hard over a book,” “vainly endeavouring to master some task which a child of nine years old, possessed of ordinary powers, could have conquered with ease” (318; ch. 25; 148; ch. 12).

The different degrees of support offered by Nicholas during these last two crises help explain Smike's varying levels of success to a point, but they also indicate the tale's ambivalent relationship with Smike. When the young man tearfully informs Nicholas that he cannot complete the earlier reading task, Nicholas successfully discourages Smike from further attempts, claiming “in an agitated voice; ‘I cannot
bear to see you” (148; ch. 12). Smike’s later attempt to memorize lines for a play that will provide living expenses for them both bumps up against similar obstacles, but this time Nicholas jumps at the opportunity to help Smike and, bit by bit, helps him negotiate the challenge before him. Such apparently incongruous moments provoke a number of questions. To what degree does Nicholas consider Smike a charity project and to what degree a true confidant and friend? Are Smike’s intellectual deficiencies insurmountable or not? If not, what kind of environment does Smike’s improvement require? Dickens’s changing portrayal of Smike’s intellect might be defensible as a narratological strategy that underdetermines Smike’s limits to keep the audience guessing as to his final destiny, or perhaps as a more socially minded tactic to disrupt the readerly impulse to pigeon-hole the intellect of and thus prescribe the proper place for Smike (and those real people like him). The problem is, from a cultural studies perspective concerned with how fictional mimesis both reflects and shapes societal forms, that Smike’s unrealistically variable nature prevents his full assimilation into Nicholas’s family and, arguably, paves the way for both his removal from the tale’s central community and his subsequent death.

The argument that any inconsistencies in Smike’s intellectual abilities can be accounted for by laying a developmental map over his narrative, by seeing in him “a personality developing through self-realisation” does not rightly consider Smike’s final, fatal situation, nor his friends’ responses to it (Ball 125). His falling in love with Kate Nickleby may demonstrate his humanity and sensitivity (Ball 128), but it simultaneously highlights the emotional and social gap between him and those closest to him. This gap serves as more than another example of Smike’s failed self-confidence: we receive no indication whatsoever that such a love relationship could have ever been, even if Smike had made visible overtures to Kate. We know Kate belongs with Frank Cheeryble from the moment the two enter the same space. And though Smike begins to fail rapidly after meeting the beautiful Kate and subsequently becoming “more conscious of his weak intellect” (463; ch. 38), no one—including Nicholas—ever considers that the onset of “rapid consumption” (687; ch. 55) might have anything to do with unexpressed, unrequited affections. Even Newman Noggs, who notices Smike tear up while listening to Noggs enumerate Kate’s many virtues, fails to discover the truth (486–7; ch. 40). Smike just does not count as a card-carrying member of this romantically inclined community which, in the comedy’s conclusion, will plump itself with a number of happy marriages. He must instead be eliminated and the reader made to feel that such a removal is not only appropriately touching, but necessary. In an effort to comfort the bereaved Nicholas upon Smike’s death, the congenial businessman Charles Cheeryble expresses an eerily pat
formula for comfort:

we must not be cast down, no, no. We must learn to bear misfortune, and we must remember that there are many sources of consolation even in death. Every day that this poor lad had lived, he must have been less and less qualified for the world, and more unhappy in his own deficiencies. It is better as it is, my dear sir. Yes, yes, yes, it's better as it is. (746; ch. 61)

Though well-meaning in intention, and appropriately pathetic for the sentimental scene Dickens means to paint here, these encouraging words blatantly counter what the careful reader already knows about Smike to this point. It is surely strange to hear Nicholas agreeing with Cheerbyle's sentiment: “I have thought of all that sir,’ replied Nicholas, clearing his throat. ‘I feel it, I assure you’” (746; ch. 61).

Pleasantries aside, why would Nicholas agree with Cheerbyle's assessment of Smike's potential? Would it not have been consistent with Nicholas's character and previous altruism to have offered Smike a home with himself and his new bride if his friend had lived? He promised Smike such a future and introduced his friend to his own family with this goal in mind (359; ch. 29; 422; ch. 35). Would the network of friends Smike obtained in recent months have mysteriously discontinued their support of his ongoing development? He had learned the acting profession readily enough under Nicholas's tutelage, and had quickly proven himself indispensable to Mrs. Nickleby as an attentive, sympathetic listener (426; ch. 35). Given the social and developmental progress made thus far, would he really have grown increasingly “less qualified” and “unhappy in his own deficiencies” if had recovered from his illness? The above exchange between Nicholas and his new employer serves as more than a moment of socially appropriate consolation—Cheerbyle is a bit too cheery here. His words erode the novel's central relationship, upending the notion of an incremental progression on Smike's part, and erasing any mistaken assumptions of (a shared) reciprocity by throwing into greater relief the lop-sided nature of Smike and Nicholas's friendship. Nicholas might well remember the dying Smike as “the partner of his poverty, and the sharer of his better fortune” (715; ch. 58), but Smike alive and well never gave as much as he took.

Smike had hoped the balance might swing in the other direction. He had wished to be Nicholas's “faithful hard-working servant,” taking only the comfort of Nicholas's presence as payment (162; ch. 13). Nicholas himself had called for a more egalitarian relationship: “the world shall deal by you as it does by me” (162; ch. 13). In practice, however, conditions always favored Smike's status as sole receiver of goods and
services. The profoundly virtuous Nicholas taught Smike to pray (535; ch. 43), got him an acting job on the merits of Nicholas's own promising looks and abilities, and provided Smike—if briefly—with the surrogate family he desired. During one difficult period, and in an attempt to make Smike feel his worth, Nicholas had claimed that through all their difficulties Smike remained his “only comfort and stay,” adding the seemingly innocuous appendage, “The thought of you has upheld me through all I have endured today” (251; ch. 20). This gentle endearment actually, inadvertently betrayed Smike's primary function in Nicholas's daily life—that of a needy dependent, the primum mobile for Nicholas's attempts to establish a dependable livelihood. Smike may have consistently considered ways to please Nicholas (267; ch. 22), but Nicholas was the one whose acting skills and business acumen supported the two. Smike rarely did anything beyond getting himself in situations necessitating Nicholas's intervention. He was also the one who ultimately—in his fatal illness—had required the other's unremitting attention and care (711; ch. 58). Nicholas compassionated Smike with each new fit of depression that came upon him, encouraging his friend to be open with his feelings, but Smike never gained the same easy access to Nicholas's own, innermost workings. When Smike unearthed Nicholas's distress after the latter had finished writing Noggs for an account of Kate and Mrs. Nickleby, for instance, Nicholas denied his melancholy “with assumed gaiety,” afraid “the confession would have made the boy miserable all night” (359; ch. 29). Nicholas consciously, though not maliciously, retained emotional control over their relationship, insuring that he would never himself become the object of pity he preferred locating in Smike.

Ultimately, the sad spectacle of Smike earns the reader's condescension in the same way it does Nicholas's own. We indulgently relate to the attractive hero who strives and overcomes, but watch Smike with an estranging pity that petal without embracing him. Dickens encourages such distance by diminishing Smike's agency to almost nothing and providing the reader virtually no point of identification with one who seems made to suffer and die. In retrospect, Dickens rationalizes Smike's final removal by having made it seem inevitable all along. With the possible exception of his heavily applauded, proud moments on the theatrical stage (318; ch. 25), Smike does not act upon anyone in a way that could help form a mutually beneficial relationship. When not provided for as a dependent, the wretch is acted upon as a most helpless victim. As mentioned earlier, Squeers plays the role of primary scourge, wrecking on Smike “the vilest and most degrading cruelty,” dressing the nineteen-year-old in a child's clothes barely “wide enough for his attenuated frame,” habitually working his “student” to the point of exhaustion, and withholding sleep (90; ch. 7). Verbal and physical
abuse compound hard manual labor, practices Squeers accelerates when
he notices Nicholas’s kindness to Smike. Such a confiding connection
as that shared by these two fast friends has been long in coming: Smike
has for years looked through incoming letters for evidence of the
parents who abandoned him in childhood, and has long feared dying
without any intimate ties to the rest of humanity (89; ch. 7, 106; ch.
8). The boy, that is, ranks at least as high on the scale of sentimentality
as does Tiny Tim. At times Smike’s pain does provoke laughter, as when
the theatre manager appraises his emaciated countenance and body
as perfect for “an actor in the starved business” (275; ch. 22), or
when Smike learns more quickly than his lines the notion that his
character must appear extremely hungry “which—perhaps from old
recollections—he had acquired with great aptitude” (318; ch. 25). Such
sugared comedy, however, coats a hard, bitter core. These wonderful
flashes of comic relief, which also include Mrs. Nickleby’s repeatedly
mistaking his name as “Mr. Slammons,” ultimately do little to brighten
Dickens’s bleak portrait of this intellectually disadvantaged character
(426; ch. 35). Smike dies as he has lived, a helpless young man supported
by a strong and reliable friend—one towards whom he pathetically
directs the last of his dwindling energies:

At first, Smike was strong enough to walk about for short distances
at a time, with no other support or aid than that which Nicholas
could afford him. At this time, nothing appeared to interest him so
much as visiting those places which had been most familiar to his
friend in bygone days. (711; ch. 58)

The kind of vicarious identification with the Nicklebys evidenced
during Smike’s final days, together with his desire to be buried near
Nicholas’s father and have a locket of Kate’s hair secreted in his coffin,
continues to mark him as an outsider desperately looking in. Nicholas’s
family—including the class-conscious Mrs. Nickleby—proves too kind
and caring to reject Smike, but he never enters completely into their
circle. The novel’s closing illustration of the heroes placing garlands
on their cousin’s grave (the family connection comes to light too late
to gratify Smike), their infant children playing about the site and
listening to softly spoken tales of Smike’s life and times, neatly captures
his status while alive (777; ch. 65). He was always more a catalyst for
compassionate acts and words then a vital, necessary member of the
Nickleby family.

To be continued in the June and September issues, at which time
the list of WORKS CITED will appear
The Cors of Edwin Drood

Drood

The mystery of the Drood Family

The Cors of Edwin Drood

The identity of Edwin Drood

The disappearance of Edwin Drood

Dead? Or alive?
THE DROOD REMAINS REVISITED:  
THE TITLE-PAGE  

ARTHUR J. COX

The title-page for The Mystery of Edwin Drood is much more interesting than that for any other Dickens novel—although it has to be added that comparison is difficult, because so few of the others have title-pages. None survive for the first five novels (if in fact any were made) and there are none in existence for the last five, other than the one for Drood. This leaves only the title-pages of the five middle novels, Martin Chuzzlewit through Hard Times, and three of those differ widely from that for Drood in that they consist of determined, one might almost suppose desperate, attempts to fix the wanted titles, doing so over a good many sheets of paper, usually with one title per sheet. Chuzzlewit has nine such title-pages, Copperfield has sixteen and Bleak House ten. Dombey and Son is an exception: a single sheet displays one title, “Some / Dealings with the Firm / of / Dombey and Son / By Charles Dickens / Wholesale, Retail, and for Exportation.”/ and is such an elegant specimen of penmanship and is so beautifully centered and spaced over the whole page that we are involuntarily reminded of Mr. Sapsea's epitaph for his wife's tomb. We cannot know for certain whether it is the perfected product of several attempts or a leisurely (because he had his title from the beginning) exercise in lapidary inscription; but it is probably the latter, as he did not suppress the failed attempts at a title for his two subsequent novels.

As noted, there are no extant title-pages for the four novels immediately preceding Drood. That is, there are none for Little Dorrit, A Tale of Two Cities, Great Expectations or Our Mutual Friend. The closest precursor is the one for Hard Times, fifteen years before, which, as it happens, is the only other title-page in existence that at all resembles his last one. Like it, it is dated at the top—none of the others are—and, like it, it has all the considered titles on a single page, as well as some names of characters. However, when the two sheets are placed, as it were, side by side, marked differences appear. The prospective titles for Hard Times are mostly crowded into a narrow column on the right-hand side of the right-hand half of two conjoined sheets of paper (reproduced in Stone 250–1), with a few more listed just to the left of the column. They are written in a small hand, with many blottings, including some untidy clots of multiple obliterations. The title-page for The Mystery of Edwin Drood provides a striking contrast. It is immaculate. The handwriting is somewhat larger, the layout of the page is coherent and easily graspable, and, even more significantly, there
is not a single blotting or erasure. Dickens tried out 38 possible names
for the book we know as Hard Times, with several repetitions (“Hard
Times” itself putting in three appearances, one of which is scribbled
over¹), but no prospective title for his last book is repeated exactly.
There are many variations, but each change, however slight, has a
decided point.

When we look over the title-notes for the earlier book, we naturally
take them to be jottings meant only for the eye of the author. Or, any-
way, we do so until we remember that Dickens bound these notes with
the manuscript of the novel and preserved them for posterity and so
must have known that they would someday, though perhaps not until
many years later, be read by others. But, even after this recollection
and reflection, they still look very much like work-a-day notes, while
those for Edwin Drood seem to be wearing their Sunday clothes. The
suspicion that inevitably occurs is that the title-page for Drood is
either a fair copy or a final draft. Of these two possibilities, the second
is the more likely, for the revisions seem genuinely occasioned the small
exigencies and inspirations of the moment. There is a third possibility,
though, one which seems to me even more likely, and that is that the
author wrote these notes with greater premeditation than usual—probably
at one sitting, after a protracted period of mulling over the various
candidates for the title. Regardless of which of these notions is closest
to the truth, one thing is certain: Dickens was concerned with the
appearance of his notes for Drood. He deliberately made them presentable,
one might even say photogenic, and this means that he was keenly
aware, much more so than when working on those for the other book
some fifteen years before, that they would be seen by eyes other than
his own.

The heading at the top of the sheet is “Friday Twentieth August,
1869.” Beneath this, what next catches our eye is

The loss of James Wakefield

Edwyn

Our first thought is that the author was considering “Edwyn Wakefield”
as a name for his titular character, and though that may be true, it may
not be exclusively true. The “Edwyn” is situated ambiguously, not
directly under “James” but overlapping the space between it and
“Wakefield,” and it is possible that Dickens was thinking not only of
“Edwyn Wakefield,” but also of “James Edwyn,” and possibly even—
though this is a more audacious speculation—of “Edwyn James.”
Below these two lines, with something of a drop, is
James’s Disappearance

but this somehow unsatisfactory title settles nothing. Since a peculiarity of “James” and “Edwyn” is that each can serve either as a first or last name (a flexibility denied to “Wakefield,” which is a family name only2), the full name here could still be “James Wakefield,” “James Edwyn” or even “Edwyn James.” This observation acquires a sharper point when it is noticed that the ten names clustered in the upper right-hand corner of the page—Gilbert, Jasper, Michael, Arthur, Selwyn, Edgar, Alfred, Edwin, Edwyn and Oswald—all share the mentioned peculiarity of being usable either as Christian names or surnames. This seems obvious, and yet only Felix Aylmer has mentioned it in print (41), possibly because the appearance beneath the ten of such notations as

Mr Honeythunder
Mr Honeyblast
     The Dean
     Mrs Dean
     Miss Dean

in descending separate lines (and diminishing handwriting) lead the reader’s eye away from the names above and divides his response; the expectable result being that he sees all the names on that upper side as try-outs of names for lesser characters. My own guess is that Dickens jotted down the ten after he had tried “The loss of James Wakefield” as a prospective title, and possibly after but probably before he had toyed with “Edwyn”; for it was then that he recognized that what he needed was a name that could plausibly be used as a given name for a young man and then, in the last stages of the story when the unexpected connections are being made, revealed as his family name. Not only is Edwin Drood vulnerable to such a discovery but so is Neville Landless—for “Neville” could have been added to the list in the upper right-hand corner. It will be noticed that “Jasper” is included among the ten and so Edwin’s uncle is vulnerable too, even though in his case the ambiguous name is presented as a surname. Our concern at the moment is with the title-page, but perhaps we may allow ourselves, for the sake of fuller comprehension, a brief glance at the sheet immediately following it—that is, at the first page of the monthly number plans for Drood. There we find a curious notation on the left-hand sheet of paper,

     Mr Jasper

with the “Mr” underlined; a superfluous of emphasis that arouses our
suspicions. We are reminded of Magwitch’s early acquaintance in Great Expectations, Arthur (“not as being so chrisen’d,” says Magwitch, “but as a surname”; in other words, Mr Arthur), who turns out to be Miss Havisham’s brother, Arthur Havisham. We are reminded too of Mr. Crisparkle’s habit of referring to Neville Landless as “Mr Neville” (62; ch. 7), a mode of address patronizingly taken up by Neville’s coeval, Edwin Drood (72; ch. 8), who himself becomes “Mr Edwin” to Mr. Grewgious (116; ch. 11). This amiable condescension of the older men to the younger has gone unremarked because it was a common usage of the time, but “Mr Edwin” and “Mr Neville” take on an added charge of suggestiveness when brought into proximity with the ionized “Mr” of “Mr Jasper.”

But if he is not “Mr Jasper,” who is he? We can appropriately ask such a question because it is suggested by the notes themselves. Turning back to the title-page, we find that Dickens, after experimenting with some nameless (so to speak) titles, devotes the bottom half of the sheet to his search for le nom juste for his indispensable character. His first attempt was “The loss of Edwyn Brood,” but there is an embarrassment with this in that the word “brood” has no application to the young and careless fellow we know from the story, whose song quite rightly, is “Begone Dull Care” (17; ch. 2), although it most decidedly does apply to another figure standing nearby, his uncle, John Jasper, that “muddy, solitary, moping weed,” as he describes himself (164; ch. 14). “Brood” could not be used as a family name unless it was suitable to the person to whom it ostensibly applies, and so Dickens had to soften its morbidity somehow. He tried a variant spelling in the next line, with “The loss of Edwin Brude,” but “Brude,” which is meant to dilute the family resemblance of name and word without dissolving it entirely, does not quite answer the objection: not only is it phonetically identical with “brood,” its spelling complicates the effect by pointlessly invoking the word “rude.” Some more drastic alteration was needed and, in the line below that one, Dickens met the challenge by altering the initial consonant to “D,” so that we have “Drood” in the wonderfully suggestive title, “The Mystery in the Drood Family.” This was a happy stroke, because “Drood” occludes the specific emotional meaning of “brood” and yet retains subliminally some of its dark flavor. Or, to put it otherwise: “Drood” is manifestly suitable to the nephew—or, anyway, acceptable—and latently suitable to the uncle.

We can now, on the basis of such hints gleaned from the notes, attempt an answer to the question asked above. The true name of the false uncle would seem to be “Jasper Drood,” or perhaps “John Jasper Drood”—the “John“ (or “Jack,” as Edwin calls him) having the same normative function as the “Jack” in “Jack Chinaman, ‘tother side of the court,” the opium woman’s formulaic description of her business
rival (8; ch. 1; 257; ch. 23). This would seem to mean that Jasper is not what we have always assumed him to be, Edwin’s maternal rival—although we cannot reasonably doubt that he is Edwin’s uncle in some connection or another, since the two are referred to, both in the text and in the author’s notes, as uncle and nephew.

In tracing out this line of thought, we have passed over the entries in the upper middle of the page—necessarily, as they feature no names of individuals. This last observation is one that could be borne down upon a bit more heavily. That is, we could recognize that here Dickens was trying to devise a title that would outflank the difficulties involved in his search for the sort of personal name he wanted, one that could be adapted to both an apparent and a concealed purpose. These nameless titles are

Flight And Pursuit
   Sworn to avenge it
   One object in Life
A Kinsman’s Devotion
   The Two Kinsmen

The first line here is almost too transparent for comment. If those who think that Edwin Drood somehow survived his disappearance in the fourth monthly number have not appealed to it for support, it is because they assume that the flight is that of Neville Landless, with the pursuer being John Jasper. The second, third and fourth lines anticipate the diary entry that Jasper shows Crisparkle at the end of chapter 16 (186), in which he announces as his great object in life the fastening of the murder of his nephew upon the murderer and vows to devote himself to that man’s destruction.

We naturally suppose that “A Kinsman’s Devotion” and “The Two Kinsmen” were jotted down at about the same time, but there are reasons for doubting that. The first is written in fainter ink and a slightly smaller hand than the lines above it (and so could not have been written when they were) and it is not only out of alignment with those, being too far to the left, but encroaches on the underlinings of “One object in Life.” It looks very much as if it had been squeezed in as an afterthought; which is puzzling, because there was so much space between “One object in Life” and “The loss of Edwynd Brood,” the next title below it, that it could easily have been inserted between them without impinging on either. I believe I see the reason for this, although it requires some explanation.

It will be noticed that all the titles Dickens considered, after the first two tentative ones featuring the name James (which might be regarded as constituting a linked pair), are arranged in groups. These
begin with the ambivalent names in the upper right-hand corner; hanging beneath which are the more facile names for Honeythunder and the harmless Dean household; and in the middle of the page the few titles from which personal names are excluded, each composed of three or four words and of an emphatic and somewhat melodramatic character; below which are the nine lines in which he searches for that name which he will know only when he sees it; with all these ending with something like a coda at the bottom of the page. This division of the titles into groups was of course done consciously by Dickens, to satisfy his seemingly instinctual need to bring order to whatever materials he might be dealing with (and which today would be called, in an attempt to repudiate the example it sets, obsessive). “A Kinsman’s Devotion” evidently occurred to him as a likely prospect after he had already written “The loss of Edwyn Brood”—which would explain why it is aligned vertically with it. In his zeal to separate it from that title, and therefore from the projected group of titles with personal names (and also to allow room for heavy underscorings, like the others in the middle of the page), he raised it too high, so that it trespasses on the markings below “One object in Life.” The too-wide space under “The loss of Edwyn Brood” is probably compensatory.

To repeat: the two kinsman titles did not occur to Dickens simultaneously or sequentially. The first has the same locus of inspiration as the two titles immediately above it, but the second seems to have been suggested by some other consideration. It might be thought that this was simply the use of the word kinsman in the other title, but there is a further possibility. “The Two Kinsmen” is also displaced to one side—in its case very much to the right; again, not because there was not enough space between the two titles to the left, but because the underlinings of “A Kinsman’s Devotion” had been dropped so low that this new title could not have been interposed without being written across them. It was obviously thought of only after “The loss of Edwyn Brood” and then “A Kinsman’s Devotion” had been entered in the list. It is not likely to have been immediately after, because it is written in a still smaller hand and in a darker ink than the other kinsman title: a shade of ink like that resumed in “The loss of Edwyn Drood,” or at the end of “The Mystery in the Drood Family,” just above it. Either way, it is my guess that it was not until he had jotted down “The Mystery in the Drood Family” as a prospective title and had reflexively glanced in the direction of the kinships he had in mind there, that “The Two Kinsmen” suggested itself.

This small speculation has radical implications for our understanding of the novel. When we reconsider “The Two Kinsmen” from the perspective provided by “The Mystery in the Drood Family,” we see that it is not likely to be what we had supposed it to be, merely a reference to
the uncle and nephew in the foreground. That it includes them is undoubtedly true, but it cannot be the whole truth. The mystery in the Drood family cannot be a mystery confined to the present generation, because there is no such family in the present generation: Edwin and Jasper are members of the same family but cannot be said to constitute a family in and of themselves. Dickens must have had in mind other kinsmen, perhaps ones not presently on the scene or not presently identified as members of the Drood clan. These would have to be citizens of that generation missing from the half of the novel we have: the fathers and mothers, perhaps the uncles and aunts, of the younger characters, such as Edwin, Jasper, Neville, Helena, Tartar and even Deputy; which would give us a story of the Two Generations sort, as exemplified by Wilkie Collins's then-recent novel, Armadale (1866). This is not something that can be convincingly argued on the present occasion, but, in considering such matters, on this or any occasion, we should not lose sight of Dickens's habitual resorting in the latter parts of his books to startling revelations of unexpected family connections, nor should we forget his fondness for contrasts, parallelisms and doublings of all kinds, including what might be called rhyming plot-lines.

Dickens hit upon “Edwin Drood” as the final spelling of the eponym when he wrote the title “The Disappearance of Edwin Drood” in the third line from the bottom of the page. This can be said with some confidence despite the fact that the name appears in the same form one and a half lines higher as “Edwin Drood in hiding,” for that title is also written to one side and evidently as an afterthought. His intention, it seems, was to insert it between “The flight of Edwyn Drood” and “The loss of Edwin Drude,” but was unable to do so because the space between them was too narrow (although this is not apparent in the typescript facsimiles of the Clarendon and Penguin editions). Most likely, what he had wanted to do was to place it under “The flight of Edwyn Drood,” but had to content himself with placing it in the closest possible proximity to that title: for “flight” and “in hiding” are related ideas—at least in the context of “disappearance,” as in the title he had just written.

These two titles (“flight” and “in hiding”) could be taken as hints that Dickens did not intend for Edwin Drood to vanish permanently. A difficulty with this notion is that it is impossible to believe that he would have used a flat and literal title and, moreover, one that would strip his story of much of its mystery. If Edwin Drood has been murdered, he would not call his book “The Murder of Edwin Drood.” If Edwin has simply fled from Cloisterham (say for the reasons so cogently advanced by Jasper in chapter 16, pp. 178–9), he, Dickens, is not going to call it “The Flight of Edwin Drood,” using that word in its pedes-trian, as it were, sense of running away; and if Edwin, for reasons known
only to himself and the author, has voluntarily concealed himself, the author is not going to proclaim “Edwin Drood in Hiding” as the title of his book. Still, he considered these titles and must have had a reason for doing so, and what this suggests is that each title, although it seems to have a plain and simple meaning, is actually liable to more than one construction. It is but a short step from this thought to the recognition that, even if Edwin Drood is dead, there is a sense in which he has taken flight—that same sense in which Mrs. Skewton takes flight in chapter 41 of Dombey and Son, and, similarly, that even if Edwin Drood is dead, there is a sense in which he is in hiding (and in a place in which he will remain hidden until such time as his body is discovered). We can understand the appeal these two titles would have had for Dickens, but we can be grateful that he resisted their small temptations, for they are too misleading to be truly justified.

Immediately below “The Disappearance of Edwin Drood” is The Mystery of Edwin Drood, a title we can at last italicize, as it is the one Dickens chose and probably the last one he considered. The words “Dead? Or alive?” appear below it, but he cannot have seriously contemplated them as the book. It will be noticed that the three words have been set apart, as if they constituted a separate group: they are not only placed near the bottom of the page, they are carefully centered, like a motto. It may be that Dickens jotted them down, not for any practical purpose but simply as an expression of a fundamental question. But, since it is a question to which there two possible answers, one or the other of which must be true, it lacks that agreeable air of irony, ambiguity and suggestiveness the titles above it have, and appears, in their company, as brutally simplistic. Besides, he had already worked out, through a series of successive steps, the problems inherent in the original title materials and had reached a solution—I would say the solution: The Mystery of Edwin Drood.

This is surely the moment to recommend that the statement, often enough made and always credited to Dolby (46), that the title had been decided “by 27 September” of 1869 should be reconsidered. Technically, the statement must be correct—the title certainly had been chosen by that late date—but there is no reason for specifying that particular date. Dolby says that “towards the end of July, the idea for a new book had taken possession of” Dickens, adding that

He was sorely puzzled for a long while to find a title that pleased him. This, however, being at length decided on, he gave a little dinner of three, a sort of christening party, at which we drank but one toast, “Success to the ‘Mystery of Edwin Drood’” (434; 436)

Unfortunately, he does not tell us when this little party took place (nor
does he mention the name of the third person present, although it was of course Ellen Ternan). He goes on to explain, in a long paragraph, that Dickens was so busy during this period that he had to refuse all invitations (436–7). The implication of the paragraph is that Dickens was already working on Drood at the time, and it was not his habit to begin work on a novel until he had his title. Dolby then remarks that “The Birmingham Inaugural Address was delivered [by Dickens, in his capacity as President of the Midland Institute] on Monday, September 27th.” This is the only specific date mentioned within several pages, but it is not one with any discernible application to Drood.

I would like to propose another date as that on which the title was chosen: the one at the top of the title-page: “Friday Twentieth August, 1869.”

In other words, the “long while” during which Dickens “was sorely puzzled...to find a title that pleased him” did not begin on the twentieth of August, as has been supposed, but ended then. Most likely, it began in late July, when the possibilities of this new story began to glimmer upon him, and it ended when he composed that very neat page under the heading we have.

I said above that it was not Dickens’s habit to begin a novel before he had his title; actually, I know of nothing that suggests that he could get on at all until he had his title. And yet he wrote a letter dated Friday the twentieth of August 1869, the same day and date as at the top of the title-sheet, to Frederick Chapman, asking what Chapman and Hall would offer for his new story, if he should decide to publish it in twelve monthly parts and not as a serial in All the Year Round. (This was the first time it was revealed anywhere that the book might be published in twelve parts and not the long-sanctioned. twenty.) He does not mention the title, but he never did so in business correspondence concerning this book,7 and Dickens evidently meant business. Despite that small uncertainty as to the mode of publication, Friday the twentieth was a day of decision.8

Or so it would seem. And yet we cannot forget the almost pristine condition of the book’s title-page—a page without blots or repetitions. I do not mean to imply that it was for display purposes only. It certainly was not: the names in the upper right-hand corner are hastily written; there are two accidental marks (the upper one, to the left of the Deans, may be an aborted entry); and, again, the interpolations seem genuine. Still, it was to some extent a staged affair: not so much a polished public performance as a dress rehearsal; and, as with other such rehearsals, there were small difficulties along the way that had to be overcome and tardy inspirations that had to be incorporated. This is not only shown by the conscious development of the titles, at least the eponymous ones, but also and equally by the very existence of those
three afterthoughts which Dickens referred back to previous lines. If this page were purely the product of his primitive reflections, a sowing of his first wild notes, unmindful of others’ eyes, he would simply have jotted down each thought where it fell, as he did when making the title-notes for *Hard Times*, without trying to squeeze this one or that one into some more appropriate position. He had plainly either pondered the possibilities at length, or had already made, or was now making to one side, rougher notes that he did not want others to see. What we have here are notes he did want others to see; and with this recognition of a public dimension to his private notes we necessarily touch upon some intriguing questions as to its extent and bearing. But I would like to suspend any discussion of these questions until such time as Dickens’s plans and notes for his novel as a whole can be considered, for his intentions show themselves more clearly and fully in them, and more interestingly.

However, there remains a mystery connected with his choice of a title that could be, and so should be, attended to now—and that is his inclusion of the word “Mystery” in his title. In 1861, Dickens accepted for *All the Year Round* a novel by Edward Bulwer-Lytton that was eventually serialized, after some discussion between the two as to what would be the most effective title, as *A Strange Story*. At one point its author had proposed “Margrave, A Tale of Mystery,” to which Dickens replied on 20 May 1861: “As a title, Margrave a Tale of Mystery would be sufficiently striking. I prefer “Wonder” to “Mystery”, because I think it suggests something higher and more apart from ordinary complications of plot, or the like; which “Mystery would seem to mean” (Letters: 9: 417).

It will be noticed that his objection to the suggested title does not entirely condemn complications of plot (to which he was, after all, rather partial himself). His point is that a word suggesting such things does not express the character of the story, which relies chiefly upon clairvoyance, mesmerism and similar marvels for its interest. Still, why did Dickens, after pressing such a definition upon his friend, choose to call his own story *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*? Did it mean that what he was offering his readers in this book was nothing other, or nothing more, than “ordinary complications of plot, or the like”?

Probably not, for there are instances in which he used the word in a sense not restricted to that definition. A few years earlier, he had opened the third chapter of the first book of *A Tale of Two Cities* with an observation: “A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other.” And later, while aboard the “Cuba” on his second voyage to America in the winter of 1867, he read Herman Melville’s *Pierre* (1852) and admired it, “not only for its grim and horrible story,” as he told
Georgina Hogarth in a letter of 13–17 November, “but for its suggestion of wheels within wheels, and sad human mysteries” (Letters 11: 478). It will surely not be out of place to mention in connection with that first usage the 1966 film, “The Koumiko Mystery”—not a tale of intrigue and murder, but a study of a young Japanese woman, the mystery being “the mystery of human individuality”; especially, as Dickens goes on to say, in the observation just quoted from A Tale of Two Cities, that death “is the inexorable consolidation and perpetuation of the secret that was always in that individuality.” This has an unexpected and yet rather obvious application to Drood, which is famously concerned with a supposed double-identity, and also, though less obviously, with that “complete understanding” (65; ch. 7) that exists between the Landless twins, Helena and Neville, amounting almost, or so it would seem, to a shared individuality.

There are other occasions on which Dickens used the word, or seemingly understood the word, in a sense not constricted to any narrow meaning. Peter Ackroyd quotes from Dickens a reference to “an old Cathedral town,” probably Rochester, characterized by “universal gravity, mystery, decay and silence” (1054), which has the effect of suggesting a greater congeniality between the story-line of Drood and its Cloisterham setting than previously thought. Some pages later, Ackroyd retails a story which has Dickens “discussing The Mystery of Edwin Drood with a friend” (which I very much doubt), and adds: “Well, you, or we,” he said to Dickens, “are approaching the mystery—” [and] Dickens, “who had been, and was at the moment, all vivacity, extinguished his gaiety, and fell into a long and silent reverie, from which he never broke during the remainder of the walk (1070). 10 We of course recognize that Dickens became so resolutely silent because he was determined to say nothing about his book; but it is also possible, as has been suggested, that he took the remark as having reference to, or was reminded of, another approaching mystery, one for which there is no solution. 11

In the end, it is impossible to believe that when Dickens chose to call his book a “Mystery” he was confining the meaning of that word to ingenuities of plotting (although those would undoubtedly have existed) and was not using it also in some more imaginative and suggestive way. It might even be suspected that his description of Pierre as consisting of “wheels within wheels, and sad human mysteries” could also serve as a description of The Mystery of Edwin Drood itself—although that is a suspicion that could only have been confirmed by the book in its finished state.
NOTES

1 Some titles were repeated for a purpose. Not quite two-thirds of the way down the right-hand column of that page, Dickens has placed two strongly marked horizontal lines just below the words “Black and White,” but these are not underscorings for that prospective title but represent a demarcation. The thirteen titles below the double bar (six repeated from above it) are ones he lists in his letter of 20 January 1854 to Forster (Life, VII, i, 564–5; Letters 7: 254), in which he seeks his friend’s help in choosing a title. They met at 2 that afternoon and, together, decided the title then. Each had selected three names from the fourteen (not thirteen: see note 6) listed in the letter, and since each had chosen “Hard Times” as one of his three, that became the name of the book.

2 It will be remembered that “Wakefield” is the title of a short story by Hawthorne, in which a man of that name vanishes and then, twenty years later, long after he is presumed dead, comes back to his wife and home and behaves as he had never been gone—he had been living one street away all that time. See Twice-Told Tales (1837), or The Complete Novels and Selected. Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Random House, 1937), 920–26. It is curious that those who believe the missing Edwin Drood to still be alive have never called attention to the fact that at one point Dickens had considered naming him Wakefield.

3 Great Expectations, ed. Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: OUP, 1994), 344 and 348. And there is also “Mr. George” in Bleak House, who is discovered in ch. 55 to be George Rouncewell, son and brother of two other characters.

4 The reader may object that, by my own account, this seemingly instinctual need was not much in evidence when he was working on the title-page for Hard Times. It is true that it is untidy when compared with the corresponding page for Edwin Drood, but even with it the irreplaceable instinct makes itself felt—although it does so, as will be seen, invisibly. The fourteen candidates Dickens submitted to Forster (see note 1) included “The Gradgrind Philosophy,” which was one of his own three semi-finalists, and yet it is not to be found on the title-page of Hard Times. The thirteen others all have tick-marks adjacent to them and there is such a mark at the bottom of the stunted column to the left (see Stone 250), but there is no title beside or below it. The page is attached to another sheet of paper, on which Dickens estimates the quantity of MS needed for serialization in Household Words. This sheet is 7 inches long—his hand-torn and hand-cut MS sheets varied in length from 7 to 7.4 inches—and he has obviously trimmed off the bottom quarter inch of the title-page, so that it would exactly match the other sheet in size, and in doing so he sacrificed “The Gradgrind Philosophy.” He was carefully preserving his notes for future readers, but it would seem that, in this instance at least, neatness had taken precedence over full disclosure.

5 About the time Dickens was beginning work on Drood, he received from Robert Lytton, son of Bulwer-Lytton, a narrative, “The Murder of John Ackland,” for possible publication in All the Year Round. Dickens accepted it but changed the title to “The Disappearance of John Ackland,” explaining to Lytton in a letter of 2 September
1869 that this “will leave the reader in doubt whether he really was murdered, until the end” (Letters 12: 404)

And not in the sense in which Florence Dombey takes flight in “The Flight of Florence,” ch. 48 of the same novel. For Mrs. Skewton’s flight, see Alan Horsman’s edition (Oxford: 2001, p. 619): “There is something else upon its flight beside the wind and clouds.” Dickens seems to have been fond of the word, using it in both its commonplace and fanciful sense, sometimes in a single piece of writing, as he does in his essay, “A Flight” (Charles Dickens: Selected Journalism, 1850–1870, ed. David Passcoe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997). He gave the title “Divers Flights” to the original form of ch. 20 of Dood, the first flight being prosaic and the last poetic. (After Dickens’s death, John Forster, to eke out the material, divided the chapter between the fifth and sixth numbers and reduced the title of the first part to “A Flight.”) The author had considered calling this last book, though one hopes not for very long, “Flight and Pursuit.”

In his letters to Chapman (and also in those to his solicitor, Frederick Ouvry), he always referred to it as “the new book,” doing so as late as 18 March of the following year. See Letters 12: 432, 440, 450, and 482. The first mention of the title in a letter to Chapman was dated 26 March 1870 (498).

The title-page for Hard Times is also dated Friday the twentieth, although in its case the month was not August but January. Dickens wrote to Forster that same day, saying, “It is my usual day, you observe, on which I have jotted them [the possible titles] down—Friday!” (Letters 7: 254). It is possible, perhaps likely, that even though other days of the week were available, on which to begin work on Dood, but it is not likely that he also chose the twentieth. This is for two reasons: the twentieth does not seem to have had any personal significance for Dickens, and, since Friday falls on the twentieth of the month only 1.5 times a year, it would not be practical for a working writer to insist on both day and date. As far as I have been able to determine—the precise dating of these matters is a little difficult—the only novels he unmistakably began on both a Friday and a twentieth are these two.


The anecdote is taken from “A Day with Charles Dickens” by Blanchard Jerrold (Ackroyd 1140); memoir first appeared in The Gentleman’s Magazine, 5 (1870), 228–41, and was reprinted several times, most notably in Jerrold’s book, The Best of All Good Company (London, 1871). See Don Richard Cox, entries 575 and 578, for more detailed information. The edition I have seen is a reprint of the 1871 London book, published in Boston in 1878 by William F. Gill, with the reported conversation appearing on pp. 16–17.

In his introduction to the most recent Everyman’s edition of Dood, Ackroyd tells what appears to be a corrupted version of the above story: “He had been discussing the book with a friend, emphasizing its title as a clue to its meaning. ‘Well, you or we,’ he said to Dickens, ‘are approaching the mystery.’ By this he meant that they were approaching death itself, and at once Dickens became silent and fell into a reverie”
(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004; xiii.). That startling first sentence is not to be believed except on the most compelling evidence, and no evidence of any sort is given. I do not find it in Ackroyd's biography of Dickens, nor in what would presumably be its source, “A Day with Charles Dickens.” As for the third sentence, Jerrold merely conjectures that Dickens may have taken the comment by the unidentified “dear friend” as having reference to death.

WORKS CITED


All the title-pages referred to here are reproduced in this volume, both photographically and in typescript facsimiles. The originals are to be found, bound with their respective manuscripts, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, South, London.
JASPER’S PLOT: INVENTING
THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD

ROBERT TRACY
(University of California, Berkeley)

Attack the story like a radiant suicide, utter the great NO to life without weakness; then you will see a magnificent cathedral, and your senses, vectors of unutterable derangement, will map out an integral delirium. Michel Houellebecq, H.P. Lovecraft: Contre le monde, contre la vie (1991)

Lay Preceptor of Cloisterham cathedral and opium addict, John Jasper's art is music, but he is also inventing a plot and writing a book about a murder that has not yet taken place. As a character in The Mystery of Edwin Drood, he is writing a variorum version of the novel in which he appears, attempting to control its plot and define some of its characters. Jasper as novelist is a projection of Dickens himself, who has imagined so many crimes and murdered so many characters in so many novels. Jasper's book is his diary, but it is also a detailed biography of his nephew, Edwin Drood, and it celebrates Jasper's apparent devotion to Drood. “A line for a day would be quite as much as my uneventful life would need, Heaven knows,” he tells Crisparkle, “but that my Diary is, in fact, a Diary of Ned’s life too” (110; ch. 10). It is also to be a diary of Ned's death, and a fiction about the identity of his murderer.

Edwin Drood and Rosa Bud have been betrothed since childhood. Their marriage is considered a settled thing. But in chapter 6 the Landless twins, Neville and Helen, arrive in Cloisterham, and Neville Landless is immediately attracted to Rosa. Dickens has already strongly hinted that Jasper himself is obsessed with Rosa, so much so that he represents a danger to Drood. Jasper hates his life as “a poor monotonous chorister and grinder of music” at Cloisterham cathedral. He compares himself with some “wretched monk” from the cathedral’s past, who took “to carving demons out of the stalls and seats and desks” of the choir. “What shall I do?” he demands. “Must I take to carving them out of my heart?” (19–20; ch. 2). Jasper will soon carve a demonic Neville Landless out of his own heart to be blamed for Drood’s murder. Apparently Drood’s affectionate uncle and guardian, in fact his bitter enemy, in opium dreams Jasper has deliberately and repeatedly invoked visions in which he kills Drood in order to possess Rosa.

On Landless's first night in Cloisterham, Jasper instigates and carefully stage-manages a quarrel between the newcomer and Edwin Drood. “quarrel (Fomented by Jasper)” Dickens writes in his brief notes for
chapter seven; “Goblet. And then confession to Mr Crisparkle Jasper lays his ground” (Drood 285). At an evening party Jasper has observed Landless’s interest in Rosa, and noted how Landless resents Drood’s air of easy proprietorship over her. After leaving the party the two young men quarrel: Drood is “condescending,” and over-reacts when Landless mentions his betrothal to Rosa. Both become mutually insulting and even “savage” (72–3; ch. 8). Jasper eavesdrops on their quarrel, then intervenes, ostensibly as a peacemaker, and invites them to join him in a friendly drink. But once in his rooms, he deliberately brings up the subject of Rosa again by drawing their attention to her portrait.

Jasper prepares “a jug of mulled wine” which “seems to require much mixing and compounding” and serves each “a large goblet glass,” which he has apparently doctored in some way. Drood and Landless become “quickly and remarkably flushed,” their speech “thick and indistinct.” Jasper speaks of Drood’s complacency about the enviable prospects before him. Landless takes the bait, charges Drood with vanity and conceit, and calls him “a common fellow, and a common boaster.” “You may know a black common fellow, or a black common boaster.” Drood replies, and insults Landless by calling him “no judge of white men.” Landless loses his temper, hurls his glass into the fireplace and leaves, hearing himself “bolted and barred out, like a dangerous animal” (79; ch. 8). The entire encounter is as carefully manipulated by Jasper within the novel as it is by Dickens at his desk. He follows it up with a late night visit to Crisparkle, to describe Landless as “Murderous!.”

He might have laid my dear boy dead at my feet. It is no fault of his, that he did not. But that I was, through the mercy of God, swift and strong with him, he would have cut him down on my hearth. …There is something of the tiger in his dark blood.” (81; ch. 8)

After he has provoked and stage-managed this violent quarrel, Jasper writes a villain into his story of Ned’s life, a fictional version of Neville Landless. His fiction is a self-portrait; he attributes to the impulsive but innocent Landless his own determination to destroy Drood and possess Rosa. Writing about another man as murderous, he is really writing about himself. He has written Landless into his story of “Ned’s life” as the likely murderer of Edwin Drood, providing him with a motive and recording those threats to Drood’s life that Jasper has carefully provoked, threats that appear to have been carried out when Drood later vanishes. By stressing Landless’s murderous fury and endowing it with his own jealousy about Rosa Bud, Jasper has revised Landless into a projection of himself, a demon carved out of his own heart, and manipulated him as Dickens and other novelists manipulate their characters. Within a few days he has aroused “a prejudice against”
Neville Landless in Cloisterham. Mr. Crisparkle warns of “a notion about that [Landless] is a dangerously passionate fellow, of an uncontrol-
able and furious temper,” and Helen points out that this is because
Jasper “maligns him every day!” (104; ch. 10).

Soon Jasper is reading Crisparkle his diary entries about the quarrel,
which portray Landless as “demoniacal” and “savage.”

Past midnight.—After what I have just now seen, I have a morbid
dread upon me of some horrible consequences resulting to my dear
boy, that I cannot reason with or in any way contend against. All my
efforts are vain. The demoniacal passion of this Neville Landless, his
strength in his fury, and his savage rage for the destruction of its
object, appal me. So profound is the impression that twice since have
I gone into my dear boy’s room, to assure myself of his sleeping safely,
and not lying dead in his blood. (110; ch. 10).

A newcomer in Cloisterham, Landless is conveniently cast for the
role of murderer by his hot temper and his un-English appearance and
background. Like Hortense in Bleak House, he is a hot-blooded foreigner.
The Landless twins are from Ceylon, and possibly of mixed blood. Even
the well-meaning Mr. Crisparkle sees Neville Landless and his sister
Helen as having “something untamed about them both; a certain air
upon them of hunter and huntress… half shy, half defiant; fierce of look”.
But Crisparkle quickly adds, “yet withal a certain air of being the
objects of the chase, rather than the followers,” the hunted rather than
the hunters (58; ch 6). The Neville Landless Crisparkle knows is quick
to anger and intemperate, but he is not the murderous demon Jasper
has introduced into his text. Jasper has reinvented him and written
him into the story of Ned’s life to appear to be Drood’s murderer,
investing him with his own destructive rage.

By developing in his text this image of Landless, Jasper is inventing
a plausible murderer for a murder which has not yet taken place. Like
Dickens, like any novelist, he is imagining a character and putting that
character in position to perform an assigned role in the plot he is
developing, to be suspected, to be “read” as the murderer of Edwin
Drood. Jasper’s opium reveries are a metaphor for the novelist’s brooding
over a developing plot. In those reveries, Jasper has already committed
Drood’s murder over and over. Re-visitng Princess Puffer’s opium den
some time after the murder, Jasper recalls his repeated rehearsals there
of something he was going to do:

I did it, here, hundreds of thousands of times. What do I say? I did it
millions and billions of times. I did it so often, and through such vast
expanses of time,… always in one way. …When I could not bear my
life, I came to get the relief, and I got it. . . . I always made the journey
first, before the change of colors and the great landscapes and glitter-
ing processions began. They couldn’t begin till it was off my mind. I
had no room till then for anything else” (260–1; ch. 23).

When The Mystery of Edwin Drood opens, with Jasper awakening
from an opium dream in Princess Puffer’s sordid den, he has just
experienced the sinful but gratifying vision he can only enjoy through
opium. Dickens hints that this vision is of committing a crime, and it is
a crime for which he expects punishment. As that initial opium dream
fades, a pinnacle on the cathedral tower at Cloisterham/ Rochester
turns into “the rusty spike on the top of a post of an old bedstead (7; ch.
1).” As Jasper wakens, he imagines these spikes as set up to punish, to
impale criminals in the “Oriental” fantasy that invariably follows his
vision of murdering “Ned,” the name Princess Puffer has heard him
threaten with death (161–2; ch. 14). There are scimitars, and “thrice
ten thousand dancing-girls.” Sultans, dancing-girls, and punishment
hint at some sort of crime, perhaps involving a sexual transgression,
some invasion of the harem. Jasper will murder Drood in order to
possess Rosa Bud.

Jasper has imagined possessing Rosa, who lives in the Nuns’ House,
a school for young ladies, a kind of harem. He has imagined killing
Drood to do so. Jasper’s opium dreams rehearse the fictional plot he is
developing, with himself as protagonist, Drood and Rosa as victims,
and eventually Neville Landless as both villain and victim. Jasper’s
dreams come out of the ink bottle (258; ch. 23) in which Princess Puffer
mixes her potions, as Dickens’s novels came out of the ink bottle on his
desk. Jasper mixes in elements and images from his powerful and
well-stocked imagination—stocked, like Dickens’s imagination, with
images of violence, of obsessive lovers, with recollections of Rochester
and the Arabian Nights.

“I have been taking opium for a pain—an agony—that sometimes
overcomes me” (18; ch. 2), Jasper tells Drood, without explaining that
the agony is the expected marriage of Drood and Rosa Bud. In a manu-
script passage, which Dickens omitted from his printed text, Jasper’s
reference to his use of opium is connected with the murder to come,
when Jasper adds, “Its effects steal over me like a blight or a cloud, and
pass. <There is no cause for alarm> You see them in the act of passing.
Put those knives out at the door—both of them!” He covers up a mur-
derous impulse by claiming that the knives on the table might attract
lightning, but Dickens adds that there was no “passing likelihood of a
thunder-storm” (Cardwell, 10–11).

Many people have unnecessarily troubled themselves about a solution
to The Mystery of Edwin Drood. Dickens explicitly told several people—his
son, Charles Dickens, Jr; John Forster; Luke Fildes, his illustrator—that Jasper murdered Edwin Drood. In an interview with Rosa in the garden at the Nuns' House, six months after Drood's disappearance, Jasper implicitly admits the murder. Throughout the interview, Jasper is described as “wicked and menacing…darkly threatening,” “his convulsive hands absolutely diabolical.” Knowing that Drood and Rosa had broken off their betrothal before Drood’s murder, making that murder unnecessary, Jasper now sees in Landless not only the villain he has cast as Drood's murderer but another potential rival for Rosa. “Judge for yourself whether any other admirer shall love you and live, whose life is in my hand,” he tells the terrified Rosa. “That is an inexpiable offense in my eyes.” In threatening to destroy Lawless, or any other rival, he implies that he has killed Drood for the same offence (214–5; ch.19).

He is prepared to kill Lawless by bringing him to the gallows. Ever since Drood's disappearance, Jasper has insisted publicly that Landless murdered him and worked to blacken Landless’s reputation. He cites his own diary and Landless's violent temper as evidence, admittedly only circumstantial evidence. Jasper boasts that he has been working “to entangle the murderer as in a net.”

I have since worked patiently to wind and wind [the murder] round him, and it is slowly winding as I speak. …Circumstances may accumulate so strongly even against an innocent man [italics in original], that, directed, sharpened, and pointed, they may slay him. …Young Landless stands in deadly peril (216; ch. 19).

Jasper actually admits that Landless is in fact not guilty by offering to abandon his efforts to frame him for Drood’s murder if Rosa will only give herself to him. He will crush his “labors in the cause of a just vengeance for six toiling months,” he tells her, and gives her time to think about his offer. “I shall wait for some encouragement and hope,” he adds; “I shall not strike too soon. Give me a sign that you attend to me” (217; ch. 19).

Writing The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Dickens was less interested in a murder mystery and its solution than he was in studying Jasper and finding a new narrative technique to tell his story. In this last novel he is still experimenting. His most important innovation was to be the narrative method he planned to employ. “A very curious and new idea,” he told Forster in August 1869; “Not a communicable idea (or the interest of the book would be gone), but a very strong one, though difficult to work.” He soon explained both plot and idea to Forster:
The story, I learnt immediately afterward, was to be that of the murder of a nephew by his uncle; the originality of which was to consist in the review of the murderer’s career by himself at the close, when its temptations were to be dwelt upon as if, not he the culprit, but some other man, were the tempted. The last chapters were to be written in the condemned cell, to which his wickedness, all elaborately elicited from him as if told of another, had brought him (Forster bk. 11: ch. 2: 366).

The novelty—and difficulty—of this idea lies in the murderer telling his own story as if it were someone else’s. Visiting Boston in January 1868, before he began to write The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Dickens made a point of visiting the room in the Massachusetts Medical College where Professor John Webster had murdered Dr. George Parkman in 1849. He had recently published Sir James Emerson Tennant’s account of the murder in All the Year Round (14 December 1867) and knew that Webster, in the week following the murder and even after his arrest, seemed completely convinced of his own innocence and zealous that the real murderer be found. He maintained a calm detachment through his trial, and only confessed shortly before his execution. His apparent ability to separate himself from his crime resembles Miss Twinkleton’s dualities, as Dickens describes and explains them:

As, in some cases of drunkenness, and in others of animal magnetism, there are two states of consciousness which never clash, but each of which pursues its separate course as though it were continuous instead of broken (thus, if I hide my watch when I am drunk, I must be drunk again before I can remember where), so Miss Twinkleton has two distinct and separate phases of being (24; ch. 3).

These “separate phases of being,” in turn, were an important plot element in Wilkie Collins’s The Moonstone (1868), as many critics have noted. In The Moonstone, Franklin Blake removes the jewel from its hiding-place while inadvertently and unknowingly under the influence of opium. Awake, he has no recollection of what he has done. Some time later, Blake agrees to take opium again. Once drugged, he sleeps for a time, than makes his way to the place where he has hidden the stone. Collins and Dickens were alike indebted to the theories of Dr. John Elliotson in his Human Physiology (1840), who suggested that an individual could have “two distinct and separate phases of being” under the influence of alcohol, hypnosis, or opium and other hallucinogens.

Webster in real life, Blake in Collins’s novel, are both convinced
that they are innocent of the crimes they have committed. Webster
may simply have suppressed through a kind of self-hypnosis any memory
of what he had done, even as he dismembered Parkman’s body in his
laboratory. Collins’s Franklin Blake was genuinely unaware of his
actions while drugged. Jasper is somewhere in between. He wants Rosa
Bud for himself, and bitterly resents Drood’s betrothal to her. The story
of Ned’s life he is writing must become the story of Ned’s death, and of
the execution of Neville Landless for Drood’s murder. Jasper can even
improvise another fictional plot when he learns that Drood and Rosa
had broken their engagement. Perhaps, Jasper suggests to Grewgious,
Drood was embarrassed about the attention the broken engagement
would arouse. “I begin to believe it possible that he may have disap-
peared of his own free will,” he argues, “and may yet be alive and well!”
(179; ch. 16). Jasper succeeded in controlling and complicating the
story so successfully that, six months after Drood disappeared, half
Cloisterham believes that Drood had been murdered by Landless, but
the other half thinks he “had, for his own purposes, spirited himself
away” (256; ch. 23). His success is evident when we remember that,
despite Dickens’s clear statements to the contrary, many suggested
solutions to Dickens’s mystery assert that Drood is not dead at all, but
has, for some reason, engineered his own disappearance. Audiences at
the 1985 Broadway musical were asked to vote on how the show should
end, with one option being Drood’s reappearance.

Jasper’s ability to distance himself from his actions is presumably the
consequence of his habitual escape into an alternative to his life as “a
poor monotonous chorister and grinder of music” by using opium. In
his drug-induced dreams he enjoys that alternative life, but he cannot
control it. Jasper A is apparently a respectable citizen, but with opium
he reinvents himself as Jasper B, a murderer whose activities will be
objectively and perhaps unconsciously narrated by himself, as Durdles,
the stone-mason at Cloisterham cathedral, “often speaks of himself in
the third person; perhaps being a little misty as to his own identity
when he narrates” (41; ch. 4).

Dickens was ill and exhausted when he began The Mystery of Edwin
Drood, worn down by more than ten years of public readings, and the
traveling that they imposed. After January 1869 these readings often
included, despite his doctors’ warnings, the almost suicidal performances
of Sikes’s murder of Nancy from Oliver Twist. George Gissing blamed
these performances for Dickens choosing to write “a trivial
mystery...about a vulgar deed of blood” (Gissing 62). I suggest that
Dickens’s “curious and new idea” for a narrative method that would be
“strong...though difficult to work,” developed out of those public
readings, and especially out of his obsessive performances of Sikes and
Nancy, in which he described and re-enacted Fagin, Noah Claypole,
Nancy and Sikes. He had thought about adding Nancy’s murder to his repertory as early as 1863, but had “got something so horrible out of it that I am afraid to try it in public” (Collins 465). By October 1868 he had prepared a text to read to a private audience (Letters 12: 203, 212). To Dickens’s delight, they were left “unmistakably pale,” and with “horror-stricken faces.” The Times reviewer declared that Dickens had “displayed a degree of force to which nothing that he has hitherto done can be compared. He has always trembled on the boundary line that separates the reader from the actor; in this case he clears it by a leap” (Collins 465).

Sikes and Nancy became a regular and frequent feature of his 1869 reading performances, sometimes as often as four times a week. Dolby, his tour manager, was unable to persuade him to perform it less frequently, and later recalled how the murder “worked [Dickens] up to a pitch of excitement” which “invariably recurred later on in the evening after the audience had left, either in the form of great hilarity or a desire to be once more on the platform, or in a craving to do the work over again” (Collins 470). In April 1869 his doctors intervened and persuaded him to stop the readings. In May, he began to think about “a subject for a new book” and in August told Forster of his “curious and new idea” for ending The Mystery of Edwin Drood and outlined the plot. By April 1870 he had written four of the six monthly numbers we have. He had also begun a series of twelve farewell readings in January 1870, but performed Sikes and Nancy less frequently. He noted that his pulse rose from 70 to 112 when he did so, and “it takes me ten or twelve minutes to get my wind back at all.” Nevertheless, he frequently murdered Nancy in his farewell tour, doing so for the last time on 8 March 1870 (Letters 12: 350, 469–70)—though he was apparently overheard performing the murder at least one more time, alone in the garden at Gad’s Hill a few days before his own death in June (Collins 471). Many among his family and friends believed that performing Sikes and Nancy brought about his death.

Dickens’s “curious and new idea” for narrating The Mystery of Edwin Drood was for the murderer to write a confession of his crime “as if told of another,” that is, in the third person. The problem lay in how the story was to be told, how Jasper was to appear simultaneously as the persona the story is about and the persona telling/writing the story, without using the first person. Jasper was to be at once object and subject, to leap over the “boundary line that separates reader and actor.” This is the mystery that Dickens failed to solve, was perhaps unable to solve, perhaps as contributory to his death as his repeated murdering of Nancy. W.H. Wills later recalled that Dickens became “hopelessly entangled” in his own plot for The Mystery of Edwin Drood, so much so “that the anxiety and subsequent excitement materially
contributed to his sudden and premature death” (Cardwell xxvii).

Dickens was Sikes when he performed Sikes and Nancy, committing the murder while observing and describing the deed itself and the murderer’s haunted flight. Like Durdles, Dickens could be “perhaps…a little misty as to his own identity when he narrates” (41; ch. 4). To “do the murder from Oliver Twist,” which “is horribly like,” gave him “a vague sense of being ‘wanted’ as I walk about the streets,” and at the same time delighted him. He suggested that a woman friend might have “a horror of me after seeing the Murder. I don’t think a hand moved while I was doing it last night, or an eye looked away. And there was a fixed expression of horror of me, all over the Theatre which could not have been surpassed if I had been going to be hanged to that red velvet table. It is quite a new sensation to be executed with that unanimity—and I hope it will remain so!” (Letters 12: 221, 329).

Here is a situation that matches Dickens’s “strong…though difficult to work,” idea for narrating The Mystery of Edwin Drood, that Jasper would eventually write an account of the murder as if unaware that he was writing about himself. To act Nancy’s murder Dickens had to become a brutal murderer and then a haunted murderer, and at the same time remain detached as observer/writer/performer, to leap over “the boundary line that separates the reader from the actor.” Can we doubt that when he performed as Sikes, he simultaneously felt some guilt for having imagined and written such a brutal scene, but also pride and delight that he had written it so powerfully? Did the repeated readings gradually suggest to him that “curious and new idea” by which the murderer would witness and describe the murder without realizing that he was himself the murderer?

Dickens was obsessed with Sikes and Nancy as Jasper was with Drood and Rosa. Both repeatedly rehearsed their obsessions in fictions, and both found ways of experiencing the thrill of murder as a fine art, while somehow remaining in their own eyes blameless. For Dickens, murder could be vicarious. He became Sikes, Jonas Chuzzlewit, Bradley Headstone by powerfully imagining them as he wrote about them committing murder, miming their speech and actions. In performing Sikes and Nancy he experienced being a murderer even more powerfully. In Jasper he imagined a murderer who experienced murdering Drood in the story he made up and re-enacted in his opium dreams, then murdered Drood and would later somehow detach himself from the deed to write a description of what he had done. Dickens sensed the resemblance between the opium dream and the novelist’s absorption in his story. In what he probably suspected would be his last novel, he imagined a narrator who does not admit or perhaps understand that he himself has invented the plot he narrates, the murder he deplores, and a narrative device that would challenge and explore a darker side to the very act of fiction.
WORKS CONSULTED

REVIEWS


This rich and well-organized collection will be a great help to any reader confronting the complexities of Dickens's novel for the first time. Like other Routledge Guides, it aims to offer the basic information needed to experience Bleak House in its historical and social dimensions and as the subject of an ongoing and lively critical debate.

The carefully chosen excerpts from contemporary critics taking part in the debate invite the reader to participate as well, and offer a useful introduction to several recent critical methods. J. Hillis Miller’s deconstructive argument insists that Bleak House is primarily a novel that “calls attention to its own procedures” and is about its own interpretation; it is “full of unsuccessful detectives” (68–9). But Guppy and Tulkinghorn succeed in discovering Lady Dedlock’s secret and Inspector Bucket does find Lady Dedlock. Writing from a New Historicist perspective, D.A. Miller rightly claims that the detective story element, represented by Bucket, indicates Dickens's commitment to the possibility of discoverable truth. Elizabeth Langland compares Esther Summerson to Bucket. Both are guardians of order and middle-class values, she in the domestic sphere, he in the streets; both rebuke the inanities of “fashionable life” and the miseries of the poor. Carolyn Dever sees Esther, who should never have been born and has been reported dead, as creating herself, writing herself into existence by telling her story. Hilary Schor finds Esther's diffidence, which even irritated some of Dickens's earliest reviewers, as the self-portrait of a woman who has few legal rights, and as an illegitimate child, daughter of “Nemo,” No-One, who does not legally exist, but who nevertheless connects the different parts of the story. This array of critical approaches invites the reader to try them out on Dickens's novel. Which one works? Which one makes the best sense, is most helpful in coming to terms with the novel's complexities and mysteries? How can they be synthesized?

Janice Allan begins with her own overview of the novel and its contexts, clarifying relevant aspects of Victorian life: the establishment of middle-class values, issues of sanitary reform and policing, the looming presence of the Court of Chancery. She rightly singles out sanitation, which provides the book with its governing metaphor of “infection,” as the crucial issue. Infection is invoked in the very first paragraph and is pervasive thereafter: the taint of Esther's illegitimacy and Lady Dedlock's
hidden past, the literal disease Jo brings to Bleak House from his fetid slum, the blight that Chancery imposes on individuals and estates trapped in its endless litigation, the corruption and greed it engenders in the legal profession, the disease of vain hope which destroys Richard Carstone. Chancery itself is a kind of cancer on the body politic, Allan includes Carlyle’s famous passage about the Irish widow refused treatment by the charities of Edinburgh, who “prove[d] her sisterhood by dying, and infecting…Seventeen of you…with typhus” (32), and a fascinating passage from Hector Gavin’s Sanitary Ramblings (1848), describing the squalor and over-crowding of a London slum. Dickens’s 1851 speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association and his “On Duty with Inspector Field” (1851) further clarify aspects of Bleak House, as does his condescending “Suckling Pigs” (November 1851), an attack on women with “a Mission”:

There can be no satisfaction for Mrs. Bellows, in satisfying her mind after due reflection that the thing she contemplates is right, and therefore ought to be done, and so in calmly and quietly doing it, conscious that therein she sets a righteous example…. Mrs. Bellows has no business to be self-dependent, and to preserve a quiet little avenue of her own in the world, begirt with her own influences and duties. She must discharge herself of a vast amount of words, she must enlist into an Army composed entirely of Trumpeters. (41)

The passage anticipates both Mrs. Jellyby and Esther, but its categories are too narrow for the novel Dickens was just beginning to write. Mrs. Jellyby is indeed portrayed as one of the Trumpeters.

But it is Esther who discharges herself of a vast amount of words as one of the two narrators of Bleak House. Dickens endows her with his own verbal skills and his own gift for noting the grotesque detail and the pretense of virtue. She brings order into the chaos of Mrs. Jellyby’s household even as she lovingly describes that chaos. She efficiently organizes the rambling house that gives the novel its name. As co-narrator, she efficiently controls this sprawling novel with its murder plot, its marriage plots, its lost will plot, its blackmail plot, and even controls the other narrator, who tries to include everything: the Tooting baby farms, the Oxford Movement, Chancery abuses, the status of soldier’s wives, sanitary reform, the summer 1852 “Bribery” election. As Dickens half-realizes, Esther would bring order to public life if given the chance.

Allan is better at placing Bleak House historically than in its literary context. It is rather sweeping to declare that “in the early decades of the [nineteenth] century, the novel was considered to be a young, upstart genre, ephemeral by its very nature” (19). Despite Evangelical discomfort with fiction, Jane Austen and Walter Scott made the novel
respectable before Dickens started to write. Dickens was more often criticized for his cavalier way with his plots than for failing to be realistic, as in reviews from *Spectator, Illustrated London News, and Bentley’s Miscellany*, here excerpted. While Trollope believed that “the novelist’s language and style should be as unobtrusive and transparent as possible” (20), this was hardly the practice of Thackeray, the Brontës, or George Eliot, nor a stumbling block to their readers.

Allan prefaces her selection of “Key Passages” from twenty of the novel’s sixty-seven chapters with brief but ingenious suggestions about ways of reading Dickens’s text and realizing what he meant by “the romantic side of familiar things.” Discussing chapter one, for example, she clarifies the relationship between the literal and metaphorical presence of mud and fog; when Esther thinks she sees Jenny, “the mother of the dead child” at the graveyard gate (chapter 59), the phrase accurately identifies Lady Dedlock, another mother of a supposedly dead child, Esther herself. Read in conjunction with the novel, these passages constitute a primer of close reading.

University of California, Berkeley
Robert Tracy


Nicholas Roe, in his biography of Leigh Hunt, *Fiery Heart*, speculates that Hunt may have known John Dickens, for in 1805 both young men were clerks in the expanding government bureaucracy of the war against Napoleon. Hunt owed his position in the War Office to his father’s connection with Henry Addington, who succeeded Pitt as Prime Minister; Addington’s name also appears in the list of distinguished subscribers to Hunt’s first volume of poetry, *Juvenalia*, published in March 1801. In two years, 1801–03, the book went through four editions and acquired further subscribers such as Pitt and Fox, Nelson, Benjamin Franklin, Edward Jenner, William Wilberforce, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, even Lord Eldon, the Lord Chancellor, and Lord Ellenborough, the Chief Justice. The fullness of Roe’s research is demonstrated in the minutiae of this list and more generally throughout his account of Leigh Hunt’s life up to the death of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Roe argues that had Hunt drowned with Shelley
in 1822, he would have come down to posterity as one of the precocious writers who exemplify that era: in other words, there would have been no Harold Skimpole.

However, Hunt has not been remembered as a poet but only in footnotes to other poets. Roe here gives us the details that go to make up the Leigh Hunt of the Romantic era—who was a journalist more than a poet. He is especially good on Hunt’s American ancestry and connections, taking two chapters to fill out the names and connections of eighteenth-century intellectual and political America. This approach is of enormous use to scholars, inasmuch as Roe also makes it possible for others to pursue their own hypotheses. It allows us, for example, to see that John Dickens made his feckless way during a time of national war, in a bureaucracy that employed an unprecedented number of ambitious young men and then threw them out of work again after 1815. In this context John Dickens’s distresses seem hardly personal, however much they felt so to his eldest son.

Indeed, although Roe alludes only once to John Dickens, his text is otherwise is filled with speculative juxtapositions of all kinds and makes the book a resource sometimes more than a narrative. Occasionally the imaginative drawing-out of implications becomes intrusive, but one can understand why he is at pains to bring each idea to its full amplitude. One cannot help but contrast the formal eighteenth-century display found in Hunt’s *Juvenalia* subscribers list, a last remnant of the courtly patronage system, with Dickens’s scramblings to get published during the early 1830s. Unlike Hunt, Dickens had no pretensions to being a poet. That their careers intersected and that we should now see Hunt as a predecessor to Dickens is the greatest coincidence to be considered. Roe cites Hunt’s weekly journal *The Indicator* (October 1819 to March 1821, price 2d) as “a milestone in British journalism” (326), because it broke with the heavy political seriousness of the early nineteenth-century quarterlies and anticipated the intimate editorial tone and miscellaneous range of *Household Words*. The *Indicator* welcomed readers who “had received no university education but were avid readers receptive to new ideas” (326), and its topics—“‘Names’, ‘Dolphins’, ‘Coaches’, ‘May-Day’, ‘A Rainy Day’” (324)—seem unexceptional to a Dickens reader. But they are startling when we consider that the *Indicator* was begun in year of momentous political upheaval and that Hunt himself was known as a leading political journalist.

If Roe’s piling-up of details forces the reader to give due consideration to the first thirty-eight years of Leigh Hunt’s life and to see him in the context of eighteenth-century American and Unitarian Dissent, Anthony Holden’s biography, *The Wit in the Dungeon*, is of especial value to the reader of Victorian journalism: “The Victorian critic George Saintsbury testified that Hunt ‘transformed the 18th Century magazine
essay’, [and] the American scholar Kenneth Neil Cameron that ‘the ancestry of the magazine article of today can be traced more readily to Hunt than to any other writer’ ” (50). Holden manages to hit all the topics dealt with by Roe, while his writing retains the crispness of good journalism and elegantly allows some of the same features of Leigh Hunt’s life to emerge more distinctly. For all that Holden is a professional biographer, his research appears to have been careful, and his prologue offers a useful outline of Leigh Hunt scholarship up to the present day. It is notable that Holden’s manuscript was read by the most recent editors of Leigh Hunt’s letters and writings, and his relationship with the Hunt family archivist appears to have been close. To the subject of Dickens’s relationship with Hunt, Holden devotes a whole chapter, showing how conscientiously Dickens worked to extricate Hunt from his financial difficulties before *Bleak House* and how severely contemporaries subsequently judged the drawing of Harold Skimpole—though one cannot help but forgive Dickens for his exasperation at finding a second John Dickens on his hands.

The resemblances between Dickens’s own writing and Hunt's were commented on as early as *Sketches by Boz*. Both knew the inside of debtors’ prison and the dullness of legal clerkdom; both were avid theatergoers and their most famous periodicals gathered an artistic circle round them. The younger man knew much greater success but never knew what it was to be fined and imprisoned for his writing or to stand up to the Government in a courtroom on charges of libel. But Victorian politicians made recompense to the writer slighted by Romantic authorities: in 1847, Lord John Russell as Prime Minister, awarded Hunt a Civil List pension of £200 p.a., writing: “the severe treatment you formerly received, in times of unjust persecution of liberal writers, enhances the satisfaction with which I make this announcement” (275–6). Hunt remarked that he felt “as if history itself were deigning to speak to me as a friend” (276).

Leigh Hunt fortunately lived long enough to see his earlier life as historical. Roe speaks of the years from 1822 onwards as Hunt’s “after-life,” but Holden’s account of these second thirty-seven years is surprisingly full. Russell recognized the brutality of what the *Examiner* writers had endured, but even someone such as Charlotte Brontë, who had made Byron, Wellington, and Napoleon into childhood playthings, recorded her pleasure in 1848 at Leigh Hunt’s *The Town*, for his “varied knowledge, just views and kindly spirit” (278). One contrasts this with John Hunt’s rebuke of his brother, thirty years earlier, for writing too much about the sufferings of a homeless man, “Fellow-Creatures Suffered to Die in the Streets”—which he called “Ultra Sentimental” (305). John Hunt likely would not have welcomed the writings of Charles Dickens, because nothing so much as these articles,
written as the demobbed homeless swelled the streets after 1816, so
strongly recalls Dickens’s prose. One speculates that Leigh Hunt’s role
in the Examiner came about as the accident of being a younger brother,
someone whom the elder ones kept busy in their own projects. It was
John Hunt, politically engaged with a repressive government, who was
the Romantic journalist: his brother, who wanted to be an eighteenth-
century poet of sensibility, took on an uncomfortably long apprenticeship
to opposition. He was neither a radical poet like Shelley nor a crusader
like John Hunt: instead, he had to wait till his “after-life” to become a
“Victorian” journalist. Whatever his personal impatience with Harold
Skimpole, Dickens always showed that he was quite conscious of the
journalistic legacy bequeathed him by Leigh Hunt, and it was Dickens’s
novels that brought the Romantic sensibility found in “Fellow-Creatures
Suffered to Die in the Streets” to its Victorian fulfillment.

Trent University

Kathryn Chittick

Gail Turley Houston. From Dickens to Dracula: Gothic, Economics, and
Pp. xiv + 165. $75.00.

Having examined Dickens’s representation of the Queen in Roy-
alties: The Queen and Victorian Writers, followed by his portrayal
of women and starvation in Consuming Fictions: Gender, Glass,
and Hunger in Dickens’s Novels, Houston turns her attention to the
Gothic economy of the nineteenth century in From Dickens to Dracula:
Gothic, Economics, and Victorian Fiction. In this work, she demonstrates
how economics, commerce and banking are transformed in Victorian
Gothic fiction. To live in a capitalist economic system is to be perpetually
in crisis, Houston contends, and her work is informed by New Economic
Critics who contend that cultural practices and economics are intimately
related. Whilst much has been done in other interdisciplinary fields,
such as literature and science, Houston’s assessment of the connections
between economic and literary discourse is a welcome addition to
current work in this burgeoning area of research.

Houston considers how “Gothic tropes register, manage, and assess
the intense panic produced and elided by the unstable Victorian
economy” (1) with reference to two Gothic-realist novels—Charlotte
Brontë’s Villette, and Dickens’s Little Dorrit—and two “classic” Victorian
Gothic texts—Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde,
and Stoker’s Dracula—in the course of her analysis. Before turning her
attention to these novels, Houston devotes two chapters to elucidate
her theoretical framework, and the nineteenth-century Gothic economy respectively. Reading literature in contexts such as the Bank Act of 1844, Houston examines the extent to which financial and emotional panic are conflated in her second chapter, with reference to Walter Bagehot's and his fiancée's letters. Marx informs Houston's work, as she suggests that the Gothic is a way of envisioning how the effects of capitalism haunt and destabilize the self. Whilst classical economists see crises as a necessary, cathartic part of the economic cycle, Houston, in common with Marx and Engels, differs on this issue, illustrating how the human body is haunted by economic instability and "vampiric capital" (37).

In her chapter on Villette, Houston reads Lucy in terms of economic metaphors, contending boldly that her sexual desires are also economic ones. In the course of the analysis, she evaluates some interesting material on the Brontës' financial investments, and their knowledge of, and investment in, the stock market. Her reading of the ghost motif in the novel as an indication of the fears of capitalist economics might have been realized more successfully here. Houston also examines Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in relation to the author's own financial anxieties, and illustrates how fundamental the bank's belief is to one's credit, and even one's own identity, through analysis of Hyde's checks. Yet the Gothic horror of the novel lies not in the idea of the split personality; it is in the recognition of how fictional personal and financial credit is. Houston's final chapter on Dracula is also rewarding; whilst the Gothic resonances of this novel have been scrutinized in great detail, she brings an interesting perspective to the text through her reading of the economic anxieties it depicts. She illustrates successfully how the novel can be read in the context of the corporate personality and bankerization. Both Dracula and Van Helsing are, she contends, competing for "a complete monopoly on circulation and consumption" (117). Dracula is read in the context of the foreign investor competing, and attempting, to overthrow his competitors. Although this argument is suggestive, it would have been useful for Houston to acknowledge Franco Moretti's Marxist approach to the novel in his chapter "Dialectic of Fear" in Signs Taken for Wonders (1983), specifically Moretti's consideration of how Dracula is "a true monopolist."

Houston's fourth chapter is devoted to Dickens's Little Dorrit. As with the other novels, Houston scrutinizes specific economic issues that are relevant to the writing and publication of the novel: in this case how the final installment of Little Dorrit precedes the 1857 economic crash by six months. Brief references might have been made in this chapter to earlier critical explorations of Dickens's treatment of money, such as Grahame Smith's Dickens, Money and Society (1968),
James M. Brown’s *Dickens: Novelist in the Marketplace* (1982), and Norman Russell’s *The Novelist and Mammon: Literary Responses to the World of Commerce in the Nineteenth Century* (1986), although Houston’s approach is clearly divergent from theirs. *Little Dorrit*, she contends, “portrays the rough cycle of trade” (71). Houston reads the novel productively in relation to Henry Dunning Macleod’s *Theory and Practice of Banking* (1855). Macleod sees currency as, metaphorically, a kind of steam, and the bank as an engine, and argues that money has a “‘duty’” to circulate (qtd. 76). Houston speculates whether Dickens and Macleod read one another’s work at this period, bearing in mind Pancks’s need to keep working, or at it, because this is “‘the Whole Duty of Man in a commercial country’” (Little Dorrit qtd. 77). This point could have been made even more meaningful had Houston made reference to Dickens’s depiction of Pancks blowing “like a little labouring steam-engine” (ch. 13). She demonstrates how the novel can be read in terms of the second law of thermodynamics, namely that energy is not infinite, and “the law of entropy overrides the first law” (75) through the illustration that Merdle’s own circulation of money comes to a halt. Indeed, Houston sees bankruptcy in the novel as a “demise of energy” (85) in keeping with this law, and shows how *Little Dorrit* explores both increases in economic circulation and the realization of economic panic and collapse.

Overall, Houston’s examination of the relationship between Victorian economics and these texts is probing and original. Whilst the field of Gothic fiction has been theorized extensively, Houston’s work is elucidative because it offers fresh insights through its contemplation of the ways in which economics informs and is, in turn, transformed by literature in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. More might have been done to make the connection with the Gothic resonances of the novels successfully at all times, and when Houston assesses these in her chosen fiction, she tends to make it all sound rather dry, which is a pity in view of the subject matter. A more detailed acknowledgement of work being undertaken on the nineteenth-century novel in relation to the Gothic (such as Robert Mighall’s *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction* [1999], and Julian Wolfreys’ *Victorian Hauntings* [2002]) and economics (for example Patrick Brantlinger’s *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694–1994* [1996], and Margot Finn’s *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740–1914* [2003]), could have been helpful, although it must be stated that Houston’s emphasis does take her in a different direction. Indeed, the real strength of *From Dickens to Dracula* is that it provides a fresh perspective through its consideration of how financial panic is figured in nineteenth-century fiction, and is thus a valuable addition to scholarship in this field. Such a work might also suggest the need to evaluate the
economic preoccupations that inform late eighteenth-century Gothic novels in more detail than has been the case hitherto.

University of the West of England, Bristol Gill Ballinger


“Realism” is a slippery noun—but Peter Brooks does not seem to regard it so. He suggests that realism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is simply the claim by literary artists to represent the world “as it is.” Even from the beginning, however, the term is used in competing ways. “I think we have a thirst for reality,” Brooks states at the opening of Realist Vision, “Which is curious, since we have too much reality, more than we can bear” (1). Do these two senses have precise enough meanings to be useful? Certainly, both seem to be different from the nineteenth-century literary practice of, as Brooks has it, representing the world “as it is” in a literary artefact. “As it is,” according to whom and under what conditions? Through what frames of ideology, philosophy, theology, gender, history? The notion of “realism” as a literary practice is endlessly debatable. And if a book bravely intends to examine it with the sort of coverage of this—and especially in the potentially paradoxical form of “realist vision”—then one should not be surprised if it had something to say to the major critics who have recently considered the subject.

Peter Brooks may, perhaps, have clear arguments against Roland Barthes and Catherine Belsey; he may be convinced of the errors of Nancy Armstrong’s arguments about realism and photography and dubious of what Jonathan Crary has done for scholars’ understanding of perception and optical technology in the nineteenth century; Kate Flint’s work on the visual imagination may seem to him problematic and answerable; feminist debates about realism and gender may appear to him no longer serviceable to the contemporary reader. This may be: Brooks perhaps thinks that the ’nineties have added little to a collective understanding of Victorian and early twentieth-century practices of vision and the literary representation of what was understood to be real. But he does not tell his readers the reasons for so thinking, and he offers no account of why he has chosen to dispense with, frequently not even to mention, a critical heritage that is extensive. Disengaged from recent work on the nature of the real in the period, Brooks’s book—a version of lectures given at the University of Oxford and then later at Yale—has natural insight, knowledge, breadth, and zest. It is locally
rewarding and admirable in the connections it makes between British and French writing. But among its several virtues is not, remarkably enough, a readiness to engage with recent debates about its subject.

Readers interested in Dickens, unfortunately, will find one of the least satisfactory chapters. Here, the problem is not so much an absence of response to critics of realism but a distance from critics of Dickens. Trickier even than that, though, is the chapter’s reluctance to think about how the ways in which Dickens might look differently if read as a man debating with the issues of his own age rather than someone else’s. Brooks hardly sees, I think, a Victorian Dickens. The chapter is called “Dickens and Nonrepresentation” and the title is a herald to the author’s objection to the apparent failure of *Hard Times* (1854)—a “pest of a novel,” he remarks, with one of his abrupt evaluations—to make “a persuasively full effort to represent industrial England” (53). There is too much about the imaginative process in the text, Brooks says, and it feebly offers what he thinks is a “Ruskinian” argument that “beauty is the truth” (52) instead of “properly” depicting the “real” conditions of industrial society. It is difficult to know where to begin in responding.

The issue Professor Brooks really cannot accept is the treatment of Stephen Blackpool. “For Dickens to turn Slackbridge into a sinister emblem of seduction and misrule,” he declares, “and to do it through his pretentious inflation and misappropriation of the English language, and to make part of Stephen’s heroism his refusal to join the union—this seems to me perverse beyond words” (46). But—it seems unnecessary to have to say it—basic to understanding *Hard Times’s* politics is the willingness not to transplant twentieth-century notions of the importance of trades unions and collective political protest into the middle of the nineteenth century. What is needed is a grasp of the essential role in Dickens’s thought (and Carlyle’s, Gaskell’s, Ruskin’s) of a hierarchical idea of the nation in which allegiance to appointed roles and their responsibility defines an individual’s ethical and social identity. Seeking to upturn such social arrangements is not, for Dickens, merely political folly but also *moral error*. Stephen’s refusal to join a group of men willing to employ violence to disturb a social structure of hierarchical labor is, within the terms of this political philosophy, entirely admirable. *Hard Times*, at its close, reaffirms the duty of individuals to fulfill the roles to which they have been appointed: it really does, to borrow the language of the novel’s conclusion, rest with “you and me,” as far as Dickens is concerned, whether the (ideal) structure of society with its tiers of rights and responsibilities can be made to work or not. Dickens’s representation of Slackbridge, who threatens that precious social structure, and Stephen, who will put his own well being in jeopardy to defend it, is coherent with this political philosophy. It may not be a twentieth-century philosophy and it may
be objectionable now—but Dickens is not a twentieth-century man. Only by accidentally thinking otherwise could one regard the rather ordinary mid-nineteenth-century politics of *Hard Times* as “perverse beyond words.”

Peter Brooks, Professor of English and Law at the University of Virginia, confesses himself unable to resolve the “puzzlements [sic] that the novel provokes, in me at least” but historically sensitive readers will solve them without too much difficulty and move to more interesting features, and more original criticism, of Dickens’s art. Elsewhere in this colloquially written, informally argued, and wide ranging book, the level of critical insight is higher, and Brooks is more sympathetic to Henry James, Zola, and high Modernism. But he is still inclined to invite his reader into arguments not quite ready for circulation. By his own admission, his conclusion offers “idle speculation[s]” (227), and, symptomatically, he feels no difficulty in admitting that, in the case of Joyce, Proust, and Woolf, he is merely offering “forays” (198) into the novels rather than arguments that are completed. Valuable in its grasp of what might be included under the mantle of English and French realism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Peter Brooks’s book will encourage literary critics of English literature to read more French. But many academics will feel a degree of sympathy for the author, recognizing that lectures, published without much revision, do not always show one at one’s best.

Francis O’Gorman

University of Leeds
Charles Dickens visited Belfast in 1858, 1867, and 1869, to deliver those public readings which so captivated audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. He gave renditions of such favourites as The Story of Little Dombey, Boots at the Holly-Tree Inn, Mrs Gamp, and Sikes and Nancy. He also developed close friendships with the Belfast-born politician and merchant James Emerson Tennent and with Francis Dalziel Finlay, owner and editor of The Northern Whig. He enjoyed his sojourns in Ulster, remarking on his ‘delightful days’ in Belfast, where he was widely recognised and warmly welcomed.

Belfast is the venue for the 11th annual symposium of the Dickens Society of America. This organisation, founded in 1970, aims to conduct, encourage, foster and further support research, publication, instruction and general interest in the life, times and literature of Charles Dickens.

Papers are welcomed on any aspect of Dickens and his works. Final papers must be readable in twenty minutes.

Prospective panellists should send a one-page abstract, by post or email, to:

Dr Leon Litvack  
School of English  
Queen’s University  
Belfast BT7 1NN  

L.Litvack@qub.ac.uk  
Tel. +44-28-90973266

Conference participants will have the opportunity to sign up for excursions to local sites of interest including the Giant’s Causeway.
and the North Antrim coast. The highlight of the conference is the will be the Dickens dinner, where delegates will experience traditional Irish singing and storytelling, provided by the famed local duo Len Graham and John Campbell, who have delighted audiences throughout Ireland, the U.K., Europe, Australia, Canada and the USA.

Accommodation will be offered at the Elms Student Village, 78 Malone Road, Belfast.

Conference information and registration forms can be obtained at the conference website:

http://www.qub.ac.uk/en/dickens

The deadline for submission of proposals is 31 May 2006

Further information on the Dickens Society, and its journal *The Dickens Quarterly* may be found at http://www.dickensquarterly.org/
The Dickens Quarterly Checklist

Primary Sources
CALL FOR PAPERS
URBANISM, URBANITY...
ON DISC
AN ENGLISH LADY IN PARIS
the diary of Frances Anne Crewe, 1786
edited and introduced by Michael Allen

hardback; 24 x 16cm; 244pp; col.illus; extensive annotation; appendices; bibliography; index
ISBN 0 9552490 0 7
$59.50

Date of publication
27th April 2006

Oxford-Stockley Publications

In 1786 Frances Anne Crewe, employer of Charles Dickens’ grandparents, close friend of Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, and lover of the dramatist Sheridan travelled to Paris for a visit of three months. Her fascinating observations of the scene just prior to the French revolution were kept as a diary, now held at The British Library. It has been often quoted but never before published. Her descriptions of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette spring vividly to life. Fashion, theatre, balls, coach-travel, science, literature – the life of Paris in 1786 fills the pages of this unique account. Michael Allen, author of Charles Dickens’ childhood, provides a masterly introduction to the Crewe family, to the background in which Dickens’ grandparents lived and his father grew up, and to a fascinating piece of real history.

MICHAEL SLATER – Michael Allen’s work is very much in the tradition of such outstanding scholars as Kathleen Tillotson and K.J. Fielding
PHILIP COLLINS – Allen is an industrious and resourceful scholar
PETER ACKROYD – he writes with conviction and authority
DAVID PAROISSIEN – a careful and painstaking builder, a foundation expert

Available (carriage-free) from
Oxford-Stockley Publications, 17 Heather Close,
St Leonards, BH24 2QJ, United Kingdom
email oxfordstockley@btinternet.com
AD FOR
DIANA MAYER BOOK?
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Arthur J. Cox has written extensively on The Mystery of Edwin Drood, and this article is one of three reconsidering matters he discussed in “The Drood Remains” in the January 1966 issue of Dickens Studies. His reading of the manuscript of the novel is the textual basis of editions of The Mystery of Edwin Drood published by Penguin Books in 1974 and 2002 and by the Folio Society in 1982.

Paul Marchbanks is a Jacob K. Javits Fellow at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and is completing his dissertation under the co-directorship of Beverly Taylor and Weldon Thornton. His larger project tackles fictional and socio-historical representations of intellectual disability in Victorian poetry and prose, under the working title Idiot Mine: Excavating Enlightened Intimations of Intellectual Disability from 19th Century Literature.

Robert Tracy is Professor Emeritus of English and Celtic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He has published widely on a range of authors and is currently working on Clarence Mangan’s prose fiction and further translations from Osip Mandelstam.