

## Week 5:

Corey and Yumi

### Character and social networks

#### “Extracting Social Networks from Literary Fiction” - Elson, Dames, and McKeown

- **Anna’s critical summary**
- “They argue that a given novel’s narrative standpoint is what determines the nature of its social network, or that this standpoint at least has much more of an effect on the amount and quality of the dialogue than does the setting or the number of characters involved,” (Gonzales 2)
- “We’ve talked about how it is difficult to locate a protagonist or main character in the novel, even if John Harmon/John Rokesmith/Julius Handford seems like he should be at its center, because of various formal qualities and quirks of the books, and these methods would definitely be one way in which to begin to evaluate this question.” (Gonzales 3)
- How do the authors define character? Social network? How does this compare to your sense of how these categories function in Dickens? (The title *Our Mutual Friend* seems to suggest that in some way, the novel is structured around the discovery of social networks and connections between characters.)
- Expanding on the question of defining character: Elson, Dames, and McKeown used a tool called the Stanford NER (Named Entity Recognizer) to extract the names of characters from each text (see section 4.1). We ran the text of *Our Mutual Friend* through the NER. See the results here: [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14xmDgh6NdiFHK4Une9KBEmZUVJHsNOjOgGJ5gI\\_zarU/edit](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14xmDgh6NdiFHK4Une9KBEmZUVJHsNOjOgGJ5gI_zarU/edit). What do you notice about what is and isn’t included? How does this list differ from one you might make of the characters in OMF?
- How bounded by class are Dickens’ social networks? What other patterns do we see in them?
- How do social networks develop, or connections between characters become clear, over time in Dickens (thinking about both the unfolding of Dickens’ narrative and the serialization of the text)?
- How do the authors deal with reported speech? What would they say about Cohn, and vice versa? What possible dynamics are working (and lost by this study) through indirect speech?

- Does Elson, Dames, and McKeown's conclusion apply to OMF, and if so, what does it say about narrative voice? The City?
- As Anna points out, how does this paper answer and fail to answer Ramsey's call for an "algorithmic criticism"? Morretti's Operationalizing? Are there any greater truth claims?

## Circulation

From Luke's seminar paper: "money is passed amongst the upper and material items are passed amongst the lower."

We'd like to propose that parallels can be drawn between the circulation (or failure to circulate) of the following:

- money (see references to stocks, speculation, Fascination Fledgby's mortgages)
- items throughout their life cycles (dust heaps, pieces of bodies (Wegg's leg), Jenny Wren's fabric scraps) -> it-narratives
- documents or material texts (Harmon's will; the books that Boffin buys, whose material features like binding and number of volumes are highlighted; the ballads that Wegg sells; possibly the material form of *Our Mutual Friend* itself)
- people, who are assumed dead and then reborn (often out of the Thames, like the items Gaffer retrieves from the dead)
- people, through different classes and spheres of society
- knowledge, which is figured as a commodity or form of capital (see Winter) and Mr. Boffin: "hear some more. . . There's plenty more; there's no end to it," (Dickens 484)
- Does circulation have a moral value for Dickens? A practical value? An artistic value?
- Does one metaphor predominate or hold more thematic significance here?
- Are there moments when these parallels break down or become problematic?

## Literacy and subject formation

**"Learning by Heart in Our Mutual Friend" - Sarah Winter (2011)**

- Yumi's criticism summary

- **Luke's seminar paper**
- How does literacy shape class divisions? Does it also shape social networks?
- Luke writes: "[Jenny's] social mobility is thus impaired, but neither she nor Lizzie nor any of Dickens' lower-class characters are aware that their inability to advance in society is due to illiteracy." How do we see Dickens' characters thinking about their own literacies and class positions?
- We might also consider this passage of Eugene's speech, which Winter quotes: "'You charm me, Mortimer, with your reading of my weaknesses. (By-the-bye, that very word, Reading, in its critical use, always charms me. An actress' Reading of a chambermaid, a dancer's Reading of a hornpipe, a singer's Reading of a song, a marine painter's Reading of the sea, the kettle-drum's Reading of an instrumental passage, are phrases ever youthful and delightful.)'" (Dickens 542)
- Are the issues of learning and class that Winter describes gendered? We might consider Eugene and Headstone's conflict over Lizzie (see p. 288)
- Do alternative literacies threaten the written word?
- What argument is Winter making about (novel?) reading and "synthetic knowledge" (266)? Can this argument be brought into conversation with others, like Miller's, that focus on the ideological and/or disciplinary functions of novels?
- What do we make of Boffin purchasing books about misers? Can we connect this to Winter's arguments, and to other issues around Boffin's engagement with material texts?

"Mr. Boffin would say, 'Now, look well all around, my dear, for a Life of a Miser, or any book of that sort; any Lives of odd characters who may have been Misers.' Bella, thus directed, would examine the window with the greatest attention, while Mr. Boffin would examine her face. The moment she pointed out any book as being entitled Lives of eccentric personages, Anecdotes of strange characters, Records of remarkable individuals, or anything to that purpose, Mr. Boffin's countenance would light up, and he would instantly dart in and buy it." (467)

## Death, rebirth, identity, and the supernatural

- **Anna's and Lanie's close readings**

Anna: "In a novel rife with disguises and aliases, deceptions in which Harmon himself plays a major role, Harmon's reflections here further destabilize already-unsettled notions of identity and raise a series of questions about what it means for a specific person to exist."

Anna: “In his questioning, in his stating that he “cannot possibly express” what took place as it truly happened, Harmon suggests that there is some fundamental, impossible-to-bridge divide between what took place in the room and his telling of it, even though this is a telling to himself rather than to another person. Thus, the truth value of the whole story is called into question not because Harmon is attempting to communicate it to someone who was not there, but because it is being narrated at all.”

Lanie: “This suggests, perhaps, that there is some complexity of character in life that does not exist in death; that in life, men cannot be easily categorized as good or bad, and their wrongdoings cannot be easily forgiven.”

Lanie: “Contrary to Riderhood’s unimpressible face at the beginning of the paragraph, his body is now doing the impressing upon the other characters. His revitalization becomes more palpable as it alters the surrounding characters’ emotions, as if Riderhood’s returning life force is tangible.”

- Let’s first look at these individually and identify what’s going on.
- What parallels exist between these passages? With others involving similar themes or motifs?
- How is identity constructed? Is it fluid or immobile (or are some characters dynamic and others not)? Can we relate this back to education?
- Are there moments of self-awareness or attempts to be so? Looking at Eugene: “Riddle-me, riddle-me-ree, perhaps you can’t tell me what this may be?—No, upon my life I can’t. I give it up!” (295) John Harmon: “There was no such thing as I,” (369) Bradley Headstone: “No man knows till the time comes what depths are within him. . .” (396) Bella’s identity play by referring to herself as the “lovely woman” (316) others? What is going on?
- Do characters recognize the subjecthood of others? Is there unease?
- Does the fluidity of the Thames River motif apply here, looking at Harmon’s and Riderhood’s ‘baptisms’, as well as the strange anthropomorphization in the following quote: “In those pleasant little towns on Thames, you may hear the fall of water over the weirs, or even, in still weather, the rustle of the rushes; and from the bridge you may see the the young river, dimpled like a young child, playfully gliding away among the trees, unpolluted by the defilements that lie in wait for it on its course, and as yet out of hearing of the deep summons of the sea,” (Dickens 504).
- **Adriana’s seminar paper**
- What is the significance of ghosts in *Our Mutual Friend*? Can we connect this to the close reading passages?

## Narration, problems thereof, and realism

- p409 Tippins narrated monologue
- p325 and others—injunctions to “my lords and gentlemen and honorable boards”
- Lizzie’s love for Eugene “I have no more dreamed of the possibility of my being his wife, than he ever has - and words could not be stronger than that,” (528). p512-4 Betty Higden’s death represented through dialogue. Why might there be almost no narration at all here? How explain the unprecedented asterisk break?
- Harkening back to Anna’s close reading, as well as the foregoing discussion, are there moments where realist strategies break down? What is the effect and what is at stake?
- if time, comedy not strictly realistic - p336-7 Sloppy ululates
- Notebook: “Relieve by making Wegg as comic as possible,” (Stone 357)
- From Adriana’s paper: “This poses also a strange semiotic problem – the novel, at its own level of abstraction, already bears a complicated relationship to the reality it purports to represent. But with Wegg, the reader is met by an additional level of abstraction from the reality within the novel itself. The fantasy is attached to referents that exist solely in the book, but is nevertheless projected onto what would be considered “real” people in the spatial and temporal reality that they occupy.”
- Consider also: the NER “flattens” the levels of fictionality that appear in the text, putting Aunt Jane, Mr. Baggs, Caggs, and Daggs, and the names of referential people like Napoleon Bonaparte alongside those of Dickens’ major characters.
- To return to Winter: OMF “suggests that reading, rather than being a means of rote learning, can express an idiosyncratic interpretation of a text or artifact. In this way, reading can be recognized—and taught—as a productive activity through which individuals fabricate and reconfigure their social and economic viability within an increasingly pervasive capitalist culture,” (Winter 230-1). What effects does reading have on the characters? On the readers? Could this explain Dickens’ strange narrative and stylistic shifts in OMF?
- Thinking about all the novels we’ve read so far, does the realist novel as theorized by critics like Watt exist? Or: can you imagine a perfectly realist novel, or realist novel that never breaks with realism? What do we mean and what are we doing when we apply the term realism?

## Note-taking

- Reader writes: “I would like us to consider reading notebooks as *primary* literary sources, attending to their particular conventions, organizing princi-

ples, quirks, and charms. If we suspend our habit of viewing such materials as mere anticipations of future works, what kinds of possibilities emerge for criticism? What are the tropes of notation (e.g. dating, headings, quotation, unguarded confession, casual tone, doodles, fragmentary syntax, parataxis, etc)?" (2). How could we analyze Dickens' notes as primary sources?

- How do Dickens' note-taking practices compare to our own? To the digital platforms we've been using?
- Is there an aesthetics to Dickens' note-taking practices?
- Possibly a weird question, started to ask this in class last week: is there a way we can imagine Dickens's notes as an algorithmically-produced transformation of OMF? Or if this is too weird, as a paratext, in Ramsay's sense?
- If writing is recycling, can we use that to go back and read the scene of Wegg and Boffin's names (47-9)?

## **Assignment for next week: indexing OMF with Dickens's notes**

**3:45-4: PJ gives us a progress report on Barsetshire visualizations**

**4-4:30 long-deferred discussion of Markdown, git, and Zotero (Nabil will come)**

**4:35: wrap-up**

Next week:

**February 28: optional but recommended open lab, NVol, McCabe**  
Computer Classroom, 1-4 pm

**March 2: corpus**

- Charles Dickens, Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, third third
- OMF critical reading 1
- OMF critical reading 2
- Algee-Hewitt and Piper, "The Werther Effect"

- explore Dickens's corpus with [CLiC](#)
- text analysis reading from A New Companion to Digital Humanities
- post to Known: Novel into Notes - indexing *Our Mutual Friend*
- 3 pm Skype visit from Anna Gibson, director of the [Dickens Notes Project]([Dickens Working Notes Project](#))
- look also at [Versioning Machine](#)
- data viz discussion with PJ: follow up

discussion and outline: Adriana, RJ; close reading: Anna, Corey, Lanie; criticism summary: Gaby, Nithya; seminar paper: ; break: Lanie, Anna