

## Discussion Outline - Week 6

Adriana and RJ

### Adriana's paper

Consider the paranormal in OMF and how it challenges our notions of realism. "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." (2)

### Commodification in OMF

#### Marx

Summaries by Nithya and Luke Do Nithya and Luke pick up on different details? Their concluding questions: Nithya asks, "what do we make of all the scenes that make labor explicit, from Jenny Wren to Gaffer? Does Dickens make visible the process that a capitalist society render invisible? I think that it is also interesting when we consider the transformation of people (women in particular) into commodities themselves, because it complicates the division between people and commodities." it might be helpful to consider Nithya's first question in relationship to this passage: "the labour of the individual asserts itself as a part of the labour of society only by means of the relations which the act of exchange establishes directly between the products, and indirectly, through them, between the producers. To the latter, therefore, the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things." (Marx, 437) Nithya: "The table does not become 'mystical' because of its use-value, but rather because, in the act of exchange, the social character of human labour takes the form of relationships between products." (1)

Luke asks, "If we model these characters as objects, then, what would Marx say about these characters bettering themselves? By his logic, the man-hours put into bettering themselves (through learning to read, etc.) would constitute increasing their value, but as we discussed society generally does not acknowledge this betterment in OMF. How can these characters gain value if they are considered commodities and thus require an input of labor? Headstone might be particularly interesting to examine under this context."

How can we interpret this seemingly literal instance of Marx's exchange value in OMF? "...Georgiana produced a necklace. 'Ma says chits and jewels have

no business together,' pursued Georgiana, 'and that's the reason why I have no trinkets except this. . . However, here it is, I am thankful to say, and of use at last, and you'll sell it Sophronia, and buy things with it.'" (647)

## **Yumi's seminar paper**

Dickens' parallels with Marx social standing : moral value :: exchange value : use value "Dickens attempts to distinguish between characters' social standing (a socially and relationally determined quality, analogous to exchange value) and moral value (an inherent quality, analogous to use value)." (1) "These plotlines, which end in happy marriages, seem to dramatize the importance of valuing 'use value' over 'exchange value.'" (2) "It is Bella's ability to let go of her desire for money that ultimately wins her both John Harmon's love and his money." (2) "However, within the world of *Our Mutual Friend*, social and moral value are more closely intertwined than Dickens might like to believe. Lizzie's sense that she is unworthy of Eugene and her lack of desire to exploit her connection with him for financial gain serve as signs of the virtue that ultimately allows her to ascend in the social order." (2) River Thames "I want to read the Thames as a site where some degree of freedom from social determination can be attained. . . The river also seems to create possibilities for characters' identities and social positions to be destabilized." (3-4) How can we compare this to the moment on p. 688? "I think. . . . among them. . . . there is a ship upon the ocean. . . . bringing. . . . to you and me. . . . a little baby, John.'" (2)

## **Humans as Commodity**

Bella as Commodity "For a City man, John certainly did appear to care as little as might be for the looking up or looking down of things, as well as for the gold that got taken to the Bank. But he cared, beyond all expression, for his wife, as a most precious and sweet commodity that was always looking up, and that never was worth less than all the gold in the world." (683) + Boffin and Venus "Taking him into custody for that purpose, or overshadowing him as if he really were his Evil Genius in visible form, Mr. Wegg clapped Mr. Boffin's hat upon the back of his head, and walked him out by the arm, asserting a proprietorship over his soul and body that was at once more grim and more ridiculous than anything in Mr. Venus' rare collection." (657)

## **Sexuality in OMF: Anna's close reading**

"Our Mutual Friend attempts to make her sexuality disappear and then to efface it through framing Bella's desire or body as something to be passed between Rokesmith and her father, and through scripting her actions towards her father as those of a mother to a baby." (1) Infantilizing of father figures Jenny Wren

treating father, Mr. Dolls, like a child -> what purpose does infantilizing serve in this context? How is it different from the role it plays for Bella? Do all instances of Bella's infantilizing of her father serve the same purpose (Consider pgs.684-85)?

## **It narratives**

On 689-90, following vivid description: "some despairing gingerbread that had been vainly trying to dispose of itself all over the country, and had cast a quantity of dust upon its head in its mortification, again appealed to the public from an infirm booth. So did a heap of nuts, long, long exiled from Barcelona, and yet speaking English so indifferently as to call fourteen of themselves a pint." How does the personification of these commodities relate to the human labor inherent in them (referring back to Marx)?

## **Repetition**

651: "'All right, Venus, all right. ... All right, Venus. Thank'ee Venus. Thank'ee, thank'ee, thank'ee!'" 673: "He read the letter, and faintly exclaimed 'Dear me!' 'You may as well say Dear me!' rejoined Mrs. Wilfer, in a deep tone. Upon which encouragement he said it again, though scarcely with the success he had expected; for the scornful lady then remarked, with extreme bitterness: 'You said that before.'" 152: "'I, Roger Riderhood, ... tell you, Lawyer Lightwood, that the man Jesse Hexam ... told me that he done the deed. What's more, he told me with his own lips that he done the deed. What's more, he said that he done the deed. And I'll swear it!'" (152) 47, 722-724, 585  
What effect does repetition have on the narrative? Does it perhaps reflect or mimic the industrialized production of commodities in a capitalist economy?

## **10 min break**

## **DiHum + note-taking**

our note-taking assignments (Known posts) Gaby on "The Werther Effect I"  
"Digital tools could revolutionize literary studies, but the jump to make it instantly revolutionary – before we've even mastered the fundamentals of its language – strikes me as a miscalculation." "From this list, we then created a scaled document term matrix that lists the frequencies of our Werther words as a percentage of the overall number of words in each of the works in our corpus. This matrix gives us an idea of the relative presence of our ninety- one variables for every work. We then created a distance table that calculates the distances between every work in the corpus by considering each of the word frequencies as a single coordinate in Euclidean space. A work's location is the

aggregate of all these coordinates (i.e., word frequencies) so that it assumes a location— in our case, in a ninety- one dimensional space. The distance between each work’s location is then calculated using straightforward Euclidean geometry. “Distance” is thus a measure of the similarity of the lexical presence of Wertherian words between any two works.” (5) Reading topologically " In rethinking our engagement with literary history in topological terms, we aim to reframe our understanding of literary works not as static, discrete, and highly singular objects but as socially embedded, circulatory processes— as linguistic events that can be mapped. In so doing, topologies place us in a critical relationship to the network as one of the dominant figures of contemporary thought.” (176) “According to topological thinking, there is not a singularity out there called Werther but rather different kinds of Wertherisms that allow different kinds of new literary arguments to take shape.” (156) what kinds of literary arguments can we make by using this method? Simon Reader “I would like us to consider reading notebooks as primary literary sources, attending to their particular conventions, organizing principles, 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?”

Prep for Anna Gibson <http://dickensnotes.com/> <http://v-machine.org/samples/>  
<http://cllc.bham.ac.uk/>

**3:00 PM Anna Gibson**

**10 min break**

**Class / value / character / gender**

Eugene + Lizzie Lanie’s close reading “Eugene’s anxiety over Lizzie discovering his flaws is successfully moving such that Eugene redeems himself to the reader through his attempt to redeem himself to Lizzie.” “Dickens gives himself significant space in the novel to complicate many characters’ morality before ultimately pushing them toward good or evil.” Corey’s close reading “This frees [Eugene] to become the confused spectator of his own thoughts, which are neatly partitioned off into separate speakers and so fictitiously coming from them and not him, which is precisely the “aid” the “tone of levity” renders.” “Eugene’s reliance on other voices and Lizzie indicates that subject formation is situated in a social context, and arises out of the collision of various people and ideas.” John + Bella To what extent are John/Bella and Eugene/Lizzie exchangeable duplicates? Do they have the same value? Are they equivalent products of different brands, so to say? Economic value reflecting virtue “Truly, Bradley Headstone had taken careful note of the honest man’s dress in the course of that night-walk they had had together. He must have committed it to memory, and slowly got it by heart. It was exactly reproduced in the dress he now wore. And whereas, in his own schoolmaster clothes, he usually looked as if they were the

clothes of some other man, he now looked, in the clothes of some other man, or men, as if they were his own.” (631)

**Version control (Known posts) [around 4:45]**