



# Idiots, Madmen, and Other Prisoners in Dickens

*Natalie McKnight*

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Influenced by feminism and Michel Foucault, this study explores Dickens's fascination with prisoners of private worlds and languages, suggesting that his attitude toward these figures was influenced by 19th-century prison and asylum reforms, holy idiot/wise fool traditions and his own experiences with imprisonment. Through such characters, Dickens's regels against limiting Victorian norms, advocating a greater openness to aberrance. But his treatment of these figures is not consistent - sometimes his own imprisonment in bourgeois norms causes him to marginalize the very characters he wishes to celebrate, particularly his female fools. His conflicting attitudes toward the aberrant dramatically shaped his life and work.

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