Feminist criticism has not been kind to Charles Dickens, scorning in particular what Orwell referred to as his “legless angels” – good daughters like Little Nell, Agnes Wickfield, Esther Summerson, and all their dutiful ilk. Such critics have turned instead to the dark, angry women whose path seems to cut across the ordered progress of the Dickens novel, but they have ignored the good daughter’s own wanderings outside the paternal house. Hilary M. Schor argues that in doing the necessary work of conveying value and meaning – dutifully carrying out her father’s will – the good daughter acquires many of the attributes of her dark sister. The more earnestly the good daughter struggles to transcribe her father’s story, the more she inscribes her own, overstepping the limits of domestic goodness, and claiming her own secret inheritance as a center of narrative authority in the Dickens novel.

Hilary M. Schor is Associate Professor of English at the University of Southern California. She is author of Scheherazade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel (1992).
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DICKENS AND THE DAUGHTER OF THE HOUSE
Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly syntheses and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as “background,” feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field.

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