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Andrew Mangham. *Dickens's Forensic Realism: Truth, Bodies, Evidence.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017. xvi + 253 pp. $84.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8142-1324-7.

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Dickens's Forensic Realism begins with the commonplace observation that bodies—particularly unstable ones, as well as dead—abound in the novelist's works. Arguing that Dickens's interest in these bodies stemmed from a forensic fascination with their aesthetic, political, and philosophical potential, Mangham shows how Dickens was informed by—and spoke back to—Victorian values of medico-legal truth. The instability of interpretation, perception, and narration is shown to be an inherent feature of both medical-jurisprudence *and* Dickens's technique, informed by his strong working knowledge of the period's developments in forensic medicine. The whole book is meticulously researched, fluently and entertainingly written, and sheds light on perennial epistemological questions of what we know and how we know it in the face of alleged truths and unstable evidences. In relation to how we perceive and narrate our answers to such questions, Mangham reflects that both medico-legal discussions and Dickens's novels demonstrate that "while one can never hope to capture absolute truth, limited, self-aware, and self-distrusting truth is a powerful compromise" (p. 118).

The opening chapter presents a number of high-profile historical court cases alongside a thorough survey of the development of forensic medicine and its relation to the law. Received notions of "natural law" and "gut feelings" dominated common law practice at the start of the nineteenth century, leading to a mistrust of experts and prevailing "common sense" notions that "the truth will out." Mangham traces this history in detail to demonstrate how Dickens's novels—notably *Bleak House* (1852-53), with its savage representation of Chancery, and Tulkinghorn's outmoded legal methods—provide a damning critique of this status quo. Dickens's formative childhood reading of sensationalist journals such as *The Terrific Register* helped shape the mature author's dismantling of the relationship between narrative and "natural justice." Mangham also shows how Dickens's critique of the conflicts between forensic medicine and law, in their conflicting claims to authority, are shown to originate in his understanding of how forensics and law competed "for intellectual authority over the process of interpretation" (p .64)—what Mangham characterizes as "the law's need for certainty and medicine's need for doubt" (p. 85).

A second chapter explores how Dickens employed the methods of forensic medicine in *Oliver Twist* (1837) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864) to develop a narrative style that troubles objective claims to "the whole truth." Through a detailed discussion of the former, Mangham shows how Dickens drew on medical ideas "as a means of cre-

ating and making good use of a central light in the novel" (p. 88). Oliver's dominant perception, characterized by goodness and light—"the heliocentric characterisation of Oliver" (p. 100)—mirrors the interlinking of truth and justice in the medical jurisprudence of the period. In one passage, Fagin is shown to become unnerved when he realizes Oliver is watching him pore over his treasures and yet, in a later dream passage, the gaze is reversed as Oliver is watched by Fagin and Monks at the window. This, Mangham argues, is the crux point at which Oliver's observations as guiding light in the novel can no longer be trusted, deconstructing the objective center of the text in a way that parallels the discussions being held in the medico-legal field of the time.

In contrast to *Oliver Twist* with its central lead character, *Our Mutual Friend* has no central protagonist, a narrative decision, Mangham argues, that enables Dickens to employ a narrative strategy of multiple, interlocking perspectives that echo contemporary medico-legal discussions. Mangham argues, for example, that Mr. Venus's "articulation" of bones mirrors concerns in forensics: "reading bodies textually in this way, and articulating the meaning of their clues" (p. 106). Mangham argues that Mr. Venus "allows the novel to personify one of the major epistemological questions asked at the border between law and medicine and the theme running through the novel: namely, the issue of converting the limits and the reaches of human perception into a reconstructive account" (p. 109). It is in such nexuses, where literary interpretations coincide with the forensic and legal history, that Mangham's argument gathers persuasive force.

In chapter 3, Mangham juxtaposes *Bleak House* with Dickens's early journalism to explore the links between "realistic representation and corporeal symbolism" (p. 17). Infamous cases such as the spat between Dickens and G. H. Lewes over the veracity of the "spontaneous combustion" of Mr. Krook, are discussed to argue that "the author not only shared forensic medicine's distrust of the 'absolute truth' but also believed that the kind of positivism preached by Lewes and his circle was in danger of reproducing the pernicious effects of taking evidence at face value" (p. 120). Indeed, much of what follows in the second half of the book is directed at the relationship of Dickens's fiction to such "face value" interpretations, arguing that "in line with forensic ideas, Dickens believed in a sort of realism that laid out its evidence so that it might be examined like it would in a court of law" (p. 130). This investigative mode, Mangham argues, allowed Dickens to "lead his narratives astray" (p. 132) through questionable multiple perspectives; objects, facts, and things with complicated histories and functions; and a medicalization of the city itself—a grotesque making-strange "method of describing the city that he would continue using throughout his career: the imposition of corporeal metaphors befuddles as much as it immerses us in the real world" (p. 133). It is to the signs left on bodies, on city streets, and the "befuddling" role of objects that Mangham directs his attention in passages from *Bleak House*, *Sketches by Boz* (1833-36), and other aspects of Dickens's early journalism, such as *The Mudfog Papers* (1837-38), written for *Bentley's Magazine.* Concerning these, Mangham argues that "Dickens's vacillations between the imperatives of investigative journalism and the invented world of fiction find more common ground with the methods of forensic analysis than one might expect" (p. 177).

The final chapter discusses the "thingness" of *The Pickwick Papers* (1836) and *Great Expectations* (1860) to explore the unfixed nature of evidence and question the nature of interpretation, arguing that "the physical object world, once breathtakingly legible, has become opaque" (p. 181). Through detailed analyses of "the death masks in Jaggers's office, the bags of hair in Mr. Krook's shop, Madame Defarge's knitting, Fagin's pitchfork" and other objects, Mangham shows how Dickens's objects "all tell stories that are big-

ger than their purely descriptive function" (p. 182). Dickens is shown to populate his works with myriad objects that simultaneously encourage and frustrate forensic investigation: "objects do not always have the weight of truth or accuracy of interpretation to commend them" (p. 185); or inanimate objects which are invested with lifelike qualities "for the purpose of tormenting guilty characters … the door-knocker in ***A Christmas Carol*** (1843), and the pointing Allegory in ***Bleak House***" or the chair which comes to life in ***The Pickwick Papers*** "to solve a crime and to tell stories about the dozens of posteriors it has known" (p. 210). There is also a lively discussion of objects in Miss Havisham's room in ***Great Expectations*** and the way that they project themselves onto Pip's imagination so that "Pip's fancies are indeed a version of the forensic idea that the foibles of interpretation are unruly forces that are both a need and an anxiety for the science" (p. 225). My one very minor criticism lies in this chapter, with Mangham repeatedly placing the word "things" in scare quotes, in the same manner that "truth" has, for decades, been picked up with the antiseptic tongs of inverted commas. It is abundantly clear from the excellent argument that Mangham means the world of objects when referring to "things" and, furthermore, that the status of these objects and the evidence they provide is fluid and conditional. It detracts from the argument to repeatedly draw attention to "things" in quotes as unstable; bodies are as equally unstable in Dickens as things are, but Mangham never once refers to them as "bodies"—to do so would be absurd.

Mangham's conclusion summarizes his argument but points to wider truths than those which simply highlight the coincidence of the novels with the forensic and legal history. Significantly, he alerts the reader to present-day issues: "Privileging the sciences over the arts and humanities," he argues, "risks forfeiting crucial research that needs to be done on the ways we read bodies and their contexts" (p. 227). His close reading of Dickens in relation to the development of medical jurisprudence goes a long way in making the very clear case that "it is not objectivity, obsession, statistics, or science that is the enemy of truth, but the unexamined premise—the belief, in short, than an idea can be relied upon without any scrutiny of the cognitive and evidentiary journey that gets us there. We are no more objective than our Victorian forbears, and we are in as much need as they were of the careful, imaginative considerations of reality and perception that we find in the arts and humanities" (p. 229). I do not doubt that these elegantly expressed and poignant arguments will make this a significant, pioneering book in Dickens studies, the medical humanities, and studies of the history of science.

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