

Title: Victorian Research Seminar Week 5 Outline Author: Alexandra Ye Date: February 20, 2018 —

Outline Week 5

Bakhtin

Leila's paper

What is the significance of the link between Headstone and Rokesmith's language in their respective marriage proposals?

How does Bakhtin argue that Dickens is using language in these scenes?

- Both of them speaking not *in* language, but rather *through* language - how and why?
- How are Dickens's intentions mingled with Headstone and Rokesmith's intentions in each of their scenes?
- What can Dickens's notes tell us about this?

Language

How does Bakhtin's conception of language relate to our understanding of fiction and realism?

- Language treated "as objects, as typifactions, as local color" (288)
- Literary language as a "dialogue of languages" (294)

Poetry vs. Prose

Willa's questions

Isn't poetry also highly referential? Is poetry necessarily highbrow/novel low-brow? Is this distinction necessary + what do we gain and/or lose from it? What's Bakhtin's overall objective in this book? Language as "ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion..." (271)

(Is this accurate? Does the language of prose really not do this?) What can Hack's close reading at a distance and Underwood, Bamman, and Lee's distant reading contribute here?

The English comic novel

Bakhtin's close readings of *Little Dorrit* and passages from other novels Hybrid constructions and pseudo-objective motivations

How do they compare/relate to Cohn's narrated monologues? Especially with regard to comic style and the tendency of narrated monologues towards attitudes of sympathy/irony What is the effect of comedy on realism? Parodic stylization such that incorporated languages are revealed to be "inadequate to reality" (311) [Am I confusing two different uses of the term "realism" here?] Narrators and character zones

How might these connect to Dickens, Cohn's narrated monologue, Trollope as a narrator?

Dickens's narrative in *Our Mutual Friend*

Rebecca on Mr. Wegg

Narrative contrast and moral judgment See very beginning of book 2, chapter 10 > "There was grief in the aristocratic house, and there was joy in the Bower. Mr Wegg argued, if an orphan were wanted, was he not an orphan himself; and could a better be desired? And why go beating about Brentford bushes, seeking orphans forsooth who had established no claims upon you and made no sacrifices for you, when here was an orphan ready to your hand who had given up in your cause, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker? Mr Wegg chuckled, consequently, when he heard the tidings. Nay, it was afterwards affirmed by a witness who shall at present be nameless, that in the seclusion of the Bower he poked out his wooden leg, in the stage-ballet manner, and executed a taunting or triumphant pirouette on the genuine leg remaining to him."

Emma on Bella Wilfer's mercenary aspirations

Free indirect discourse and "the lovely woman" See chapter 8 > "And then, as they sat looking at the ships and steamboats making their way to the sea with the tide that was running down, the lovely woman imagined all sorts of voyages for herself and Pa. Now, Pa, in the character of owner of a lumbering square-sailed collier, was tacking away to Newcastle, to fetch black diamonds to make his fortune with; now, Pa was going to China in that handsome threemasted ship, to bring home opium, with which he would for ever cut out Chicksey Veneering and Stobbles, and to bring home silks and shawls without end for the decoration of his charming daughter. Now, John Harmon's disastrous fate was all a dream, and he had come home and found the lovely woman just the article for him, and the lovely woman had found him just the article for her, and they were going away on a trip, in their gallant bark, to look after their vines, with streamers flying at all points, a band playing on deck and Pa established in the great cabin."

Break

Hack

What are the stakes of Hack's argument?

Victorian literature and African American literature as important archives for each other

Thinking about reception, re-use, repetition, the concept of archive

What do we gain from this? How could Dickens's notes be useful for this, if we were to think about *Our Mutual Friend* in this context? Or Butt and Tillotson on Dickens as a serial novelist

What is "canonical" British literature, and what does it do?

Hack's method of close reading at a distance

Attention to "the text itself" as well as work's "geographic dispersal and uptake, especially by readerships not envisioned or addressed by the work itself (3)

How does this compare to Underwood, Bamman, Lee's method and objective?

What is our own distance from these texts? —> Art's paper

Art's paper

Recontextualization as destabilization/reclamation "Two Men in a Boat," by zlot

Fanfiction as archive/reuse/citation How does the "what if?" question in fanfiction also speak to Hack's argument? What does fanfiction mean for OMF's geographic dispersal + uptake And what about the movement through time and space of that fanfic?

Underwood, Bamman, Lee

Transformation of gender

Measuring the "diachronic instability of gender categories"—binary gender categories "became less central to characterization" over time (12,11)

"While gender roles were becoming more flexible, the space actually allotted to (real, and fictional) women on the shelves of libraries was contracting sharply"

(1) Were you surprised by this? What do we think of the quantitative methods used?

What can looking at English-language fiction from 1703-2009 tell us about Victorian literature specifically? What insights can we gain into *Our Mutual Friend*? Or is this a misguided line of questioning—to what extent do we need to put quantitative study, close reading, and book history side by side? Looking at the theoretical questions left open: how should we understand these changes in gender categories? How might one go about studying perspectival instability, as suggested in the conclusion? What other questions might we have that we think Underwood et al's datasets and method could answer?

Last week on *Our Mutual Friends* [weave this stuff throughout outline?]

Lots of changing characters

Bella Wilfer

Her changing/budding relationships with her family, Rokesmith, Lizzie

Emma on Mastodon: child/father relationships - parallel between Jenny Wren and Bella Wilfer?

Mr. Boffin's miserhood

Mrs. Lammle's change of conscience

Bradley Headstone - yikes

John Rokesmith/Harmon/Julius Handford's conversation with himself

What to make of the characterization of Mr. Riah?

Notes and note-taking: ?

February 20: reference

- Charles Dickens, Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, second third
- Mikhail Bakhtin, from "Discourse in the Novel," 259-331
- Daniel Hack, "Introduction" to *Reaping Something New: African American Transformations of Victorian Literature*

- Ted Underwood, David Bamman, and Sabrina Lee, The Transformation of Gender in English-Language Fiction and
- take a look at the [Dickens Notes Project](Dickens Working Notes Project, paying particular attention to the Our Mutual Friend MS History(<http://dickensnotes.com/omfmshistory/>))
- using the OMF Notes images (higher-quality facsimiles of the OMF notes) which you will now find in Dropbox, choose a chapter from the middle third of the novel and compare notes to chapter
- discussion and outline: Aly
- close reading: Emma, Rebecca, Leila, Aly
- criticism summary: Amy (Hack), Willa
- seminar paper: Leila, Art
- break: Katie, Tristan