

CHARLES DICKENS: BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, DEATHS
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ABSTRACTS

Zelma Catalan, “Dodging Nell: Dickens and Resilience”

In Dickens’s *Bleak House*, Esther’s first encounter with the Jellybys takes place in a dramatic situation, in which one of their children, in danger of suffocating between the railings where he is stuck, is saved only thanks to the serendipitous appearance of a benevolent and resourceful adult. This episode can be read as an allegory of the plight of the many children at risk in Dickens’s novel, not all of whom are as lucky as the Jellyby boy. Neglected by their families and social services, placed in the care of incompetent and irresponsible servants, enduring hunger, indifference and threats to their physical existence, they are unlikely to survive. Indeed, it is by the memorable dead children like Nell, Paul and Jo that we tend to judge Dickens’s attitude to childhood as one of identification with those doomed to perish. My purpose in this paper, however, is to look also at those who survive against all odds. The perspective I want to use to consider the issue is that of resilience, which is currently one of the most intensely and seriously studied and theorized aspects of developmental psychology. I will use its analytical apparatus to investigate how Dickens deals with the protective factors and resources which save David and Esther but whose absence from the very first dooms Nell and Paul. My argument is that the “child cases” in Dickens’s novels give coherent narrative shape to his prescient awareness of the possibility of “bouncing back” from trauma and achieving positive adaptation. But I also see in his accounts of child death and survival his own cognitive mechanism of resilience building, one that de-modalizes and particularizes his statement that without “the mercy of God,” he would easily have turned tramp or thief.

Ayse Celikkol, “Dickens’s Aesthetic of Sameness and ‘an Innocent Elopement’ in *Our Mutual Friend*”

Our Mutual Friend features “an innocent elopement” where the eloping parties consist of a father and his daughter. What makes the elopement innocent is the fact that R. Wilfer is having a secret meeting with none other than his own daughter. However, for all its presumed innocence, the elopement metaphor evokes incest, especially when Bella flirts with her father: “Now, Pa,” said Bella, hugging him close, “take this lovely woman out to dinner.” Through the metaphor of elopement, Bella becomes both daughter and lover. Just as R. Wilfer figuratively has the same woman as daughter and lover, Miss Wren has the same man as father and child. “[M]y child’s coming home. And my child is a troublesome bad child,” she says, talking about a father whom she chides and terrifies. In this novel, the same person takes up multiple roles in the family. Thematically, this pattern speaks of Dickens’s career-long penchant for characters who appear in alternative family arrangements. However, in this paper I will approach this topic through a structural rather than a thematic lens. My argument is that these familial dynamics befit what I am calling Dickens’s aesthetic of sameness.

Various motifs in *Our Mutual Friend* echo one another, to the point where all seems reducible either to dust, the river, or even the one item that reduces both of these elements to one, the mud. This is what I am calling Dickens’s aesthetic of sameness: the novel becomes a form, which, for all its diversity of discourse and thematic range, displays the same motif over

and over, with echoes and displacements of a single motif haunting the whole text. I will propose that through the aesthetic of sameness Dickens offers an alternative to the structure that Foucault has singled out as the dominant episteme of the period: the integration of complementary but distinct parts into a whole. *Our Mutual Friend* operates outside the liberal ideal of harmonious unity among diverse parts, presenting an alternative paradigm for bounding parts into a whole.

Maria Dimitriadou, “The Demon/Spinster in the House: Miss Havisham and Images of Death in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*”

Spinsters in Victorian England were grim figures of womanhood, often scorned and pitied, considered abnormal, alienated or even mad. As I argue, Charles Dickens sketches out one of the most haunting and nightmarish figures of Victorian spinsterhood in *Great Expectations* (1861). But Miss Havisham is more than a “piteous victim” of society; she is a perverted version of the angel in the house who, after having been jilted on the day of her wedding, turns into a demon and haunts not only the space she inhabits but also the people around her.

Furthermore, I will argue that Miss Havisham’s deliberate seclusion in Satis House, her disregard of time, her insistence on leaving everything to rot, including herself, and her loathing for men, reinforce a psychoanalytic reading of her condition. Drawing on Kristeva’s theory of abjection, my paper explores the association of spinsterhood not only with social marginalization, but also with images of decay and death. As an old maid, Miss Havisham remains in a constant state of melancholia, which was caused by her desperate investment of love in the wrong man. Unable to cope with her failure to satisfy society’s expectations of single women, Miss Havisham turns into a corpse-like, self-loathing demon – an abject entity whose sole purpose is to infect Estella with her vengeful ambitions and implicitly succeed in avenging herself against men (Pip). She is neither a subject nor an object; she is “in the process of becoming an other at the expense of [her] own death”. Ultimately, Miss Havisham concludes the tragic fate of the spinster by earning a witch-like, yet pitiful death.

Irmak Ertuna-Howison & Özgür Çiçek, “Spontaneous Combustion in *Bleak House*: Charles Dickens between the Fantastic and the Real”

In the age of scientific breakthroughs, the tenth installment of *Bleak House*, published in 1852, quickly became the topic of a controversy. Krook’s death by spontaneous combustion raised serious doubts about the validity and realism of Dickens’s writing. Furthermore, since Dickens was the most famous writer of his time and was read by anyone who could read English, the scene of a mysterious occult death challenged the scientific grounds that were being established in those times. Thus, in the later editions of the novel, Dickens defended his use of spontaneous combustion as a scientific fact. Although Dickens was adamant about the scientific validity of spontaneous combustion, this small episode became one of the most striking instances in which the realist nature of his novels is questioned. Dickens’s critics have often argued that realism of his novels is usually undermined by melodramatic elements that border on fantasy. Moreover Dickens himself affirms the potential of fantasy, not only in his novels, but also in his essay “Frauds on the Fairies”: “In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected [...] a nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun.” In our paper, we will use Krook’s death as a starting point to discuss Dickens’s writing as a play between fantasy

and realism. Unlike Dickens's critics, we argue that the force of his novels derives from the ways in which he was able to incorporate fantasy to engage the Victorian audience.

Michael Hollington, "Ji"

This paper will look at anonymous walk-on characters in Dickens who are present at or near births, marriages and deaths, especially marriages. It will explore benign and malign presences, e.g. that of the pensioner Gruff and Grim with two wooden legs at the marriage of John Harmon and Bella Wilfer as an example of the benign, and Mr Punch in a Punch and Judy show nearby at the marriage of Dombey and Edith, or miscellaneous pew-openers in miscellaneous texts as examples of the malign.

Joyce Hurt, "Death in *Bleak House*"

When Charles Dickens first journeyed to America in 1842, he attended a dinner in New York that was hosted by the great American short story writer Washington Irving and the American lawyer-turned-Romantic poet and New York's *Evening Post* co-editor William Cullen Bryant (Bryant and Voss). Bryant, though a bit older than Dickens, was an avid admirer of Dickens and believed in many of the ideas that Dickens espoused in his works, such as the necessity of prison reform and the need for an international copyright (Baym). Bryant, like Dickens, found the practice of law distasteful (Baym). The mutual admiration of the celebrity novelist and respected poet is understandable, in that they shared similar views on universal ills. However, of greater interest is that Bryant's view of death as presented in his most famous poem "Thanatopsis" (1813) provides a fresh lens through which key plot events in Dickens' greatest novel *Bleak House* may be viewed.

This paper discusses Dickens' view of death as depicted in *Bleak House*, and the writer proposes that though Chancery and fog may be the most important symbols in the book (Johnson), death is the great equalizer, not to be feared, but in many cases to be welcomed, as Bryant advocated in his famous poem. The writer goes a step further in suggesting that if one views the deaths in *Bleak House* from Bryant's point of view, death serves as the vehicle that brings about a great deal of good, happiness, and in some cases, welcome relief from great suffering. The writer concludes that in Dickens' literary world, there are worse things than death, and that the series of deaths in the novel, from the spontaneous combustion of Krook and the shooting of Tulkinghorn to the pathetic demises of Gridley and Jo, though often described in heart-wrenching details and occasionally deserved, and more often undeserved, combine to produce one of the most intriguing masterpieces of all time.

Rob Jacklosky, "Family Theatrics in *Nicholas Nickleby* and Beyond"

"The theatrical profession," said Mr. Vincent Crummles. "I am in the theatrical profession myself, my wife is in the theatrical profession, my children are in the theatrical profession. I had a dog that lived and died in it from a puppy..." (*Nicholas Nickleby*)

Chapter 23 of *Nicholas Nickleby*, "Treats of the Company of Mr. Vincent Crummles, and of his Affairs, Domestic and Theatrical." It is a happy chapter heading because it promises a wedding of two mutually-informing interests often intertwined in Dickens: families immersed in theatricals and the necessity of theatricality in family life. In one way or other most Dickens's

families are in the theatrical profession. From the Crummles' happily theatrical domesticity to the Micawbers' performativity we see in Dickens those families that are willing to 'play' together (including conspiring in an agreed-upon fiction) are indeed most likely to stay together. Often, theatricality can be seen as denial, or a means of deflecting the dire realities families like the Micawbers' face. Put another way, when Mrs. Micawber declares, "He is the parent of my children! He is the father of my twins! He is the husband of my affections . . . and I ne - ver - will - desert Mr. Micawber!" we are to be both "deeply affected" at her theatrical "proof of devotion" (as Micawber) and also "dissolve in tears" (as Copperfield does).

Many biographies describe Dickens's commitment to family play (theatricals, games) as being at odds with his treatment of his wife. Or, they see it as a roadmap to a "compartmentalized" self-deceiving character. But in the novels the willingness to play points to a happy feature of the Dickensian family--the way in which the joyous openness of theatrical life can be seen as a route to real emotional openness. I would like to trace how the performative impulse in Dickens's comic novels can be an expression of healthy connection rather than a dark symptom of dysfunction.

Jacob Jewusiak, "The Afterlife of Plot"

Old men shamble, cudgel, and time travel their way in and out of Charles Dickens's novels. The 1840s in particular saw the creation of some of Dickens's most memorable old men: Master Humphrey, Grandfather Trent, Old Martin Chuzzlewit, and Ebenezer Scrooge not only play a central role in the texts in which they appear, but also serve as instruments of narrative production and arbiters of the reader's attention. This surprising formal agency on the part of the old men in his novels, however, exists in tension with the fact that they tend to be excluded from the meaningful plots of the nineteenth-century. For the old man, the marriage plot and the *bildungsroman* are behind him. Objects of little narrative interest from the perspective of these normative plots, Dickens nonetheless activates the old man continually in his novels, setting up a competition between the natural death the old man staves off and the closure of the narrative in which he is enmeshed. Confronted with the difficulty of making biological termination meaningful, characters such as Ebenezer Scrooge register a narrative compulsion that misdirects the linear and propulsive plots they inhabit.

Tending toward digressiveness, stasis, and senile confusion, the old man resists the progressiveness and causality of the dominant plots of the early nineteenth-century. And yet, the old man is capable of tremendous acts of material and imaginative transformation that provide a panoramic perspective on social relations that is uniquely suited to understanding plot as unified and coherent. Using *The Christmas Carol* (1843) as a case study, I argue that the old man is jettisoned from the very plot he enables, representing a fault line at the heart of Dickens's literary imagination where plot is produced and reconfigured by the very means that seem antithetical to plot itself.

Despina Kalaitzidou, "Violence and Death as Historical Necessity in *A Tale of Two Cities*"

This paper will explore Dickens's idea of violence and death in *A Tale of Two Cities*. From his first chapter, Dickens recalls "the Woodman, Fate", and "Farmer, Death", to describe pre-revolutionary France. By joining Fate, Death, and Revolution, Dickens sets a "deadly" tone for the rest of his novel. Death for Dickens is both literal and symbolic, while the theme of rebirth is also potent throughout the novel. This paper will seek to discover whether Dickens sees the

French Revolution as inevitable, and violence as unpreventable or not. It will seek to discover whether Dickens's deaths and rebirths relate to the notion of the French Revolution as a historical necessity. Could Dickens agree with Marx's dictum that "force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one"? Does Dickens use the themes of death and rebirth to make a political point/statement? Many critics deny Dickens's preoccupation with politics in this novel, finding that the French Revolution is simply the backcloth to a story concerning the private lives of individuals. This paper will examine the portrayal of violence and death in Dickens's novel, searching for the novelist's political point of view concerning the French Revolution, and the notion of revolution itself.

Valerie Kennedy, "Oliver Twist: Fathers and Death"

Fathers and father figures are a significant feature of *Oliver Twist*. In the course of the novel, Oliver's initial fatherless and illegitimate state ensures that he comes under the influence of a series of characters who stand in a paternal relation to him: Mr. Bumble, who names him, the board, who are his guardians, Mr. Sowerberry, who makes him a mute, Bill Sikes and Fagin, who wish to make him a thief, and Mr. Brownlow, who wishes to make him a gentleman. Father figures might be expected to give life to their sons; however, in *Oliver Twist*, for Oliver, acquiring a new father figure means being threatened with a new form of death, either by hanging or as an escape from the perils of life. Death haunts the novel and Oliver's relations with his father figures, to the point where Oliver himself frequently wishes for death. However, he does not die, and instead finally accedes to his true inheritance, as his biological father's son, although even that inheritance is tinged with death, reflecting the fact that perhaps Oliver does not die because he may be said to have never truly lived as an independent character.

Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou, "A Little Life Among the Multitude of Lesser Deaths': Productive Life Cycles in *Little Dorrit*"

The birth of Amy Dorrit in the filth of the Marshalsea prison announces both an evolutionary victory, as it coincides with the death of hundreds of flies that fall into traps, and a foreshadowing of future cleansing from private and public defilement. The aim of this paper will be to examine how Dickens's obsessive returns to contaminated and disintegrating forms of life render the clean and the abject fluid and interchangeable categories. Little Dorrit, hardly stronger than a fly, and close to the abject by her feminine nature, according to Kristeva, builds her purified microcosm within the miasmatic spaces in which she operates: the cell of the prison, the public street, the remains of the cursed Clenham house. Moreover, the paper will focus on Dickens's preoccupations with life cycles, his perception of 'matter out of place' as recycled rather than wasted matter, and his insistence on a productive appropriation of death and dirt.

Gül Kurtuluş, "Autobiographical Truth Reflecting the Social Truth of Male and Female Subjectivity in *No Thoroughfare*"

When Charles Dickens' less known partner Ellen Ternan's life story is scrutinized it can be seen that her life reflects the problematic theme of female subject formation linked with the parental relation. In the social world, however, it is the laws of society that determine the subjectivity of a child. In other words, the world the child exposed to is already interpreted and/or formulated. This forecloses the possibility of becoming either a free or a 'true' subject. Moreover, the subject

formation of women in society is more problematic than that of men since they do not have the privileges men have in patriarchal society, particularly in Victorian society. Ellen being an actress, a profession she inherited from her mother and her grandmother, had an undeniable influence on Dickens's interest in drama especially after the 1850s. This paper dwells on the mother-daughter relationship with respect to the child's perception of the subject as an independent being or as a restricted being as seen in Nelly's life and explores its traces in Dickens's play, *No Thoroughfare*. The play indicates how females are defined in terms of their sexuality in society. In the play, female characters, who are fictional reflections of Dickens' partner, Nelly, her mother and her two actress sisters demonstrate subject formation by confining them to the role of Victorian ladies, and display the widely accepted association of femininity with compassion, sympathy, and intense emotional states as well as their mercenary side as opposed to the unfeeling, cruel and patriarchal mindset represented by the male characters. Marriage, extramarital relationships and women as seen with regard to the roles assigned by Victorian society that inhibits women's subject formation will be vital parts of the main argument.

Mario Martino, "Born an Item': Fictional Births in Dickens's Novels"

There is a remarkable number of births in Dickens's novels - all the more remarkable with respect to the number of more famous deaths one meets with in the history of the novel, and in Dickens himself (Little Nell, Paul Dombey, Jo the crossing-sweeper...).

Besides, Dickens's literary representations of birth events are indeed qualitatively unique and memorable, not just cursively related in 'telling'; instead, they are lingered on, in 'showing'. My contention is that they signal his modernity and are therefore part of his appeal.

The word "item" in my title, which is used in *Oliver Twist* to refer to the novel's new-born protagonist, is perhaps one of the most significant indexes of such uniqueness. It makes us aware that, for the first time in history, we are born not as human beings but, like Oliver, as measurable facts, as quantifiable entities, in a world in which the scientific perspective, down to its extreme utilitarian version, was gaining an almost unquestioned hegemony. Dickens's realism accepts that perspective but also opposes and denounces it with trenchant satire.

Through a range of examples (including *David Copperfield*, *Little Dorrit*, *Dombey and Son* and *Oliver Twist*), I will examine therefore how Dickens's narrative discourse conveys an empirical and scientific epistemological perspective, even sensing Charles Darwin's theories on the one hand, and the new discoveries in thermodynamics and energy conservation laws on the other. In having the scientific perspective under scrutiny, I will also discuss how Dickens attacked Benthamite and Malthusian ideologies seen as the ultimate outcome and distortion of the scientific world view.

Jerome Meckier, "Death(s) in *Great Expectations*"

One birth occurs in *Great Expectations*—that of little Pip off-stage. One birth occurs in *Great Expectations*—that of little Pip off-stage. Before that, there are four marriages—"It's my wedding day,' cried Biddy in a burst of happiness, 'and I am married to Joe!" The other three are Herbert Pocket's to Clara Barley, Estella's to Drummle, and Wemmick's to Miss Skiffins. But there are upwards of a dozen deaths, three more than in *Bleak House*, two more than in *Hamlet*, even counting Yorrick. Pip's parents head the list, along with his five brothers; they are followed by

Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham, the woman whom Molly surely murdered, Compeyson, Magwitch, Drummle, the two usurpers in “the Eastern story”, and Herbert’s prospective father-in-law. By the time Mr. Pirrip (i.e., Mr. Phillip Pip) frames his narrative in 1860-61, one should probably add Estella, Bidley, Jaggers, and Joe Gargery.

Yet *Great Expectations* is not a morbid novel. Dickens’s masterpiece employs death ironically as the common denominator for the human tragicomedy; it is the last not-so-great experience to expect from life, thus one of the many ironies in the title. All of the novel’s characters, major and minor, high and low, share this expectation. Inevitable mortality, often unacknowledged, undercuts their schemes. Pip comes to terms with death, but it takes both endings for him to do so and one must make allowances for Dickens’s tinkering.

John Murray, “Free will, Destiny, and Death in Dickens”

In the opening lines of *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens announces the birth of a new factual and technical language that will transform commerce and community within the Victorian era. This new language shapes the events of his novel and also restricts the characters’ physical and ideological movement by routinizing and calculating aspects of social behavior. The precision of the emergent technical language limits the potential for expressing alteration and contextuality, for exercising free will, and for making choices of accountability. Stephen Blackpool, the representation of honesty and sincerity, embodies the suffering of the Victorian working class. He is in stark contrast with Josiah Bounderby, a factory owner, whose “long career of quibble, plunder, false pretences, [and] vile example” provided “little service” to the community of Coketown. Despite their considerable differences, both characters fall victim to the randomness of futurity, a progression of unpredictability that remains indiscriminate in exercising its influence over their life outcomes. The technical language of the Victorian era cannot approximate the randomness of futurity experienced by the characters of Coketown and is made ineffectual. This talk will consider how the randomness of the characters’ destinies in *Hard Times* might balance out the inequalities of their social histories and identities. In placing these characters at the whim of destiny, Dickens levels the playing field between the economically disparate classes these characters symbolize and the restrictive technical language used to signify them. Thus, he reduces the opportunity of constructing a relativized and quantified conception of factual probability. When Blackpool falls down Old Hell Shaft and Bounderby experiences his fit of apoplexy, readers are left to tease out a confusing moral lesson whereby good and evil characters suffer the randomness of destiny, and the lack of factual social, economic, and moral distinctions. Both Bounderby and Blackpool gaze into futurity, toward uncertain destinies that cannot be approximated by the restrictive language of an emergent industrialized society.

Sandhya S Nayar “Death and Resurrection in Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield* and the *Bhagavad Gita*: A Comparative Study”

Just as an individual forsaking dilapidated raiment dons new clothes, so the body-encased soul, relinquishing decayed bodily habitations, enters others that are new.

Chapter 11, Verse 22, The Bhagavad Gita

In the timeless celestial song of the Bhagavad Gita, a scripture narrated by Lord Krishna to his chief disciple Arjuna on the brink of the horrendous war of Kurukshetra, death and resurrection signify not only a change of residence by the soul from one body to another, but also a change in

the composite expression of the ego from one state of consciousness to another state of consciousness within one lifetime. In this sense, one can live many lives in one's life space simultaneously conscious of all the different lives (or habits of life) encompassed by that one incarnation, with no imposition of the forgetfulness of intervening death.

David Copperfield, 'a posthumous child', is shaken many times by the blows of death – 'a hopeless consciousness' of all that he has lost – love, friendship, interest, his first trust in the form of the pristine friendship with the unworthy Steerforth, his first affection for Emily, the consciousness of mismatched sensibilities in his marriage to his 'child-wife' Dora, and so on. Like Arjuna shattered by the spectacle of chaotic ruin around him, David Copperfield too undergoes the crescent of his agony where he sees himself as a man upon a field of battle who receives a mortal hurt and scarcely knows that he is struck. He feels he is left alone with his 'undisciplined heart' having no conception of the wound with which it had to strive.

His soul lies cramped by this oppressive death of all that he once held pure and supreme but grace intervenes and 'the night that fell on his undisciplined heart' is no more. The 'long, sad, wretched dream' consummates into the dawn of a new birth. There is a resurrection of hope in the battlefield of his life strewn with the corpses of his dreams.

This paper attempts to draw a parallel between the heroic and vulnerable warrior Arjuna of the Bhagavad Gita who awakens to a higher consciousness battling death literally and metaphorically, with David Copperfield who moves from the wasteland of his dreams a new dawn of awakening.

Tetiana Nekriach, "Quasi-Marriages in Dickens's *David Copperfield*"

Dickens's insight into human hearts enabled him to create an astounding array of love and marital relations in Victorian society. In "David Copperfield", the central theme of which is love in its multifarious manifestations, he also presents several marriage patterns:

successful marriage, based on spiritual equality, with neither spouse regarding the other as inferior (Dr. Strong and Annie, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, Barkis and Peggotty, and, certainly, David and Agnes);

destructive marriage, when one spouse, usually, the husband, seeks to crush the other's spirit in order to achieve complete power (David's mother and Mr. Murdstone, Miss Trotwood's first marriage);

retrospective marriage, when one spouse is dead and the other "reconstructs" their past conjugal life as ideal (Mr. Wickfield, Mrs. Gummidge);

quasi-marriage, when a man and a woman share the household (but not necessarily the bed) without being officially married.

This latter type is best exemplified by the relationship of Miss Betsey Trotwood and Mr. Dick. Taking into account Miss Betsey's strong will and resolute character, it does not seem very likely that she would have been intimidated by her husband's violence, so the story of their separation might well be just a "wild legend". She might have sought moral and financial independence. She is inclined to patronize Mr. Dick, whom she saved from his dishonest relatives and the horrors of a mental asylum, and who turns out to be an ideal partner for her. Throughout the novel she demonstrates her care and affection for him, which has a healing effect upon ever-grateful Mr. Dick.

Björn Oellers, “The Metanarrative of Marriage in Dickens’s Panoramic Novels”

Marriage plays a crucial role in Charles Dickens's panoramic novels *Dombey and Son* (DS), *Bleak House* (BH), *Little Dorrit* (LD) and *Our Mutual Friend* (OMF), because it marks the close of each narrative. In my presentation I will examine these marriages and show how their respective meanings change from novel to novel and how this change constitutes a process. In DS Flora Dombey's marriage stands for a new form of social integration which is subsequently questioned in the following novels. The marriage at the end of BH carries the stains of Chancery, in LD the freshly married couple almost disappears in the chafing London crowd and in OMF John's and Bella's marriage is based on a lie until the very end when they move into a phantasy ideal. I will then show that this development forms a meta-narrative to the process of British society: first new social conditions emerge (DS), then these conditions develop their own momentum (BH) and close on the characters like a prison (LD). Finally the characters have internalised the new conditions and their specific ideology (OMF). Thus Charles Dickens's end-of-narrative marriages present an image of nineteenth century development still worth to be discussed today.

Nic Panagopoulos, “Courtly Love in *Great Expectations*”

This paper analyzes Dickens' *Great Expectations* through the tradition of courtly love. The biographical element is prominent in the novel which reflects Dickens' frustrated social expectations related to his aborted engagement to the banker's daughter, Maria Beadnell, as well as his mid-life romance with the young actress, Ellen Ternan. The courtly love material in the novel is explored from a sociological and psychoanalytic perspective. It is argued that courtly love conceals class and gender politics through such devices as denial, role-reversal, idealization, and reification. The female love object is seen as a kind of prize, and therefore the embodiment of men's amour-propre as well as their socio-economic aspirations. At the same time, if we accept Lacan's theory of courtly love as the situation in which desire for the taboo maternal object is transferred to the taboo sexual object, then we may agree that it represents a “fraud” or “an altogether refined way of making up for the absence of sexual relation by pretending that it is we who put up an obstacle to it” (Courtly Love 141).

David Parker, “Dickens’s Deathbeds”

Oscar Wilde famously joked: “One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing.” This is odd. The death of Little Nell isn't actually described in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. But the joke is popular among modern readers because it gives us a distancing perspective upon the deathbeds in Dickens's fiction, which stand out uncomfortably for us in narratives largely naturalistic.

When describing the deaths of estimable characters, Dickens drew upon sources alien to naturalism—upon melodrama, upon sensation fiction and, above all, upon a religious understanding of death codified in Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Dying* (1650-51), and represented dramatically in part two of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1684).

The deathbed scenes are almost always powerful and moving, but Oscar Wilde's joke helps readers embarrassed by the awkward fit between them and the rest of the narratives in which they appear. Dickens was aware of the awkwardness, I submit, and sought ways to

overcome it, in which search he was eventually successful. Assertive religious doctrine is blended with comedy, powerful imagery, language which echoes throughout the text, keen-eyed observation of characteristic behaviour, and narratorial intrusion that stands apart from what is being described.

The modern reader might still object that, however cunningly it is made acceptable, such treatment of deathbeds has no place in naturalistic fiction. But it is worth remembering that most of Dickens's contemporaries found his intimations of immortality believable.

Lizzy Pournara, "Masochistic Marriages and Incestuous Desires in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*"

In Victorian England, strict moral codes oppressed women, as their sexuality had to be restrained, entrapping them thus in a passive position, in order to avoid the label of "improper" behavior. Consequently, Victorian times witnessed instances of erratic female behavior and masochism for which it could not account and science tried to explain and deal with these. Therefore, as a "Victorian," Freud voiced a view, which has subsequently been largely challenged, that masochism manifests itself also "as an expression of the feminine nature." More specifically, by distinguishing a separate "feminine" type of masochism, Freud assumes that by nature, women are prone to masochist behavior, an argument that seems to be in agreement with the socio-cultural conditions of Victorian England.

My paper will discuss Freud's theory of "feminine" masochism through the examination of the character of Louisa Gradgrind in Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times* (1854). Louisa's character, as sketched by Dickens, like the majority of young women in Victorian England, has already experienced a childhood during which she was oppressed by her father, is now trapped in a masochistic marriage to an old man, who shares a lot of characteristics with her father, making thus her oppression double. As I argue, Louisa's oppressed childhood is the equivalent of a repressed sexuality, which cannot be repressed indefinitely, and her feelings towards her oppressors – her husband and her father – are sublimated into incestuous feelings for her brother, Tom. In her relationship with Tom, Louisa acquires a certain degree of freedom in her expression of sexuality and assumes an active role as her brother's seductress.

Dominic Rainsford, "Posthumous and Prenatal Dickens"

This paper addresses Dickens's interest in life after death (or its absence), and, more strangely, life before birth. Starting from passages in *David Copperfield* and *Our Mutual Friend* that suggest a view of terrestrial existence as a middle space, I will examine whether Dickens's ideas on this matter have any depth or coherence, how they relate to the earthly plotting of his narratives, and how they compare with the thoughts and beliefs of other nineteenth-century writers.

Maria Ristani, "Life-in-Death: Machinic Bodies in Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*"

The aim of this paper is to explore the couplings of organic bodies and inorganic matter prevalent in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and its stage adaptation by the Bald Theatre Group of the English Department at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (May 2012). My focus will primarily be on how human bodies in Dickens's novel relinquish their vitality, will-force and anthropomorphic vigor in favor of convulsive moves, contracted postures and rhythmic grooves, yielding machinic assemblages, and thus putting to the test received binaries

of “dead” matter and organic drives. The most striking example is perhaps found in Dickens’s description of the knitting women, around which much of the action in *Tale* revolves. Madame Defarge, a central figure in the story, is completely taken up, almost subsumed, in the action of knitting: “Madame Defarge knitted with nimble fingers and steady eyebrows, and saw nothing”; along similar lines, people are described by Dickens with “foreheads knitted into the likeness of the gallows-rope they mused about enduring, or inflicting”. Organic features or movements – the cornerstone of anthropomorphism in nineteenth-century thinking – meld with mechanic convulsions in mutual prosthesis. Bringing this world alive on stage, our emphasis with the Workshop Theatre students was similarly placed on stylized gestures or grimaces, mechanical repetitions and sounds, which would faithfully transcribe in performance Dickens’s living automatons. Bodies on stage, as on Dickens’s page, are found immersed in and absorbed by the inertness of matter, yet not in assumed death surrender, but in what seems as an unnaturally vigorous, almost irresistible, compulsion.

Catherine Robson, “Birth, Copulation and Death: *Bleak House* and the Married Woman’s Perspective”

Taking its lead from John Jordan's recent book *Supposing Bleak House*, this paper pays close attention to the retrospective nature of first-person narration in this novel. For Jordan, Esther's achieved knowledge of the facts of her birth and her mother's death is paramount; I, however, argue that it is vitally important to notice that half of the book is told from the perspective of a sexually-experienced married woman. I approach my topic by way of Chapter 51, focussing on a moment which finds Esther Woodcourt telling the story of the evening that she stood outside the closed apartment door of the newly-wed Richard and Ada, and listened to “the murmur of their young voices” within. I suggest that there are at least two good reasons to analyze this moment of division between the intercourse of others and the self-narrating individual. In the first place, it sheds a different light on *Bleak House*'s peculiar formal construction and the chief mystery of its plot: the splitting of narration between an unlocated present-tense speaker and a single individuated being thus appears to body forth the simultaneous connect and disconnect between the love-making of Captain Hawdon and Honoria Barbary and the existence of their child. In the second, it licenses some speculative observations about the characteristics of those lines of descent that run from the first-person narrators of the Victorian novel to the psychoanalytical notion of the subject: I suggest that nineteenth-century fiction's most carefully-elaborated psychologies are grounded upon hostility towards the sexual act that both created them and cared nothing for their individuality.

Victor Sage, “Evolutionary Murder: Death by Water and the ‘Struggle For Existence’ in Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*”

There is a growing consensus about the presence in *Our Mutual Friend* of what the late Sally Ledger calls ‘a wider social-Darwinian account of the struggle for existence’. This paper seeks to locate an overlap between two different streams of discourse in the novel – the Gothic (doubling, the Uncanny Other) and the Grotesque (spare body parts, prosthetic anatomies); and to suggest some of the implications of this rhetorical assimilation for the way this text portrays sexual and social competition in the context of the ontological shift effected by Darwin.

Lourdes E. Salgado, “Mrs Quilp: A Dickensian Character Trapped in a Dead-End Marriage”

According to F. M. L. Thompson (1988), “marriage was the conventional starting point for Victorian families. The middle-class image of marriage was clearly one of a union between social equals, with a penchant for welcoming the good fortune of the occasional lucky alliance with a social superior and to be unforgiving if a son or daughter became entangled with an inferior. Special scorn was reserved for daughters who formed attachments, or actually married, beneath themselves; although such regrettable things clearly did happen from time to time, elaborate precautions were taken to ensure that this was highly exceptional.” The marriage between Mrs and Mr Quilp seems to have been based on Mrs Quilp’s weird attraction to her husband. Since Mrs Quilp was fatherless, she probably tried to restore the Victorian family she once had, and hence her decision to marry such a man, a situation in which the husband’s power over her takes the form of violence and fear. Mrs Quilp, together with her mother, are actually being maltreated, even though they pretend otherwise. It is then that the mother attempts to set free them from this monster but, unfortunately, without a positive result. The whole situation of both mother and daughter is clearly presented to the reader in just a few words. There is a psychological war between daughter and husband, between husband and mother-in-law and possibly, in an unconscious way, between mother and daughter.

Maria Schoina , “Picturing the Birth of a Nation in Charles Dickens’s *Pictures from Italy*”

Part travelogue, part creative writing, *Pictures from Italy* has only recently attracted academic attention on account of its composite style and uneven narrative technique, both of which make it resistant to easy interpretation and generic categorization. In spite of its belatedness in its field, Dickens’s 1846 travel book set out to compete with the existing mass of literature on the subject of Italy by seeking to deflate the pervasive Byronic/Romantic aura surrounding the Italian tour, and to present, instead, Italy to the British reader as “a series of faint reflections” mere shadows in the water “of places to which the imaginations of most people are attracted in a greater or less degree.”

In view of current discussion of the political allusions in the book and its engagement with the controversial aspects of the Italian Risorgimento, my aim in this paper will be to investigate how the book’s idiosyncratic, impressionistic and seemingly loose style and rhetoric open up a contentious space for political commentary on Italy’s emergence as a nation, and on Britain’s involvement in it. Drawing on the view that the nation is a series of social and literary narratives and grows to become itself through the languages of those who write it, I argue that *Pictures from Italy*, by consistently diffusing and dissipating topographical reality into dream-like, visionary impressions, problematizes the prospect of the genesis of a unified and self-governed Italian nation.

Akiko Takei “The Complexity of Domestic Violence in Dickens’s Novels”

Dickens’s concern for domestic violence is a recurring theme in his novels. One can see that his treatment of marital violence varies according to the period in which the novels were written. In his early novels, *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, violence is generally inflicted on women by their partners. However, in *David Copperfield*, Dickens succeeds in

describing fully the process where Murdstone (a perpetrator) cleverly victimizes Clara. In addition, the influence of Murdstone's maltreatment of Clara haunts David. After marrying Dora, David unconsciously models his behaviour on Murdstone. David fails to 'form Dora's mind' (ch.48) in the style of Murdstone and Dora dies probably because of stress caused by David's "education." In *Great Expectations*, which is different from previous novels, women are both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. Mrs Joe daily bullies Joe and Pip, but a physical attack by Orlick leaves Mrs Joe in a vegetative state. Jilted on her wedding day, Miss Havisham adopts Estella and raises her as a woman devoid of any emotion, to avenge the pain which her fiancé has caused her. Estella verbally and psychologically abuses Pip, but, in turn, is bullied by Drummle. If we read his novels chronologically, the change in Dickens's description of domestic violence could be regarded as a testimony of his lifelong concern about the darker side of marriage and his maturity in discussing complex issues related to abuse and its influence on the abused.

Jeremy Tambling, "In the Beginning, and What Precedes it: Dickens's First Chapters"

In three novels, *Oliver Twist*, *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield*, Dickens begins with the birth of the child, coming closer each time to a process of description of being born, culminating in the first-person narrative of David Copperfield, which announces an impossible transition from one state to another, in 'I am Born'. The desire for origins and to go beyond origins means, in Freud's terms, a reaching towards the primal scene, and it means that the rest of the three novels concerned revisits the scene of these births, and probes it, constantly, finding more than had been stated there. In two of these narratives, there is the death of the mother, and in both of these, the question of marriage, and therefore of a relationship to patriarchy is central. But in the third, the birth is posthumous: the father, not the mother, has died, and what stands in for the father is the aunt who has disavowed marriage. The concern within this paper is to investigate the writing of first chapters, and the developments from one to another, and then to read the interconnectedness of these events, which are in profound relationship to each other, and to analyze the increasing interest Dickens has in seeing how birth must be put into the context of death, which is one interpretation of what David Copperfield calls 'this land of dreams and shadows'. The paper will consider, too, how these first chapters are felt to work, unconsciously, in other novels of Dickens which start later in the progress of life but which are intensely aware of death and birth, and marriage: *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend* particularly.

Vladimir Trendafilov, "Death and Closure in Dickens: *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Bleak House*"

Scholars have pointed out that the motif of death is prominent in Dickens's aesthetic. In this essay my chief aim is to argue that in several of Dickens's novels the death issue features not only thematically but also at the level of plot structure and character construction. The plots display a somewhat intermittent, closural structure, involving one or more subclosures before the closure itself: this structure has some origin in the instalment form of publication without necessarily coinciding with it. There seems to be a pattern that at certain moments in the story the protagonist (*Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Esther Summerson*) invariably "dies" to his/her old self, usually having his/her mental outlook changed abruptly (death signifying, simultaneously, re-birth). *Oliver* "dies" just once, when he finds his outcast life and self gone,

waking up at the Brownlow place – never to fully go back to them, although he soon suffers a forced return to an underground milieu eager to re-adopt him. As for David Copperfield, he “dies” several times. In a way, “death” seems to often function as an in-built element in the lives of Dickens's main characters. The closural structure of the protagonists' lives, around which the plot is organised, tends to adumbrate the protagonists as social nomads equally detached from the several sections of society they happen to exist in. Thus they become positioned in the story as both agents and observers, hence acting symbolically – to name one role among quite a few – as mirror reflections of Dickens's artistic self.

Maria Vara, “A Story of an Absence: The Writerly Mystery of *Edwin Drood*”

The sudden disappearance of Edwin Drood from Dickens's last novel is a typical turn in the geometric regularity of classical detective fiction plot. According to Tzvetan Todorov all whodunits include a crime “story of an absence”. This story serves as a mechanism to propel the narrative of the investigation forward, which in the end would provide the comfort of a readerly solution. But what happened to Edwin Drood? Death by murder? By “accident” or by drowning? *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is not a common story of an absence. Dickens's own actual absence, his death, has permanently disrupted the novel's teleological narrative movement from cause to effect, or from mystery to solution, keeping readers forever in suspense.

This paper will investigate how the foreknowledge of the novel's absence of a final solution affects the reading practice. Dickens's untimely death has unintentionally disrupted what would have been a passive reading experience of classical detective fiction, with all “loose ends” retrospectively tied. By refusing the reading pleasures classic whodunits depend on, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* can be seen as a crucial final threshold in Dickens's writing, an early case of a *writerly* text, to borrow Barthes's terminology in *S/Z*, which has demanded an active labour of reading, generating countless rewritings (and completions) since its first publication.

Catherine Waters, “Dickens, ‘first things’ and the Rites of Growing up”

We think of the ‘Births, Marriages and Deaths’ that form the subtitle for this conference as marking the most crucial threshold events of a Victorian life – and rightly so. Indeed, these events were front-page material for the nineteenth-century newspapers. Despite their being acknowledged by newspaper announcement as the most important moments marking the ages of man in Victorian culture, however, and while Dickens undoubtedly depicts some very memorable birth, marriage and death scenes, his writing provides a wider range of threshold events for us to consider in thinking about Victorian life cycles and the rites that distinguish them. In a collaborative essay written with George August Sala for *Household Words* and published as the leader on 15 May 1852, Dickens identifies a more varied and idiosyncratic set of landmarks in life. Entitled ‘First Fruits’, this sketch addressing a range of milestones – both whimsical and serious – forms the framework for my focus upon Dickens's engagement with *other* significant moments in a Victorian lifecycle, beyond those announced in the front-page columns of the *Times*. How do these ‘first things’ expand our sense of the variety of ritual passages that marked a Victorian life? What do they tell us about the formation of identities and the understanding of relationships between past and present selves? In particular, how do they materialize that ambiguous stage of development that we have come to call ‘adolescence’?