Points of Departure:
Revisiting London in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*

by
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A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of English

Memorial University of Newfoundland
August 2021

St. John's Newfoundland

Abstract

Dickens's last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend* [1865], is most often studied as a conclusion to his literary career. Instead, this thesis focuses on this text as a transitional novel, not a terminal one. It analyzes how Dickens repurposes his former narrative patterns and tropes of the city in a society that was vastly different from the one he was writing in his earlier novels. I examine how *Our Mutual Friend* creates a multi-perspective view of London through its use of juxtaposition, fragmentation, and layering, which is representative of Dickens's shifting focus to a broader range of perspectives and his new interpretation of the city, including his increasing belief that London in the late nineteenth century was a place lacking opportunity for its inhabitants. I analyze *Our Mutual Friend*'s differences, including how Dickens alters his representation of London, how he adjusts his use of the omniscient narrator, how he represents public and private spaces in the city, how he uses and represents the movement of male characters through London's streets, how he moves away from a central protagonist, and how he treats women who actively navigate the public space of the city. Through a series of close readings, I compare these aspects of *Our Mutual Friend* to his earlier novels, most notably *Oliver Twist* [1837], *David Copperfield* [1849], *Bleak House* [1852], *Little Dorrit* [1855], and *Great Expectations* [1860]. While prior literary critics study Dickens's representation of London through a biographical lens and cite him as the authority on literature of the Victorian city, my study takes a different approach by analyzing how his changing literary techniques make *Our Mutual Friend* a departure from his earlier novels.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the patience and kindness of my supervisor, Dr. Annette Staveley. Her guidance during an unprecedented time allowed me to write a thesis that I am proud of. Additionally, I am endlessly thankful to my parents: without them answering my countless phone calls, I would not have made it past chapter one. And, to my friends and co-workers: I am grateful that you have listened to me talk about Dickens and London for the past year, and provided me with inspiration that was instrumental in the completion of this thesis.

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Introduction

Rereading Charles Dickens's last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend* [1865], is an exercise in leaving behind traditional assumptions about Dickens, his novels, and the progression of his literary career. This thesis will examine the ways that *Our Mutual Friend* is a transitional novel, not a terminal one. Through a survey of the critical approaches to *Our Mutual Friend* and a series of close readings of its perspectives, settings, and characters, I will discuss how Dickens adapts his earlier narrative patterns and techniques in this novel to create new ways of narrating the city and its inhabitants in the rapidly changing and modernizing capitalist environment of mid-Victorian London. I intend to position *Our Mutual Friend* as the beginning of a new phase in Dickens's literary career, one which grows away from the themes and motifs he explored in his previous novels, and which prefigures the continuation of these transitions in the unfinished fragment of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* [1870]. This new cycle of writing that begins with *Our Mutual Friend* leaves behind the specificity of protagonist-centred narrative in favour of the 'Voice of Society,' presented in the form of a unique, unnamed narrator who pivots between multi-layered panoramic and private perspectives.

Dickens's novels, detailing a range of beloved, notorious, and complex characters living in the rapidly expanding industrial world, are some of the most widely studied texts in English literature and produce vast expanses of commentary, both positive and negative. Deirdre David and Eileen Gillooly write that "only the Bard enjoys greater name recognition, yet the adjective 'Dickensian' conjures a more vivid set of associations than does 'Shakespearean,' and Scrooge cuts a more familiar figure in our market-driven global economy than Lear or Hamlet or Macbeth" (1). *Our Mutual Friend* was the fourteenth novel in a prodigious literary career that began in 1836 with the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* and concluded in 1865 with *Our*

Mutual Friend. Although Dickens began writing *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* in the late 1860s, his unexpected death left unfinished the novel intended to follow *Our Mutual Friend*. His career coincided with, and drew inspiration from, the dramatic changes in the political and social structure in Britain in the nineteenth century.[1] In this period, philosophers, politicians, and literary men and women were preoccupied with the social and political effects of rapid industrialization, the simultaneous depopulation of the countryside, and the sudden unregulated growth of urban communities in response to the exponentially increasing population. London was "changing its aspect with unprecedented rapidity, and becoming a place which even lifelong residents could find strange and altered from one day to the next" (Schwarzbach 34). In his journalism, articles, books, and reading tours, Dickens contributed to the vigorous debates about the rapid growth of industrial and urban development, and he was a forceful critic of the systemic injustices in the legal, financial, and governmental institutions. Thus, Dickens's uniquely authoritative career as a writer, publisher, and philanthropist made him a notable figure nationally and internationally, and a popular and wealthy author.

Until recently, most commentary on *Our Mutual Friend* emphasized that it was Dickens's last work, and scholars paid little attention to the view that it was not the end of his artistic life, but the beginning of a new phase in his creative development. In 2014, Sean Grass noted that when he began writing *Our Mutual Friend* in 1863, Dickens's artistic development was far from waning (*Charles Dickens's Our Mutual Friend* 4). Indeed, in his Postscript to *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens illustrates what was most important in his life and art during this time:

[1] Deirdre David notes that when Dickens was writing *Our Mutual Friend* in 1863, "London was in the throes of two projects designed to cope with the urban problems contingent upon a metropolitan population which was close to three million": the embankment of the Thames, and the channeling of a new underground sewer system (53). She argues that "there is an interesting relation between this really fine work of metropolitan improvement and the really fine work which is *Our Mutual Friend*" (53).

he writes of rescuing other passengers from a "terribly destructive" train wreck in 1865, before climbing back into the carriage which was "nearly turned over a viaduct, and caught aslant upon the turn" to rescue the manuscript of *Our Mutual Friend*, keen to preserve the artistic creations of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, "much soiled, but otherwise unhurt" (822). *Our Mutual Friend* may have grown out of Dickens's past novels, but it is not reliant on them, nor does it continue them, despite the assumption of many scholars that this novel was Dickens's last attempt to 'write' London (Miller 332-333; Baker 57; Sicher xxi; Grass, *Charles Dickens's Our Mutual Friend* 4).[2] Instead, this novel was an attempt to represent the change that was occurring in the city by transitioning his narrative techniques and language, which put into practice a new way of writing the city. Karen Chase and Michael Levenson write: "Dickens recognizes London as an apparatus producing modernity. But he also sees it as a complicated machine. It flattens the past; it produces homogeneity; it ravages tradition" (141). In his novels written before 1860, most notably *Oliver Twist* [1837], *David Copperfield* [1849], *Bleak House* [1852], *Little Dorrit* [1855], and *Great Expectations* [1860], Dickens had established the familiar and popular tropes that became associated with this tradition: the orphan's search for identity, the patient and selfless young woman whose self-effacement is rewarded with marriage, the emphasis on empathy for the poor, the detailed picture of urban life as a place of opportunity won through hardship, and the self-centred nature of the bourgeois middle class. This thesis focuses on aspects of Dickens's literary art in *Our Mutual Friend* in which he reimagines some of these narrative conventions he had used profitably in his earlier works. It illustrates how, in this novel, he repurposes these techniques to represent the serious changes he saw in a city increasingly

[2] The existence of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, even incomplete, complicates the assumption that *Our Mutual Friend* was intended as an ending to Dickens's career. Dickens died unexpectedly, at only 58 years old, which would not indicate that he was beginning to slow down. In fact, during this period he was increasing his public readings, including the demanding performance of 'Sikes and Nancy' (Mee 11).

indifferent to the fate of ordinary, working-class people. *Our Mutual Friend* uses these 'Dickensian' tropes in very different ways, even, at times, seeming to parody them in this distinctive novel. Thus, *Our Mutual Friend* is recognizable as a work of Dickens but is noticeably different in what it accomplishes and how.

While Dickens's prior novels can be said to carry a universal theme of a "search for viable identity" (Miller 329), focusing on Dickens's own anxieties about "the nature of the world and of the human condition within it" (Miller 329), *Our Mutual Friend*'s mystery of identity comes in the form of John Harmon who follows an atypical 'protagonist' path. In fact, J. Hillis Miller goes as far as to claim that *Our Mutual Friend* has no "central protagonist" (281). Instead, the novel represents society more generally by providing a pastiche of omniscient and limited perspectives of pockets of urban life that correspond to Dickens's fragmented narrative of London. The London that is represented in *Our Mutual Friend* is a very different space from that which Dickens portrays in his earlier novels; even the novel published closest in time to *Our Mutual Friend*, *Great Expectations*, persists in the idea that the city can be a space for advancement and education. While Pip ultimately finds out that his benefactor is a criminal and his valued life in society is tainted, his experience in the city contributes to his self-knowledge and provides the possibility of his moral redemption. Despite his fall from social grace towards the end of the novel, Pip still deludes himself with the pastoral fantasy that he can escape the corruption of the city by returning to the blacksmith's forge and accepting a passionless marriage with Biddy. The fact that this ending fails indicates that Dickens was already pushing against the expectation for sentimental or romantic conclusions, even though he was persuaded by his friends to change his original ending to one that would meet his readers' expectations of

marriage by implying a reconciliation with Estella.[3] I argue that *Our Mutual Friend* is not a culmination or a 'grand finale,' but a logical continuation that offers a new perspective on the city, bridging the gap between the Victorian idea that urban life offered limitless opportunity and the bleaker view of urban life becoming more apparent near the end of the nineteenth century.

There is a long tradition in literary criticism of representing the personal connection Dickens had with London, but these assumptions often cloud a view of his changing perspectives and new artistic endeavours. It is commonplace amongst literary critics to conflate Dickens's writing of the city with his own experiences: many critics have dedicated entire works to mapping his life onto his novels (i.e., Lucas [1970], Ackroyd [2003], Bodenheimer [2007]). These studies of Dickens's novels have become inseparable from how they narratively represent his London. Jeremy Tambling [2009] writes that "London in cliché has become 'Dickensian'" (2), and it is this association between the author and the city that has been ever-present in Dickensian scholarship. The range of what he sought to represent in writing the city is undeniable: Rosemarie Bodenheimer [2011] argues that, at this time, "London's development into a modern urban space was singularly chaotic... [and] seeing London whole was impossible" ("London in the Victorian Novel" 144). Nicholas Freeman [2007] agrees: "How could any literary or artistic work hope to do justice to the vastness of London, with its hordes of people, its noise, its fogs, its insatiable consumption of the surrounding countryside?" (v). However, Bodenheimer cites Dickens as "the only mid-Victorian novelist who took on the challenge of representing at least fragments of this historical process... [and the] daily negotiations of urban

[3] In their introduction to the Broadview edition of *Great Expectations*, Law and Pinnington note that "it was only in the final volume of his life of Dickens that [John] Forster first revealed to readers the fact that the printed ending of the novel was not the one which Dickens had originally written" (26-27). The subject of the dual ending has subsequently been a well-studied and well-debated factor of the text, with the ambiguity of Pip's relationship status and his future with Estella taking centre stage.

life" ("London in the Victorian Novel" 144), recognizing that only through this process of piecing together fragments can a picture of the city be brought into focus. Because of this ability, Dickens's works are almost universally viewed as the landmark of London literature: Philip Allingham [2017] writes that Dickens's "urban backdrop is always a reflection of the archetypal city, the Babylon that Charles Dickens knew best: London" (242). Undoubtedly, he had an uncanny ability to tell the 'story' of London and of those who walked and lived it: he "saw the world more vividly than other people, and reacted to what he saw with laughter, horror, indignation… [storing] up his experiences and reactions as raw material to transform and use in his novels" (Tomalin xlvi [2011]). Dickens's initial "attraction and repulsion" to London stemmed from his simultaneously exhilarating and traumatizing childhood in the city (Schwarzbach 23 [1979]), and as a result, he sought to "articulate contradictory and complicated attitudes to city life, and stamp London with their characteristic perspectives" (Baumgarten, "Fictions" 107 [2001]). By the time he wrote *Our Mutual Friend*, however, Dickens had moved away from his earlier view of the city as a space for wholesome moral education towards a perception of London as a space of crushing dehumanization. As such, to study his last novel through this biographical lens is to obscure the transitions his city and his art were experiencing. In this thesis, I put Dickens's biography and personal ties to London aside in favour of discussing the way his literary techniques are used differently in *Our Mutual Friend*. His experience as a mature, successful artist allows him to write a 'new' London that leaves behind his youthful perspectives of the fear and fascination the city provided.

Tracing how *Our Mutual Friend* has been studied in the past, along with how Dickens is perceived most pervasively in critical interpretation, provides the background necessary to place *Our Mutual Friend* at the beginning of a new narrative cycle. This novel does not merely grow

out of the past texts, but also grows away from them, utilizing many of the same techniques but adapting them to create a very different product. To discuss these tools properly, it is necessary to define some of the broad terms that will be used in this study, including the terms *narration* and *setting*. Narration is a slippery term in comparison to the more concrete '*story*,' which refers to a communication including actions, events, and characters that proceed forward in time (Abbott 41). Narration "has been used as a synonym for narrative," as "the production of narrative by a narrator," and most restrictively, as "the narrator's words exclusive of all direct discourse" (Abbott 41-42). For my purposes, I employ the second use in which narration or narrative in this text is used to refer to the story as told by the third-person narrator. Because of its wide cast of characters, I refer to *Our Mutual Friend*'s lack of protagonist, or main character; this study assumes that the novel's many characters are all *literary figures*, or "artistic product[s]… constructed by an author for some purpose" (Margolin 66). In my consideration of the city, it is crucial to designate setting and the importance of temporal and spatial relationships, which "are essential to our understanding of narratives and go beyond the specification of a date and a location" (Bridgeman 52). When I refer to *Our Mutual Friend*'s London, I am referring to the setting of the novel as it is in comparison or contradiction to the actual London in which Dickens lived; while it has a counterpart in the physical world, *Our Mutual Friend*'s London is fictional and therefore a creation by its author. Unlike past texts (for example, *Oliver Twist,* which ends with the re-claiming of the orphan's identity, or *Bleak House*, which ends with Esther's elevation through a loving and prosperous marriage) *Our Mutual Friend* is not neatly tied up: its central concerns are not fully resolved, and it ends abruptly amongst the voices of society that the novel condemns the most. However, *Our Mutual Friend*'s seemingly incohesive nature is intentional, and is also what makes it different from Dickens's earlier works, offering

the technique of *fragmentation*, or the breaking apart of a whole. This final completed novel juxtaposes these separate pieces through *layering*, a term I use to refer to the palimpsestuous nature of this text in which its structure depends on its interconnected plots being represented simultaneously, seeming to occur one on top of the other. This layering represents London as the bringing together of incompatible fragments and fosters an understanding of the city as a pastiche of recognizable but distinct parts. Georges Letissier calls *Our Mutual Friend* a "motif of the city as miscellaneous assortment" (179), but the novel draws unity out of its miscellany and uses its fragmentation and layering to illustrate that the 'new' London it represents is one told by many voices.[4]

The layering which shows up on several levels in *Our Mutual Friend* influences its structure, its narrative styles, and its many multi-leveled and interconnected plots, setting up the novel as a multiplicitous work amid its attempt to create a new, multi-perspective way of interpreting the city. Instead of a central plot or protagonist, the novel has a 'story' within the narrative that weaves together the lives of its wide cast of characters and the places that they pass through. *Our Mutual Friend* begins with a mystery: a body found drowned in the river in the first chapter, and its story turned into superficial dinner party gossip in the second. This contrast established in the first two chapters sets up the structure for the rest of the novel and a series of comparisons through similar juxtapositions: *nouveau riche* versus working class, educated versus uneducated, generous versus greedy, benevolent versus malicious, and commodity versus dust. The lives of the characters of *Our Mutual Friend*, all connected through the Harmon mystery,

[4] The many voices of *Our Mutual Friend* were influential for T.S. Eliot, and the novel was "often cited as a precedent for the representation of London in *The Wasteland*" (Alter 15-16). Georges Letissier recognizes the "polyvocal echoes" and "polyglossia" of both texts, and notes that *The Wasteland* originally bore the title "He do the Police in Different Voices," a quote from *Our Mutual Friend* (180-181).

encompass no less than seven identifiable, yet intertwined, narratives or plots.[5] First, the story of the Boffins' inheritance of the Harmon fortune after the 'death' of John Harmon and the role of Noddy Boffin's mysterious new secretary, John Rokesmith, revealed to be Harmon in disguise. Second, the story of Bella Wilfer, John Harmon's betrothed, including her elevation to 'society,' Boffin's deception to replace her greed with love, and her marriage to Rokesmith/Harmon. Third, the life of Lizzie Hexam, daughter of the waterside scavenger of dead bodies, Gaffer Hexam, who finds the body assumed to belong to John Harmon. Fourth, the story of Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn, who act as bridging characters between the London of 'society' and the London of the working-class poor as Eugene eventually marries Lizzie Hexam. Fifth, the story of Bradley Headstone, who descends into jealousy and madness after Lizzie Hexam rejects his proposal of marriage. Sixth, the plot of Silas Wegg to trick Mr. Boffin out of his inherited fortune with his less vicious accomplice, Venus. Finally, the story of Jenny Wren, a disabled woman, and Mr. Riah, a Jewish man, both friends of Lizzie Hexam who are shunned by society yet dignified through their strength and moral choices. The members of the *nouveau riche*, namely the Veneerings, the Lammles, and the Podsnaps, move in and out of these various plots, representing the indifference and cruelty of a society that regards human beings as expendable commodities amongst the novel's complex motivations. While this summary highlights the characters of *Our Mutual Friend*, in this thesis I focus on the interaction between them, and more importantly, how they navigate the city throughout the text. By examining the juxtapositions throughout the novel, and the broader differences between *Our Mutual Friend* and

[5] Molly Anne Rothenberg notes that any work concerned with space finds difficulty in providing a plot summary of the novel (720). For plot specifically, she provides a lengthy yet helpful footnote that chronologically outlines the main events of *Our Mutual Friend* (744-745, note 3).

Dickens's prior works, I argue that this novel is a new beginning for Dickens, representing a fresh approach to the art of the city that was halted by his unexpected death.[6]

In the second chapter of this thesis, I provide a brief overview of the literary criticism written on Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*. This chapter will also compare *Our Mutual Friend* to Dickens's prior works and show that Dickens's last completed novel is not an end to his career, but a shift to a new way of narrating London. The third chapter analyzes how London is depicted in *Our Mutual Friend* in relation to its representation in prior novels by looking at how the fluid omniscient perspective and unnamed narrator of the novel are used to interpret the city, how public and private areas are represented as panoramas and in-between spaces, and how movement through London by male characters constructs a perception of city space. The fourth chapter will provide an analysis of the role the city plays in shaping identity in *Our Mutual Friend*, focusing first on John Harmon as an atypical character whose multiple identities are layered as a reflection of the city, and then on the representation of women in the novel as they also journey through London, concentrating my discussion on Bella Wilfer, Lizzie Hexam, and Jenny Wren, who all travel independently through the London districts and renegotiate their place in the domestic sphere through their movement in the public world. Finally, I conclude this study with a brief discussion of the novel's atypical ending and a reflection on the different aspects discussed throughout this study that make *Our Mutual Friend* an evolving text.

[6] The suddenness of Dickens's death in 1870 cut short his renewed excitement in his writing and art. He wrote to his friend John Forster in October 1863 that he was "exceedingly anxious to begin [*Our Mutual Friend*]" and confessed in January 1864 that he believed the book to be "very good" (Cotsell 1).

Chapter 2 – Departure and Difference

2.1 Dickens and the City: Reviewing the Literary Criticism of *Our Mutual Friend*

In his influential critical analysis titled *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (1958), J. Hillis Miller recognizes that most literary studies on Dickens's works are "investigations of the relation between Dickens's life and his fiction" (viii). This interrelationship between the life of the popular author and his prodigious literary output, and the Victorian world that he observed and created in the minds of his readers, became the conventional way of analyzing his texts. Miller himself attests that Dickens's "own creative vision" played a role in "determining the 'Victorian spirit'" (ix), and that "taken together, all the unit passages form the imaginative universe of the writer," arguing that a novel is not simply an external structure of meaning… [but] also the expression of the unique personality and vital spirit of its author" (xi). [7] I begin with Miller's text, despite its age, because it acts as a precedent for several significant studies that follow: F.S. Schwarzbach [1979], Deirdre David [1981], Efraim Sicher [2003], Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux [2011], Julian Wolfreys [2012], and Jeremy Tambling [2009, 2015]. Indeed, J. Hillis Miller's interpretations initiated many serious scholarly analyses of Dickens's complex and sophisticated literary narratives.[8] Juliet John [2012], citing the perspective of Philip Collins,

[7] J. Hillis Miller's study "presupposes that each sentence or paragraph of a novel, whether it is presented from the point of view of the narrator or of some imagined character, defines a certain relationship between an imagining mind and its objects" (xi). He uses the phrase "*unit* passages" to refer to these many types of passages in totality, attesting that these "distinct elements can clarify one another and be brought to reveal their profound harmony" (Miller xi, my emphasis).

[8] Prior to Miller, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Dickens had many well-known and important "detractors" — for example, George Henry Lewes, Virginia Woolf, and Henry James (Nord 265).

sees Miller as the "main representative of [a] distorting reinvention of Dickens" that placed his novels as "autonomous works of art" throughout twentieth century criticism (4).

Miller's work, along with the work of Edmund Wilson [1954], Lionel Trilling [1956], and Steven Marcus [1965], is a precursor to the criticism that emerged on the centenary of Dickens's death in 1970, including John Lucas's *The Melancholy Man: A Study of Dickens's Novels* [1970] and John Carey's *The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens' Imagination* [1973]. These twentieth-century works were subsequently cited frequently in the resurgence of critical evaluation of Dickens's work published for the bicentenary of his birth in 2012 (Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux [2011], Juliet John [2012], Julian Wolfreys [2012], etc.). Most importantly for my study, however, Miller discusses the multitudinousness of *Our Mutual Friend* and the great number of characters whose identities are integrated with their experience of the city, which I discuss in a close reading of movement and structure in the novel. Discussing this technique, Miller analyzes how *Our Mutual Friend* portrays a "complete transformation of tone and milieu from chapter to chapter," in which the novel is formed "by the juxtaposition of incompatible fragments in a pattern of disharmony or mutual contradiction" (284) and is "a plurality of worlds rather than a single world" (290). A key difference in *Our Mutual Friend*'s structure is the development of simultaneous spaces and communities in juxtaposed settings, through the perspectives of juxtaposed characters and a shifting narrative perspective that does not privilege any single voice. Miller writes that "the essential quality of the city is its transcendence of any one person's knowledge of it" (xvi), so his interpretation of *Our Mutual Friend* relies on these contrasting narratives and, by extension, the contrasting spaces and interpretations of its world to reveal how Dickens's "verbal copy of reality" in the novel creates a space of interpretation for readers (303). In my study, I begin my work in this space between the

'verbal copy' and the reader's imagination in which narratives of the city work together to create a version of London dependent on the various, interconnected experiences of urban dwellers.

Our Mutual Friend's London is not left to chance; the writing style of the mature Dickens was deliberate in its use of fragmentation and structure to set up the contiguity that is crucial to its understanding of the city. London itself was physically fragmented in the late nineteenth century, as it underwent a series of constructions and demolitions: Judith Flanders calls this London "one never-ending building site" (10), and Jeremy Tambling argues that only fragments of Dickens's London remain, because "apart from the modernizations of London at the end of the nineteenth century, which eliminated many places Dickens wrote about specifically, no attempt to revisit Dickens' sources can get beyond the Blitz of 1940" (*Going Astray* 30). Joanna Hofer-Robinson also comments on how, in nineteenth-century London, "street layouts were altered, landmarks were removed, houses and businesses were torn down, and thousands of people were displaced" (1); she draws on Walter Bagehot's suggestion that "Dickens's novels mirror the diversity and fragmentation of Victorian London" (21). Dickens extends his use of fragmentation in *Our Mutual Friend*'s structure, layering the distinct stories of the inhabitants of distinct locations and offering a unique perspective on the city through these narrative techniques.

Our Mutual Friend was published in monthly instalments, a return to this form for Dickens after nearly a decade away from it while he focused on weekly publications for his magazine *All the Year Round* (Grass, *Charles Dickens's Our Mutual Friend* 4). The last instalment of the novel was published in December of 1865, and Henry James infamously stated that it was "the poorest of Mr. Dickens's works… poor with the poverty not of momentary embarrassment, but of permanent exhaustion" (qtd. in Grass, *Charles Dickens's Our Mutual*

Friend 1). Laurence W. Mazzeno also acknowledges that "all through the 1850s and 1860s the critics began to pile on, heaping scorn upon *Little Dorrit*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Our Mutual Friend*," with only *Great Expectations* escaping "universal execration" (21). Sean Grass noted that "long after *Our Mutual Friend* was published, even Dickens's enthusiasts and scholars often perceived the novel as a 'bad book,' or at least as an unpopular one" (*Charles Dickens's Our Mutual Friend* 1), and it "is almost certainly too massive and strange ever to become popular now," despite an uptake in criticism and recognition of its "masterful" work in the last forty years, perhaps "because it *is* so massive and strange, and because its massive strangeness is so very Dickensian" (2, original emphasis). However, Grass also notes that the novel "has little of the name recognition" of *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, or *Great Expectations* (*Charles Dickens's Our Mutual Friend* 2). While "books, articles, and reviews about Dickens and his work number in the thousands," and "for nearly two centuries he had been idolized and demonized" but never "ignored" (Mazzeno 1), *Our Mutual Friend* has only been seriously considered during the latter stages of this legacy, and never with as much attention. Whether this is due to its length, its period of publication, or its position in the Dickensian catalogue, if its 'massive strangeness' is what makes it 'Dickensian,' it is this same strangeness that separates it from these other works and changes what the term 'Dickensian' means. Although Sean Grass wrote that "the novel… *feels* like a culmination" (*Charles Dickens's Our Mutual Friend* 4, original emphasis), and Efraim Sicher called *Our Mutual Friend* "a grand finale of Dickens's thematic and stylistic virtuosity" (xxi-xxii), I argue that these views do not credit him for his continuing literary inventiveness and development. By considering the last novel only in light of his other works and as a conclusion is to take away from how its rich cast

of characters, complex plots, and unique perspective offer a view of the changing urban society that it reflects.

Many scholars focus on the thematic features of the novel that tie it most explicitly to the 'Dickensian' whole: the critiques of wealth, the wastage and decay of urban society, and the conditions of the poor. Robert Baker laments this exhaustive focus on "river symbolism, the dust-money nexus, the death imagery and the obsessive theme of increasing social disorder and pervasive entropic decay" in studies of the novel (59). With the dust-heaps as the novel's most pervasive image and the Thames as its most powerful metaphor, virtually every study of *Our Mutual Friend* incorporates these factors and draws its conclusions based on the idea that dust and the river must be at the centre of any interpretation. Dickens himself anticipated some of these difficulties in the novel's reception and reiterated his own artistry when he wrote in the novel's postscript that "an artist… may perhaps be trusted to know what he is about in his vocation," and "it would be very unreasonable to expect that many readers…will, until they have it before them complete, perceive the relations of its finer threads to the whole pattern which is always before the eyes of the story-weaver at his loom" (*Our Mutual Friend* 821).

Nevertheless, while innumerable articles and studies have been published on *Our Mutual Friend* exclusively, and many critics compare it to other novels by Dickens (perhaps most notably *Bleak House*) the relationship between *Our Mutual Friend* and the city is not a primary focus. Very few of these studies focus on the novel as a cohesive unit, preferring instead to focus on specific moments or characters in the novel rather than the work as a totality. In my research, I trace four different threads of discussion through prior studies of *Our Mutual Friend*: the novel's motif of reading and its use of language (Friedman [1973], Baker [1976], Mundhenk [1979], Jaffe [1987], Sroka [1993], Pollack-Pelzner [2008], Zigarovich [2012]); the novel's form

and technique as a 'Dickensian' text (Kucich [1985], Beiderwell [1985], Smith [1989], Gaughan [1990], Ginsburg [1992], Hecimovich [1995], Farrell [1999], Reed [2006], Celikkol [2016], Coleman [2016]); performativity in the novel (Newsom [1980], Kiely [1983], Bodenheimer [2002], Rothenberg [2004], Rudy [2006], Gates [2015], Pollack-Pelzner [2017], Easley [2019]); and, most obviously, the representation of waste and death in *Our Mutual Friend* (Metz [1979], Hale [2000], Scoggin [2002], Gilbert [2005], Hotz [2009], Simon [2011], Graber [2018], Wilwerding [2018]). I argue that in these studies, the lack of attention paid to the novel as a cohesive whole does not do justice to the wide range it portrays of the city and its characters. By acknowledging the variety of interpretations of the novel's representations of literature, its structure and technique, its performativity, and its metaphors, I will demonstrate that the novel offers a new interpretation of the city and a new development of Dickens's literary art as it departs from the 'Dickensian' cycle and these niche focuses.

The theme of waste and dust as death and decay in *Our Mutual Friend* is prevalent and perhaps disproportionately emphasized in prior scholarship, but the juxtaposition of this theme with life and wealth in the novel is critical to how I interpret the novel's fragmentation as a means for accentuating Dickens's use of multiple voices and interpretations. In J. Hillis Miller's analysis of the novel, he notes that "the city of *Our Mutual Friend* is integrated by the river" (286), and further, closes his chapter on the novel with a statement that links these symbols to the excessive commodification of the city: "When one has recognized that gold is dust, one can go on to make gold of dust. Out of dust can come gold, out of death, life" (Miller 327). This statement reiterates how the novel continuously interchanges these binaries: wealth and waste, and life and death. In 1979, Nancy Aycock Metz drew similar comparisons, arguing that the idea "at the heart of [the novel]" is that "everything is of potential value, that nothing is so trivial,

vulgar, or superficially unlovely that the imagination cannot reanimate it and make it new" (68). Keith Hale compares the novel to T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, drawing on the moral corruption that is symbolized by the presence of waste in the novel: it contains a "corrupting force that creates a multiplicity of false identities" (Hale 310), and "the theme of greed is represented… by dust" (311). Leslie Simon returns to the aesthetics of dust in correlation with technique, comparing the novel to *Bleak House* and discussing that "rather than simply conveying notions of waste, expenditure, or disuse, dust in Dickens suggests that modern life might be reinterpreted through structures of fragmentation, miscellany, and dynamic interrelation" (219). Similar to my discussion of *Our Mutual Friend*'s difference from earlier texts, Simon also draws on J. Hillis Miller and acknowledges that "whereas *Bleak House* offers a solution to its madness in the figure of Esther Summerson… *Our Mutual Friend* provides no such closure, as the world of [the] novel spins continuously off its axis, decentered, destabilized, given over entirely… to the entropic aesthetic of the dust-pile" (222). It is interesting that Simon refers to the 'entropic' aesthetic of the dust-pile, as Robert Baker, in 1976, referred to the "pervasive entropic decay" in studies of the novel (59). Figuratively, 'entropy' can refer to "a state of or a tendency towards disorder" ("Entropy"); the argument by both critics is a presumption of disorder amongst the thematic elements of the novel. While it is true that the novel's fragmentation and seemingly disjointed structure may be read as a lack of order, my interpretation of the text as a new endeavour by Dickens in the writing of the city sees it, instead, as a new beginning *after* disorder, creating a new structure through a transition in language and technique that embraces ambiguity and change. The novel's pastiche of waste and life is not random; Dickens's contradictions in this novel were carefully planned and he orchestrates a cohesive whole with a theme of mutual connection despite *Our Mutual Friend*'s division.

2.2 What is Dickens Doing Differently in *Our Mutual Friend?*

Dickens's early representations of London were journalistic and observational, spurred on by the memories of both the attraction and the repulsion he had felt as a young boy working in a blacking factory while his family was imprisoned in the Marshalsea for debt (Schwarzbach 23; Schlicke 163; Tomalin 7-31). In *Sketches by Boz* [1836], Schwarzbach argues that Dickens grasped the "sensibility of the city" for "perhaps the first time in English literature," revealing it as "the essential nature of modern life" (32). As a journalist first, Dickens's early narrative writing and interpretation of London "respond[ed] to hard, empirical observation, though we must always mark the trace in his writing which indicates that seeing always sees what has been given to vision through previous texts" (Tambling, *Going Astray* 50). Dickens, like the many authors that turn to him as an example, necessarily drew on the literary city that he had both read and experienced. From this journalistic beginning, Dickens's London evolved into a labyrinthine representation, acknowledging the "dark, foul, and revolting" aspects of city life in *The Pickwick Papers* [1836], *Oliver Twist* [1837], and *Nicholas Nickleby* [1838] (Schwarzbach 45). He used the symbol of the maze or labyrinth to represent the city, incorporating the confusion, mystery, and anonymity at play in London's streets, but also implying that there was an exit or a centre, a destination that could be reached where a goal would be met, or the light would return. In *Martin Chuzzlewit* [1843], Dickens began to use London "consciously as a model of the social organization of England" (Schwarzbach 80). *Dombey and Son* [1846] represents "the point at which Dickens begins to evince in his fiction a perception of London in the throes of momentous historical change" (Alter 64); John Lucas argues that it is with this novel that Dickens began to "plan his novels with great care" (113), an important fact to remember when considering the complexities at work in *Our Mutual Friend*. Expanding his writing to include his ever-increasing

familiarity with the city, Dickens's personal history with London is fictionalized in *David Copperfield* [1849]; however, Lucas notes that Dickens's attempt to turn fact into fiction was not entirely successful, and the novel borrows very heavily from his own childhood trauma (167-168). In *Bleak House* [1852] and *Hard Times* [1854], he began the *de*-familiarization of London and the urban environment, a practice which makes common or familiar concepts different or strange, which he does most famously in the opening of *Bleak House* when fog envelopes the city and makes it something mysterious. *Bleak House* "destroys our comfortable notion of art as refuge," and "turns outward to the real world and in so doing banishes forever the idyllic world of *Pickwick Papers*" (Lucas 204). In *Little Dorrit* [1855], he establishes a London 'vocabulary,' a set of paradigms that indicated the city in his writing (Schwarzbach 151), while continuing the focus on interior scenes instead of exterior that he began in *Dombey and Son* (Alter 65). Finally, in *Great Expectations* [1860], he explores London as a 'traumatic' environment, returning to the prison motif begun in *Oliver Twist* (Tambling, *Going Astray* 187). By the time Dickens was writing *Our Mutual Friend* in 1864, the city he created was not only shrouded in fog, but engulfed in the waste and filth produced by the vast consumerism of the capitalistic urban economy. While he still incorporates the 'happily-ever-after' narrative between the two central couples, it is overshadowed by a society driven only by the thought of money and the question of who will benefit from the Harmon fortune. Both marriages emerge from waste in some manner and are forced to confront their complicity in a society governed by 'Podsnappery': the relentless pursuit of wealth and status at the cost of a principled respect for humanity.

Departing from these earlier texts, *Our Mutual Friend* is not a novel about the individual, but about society and its large cast of characters. Sean Grass argues that "where *Great Expectations* is portrait [of an individual], *Our Mutual Friend* is panorama" (*The*

Commodification of Identity 162). Dickens plays with perspective in *Our Mutual Friend* by offering an unnamed narrator who functions in a cinematic sense; the narrator can 'zoom' in and out of the characters' consciousness while also providing an omniscient overview of the city of London. The closest Dickens came to such a perspective previously is in *Hard Times*, published ten years before *Our Mutual Friend* and offering a similarly varied perspective, but which provides a narrative that, unlike most of his works, is never set in London. *Hard Times,* a commentary on the deadening effect of a utilitarian, unimaginative society, foreshadows Dickens's view of society in *Our Mutual Friend* and the multiplicitous technique used in the later novel. Through this piecing together of varied perspectives, Dickens represents both exterior and interior spaces of London in *Our Mutual Friend*, creating many portraits that together make a panorama. Recalling Letissier's description of the novel as a "motif of the city as miscellaneous assortment" (179), the thematic centre of the novel is revealed: it is not the waste and death so often associated with *Our Mutual Friend*, but the interconnection of the fragments of individual lives that, like the dustheaps, seem worthless but can be made into something worthwhile.

Arguably, Dickens's most popular novels are those that intimately follow a protagonist's growth into maturity, or quest to find a home. In chronological order, the most famous are *Oliver Twist* [1837], *David Copperfield* [1849], and *Great Expectations* [1860]. In *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations,* with first-person 'I' narrators, Dickens specifically played into a new focus on autobiography in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, when "mid-century readers devoured both real and imaginative autobiographical works, as if they craved a certain kind of narrative and imaginative contact with other lives" (Grass, *The Commodification of Identity* 37). Spanning three decades of his writing career, these novels present the basis for the argument that

Dickens's works follow a natural evolution. However, *Our Mutual Friend*'s lack of protagonist and wide narrative focus is directly in contrast to these individual-focused works. *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations* all follow a young boy's search for selfhood and identity in the city of London, reflecting Dickens's evolving perception of the city in the progression of the novels. *Oliver Twist* is hopeful and optimistic in its conclusion, wrongs are righted, the 'villain' is punished, and the protagonist lives happily-ever-after, reintegrated into his proper middle-class status. The novel's association with the criminal underworld and the persistent presence of the threat of hanging is undercut by its strict moral judgements: good is incorruptibly good, and bad is beyond hope. *David Copperfield* is popularly considered as Dickens's fictionalized autobiography, and its meticulous attention to personal detail makes it a "mythic reordering of the past" (Schwarzbach 18) while representing London as "more of an apparent single entity" (Tambling, *Going Astray* 121). This novel features a protagonist that matures as the city matures and in this is reflective of its maturing author. In *Great Expectations*, the city is still presented as a place of hope and the protagonist matures in its clutches, learning how to survive in an urban world. However, the dual ending undermines the expectation of the traditional marriage-plot conclusion (see footnote 3). Pip's good fortune is found to have come from crime, and in this novel's conclusion, Dickens begins to question London as a space for growth and opportunity when his 'expectations' ultimately fail. While there is some contentment in Pip's later life as he leaves the city and works to honestly pay off his debts, this conclusion puts to rest Dickens's representation of the city as a place for positive growth and opens the door for a divergent representation of the city in *Our Mutual Friend*.

Our Mutual Friend was Dickens's last completed novel, yet at the time of his death he was only fifty-eight years old, still giving public performances, and writing his next novel, *The*

Mystery of Edwin Drood. His sudden death in 1870 brought an abrupt end to the transformation that was occurring in his new writing. Sean Grass notes that Dickens "almost certainly did not mean *Our Mutual Friend* to be a culmination" (*Charles Dickens's Our Mutual Friend* 4). As early as 1979, Schwarzbach saw *Our Mutual Friend* as the beginning of "a new novelistic career" for Dickens, one in which he moved more toward a style of fiction that gave "development and exposition of character" more prevalence than "plot and description" (217). He argues that "this change in the character of Dickens' writing" developed further in *Edwin Drood* when Dickens's focus on the city appeared, on the surface, to wane: a "startling development, for it implies that toward the close of his writing career the greatest English novelist of the city was ceasing to write city novels" (Schwarzbach 218). Except, Dickens did not. Schwarzbach argues that it is "only in a certain sense" that Dickens ceased writing about the city, and that this transformation was indicative of "the development of Dickens' attitudes toward the city… and to his increasing interest in the psychology of character" (218). While Schwarzbach argues that Dickens was "no longer writing about the actual city around him as if it were a character, complete with associated feelings, emotions, states of mind and influence over those who come into contact with it" (218), the alternative perspective, and the one which my study accepts, is that Dickens was beginning to represent the city as a reflection of the thoughts and feelings of its living inhabitants and not the inanimate physical traits of the city itself. In *Our Mutual Friend,* and presumably in *Edwin Drood*,[9] if it had reached completion, Dickens is creating an aura of the city that is not its physical presence, but its influence on its narrators and stories. For an author who delved so deeply into figurative language in his descriptions (Alter 21;

[9] Lawrence Frank examined Dickens's notes in his Memorandum and concluded that "although *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is not simply a continuation of *Our Mutual Friend*, it does clearly emerge out of those recurring concerns revealed in the Memorandum Book and…in the last completed novel" (159).

47; 71), this transition is not surprising. Dickens uncovers, in this new novelistic cycle that begins and ends prematurely with *Our Mutual Friend,* that the city is not its detailed descriptions, but its fragmented and mismatched experiences that nonetheless come together to create an incongruent whole.

Chapter 3 – Narrating a New London in *Our Mutual Friend*

While Dickens's earlier novels presented the city of London as a central figure, *Our Mutual Friend* juxtaposes contrasting areas of the city, employing techniques of metaphor to illuminate its real focus: not the city itself, but its inhabitants and how they function in the hostile urban environment. In this chapter, I discuss *Our Mutual Friend* as a work of an experienced author developing new ways of narrating the inner and outer lives of a wide range of people living in and walking through the new metropolis. Through close readings of several key passages involving the city of London, I examine how Dickens's new approaches to narration and figurative language create points of departure from his earlier narrative process and develop a new way of narrating the city through juxtaposition of its many distinct parts.

In *Our Mutual Friend,* Dickens's narrative travels through a variety of expansive districts and dramatically different spaces: the Limehouse riverside neighbourhood, where the 'water-rat' Gaffer Hexam lives with his children, Lizzie and Charley, near Rogue Riderhood and the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters; the shops and mansions in the West End, expanding from Hyde Park and encompassing the areas of Regent Street, Oxford Street, Piccadilly, and Covent Garden, and including the homes of the *nouveau riche* Veneerings and Podsnaps and the fashionable stores where Jenny Wren sells her dolls; the rapidly growing Holloway region of the Islington Borough north of the city, where the Wilfers live in a "suburban Sahara" (*Our Mutual Friend* 33); the dustheaps of Harmony Jail (later called, ironically, Boffin's Bower) in the Battle Bridge neighbourhood of inner London; St Mary Axe, off Leadenhall Street, where Lizzie and Jenny work in female-dominated trades and Mr. Riah collects rents for the financial business of Pubsey and Co.; the Albany in London's West End, where 'Fascination' Fledgeby lives in a luxurious

set of rooms, idling away his time while Riah conducts his business; Venus's little shop of oddities, bones, and imperial memorabilia in Clerkenwell (*Our Mutual Friend* 77-79), where the process of piecing together fragments of existence is made into a business, and which is also the site in *Oliver Twist* where Dickens's pickpockets are trained (*Oliver Twist* 73); the neighbourhood up the river where Lizzie works at a paper mill on the banks of the Thames; and the financial district known as the 'City' of London, where Mortimer Lightwood establishes a law office off Fleet Street (*Our Mutual Friend* 86) and R. Wilfer works at the business of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles in the area of Mincing Lane, off Fenchurch Street (*Our Mutual Friend* 314). It is Dickens's representation of these spaces and their narration through shifting and varied perspectives that set up the important juxtapositions at work in the text.

3.1 Omniscient Perspectives and the Unnamed Narrator of *Our Mutual Friend*

In his early works, Dickens represented the city as a space of opportunity despite the noise, confusion, and squalor, but by the time he wrote *Our Mutual Friend*, he diversified his perspective to represent a space that no longer held such potential. Many literary critics write of Dickens's ambivalent feelings about London yet recognize that he drew inspiration by walking for miles through the city streets as part of his writing process; Tambling notes: "He is not simply walking but *writing* London… and, by writing, creating London" (*Going Astray* 1, original emphasis). Previously, Dickens's fascination with the city and the streets as perceived by the masses was the catalyst for his imagination, but in *Our Mutual Friend*, he began to supplement the increasingly limited perspective of the unnamed narrator with the perspectives of individual characters. This unnamed narrator acts as an anonymous character who plays no part in the story, merely acting as an observer telling the tale. Dickens provides two versions of the city using this technique: the panoramic city viewed from above by an omniscient perspective, as

represented in Dickens's description-filled passages that open several chapters in the novel (*Our Mutual Friend* 144; 393; 420), and the localized view of the unnamed narrator who communicates the perspectives of different characters with varying degrees of access to their interior thoughts and experiences. For example, *Our Mutual Friend*'s unnamed narrator provides extensive access to Bella Wilfer's thoughts and feelings as she navigates her elevation to the edges of upper-middle-class society, gives limited access to the motivations and thoughts of Noddy Boffin, as evidenced by the narrator's apparent lack of knowledge of the falsity of his descent into miserliness, and offers restricted access to Mortimer Lightwood, whose primary role is to communicate and filter the stories of others, instead of his own story. Dickens's pervasive use of these two perspectives in *Our Mutual Friend* allows for the representation of the totality of the city through alternating omniscient and limited views. While *Bleak House* offers a dual perspective by alternating between Esther's first-person narration and an omniscient third-person narrator, *Our Mutual Friend* is the only novel to offer this duality without a protagonist or identifiable character as narrator, or an omniscient narrator with an unobstructed perspective. Instead, this novel features an unnamed narrator who does not have complete access to the characters or the plot.

Dickens's earlier novels sought to filter his personal experiences of walking and writing the city through a single protagonist occupying the centre of the narrative and limited to their own experiences, which often involved experiencing London for the first time. In *Oliver Twist*, Oliver is in awe of the city despite his first view of its filth and poverty and as such, the novel's narration shares his wonder: London is "that great large place!" in which "no lad of spirit need want" (*Oliver Twist* 54). Oliver is drawn to "hasty glances" at its nighttime squalor despite thinking that "a dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen" (*Oliver Twist* 59). *Bleak*

House's Esther Summerson notes her "inexperience" of the city, and its "strangeness" (*Bleak House* 45). Pip in *Great Expectations* demonstrates his similar lack of familiarity with London when he worries while he waits to depart for the city that "something might happen to London in the meanwhile, and that, when [he] got there, it would be either greatly deteriorated or clean gone" (*Great Expectations* 178). When he arrives, he is "scared by the immensity of London," and despite having some doubts about its cleanliness he believes in its greatness (*Great Expectations* 193). Closest to *Our Mutual Friend*'s perspective amongst the later novels is *Little Dorrit,* which is told as a third-person narrative by the eponymous protagonist, Amy Dorrit, who was born in the isolation of London's Marshalsea Prison. Like John Harmon, she is raised in London, but her isolation within the prison walls separates her from the city; when she ventures outside of the prison's limits, Amy finds London to be "so large, so barren, and so wild" (*Little Dorrit* 175). In contrast, *Our Mutual Friend* undermines the perspective of a protagonist viewing London for the first time by offering multiple perspectives and featuring John Harmon's *return* to London instead of his first experience with the city.

Our Mutual Friend distinctly differs from these novels, containing no central protagonist and several mutually dependent, yet equally prominent stories. Unlike the forementioned protagonists, one of *Our Mutual Friend*'s main characters, John Harmon, is not unfamiliar with London, but is *returning* to it after a period of exile in the colonies. These separate stories and identities in *Our Mutual Friend*, taken together, provide a more cohesive whole than a traditional omniscient perspective. Like John Harmon, Dickens is not writing an unfamiliar city, but one he is returning to with fresh eyes, and fresh narratives. Discussing Dickens's narration, Murray Baumgarten writes: "The narrator… guides us through its intricate plot, eliciting intermittent identification with characters like Eugene Wrayburn and Mr. Pickwick, who make their way into

the labyrinth and… back again after slaying the monster at its heart" ("Reading Dickens" 225). In *Our Mutual Friend,* this narrator does not have a single path to follow. Each character follows his or her own path through the labyrinth of the novel, and of the city, as they move through the streets, while Dickens's unique, unnamed narrator layers the novel's stories and transitions the work towards an internal perspective that Robert Alter says the early Dickens looked to avoid (45). In this final novel, the avoidance lessens, and it can be assumed that the gap would further close in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

From its opening scene, *Our Mutual Friend* establishes that there will be no fixed perspective in this text, and that multiple influences must be combined to complete the novel's narrative. John Reed argues that it is a lack of specificity in the opening of the novel that effectively teaches a reader how to read the text, indicating that much of the novel will not be straightforward, and there will be mysteries to decode throughout the reading process (beyond the obvious mysteries of John Harmon's fate and Rokesmith's identity). Reed writes: "In this first chapter, then, the narrator gives us a lesson in reading signs and establishes the basis for some of the central themes of the narrative — preying and scavenging, the transformative powers of water, and the contrast of fancy with pragmatic thought" (17).[10] Some of Dickens's most celebrated works use the first-person point of view, but in *Our Mutual Friend* he provides a greater and more diverse perspective by using a variety of voices and avoiding the fixed nature of one single identifiable narrator. The opening sentence of the novel emphasizes the timeless perspective of the unnamed narrator's position: "In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is *no need to be precise*, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two

[10] In a January 1864 letter to John Forster, Dickens hinted at the ambiguity and multiplicity of *Our Mutual Friend*, calling it "a combination of drollery with romance" and a "perfect throwing away of points" (Cotsell 1).

figures in it, floated on the Thames, between Southwark Bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in" (1, my emphasis). The narration of this opening is conspiratorial and vague; it draws in those who may know 'these times' and those who would recognize this area of London which is already familiar to the narrator. The ambiguity of the two bridges, one of old stone and the other of new iron, situates the novel in a place between old institutions and new industries. Indeed, "with Dickens's narrators (who are often split and divided along urban fault lines), the reader navigates among unstable places and indeterminate times" (Baumgarten, "Reading Dickens" 229). This ambiguity of setting lays the groundwork for the novel's lack of fixed perspective in its narration.

While the use of a third-person narrator is not unusual in Dickens's writing, the inability to pinpoint the narrator, or give them a concrete persona and a name, is something new in *Our Mutual Friend*. Audrey Jaffe argues that "*Our Mutual Friend* is generally regarded as the most modern of Dickens's works because of the absence of a prominent omniscient voice and a clear omniscient perspective — the kind of voice and perspective we find in earlier novels such as *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*" (91). Combined with the lack of clear protagonist in the novel, this lack of a "clear omniscient perspective" signifies Dickens's transition from a style of fiction that functions as a biography of its main character to a more nuanced and sophisticated style with a broader point of view. *Our Mutual Friend*'s narrator is unnamed and offers only a partially omniscient perspective, viewing the plot from a place outside and above while having only brief moments of access to the thoughts and feelings of other characters. Jaffe continues, "presumably, in *Our Mutual Friend*, one never knows exactly where the narrator stands because he always stands partly inside his characters… without such an external view, connections remain unstated and problems unresolved, resulting in the fragmentation and confusion which earn for the novel

the term 'modern'" (91).[11] That the narrator only stands 'partly' inside the characters of the novel is significant because it implies that they only have access to a limited section of each character's perspective. With multiple characters offering multiple fragmented views filtered through an uninvolved narrator, *Our Mutual Friend* offers a different, fluid narrative structure and storytelling technique. It is this multiplicity that justifies the narrator's ability to pivot perspectives quickly, in one moment critiquing the 'Voice of Society' from outside their company and presenting them as superficial reflections with no depth (*Our Mutual Friend* 10-11), and in another breaking out of the narrative into social commentary to proclaim sympathy for Jenny Wren's "poor" position of suffering in the world (243). This unique perspective is important for the multi-plotted nature of *Our Mutual Friend*, as no one character has access to all the information of the text, and no character can stand in as narrator. There are glimpses of passages in which the narration seems to enter a character's mind (in the case of John Harmon and Bradley Headstone, during moments of profound emotional distress [366-373; 708-709]), but although these moments connect with what is later called free indirect discourse,[12] they are not yet predominant in the novel.

This "fragmentation and confusion" (Jaffe 91) occurs most obviously when the novel's unnamed narrator and its third-person perspective restrict the reader's access to information to only that which is available to a focal character. Rosemary Mundhenk analyzes how much information is conveyed to the reader through the narrator, discussing how, during the plot of the

[11] Jaffe's assumption of a male narrator is perhaps a result of the implicit assumption of a correlation between the narrator and the author.

[12] A literary device characterized by the presentation of "the thoughts or utterances of a fictional character as if from that character's point of view by combining grammatical and other features of the character's direct speech with features of the narrator's indirect report" ("Free Indirect Discourse").

"pious fraud" (*Our Mutual Friend* 771), the reader's knowledge is aligned with Bella's limited perspective of Mr Boffin's ruse, maintaining the assumption that wealth has made him miserly (Mundhenk 44-45). Most intriguing is when the narrator seemingly offers Boffin's perspective, but does not provide full disclosure to the reader in order to uphold the deception. As Boffin walks alone on the street after learning from Mr. Venus of Silas Wegg's plot against him, the narrator portrays him in a negative light: "He looked very cunning and suspicious as he went jogging through the streets. More than once or twice… he took his stick from the arm on which he nursed it, and hit a straight sharp rap at the air with its head. Possibly the wooden countenance of Mr. Silas Wegg was incorporeally before him at those moments, for he hit with intense satisfaction" (*Our Mutual Friend* 586). It is striking that in this moment, the unnamed narrator seems to be watching Boffin, and while his actions are known, his inner thoughts are not; the narrator can only guess at what he may "possibly" be thinking. In this moment, Dickens parodies his prior villainous characters when the narrator makes negative assumptions about Boffin's motivations. It is only at the end of the novel, when the result of the 'pious fraud' is revealed, that the limitations of the narrator's view are also illuminated. It is ironic that the narrator is seemingly unaware of Boffin's miserliness being an act; his feigned violence and 'cunning and suspicious' countenance seem, in this scene, to be a performance not only for the benefit of Bella and the reader, but for the unnamed narrator as well. This situation effectively separates the narrator from the narrative, meaning that the characters' stories are controlled separately from how the narrator controls the overall text, which contrasts with Dickens's prior novels that often integrated the narrator, first person or third, into the frame of the story.

Because the unnamed narrator of *Our Mutual Friend* has no textual identity in the novel, it is necessary for the novel's perspective to shift in and out of the cast of characters, and there

are two very distinct characters who illustrate Dickens's new and inventive technique: Bradley Headstone and Mortimer Lightwood. One complicates the role of the villain through the narrator's ability to feel and communicate Headstone's violent and delusional desires, while the other acts as a bridging character for the text, seeming to fill the gap left by the lack of known narrator in the novel as he passes along information to others, while simultaneously lacking the overarching voice, perspective, and original thought necessary to assume the role of the omniscient narrator in the text. These figures are at two ends of the spectrum of the narrator's ability to portray character. Jon Mee writes: "While the novels do cohere to some extent around… recognizable linguistic patterns… their language is scarcely homogenous. Tone and register are continually changing to provide a shimmering sea of different kinds of speech that plays across their surface. Characters are known not just by their names but by the way they speak" (34). It follows from this analysis that the characters' perspectives are similarly unique and recognizable, and following them through the narrator's perspective or featuring the narrator's access to their thoughts, however limited or extensive, provides changing linguistic and narrative patterns as well. Bradley Headstone provides a circumstance in which the narrator offers nearly full access to the character's thoughts, delving deep into his mental capacities and struggles as Headstone plans to commit murder. Mortimer Lightwood, on the other hand, offers an extremely limited point of view when he is centred in the novel. Lightwood's perspective is juxtaposed with his role as go-between in the text as he passes along information surrounding some of the most crucial moments.

The most obvious comparison to Bradley Headstone amongst other Dickensian texts is Bill Sikes in *Oliver Twist*. Both Sikes and Headstone are determined to commit murder, though Headstone fails whereas Sikes succeeds. They are both driven by their frustrated desire to

dominate women, and are both unable to escape psychologically from their crimes. Sikes's mental trauma comes in the form of eyes watching him, giving his guilt literal form (*Oliver Twist* 389), whereas Headstone's trauma begins much before the act and is, in fact, the cause of it. The difference is that Sikes is a career criminal, whereas Bradley Headstone is a respectable schoolteacher, having followed the rules supposed to guarantee success for an educated working-class man. Headstone's struggle to reach a higher status embitters his actions, and when Lizzie rejects him "the psychopathic Bradley Headstone, his name referring to his grave career, stalks Eugene Wrayburn to the point of attempted murder in the hope of obliterating a traumatic reminder of upper-class privilege" (Scoggin 108). Mary Elizabeth Hotz reiterates that "Headstone's unease signals a deeper discrepancy that Dickens surely wants his readers to notice — that despite Headstone's attempts to improve himself and his station in life, he can never quite shake those nagging pauper origins, no matter how much education he has accrued" (85). These factors make Headstone a very different character than Bill Sikes. While the narrator gets inside the mind of both Sikes and Headstone, *Our Mutual Friend*'s narration differs when it offers the duality of Headstone's circumstances by emphasizing the contrast between the unnamed narrator's account of his psychological disintegration and his everyday appearance in the classroom. While still offering the third-person perspective, the narrator deliberates on Headstone's state and dives deep into his mind:

> Now, too, was he cursed with a state of mind more wearing and more wearisome than remorse. He had no remorse; but the evil-doer who can hold that avenger at bay, cannot escape the slower torture of incessantly doing the evil deed again and doing it more efficiently…If I had done it as alleged, is it conceivable that I would have made this and that mistake? If I had done it as alleged, should I have left that unguarded place which

> that false and wicked witness against me so infamously deposed to? The state of that wretch who continually finds the weak spots in his own crime… is a state that aggravates the offence by doing the deed a thousand times. (*Our Mutual Friend* 708-709)

As in John Harmon's lengthy first-person soliloquy (366-373), this passage combines first-person and free indirect discourse, using the 'I' perspective in posing the rhetorical questions to incorporate Headstone's motivations, thoughts, and perspectives into the third-person narrative. It traces his mental processes and his ability to make sense of his own actions, and thus documents the downward spiral of his mind. However, unlike Sikes' mental spiral that happens in his solitary running from his crime, Headstone's happens in plain view, in front of his classroom, in front of his colleagues, and most importantly for his downfall, in front of the waterside criminal Rogue Riderhood. The unnamed narrator's shifting perspective becomes crucial when Headstone's secret is threatened publicly by Riderhood and the passage's focus on his unrest shifts to a focus on Riderhood's thoughts. The passage begins with Headstone, who is "racked and riven in his mind… and his raging sense of having been made to fling himself across the chasm… never cooled down" (791-792), but Riderhood is given precedence when they meet face to face in front of his pupils, and he finally learns the name of the man he is threatening: "'I've got it now!' said Riderhood, after attentively listening, and internally repeating: 'Bradley. I see. Chris'en name, Bradley, sim'lar to Roger which is my own. Eh? Family name, Headstone, sim'lar to Riderhood which is my own. Eh?'" (793). Here, the unique linguistic patterns of specific characters mentioned by Jon Mee resurface to shift the perspective from Headstone's mental turmoil to Riderhood's mental plotting, providing a uniquely varied perspective on the description of the novel's most violent act.

In contrast to Headstone's troubled existence on the threshold of respectable society, Mortimer Lightwood is confident in his ability to bridge the gap between respectable and disreputable groups. His travels throughout London are well-documented in the novel, bringing him from the depths of the slums of Limehouse (*Our Mutual Friend* 20-21) to the heights of the Lammle wedding hosted by the Veneerings (119). It is Lightwood's voice that supplies the story of John Harmon and invokes his presence in the text for the first time. However, Lightwood remains a peripheral character with only brief glimpses into his personal perspective; the unseen and unnamed narrator sees crucial moments through his eyes but does not access what he thinks. This perspective is drastically different from the elaborate access given to Bradley Headstone's mind and is closer to Dickens's typical detached omniscient style. What differs in the novel is the seamless slippage between the two, which Jon Mee identifies throughout the novel as a kind of "double-voiced narration" acting as "a subset of free indirect speech" through a "merging of a character's language — and therefore, their point of view — with the narrative voice's perspective" (36). Lightwood drives the plot by acting as the narrator's eyes at some of the most critical moments of the text: he is the mouthpiece when John Harmon's death is reported (*Our Mutual Friend* 17), and the catalyst for John Harmon's identity being revealed, when they have a chance encounter on the street and John is recognized as having multiple identities (756-757).

Not only does Lightwood introduce John Harmon for the first time in the text, but he is also an important factor in the end of the novel: again, he is a purveyor of information to the shallow and predatory upper-class figures at the Veneering dinner table. Lightwood's role in these scenes shows that, throughout the course of the lengthy novel and its multiple plots, little, if anything, has changed. Lightwood remains as detached as ever from the narrative he tells, despite his presence in the story of Eugene and Lizzie's wedding, which differs from his physical

detachment from his story of John Harmon's murder at the beginning of the novel. Questioned by Lady Tippins about his presence at the wedding, he "pretends, at great leisure": "Was I, by-the-by? … So I was!" (*Our Mutual Friend* 816). It is only at this bitter end of the novel, when society's voice damns Eugene for his marriage to Lizzie, that a glimmer of Lightwood's personal thoughts is offered in parenthetical remarks by the narrator: he wonders, upon each negative comment, from Lady Tippins, from the Veneerings, and from Mr. Podsnap, who is the 'Voice of Society' after all (818). Only Twemlow, an aging, out-of-place bachelor from the Regency period of Dickens's youth, provides any sympathy and support for Eugene in his remarks, which fall like "a canopy of wet blanket" on the company, dampening their criticism (820). While Mortimer "has been asking himself, as to every other member of the Committee in turn, 'I wonder whether you are the Voice!'… he does not ask himself the question after Twemlow has spoken, and he glances in Twemlow's direction as if he were grateful" (820). Mortimer recognizes that Twemlow's remarks contradict the critical 'Voice of Society,' and that Twemlow's attempted optimism must always compete with the voices that reflect the cynical values of the new urban world. However, he is grateful that Twemlow's gesture briefly quiets the harsh narration of the voices gathered around the dinner table even while Mortimer's role as storyteller and intermediary allows this cruel 'Voice of Society' to function.

3.2 Panoramic Perspectives and In-Between Spaces

Like Dickens's earlier novels, *Our Mutual Friend* contains lengthy descriptions of the panoramas of the city, but in this text, they differ in their purpose. Instead of characterizing the city, the passages of the novel that use an omniscient perspective focus on humanizing the city's inhabitants through an intense use of metaphor and personification to describe the lived

experience in an increasingly fragmented environment. Murray Baumgarten notes the implications of these images and metaphors in *Our Mutual Friend*:

> Dickens's prose is magical in its realism. In his fictions, the city is always present as a looming shape… and yet at the same time the novels present a personal, limited, individual view. The city is chaotic; the city is ordered; personal vision is juxtaposed against the panoramic. The two perspectives play against each other powerfully… And Dickens's prose, like his city…is always dynamic, always moving us through change. ("Fictions of the City" 111)

The juxtaposition that Baumgarten discusses between personal and panoramic is another example of the layering of dichotomies in *Our Mutual Friend*, which reiterate Sean Grass's depiction of *Great Expectations* as portrait and *Our Mutual Friend* as panorama (*The Commodification of Identity* 162). The juxtapositions in this novel between private and public, animate and inanimate, emphasize *Our Mutual Friend*'s panoramic perspective; this novel that lacks a protagonist humanizes a wider and more diverse cast of characters than a novel which focuses on only one.

One of the first passages to set up the omniscient urban perspective in the novel is also liminal in time and space: "it was not summer yet, but spring; and it was not gentle spring ethereally mild, as in Thomson's Seasons, but nipping spring with an easterly wind…," a time of change and regrowth, and it is "on the brink of the Thames," a space of life and death (*Our Mutual Friend* 144). Moving from the urban centre to the riverbank does not remove the industrial or capitalist emphasis, however, but underscores how it permeates the city and becomes important to every aspect and space of life:

> The grating wind sawed rather than blew; and as it sawed, the sawdust whirled about the sawpit. Every street was a sawpit, and there were no top-sawyers; every passenger was an under-sawyer, with the sawdust blinding him and choking him. That mysterious paper currency which circulates in London when the wind blows, gyrated here and there and everywhere… It hangs on every bush, flutters in every tree, is caught flying by the electric wires, haunts every enclosure, drinks at every pump, cowers at every grating, shudders upon every plot of grass, seeks rest in vain behind the legions of iron rails…. The wind sawed, and the sawdust whirled. The shrubs wrung their many hands, bemoaning that they had been over-persuaded by the sun to bud; the young leaves pined; the sparrows repented of their early marriages, like men and women; the colours of the rainbow were discernible, not in floral spring, but in the faces of the people whom it nibbled and pinched. And ever the wind sawed, and the sawdust whirled. (144)

Expertly juxtaposing life and death, the metaphor of sawing and sawdust is indicative of the demolition and rebuilding that was constant in the city's capitalistic economy, and the waste that was produced daily and left behind, coating the city. While it is Spring, the season of new life, the wind's 'grating' and 'sawing' is dispersing any tendency to sentimentalize that new life or to allow it to blossom. In this passage, it is not fog and smoke that chokes individuals on the street, but these residues of capitalism. This whirlwind is entirely manmade, and the commodification it represents is likened to the smoke that daily choked the inhabitants of the city. The manufactured paper currency clings to everything in London and dictates everything. Chase and Levenson argue that this currency is "the last stage in the life cycle of London paper. After the rags have been sold, the paper milled, the *Times* printed, the waste gathered, and the cheese wrapped, then the particles finally break apart into this 'paper currency' that blows in bits through the

atmosphere, as part of the 'abominable emanation of the streets'" (148). However, out of the whirling sawdust in London, life struggles: plants bloom, birds mate, and people go about their daily lives. The wind brings colour to the cheeks of those it batters, replacing the rainbow colours of pastoral spring with the human colours of the city. What is evident, however, is that while the inhabitants of the city struggle against it in this passage, stunted and diminished, they still prevail. They are hardened against its pressures and have developed a resiliency even in the face of the grating winds and all-encompassing currency in the city. This representation is no accident. One of the defining features of *Our Mutual Friend*'s difference is the tenacity that is presented in its characters and plots, in contrast to earlier characters such as Oliver Twist and Pip, who are nauseated, not empowered, by the waste and struggle of the city. The passage then shifts to a commentary on urban life: "When the spring evenings are too long and light to shut out, and such weather is rife, the city which Mr Podsnap so explanatorily called London, Londres, London, is at its worst. Such a black shrill city, combining the qualities of a smoky house and a scolding wife; such a gritty city…such a hopeless city… such a beleaguered city" (*Our Mutual Friend* 144-145). Again, all hope and opportunity are leached out of this version of London. By quoting Podsnap, one of the exploiting and egotistical *nouveau riche* characters in the novel, Dickens implies the city is rigid, close-minded, and selfish. *This* city is the one that is dying: black, gritty, and hopeless. It is the one that Dickens is rebelling against in *Our Mutual Friend* when he emphasizes the changes with his own changing techniques.

This lack of hope is reiterated in another panoramic passage from the text which recalls the prior Dickensian trope of the prison, previously used in *Oliver Twist*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Great Expectations*. The passage emphasizes the dehumanization and commodification of people living

in the urban environment, and uses the dirt of the city that coats them to represent how it suffocates and confines their lives:

> A grey dusty withered evening in London city has not a hopeful aspect. The closed warehouses and offices have an air of death about them, and the national dread of colour has an air of mourning. The towers and steeples of the many house-encompassed churches, dark and dingy as the sky that seems descending on them, are no relief to the general gloom; a sun-dial on a church-wall has the look, in its useless black shade, of having failed in its business enterprise and stopped payment for ever…The set of humanity outward from the City is as a set of prisoners departing from gaol, and dismal Newgate seems quite as fit a stronghold for the mighty Lord Mayor as his own state-dwelling. On such an evening… the city grit gets into the hair and eyes and skin. (*Our Mutual Friend* 393)

The city described in this passage is not life-sustaining. Even the towers of the churches in this passage cannot compete with the city's sheer press of humanity, engulfed by the overcrowded dwellings. The sundial is irrelevant, and time appears frozen, which is ironic as the city is so drastically affected by the modernizing changes of passing time that appear to have left the city of the past behind. In *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*, Newgate and motifs of prison are stand-ins for the city of London, but in this passage, Newgate is a metaphor for the corruption of the city itself as a "fit… stronghold for the mighty Lord Mayor," not for its inhabitants who "depart from gaol," a metaphor for the lifeless occupations they pursue to survive. Nevertheless, most condemning of the utter intertwining between life and the city is the final comment that the "city grit gets into the hair and eyes and skin"; it represents the ability of the urban environment

to permeate the lives of its inhabitants and its tangible effect on their physical being, controlling their lives and actions.

Arguably, the most notable example of this panoramic view in *Our Mutual Friend* is the beginning of Book the Third, Chapter One, titled "A Long Lane." The chapter, which features a clandestine conversation between the kind Jewish moneylender Mr. Riah and his scheming employer, Fledgeby, opens with a detailed view of the 'heart' of London. This passage spirals into a view of the neighbourhood of St Mary Axe, offering a graphic depiction of the industrial pollution that chokes the life of the city:

> It was a foggy day in London, and the fog was heavy and dark. Animate London, with smarting eyes and irritated lungs, was blinking, wheezing, and choking; inanimate London was a sooty spectre, divided in purpose between being visible and invisible, and so being wholly neither. Gaslights flared in the shops with a haggard and unblest air, as knowing themselves to be night-creatures that had no business abroad under the sun; while the sun itself, when it was for a few moments dimly indicated through circling eddies of fog, showed as if it had gone out, and were collapsing flat and cold. Even in the surrounding country it was a foggy day, but there the fog was grey, whereas in London it was, at about the boundary line, dark yellow, and a little within it brown, and then browner, and then browner, until at the heart of the City – which call Saint Mary Axe – it was rusty-black. From any point of the high ridge of land northward, it might have been discerned that the loftiest buildings made an occasional struggle to get their heads above the foggy sea, and especially that the great dome of Saint Paul's seemed to die hard; but this was not perceivable in the streets at their feet, where the whole metropolis was a

> heap of vapour charged with muffled sound of wheels, and enfolding a gigantic catarrh. (*Our Mutual Friend* 420)

The personification of the city is jarring in its imagery; it is not a vivacious London that is brought to life, but a wheezing and struggling city, a creature, both animate and inanimate, that fights to keep its head above water and stay afloat. All impressions of vitality have been eradicated; it is sick and dark and can only be identified by the murky persistence of a single landmark, St. Paul's Cathedral. However, this identifying physical landmark, the spiritual centre of London, is about to be pulled into the polluted city; only from an omniscient view from high above the city can it be "discerned that the loftiest buildings made an occasional struggle to get their heads above the foggy sea, and especially that the great dome of Saint Paul's seemed to die hard" (420). St. Paul's represents the moral and spiritual centre of London, yet even this iconic landmark cannot withstand being engulfed by industrial smoke and the materialism of the city. The figurative language in the passage depicts St. Paul's, and London as a whole, teetering on the edge and likely to fall. By contrast, in *Great Expectations*, St. Paul's acts as a beacon to guide Pip away from the horrors of Smithfield market, "the great black dome… bulging at [him]," unmissable (*Great Expectations* 196). In *Our Mutual Friend*, however, this landmark is an emblem of the spiritual values no longer found in the changing city that has been engulfed by "a heap of vapour charged with muffled sound of wheels, and enfolding a gigantic catarrh" (420). Further, the neighbourhood that Dickens identifies as the 'heart' of the city in this passage, St Mary Axe, has the darkest and blackest shroud: a 'rusty black,' reminiscent of dried blood.[13] The heart, the source of the lifeblood of any living being, is tainted the most in this comparison.

[13] St Mary Axe is an area off Leadenhall street in London, named for the St Mary Axe church which was closed in 1560. The name comes from the claim that the church held one of the axes "used by Attila the Hun to behead the 11,000 virgins said to have accompanied St Ursula on a mission to convert the heathen" (Mills, "St Mary Axe").

This implicit metaphor fits with the rest of the death imagery of the passage that contrasts with the life-giving power of the personification of the city. Intriguingly, however, it is 'animate' London that is choking and dying. 'Inanimate' London, as a 'sooty spectre' between visible and invisible, is versed as already dead, simply a shade of what once was, indicative of the movement away from physical London as the marker of city identity towards 'living' London, or its inhabitants, as its defining factor. This perspective is Dickens's new take on the city, in which all the characters are "perfectly self-aware" (Miller 282) and "a very large number, almost all those who appear, are shown in the full span of their lives" (Miller 281). These characters have manufactured a world for themselves in which they become trapped, drowning in the depths of urban life that slowly taints their lifeblood until they are also the 'sooty spectres' of the city. Not only do these descriptions underscore the dichotomy between panoramic and private that is at work in Dickens's description of the city, but also the figurative language isolates each individual's perspective – the rest of the city is blurred by fog and smoke, so each inhabitant is left to his or her own individual understanding and vision to interpret the city. Additionally, because the personification of the city in this passage represents London as a dying figure, it rejects the identification of the city as a character and opens the door for another focal point to emerge – in this case, the individuals who are in the streets 'at the feet' of the dying landmarks. Hence, London in *Our Mutual Friend* is, to again borrow Miller's phrase, "a plurality of worlds rather than a single world" (290), separating each individual world with the fog and smoke that engulfs the city. Even being "lifted out of the city's grasp" (De Certeau 92) cannot provide a complete image of *Our Mutual Friend*'s London.

Comparing his use of fog in *Our Mutual Friend* to the well-known opening passage of *Bleak House* reiterates Dickens's divergence from prior works as he uses the metaphor

differently in the later novel. In *Bleak House*, Dickens compares the fog to a Megalosaurus waddling up Holborn Hill in London (*Bleak House* 11), but his writing in the passage does not use the fog to hide details completely, but rather to animate or emphasize them; the opening of *Bleak House* provides a nearly itemized list of all parts of the city that are touched by the fog, which paradoxically makes them visible instead of the typical shrouding of details that fog causes. *Bleak House* emphasizes the fog as it is interpreted through the city, while *Our Mutual Friend* emphasizes how the city is interpreted (and *not* interpreted) through the fog. The city in *Bleak House*'s opening passage might be "dirty," but the fog is not: it is nearly whimsical, not dismal, with "smoke lowering from the chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes," and "chance people on the bridges" were surrounded "as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds" (*Bleak House* 11). This description is in stark contrast to *Our Mutual Friend*'s metaphor of fog, which is grey, yellow, brown, and rusty-black as it gets deeper and deeper within the city, and "the sun itself, when it was for a few moments dimly indicated through circling eddies of fog, showed as if it had gone out, and were collapsing flat and cold" (*Our Mutual Friend* 420). While *Bleak House* does begin to use fog to represent disease, uncertainty, and oppression throughout the rest of the novel, *Our Mutual Friend* differs by making the metaphor even bleaker. In the later novel, Dickens builds upon and refashions his earlier metaphor to make the fog's envelopment of the city even more complete: it never appears whimsical, it chokes the city's inhabitants, and even blots out the sun.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, it is Mr. Riah who emerges from the fog and attempts to shake it off, unlike the characters who remain wrapped in the fog in *Bleak House*. As a kind, elderly Jewish man who is trapped and manipulated by the capitalist industry of the city, Mr. Riah is a striking character in *Our Mutual Friend.* On one level, he represents Dickens's rehabilitation of

his anti-Semitic portrayal of Fagin in *Oliver Twist*. While Riah is engaged in the stereotypical Jewish profession of moneylending, the novel's representation of how he is controlled, humiliated, and abused by his employer, 'Fascination Fledgeby,' underscores how the capitalist and commodity-driven industries in London manipulated its working-class and 'othered' inhabitants. Dickens writes: "At nine o'clock on such a morning, the place of business of Pubsey and Co. was not the liveliest object even in Saint Mary Axe…with a sobbing gaslight in the counting-house window, and a burglarious stream of fog creeping in to strangle it through the keyhole of the main door. But the light went out, and the main door opened, and Riah came forth with a bag under his arm" (*Our Mutual Friend* 420). There is an interesting dynamic in this passage that contrasts the interior and exterior spaces of the city, with the fog representing the intrusive parts of the city that endeavour to penetrate the interior. Notably, the passage also touches on Dickens's criticism of the financial institutions in the capitalist system with the violent language that is used to surround the counting-house ('sobbing,' 'burglarious,' and 'strangle'). When Riah turns out the light and emerges from the interior, it implies that the city overcomes the counting-house, and Riah is the conqueror, foregrounding the character's individual experience. While Riah cannot be detached from the financial structures of the city that turn people into commodities, he can be traced as an individual who lives, breathes, and struggles against these structures. His journey in and out of the counting house prefigures the emphasis on interior, liminal spaces that represent the city in the novel. This emphasis further develops the shift in *Our Mutual Friend*'s narration to a more intimate view of the city and its effect on its inhabitants and how they interact with its spaces.

Dickens's iconic passages that begin chapters in works throughout his career survive in *Our Mutual Friend*, but they function differently by identifying multiple perspectives instead of

one all-encompassing point of view. Dickens also uses these techniques to represent interior spaces in the novel, hinted at in Riah's exit of the counting house, miniaturizing the city in order to highlight its changes, its outdated structures, and its juxtapositions. Two distinct places in the text become areas where Dickens employs his new multi-perspective technique: The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters and Boffin's Bower, formerly known as Harmony Jail. By layering both the images painted by the passages and the language they use, *Our Mutual Friend*'s interior spaces represent the city and how it must be read as a text with many interpreters and many stories.

The novel's structure of bringing together seemingly incompatible fragments is figuratively relevant on three layers in *Our Mutual Friend:* in the urban microcosm of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, in the representation of London on a grander scale in the novel, and in the novel's technical form and organization. As a miniaturizing of *Our Mutual Friend*'s London, the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters' permanence stands in for the immortality of the river; its precarious location on the riverbank emphasizes the novel's intermingling and layering of contrasting spaces. J. Hillis Miller describes this layering in the novel: "the basic structural technique of [*Our Mutual Friend*] is the complete transformation of tone and milieu from chapter to chapter… [the novel's] structure is formed by the juxtaposition of incompatible fragments in a pattern of disharmony or mutual contradiction" (284). Miller interprets this seemingly chaotic organization as the process through which the characters inevitably interact, their stories linking together despite the sense of disconnection. On the brink of the river, the public house acts as a meeting place for the novel's characters from all areas of society. At different points, nearly all major characters pass through its walls: Gaffer and Lizzie Hexam, Rogue Riderhood, Jenny

Wren, Mr. Riah, Mortimer Lightwood, Eugene Wrayburn, John Harmon, and Bella Wilfer.[14] Sean Grass makes a similar argument about Jaggers's office in *Great Expectations,* writing that it is "situated, appropriately enough, in Little Britain," and "is a diminutive version of the nation, predicated upon a tainting contact with matters of commerce and the law and a grotesque tendency… to produce and reproduce the self" (*The Commodification of Identity* 80). The Porters, similarly, encounters the pillars of the city in the novel, acting as a hub of community and, more importantly, the site where John Rokesmith begins the process of publicly reclaiming the identity of John Harmon (*Our Mutual Friend* 763-765).

Existing on the very edge of the Thames in Limehouse, The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters is almost tumbling into the river; the tavern, in its "dropsical appearance," had "long settled down into a state of hale infirmity," and Dickens personifies the space by imbuing it with a stubborn refusal to collapse or bend beneath the pressures of the changing times (*Our Mutual Friend* 61). The unnamed narrator of *Our Mutual Friend* is adamant that the tavern, without "a straight floor, and hardly a straight line… had outlasted, and clearly would yet outlast, many a better-trimmed building, many a sprucer public-house" (61). The tavern is linked with the Thames and the Limehouse riverside neighbourhood: despite its rundown appearance and its murky inhabitants and dealings, it is more lasting and sturdier than the fleeting "bran-new quarter of London" (6) that houses the *nouveaux riches* Londoners of upper-middle-class society. Further, the juxtaposition that happens on a grander scale in the novel's structure, placing a scene in Limehouse next to a scene in a West End mansion, is represented in the juxtaposition of old and new in the tavern. The unnamed narrator describes the tavern in detail: "It was a narrow

[14] Only Bradley Headstone and Betty Higden do not enter the Fellowship-Porters, which is symbolic as they are both removed from society in different ways. Bradley is removed due to his mental deterioration which makes his role in polite society dangerous and murderous. Betty is removed due to personal choice, as she wishes not to be controlled by the institutions of the city and to die and be buried on her own terms.

lopsided wooden jumble of corpulent windows heaped one upon another as you might heap as many toppling oranges, with a crazy wooden verandah impending over the water; indeed the whole house…impended over the water, but seemed to have got into the condition of a faint-hearted diver who has paused so long on the brink that he will never go in at all" (61). The description of the layered space infuses the tavern with pieces of history; the public house is literally made up of windows and wood piled precariously on top of each other. The language, including 'lopsided,' 'jumble,' 'heaped,' 'toppling,' and 'impending,' invokes a hazardous assortment paused on a precipice. The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, poised like a diver "so long on the brink that he will never go in at all," is indicative of the city of London in the late nineteenth century, poised on the brink of a transition from the Victorian era. The passage continues with a personification of the tavern that is representative of Robert Alter's view of a "fairy-tale perspective in Dickens's writing" (47). In *Our Mutual Friend* specifically, Alter acknowledges the "extraordinary energy of figuration [which] enables a particular vision of nineteenth-century London" (69). This technique is most evident in the comparison of the tavern's wood with an aging tree, "in its old age fraught with confused memories of its youth" (*Our Mutual Friend* 61). The unnamed narrator continues: "In many places it had become gnarled and riven, according to the manner of old trees; knots started out of it; and here and there it seemed to twist itself into some likeness of boughs. In this state of second childhood, it had an air of being in its own way garrulous about its early life" (61). Dickens sets up the tavern as an aging entity beginning to transform into something else. Thus, the most interesting phrase used in this section is 'this state of second childhood.' Considering the tavern as a microcosm of the city, this statement is illuminating. London was indeed aging and becoming more 'gnarled and riven,' but the dichotomy of birth and death is evoked by equating the perils of age with the

perils of childhood, and finding a rebirth in the change, emphasizing the value of longevity and adaptability. And, in this period, London was indeed changing into a space not of opportunity, but of the bleakness of modernity. The tavern represents a "refuge" and an "enchanting delusion," or "an index to the darkening world outside the Tavern" (Stewart 109). This novel pauses on the brink of modernity by offering this different perspective on the changing relationship between society and its spaces in the city. In its depiction of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, *Our Mutual Friend* offers an emphasis on its characters and their stories, highlighted in the fact that the tavern is powered by its patrons and its hostess, Miss Abbey, one of the strong women in the text who work in the public sphere, and who runs her small 'city' with an iron fist.

Another instance in the novel where an indoor space becomes a microcosm of the juxtaposition occurring in the city is the Boffins' new home at Boffin's Bower, previously known as Harmony Jail. Garrett Stewart argues: "It is no accident that Boffin's Bower and the Fellowship-Porters come back-to-back in *Our Mutual Friend*. They are both havens from an unsympathetic world, and the parallel is worked out in quiet detail" (109). Once again, Dickens uses structure as a means of comparison, and in this case, it is two spaces whose similarities are revealed through placing them side by side. The ironic naming of Harmony Jail/Boffin's Bower is relevant: when providing directions, the home's new owner, Noddy Boffin, must provide both names for the location to be properly communicated. His ownership of the place that is characterized by honesty and generosity is compared to the prior ownership by John's miserly father, who imprisoned and destroyed life in the 'jail.' 'Harmony Jail' is itself a contradiction, placing the positive connotations of 'harmony' within the negative connotations of entrapment in 'jail.' Additionally, 'jail' is juxtaposed with 'bower,' which commonly refers to a pleasant arbour

or a shaded garden. The space has two identities, and they exist palimpsestuously. Upon his arrival for his first reading session with the new master of the house, the conniving Silas Wegg encounters "the queerest of rooms" (*Our Mutual Friend* 55). Most notably, Wegg is faced with two sets of design seemingly at war:

> Facing the fire between [two] settles, a sofa, a footstool, and little table, formed a centrepiece devoted to Mrs. Boffin. They were garish in taste and colour, but were expensive articles of drawing-room furniture that had a very odd look beside the settles and the flaring gaslight pendent from the ceiling. There was a flowery carpet on the floor; but, instead of reaching to the fireside, its glowing vegetation stopped short at Mrs. Boffin's footstool, and gave place to a region of sand and sawdust. (55-56)

Again, a single space contains dichotomous characteristics, reflecting how this effect appears on a grander scale in the city of London. Mrs. Boffin's attempts to make the humble space fashionable may appear 'garish,' but they are representative of the human effect on the natural environment as the city becomes industrialized. Pastoral markers are parodied when they are replaced by manufactured replicas like the "glowing vegetation" that is Mrs. Boffin's "flowery carpet." In this space, Mr. Boffin's simplicity is juxtaposed with Mrs. Boffin's 'fashion,' but the warm environment, unlike the wider city, is a beacon of hope that both *can* exist together at once. The elevated, expensive furniture may have an "odd look" next to the cozy fire and across from the "sand and sawdust" floor, but it foreshadows the novel's ability to make incompatible fragments compatible: for example, the Boffins' relationship with wealth and Lizzie Hexam's relationship with Eugene Wrayburn.

What is most intriguing about the interiorizing of the city in the descriptions of the Fellowship-Porters and the Bower is the detailed and purposeful language used to describe the

spaces and connect them with their histories and their inhabitants. The use of metaphors in this text is a similarity to Dickens's prior works; Alter notes that Dickens used "metaphor as a primary vehicle for novelistic imagination" (68-69). In *Our Mutual Friend*, however, it is a vehicle to connect his wider interpretations of the city with the interior representations of private space in the text that are a changing feature in Dickens's writing. The city's panoramas are juxtaposed with the city's interiors to indicate that the same factors of interconnection, adaptability, and change are present in both, serving also to minimize the distance between classes and areas of the city as they are simultaneously compared.

3.3 Walking the Streets: Male Journeys through Public Spaces – Eugene Wrayburn, Mortimer Lightwood, Mr. Riah, Bradley Headstone

The overarching passages of the city that Dickens uses to set up his narrative make use of *Our Mutual Friend*'s unnamed narrator's omniscient perspective, but the times when the narrator follows individual characters through the streets, shifting into their limited perspective, are equally important to setting up the multiple perspectives of the text and its representation of London as a transitional space. Unrestricted movement through the city is a privilege enjoyed by every male character in this novel, but it looks different among different classes. It is easier and smoother for upper-middle-class men who have access to carriages, and more immersive for lower-middle-class and working-class men who walk through the streets and encounter the city's obstacles more frequently. *How* male characters move through the streets in *Our Mutual Friend* reflects their own lives and experiences, and indicates Dickens's emphasis on comparing and contrasting multiple perspectives.

Early in the novel, Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn make the journey, which Charley Hexam calls a "goodish stretch" (*Our Mutual Friend* 18), from the 'bran-new quarter' in

the West End to the greasier, grimier quarter of Limehouse hole in the East End. The trek is long enough that the two men have time to discuss their professions and their upper-middle-class status, and situate their familiar world as separated from the location they are about to enter. As they talk, they travel away from 'respectability,' sitting in a carriage above the 'scum':

> The wheels rolled on, and rolled down by the Monument, and by the Tower, and by the Docks; down by Ratcliffe, and by Rotherhithe; down by where accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed from higher grounds, like so much moral sewage, and to be pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk it in the river. In and out among vessels that seemed to have got ashore, and houses that seemed to have got afloat — among bowsprits staring into windows, and windows staring into ships — the wheels rolled on, until they stopped at a dark corner, river-washed and otherwise not washed at all. (20-21)

Mortimer and Eugene make a journey that "is a downward one socially… as well as in actuality" (Cotsell 38). They pass by specific markers of London's identity: the Monument to the Great Fire of London of 1666, marking the long history of London; the Tower of London, marking the authority of London; and the docks, marking the industry of London and the breadth of its naval and trading power across the globe. While these are just three of London's surviving landmarks, the fact that Mortimer and Eugene pass disinterestedly by them, and that Dickens glosses over them, indicates that these places and institutions are not the focal point of the novel. Instead, the "accumulated scum of humanity" is foregrounded, and their journey connects the West End of the *nouveau riche* to the East End of the 'scum' while emphasizing the different life experiences associated with these areas.

In earlier novels, 'the accumulated scum of humanity' is kept separate from the protagonist or main subjects: Oliver Twist never succumbs to Fagin's criminal exploitation, secure in his anonymous birth identity; Amy Dorrit remains 'pure' even while being raised in a prison; and Pip, who is set up as a gentleman by a former convict's money, and abused by his employer Havisham and her adopted child, is still able to respect and even care for those who have most affected his life while still subverting their opinions as he "lived happily,… and lived frugally, and paid [his] debts" (*Great Expectations* 499). By contrast, in *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens's upper-middle-class characters enter the heart of the 'scum' and engage directly with it; throughout the novel, Eugene and Mortimer become entangled with characters from the riverside, including Lizzie Hexam and Rogue Riderhood. The areas Eugene and Mortimer pass through, Ratcliffe and Rotherhithe, are indicative of their journey downward on the social scale. Michael Cotsell cites Ratcliffe as "the location of some of the worst slums… in London" (38), while Rotherhithe was a residential district mainly of maritime workers with ties to the docks (Walford 134-142). In these districts, industry is placed in contrast with poverty. Murray Baumgarten notes that "the changing experience is one of the reasons city life in Dickens makes its impact not as a completed image but as a fragmented experience that depends upon the partial point of view of the (inevitably involved) participant-observer" ("Fictions of the City" 112). With Mortimer and Eugene as these 'participant-observers,' Dickens can use their journey as a technique to represent the fluid connection between place and character in the novel. Further, as men of an upper-middle-class status, their interpretations of the unfamiliar lower-class areas of the city become a part of the identity of these marginalized spaces as they are perceived from an outside perspective, and as these spaces represent the reality of class exploitation in urban spaces.

In contrast to Mortimer and Eugene's acknowledged place in London society, Mr. Riah, as a Jewish man, is a character existing on the margins of this society. However, he is still able to move through the city's streets, and engages in the financial industry through his involvement with Fledgeby's business. Unlike Mortimer and Eugene, riding through London in a carriage and judging the spaces they pass from a secure distance, Riah relies on walking in the streets and is amongst the 'scum of humanity.' He occupies an interesting in-between perspective in which the narrator's panoramic gaze seems to simultaneously be able and unable to follow him through the city:

> Almost in the act of coming out at the door, Riah went into the fog, and was lost to the eyes of Saint Mary Axe. But the eyes of this history can follow him westward, by Cornhill, Cheapside, Fleet Street, and the Strand, to Piccadilly and the Albany. Thither he went at his grave and measured pace, staff in hand, skirt at heel; and more than one head, turning to look back at his venerable figure already lost in the mist, supposed it to be some ordinary figure indistinctly seen, which fancy and the fog had worked into that passing likeness. (*Our Mutual Friend* 420-421)

Riah's movements are documented almost methodically throughout the streets, but what is notable is that *Riah* is centred in this passage, not London. The city is interpreted through his movements instead of the other way around. While readers are provided with the street names, there is no visual detail for the scene; all the focus is given to the description of Riah, with his "grave and measured pace, staff in hand, skirt at heel" (421). The lively and distinct neighbourhoods mentioned are condensed into merely their names while Riah commands attention, even from the other people in the street who turn "to look back at his venerable figure already lost in the mist" (421). Riah may fade in and out of view, pulled in and out of the city's

influence, but he always emerges, even when he is forced to play the role of a distrustful moneylender, and succumbs through necessity to the exploitative financial industry of the city. It is equally notable that although Riah is foregrounded, it is not his perspective that is offered in the text; he is not given a protagonist-like power, and the scene is not relegated to purely his perspective. In fact, it is not even simply the unnamed narrator's perspective that is offered, but that of the many other individuals on the street who see Riah and interpret his appearance and movements as he navigates the city. He is not an authority and remains anonymous, in contrast to Mortimer and Eugene who are never touched by the city's mist or its exploitation.

This effect, or lack thereof, illustrates that Riah's unaffected city experience contrasts with other male Dickensian city-walkers who internalize London's filth and commotion and are physically impacted by it. Oliver Twist, led into Smithfield on market-morning, has his senses "confounded" by "the crowding, pushing, driving, beating, whooping and yelling; the hideous and discordant din that resounded from every corner of the market; and the unwashed, unshaven, squalid, and dirty figures constantly running to and fro" (*Oliver Twist* 164). Additionally, Pip, his first time in London, "came into Smithfield; and the shameful place, being all asmear with filth and fat and blood and foam, seemed to stick to [him]," and he leaves it behind only to encounter Newgate, which "was horrible, and gave [him] a sickening idea of London" (*Great Expectations* 196). In these accounts compared to the example from *Our Mutual Friend*, the relationship between the city and the individual is different: in the earlier novels, the city is disorientating and the young characters have adverse reactions to the chaos, but the later novel sees the older, dignified Riah embraced by the mist as he is able to move in and out of it, much as, later in the novel, he is also able to 'come up and be dead,' away from the city's grasp on the rooftop of the counting house, with Jenny Wren and Lizzie Hexam. By capturing more of the grim reality of

London, Dickens familiarizes these grittier moments that were jarring and disconcerting in earlier novels and makes them a part of the everyday city existence in *Our Mutual Friend*. Not only does *Our Mutual Friend* capture the momentous changes of the growing disparity between the rich and the poor, but it accepts the brutalization of life that is inescapable in the city and leaves behind Dickens's prior tendency to allow these hardships to be overcome.

The figurative language in these passages depicting the movement of characters through the city characterizes the sinister moment in the novel when the upper-middle-class Eugene Wrayburn goads Bradley Headstone, his romantic rival, to follow him throughout the city in the mistaken belief that Wrayburn will lead Headstone to Lizzie Hexam. Discussing the representation of the city in literature, Robert Alter argues that "the city begins to show a phantasmagoric face… but in order to see that affiliation better, we shall have to consider more closely the role of confusion, fantasy, and fragmentation in the experience of the city" (21). In *Our Mutual Friend* in particular, Alter recognizes "how this extraordinary energy of figuration enables a particular vision of nineteenth-century London" (69), and how "the momentum of [Dickens's] metaphoric imagination unsettles our sense of the city as a solid, substantial theatre for the realization of the objective designs of human will" (71). This tension between 'phantasmagoric' metaphor and objective uses of the city is drastically apparent when the familiar notion of walking the streets is made ominous by Wrayburn's tormenting of the schoolmaster. This passage is another in which the unnamed narrator's focus on a single character's perspective allows a brief shift into first-person narration, but in this case, it maps the city while simultaneously charting the motivations and suffering of the characters involved. Wrayburn describes his actions to Mortimer Lightwood:

> ‘Then soberly and plainly, Mortimer, I goad the schoolmaster to madness. … I have derived inexpressible comfort from it. I do it thus: I stroll out after dark, stroll a little way, look in at a window and furtively look out for the schoolmaster. Sooner or later, I perceive the schoolmaster on the watch… Having made sure of his watching me, I tempt him on, all over London. One night I go east, another night north, in a few nights I go all round the compass. Sometimes, I walk; sometimes, I proceed in cabs, draining the pocket of the schoolmaster, who then follows in cabs. I study and get up abstruse No Thoroughfares in the course of the day. With Venetian mystery I seek those No Thoroughfares at night, glide into them by means of dark courts, tempt the schoolmaster to follow, turn suddenly, and catch him before he can retreat. Then we face one another, and I pass him as unaware of his existence, and he undergoes grinding torments. Similarly, I walk at a great pace down a short street, rapidly turn the corner, and, getting out of his view, as rapidly turn back. I catch him coming on post, again pass him as unaware of his existence, and again he undergoes grinding torments. Night after night his disappointment is acute, but hope springs eternal in the scholastic breast, and he follows me again to-morrow.’ (*Our Mutual Friend* 542-543)

The first thing to note in this passage is the temptation of madness, and the thrill and comfort Wrayburn achieves from his proximity to it. This idea of rubbing up against the unknown is another microcosmic example of the experience of the city, as the jumbled nature of urban juxtapositions means that its inhabitants are always, consciously or unconsciously, rubbing up against that which is their opposite. Discussing this passage, Jon Mee argued that “forcing Headstone to shadow him through the streets, feeding him into the huge machine of the city, Eugene is tacitly aligned with the inhuman processes of exploitation that form the broader

backdrop to the novel as a whole" (28). Wrayburn is, in many ways, a play on the flâneur, the idle wanderer in the city who acts as an observer of urban life.[15] By goading Headstone with his wandering, he not only frustrates the unstable schoolmaster who is searching for Lizzie, but also taunts him with his privileged ability to wander in idleness in comparison with Headstone's working-class existence, hinted at when Wrayburn "drain[s] the pocket of the schoolmaster" by forcing him to follow in cabs (*Our Mutual Friend* 542). The labyrinthine path and action that Wrayburn describes tends toward the mythic or imaginary and reflects the unstable mental condition of both characters as they navigate their circumstances physically and emotionally. The unpredictability that Wrayburn describes in his actions becomes, again, a representation of the unpredictability of the city's streets. The metaphoric comparison which comes when he says he moves with 'Venetian mystery' is a subtle reference to the masks and drama of the Italian city, hinting at the questions of identity at play in this novel and the uncertainty within the narration. The lengthy pseudo-first-person perspective ('I stroll,' 'I tempt,' 'I proceed,' 'I walk,' 'I study,' 'I seek,' 'I pass,' 'I catch') emphasizes the individualism that is present in the experience of the city, but also the *illusion* of power, cited by Alter when he says that it is the metaphoric imagination that unsettles the solidity of the city as a place to exert our will (71). Wrayburn and Headstone represent the two sides of the city that exist simultaneously: the individual opportunity and the unavoidable but exciting threat. The wandering that Wrayburn describes, coupled with Headstone's following, that turns back on itself, loops and backtracks, without a known end, is illuminated by the idea that this cat-and-mouse chase is representative of the experience of the city. It is only by physically articulating the streets of the city that the

[15] A flâneur is defined as "a lounger or saunterer, an idle 'man about town'" ("Flâneur), describing a new type of man who was a forerunner to the 'dandy' of the *fin de siècle*. The term comes from Charles Baudelaire's 1863 essay *Peintre de la vie Moderne* [The Painter of Modern Life] and was adopted by Walter Benjamin to theorize the emergence of a consumer society (Buchanan, "Flâneur").

tension between Wrayburn and Headstone can be navigated; their unrelenting pursuit of each other indicates how their mental processes, both torments and reliefs, are symbolized by the city's labyrinth, and how it can be articulated on two levels: torment for Headstone, and relief for Eugene.

Dickens's writing process involved walking the city, so it is unsurprising that the journeys taken by his male characters are used as symbolic practices to interpret their surroundings. Their perspectives are crucial as they provide varying lenses through which to view the city, but for the first time, Dickens provides more than one detailed perspective. It is these representations of movement that bring together the areas of the city and the novel's shifting narration to create a literary London that is not limited by a single perspective.

Chapter 4 – Leaving the Past Behind: Navigating Identity in *Our Mutual Friend*

In *Our Mutual Friend*, through the ways in which his characters interact with the city, Dickens manipulates and dismantles the markers of identity, gender, and society that he, in his earlier works, helped to create. London becomes more than a backdrop in *Our Mutual Friend*; instead, it acts as a dynamic influence on the *characters* that drive the narrative. This process is accomplished in the novel through the elusive figure of John Harmon as he overcomes and rewrites the traditional protagonist role and the cliché of the 'Dickensian' orphan, and in Dickens's portrayal of three independent, passionate women who seek not simply marriage, but self-fulfillment and self-discovery in the city.

4.1 The Man from Somewhere and Nowhere: John Harmon, John Rokesmith, Julius Handford

Despite the argument that *Our Mutual Friend* has no central character, it does have a character that acts as a focal point: John Harmon. It is fitting that a text with a multiplicitous focus features a prominent character with multiplicitous identities; John Harmon is a mysterious figure, and while he may be the closest thing to a main character that the novel can claim, unlike the protagonists in Dickens's other major novels Harmon is not searching for his identity but actively concealing it. While his personal narrative may not be central enough to dictate a protagonist role, his story is a motivating factor for many characters even when he is absent; John Harmon himself is not the main character, but his story and reputation is the main event. Jolene Zigarovich acknowledges the "remarkable multiplicity of names and identities that Harmon is associated with," listing George Radfoot (his sailor double), Little Johnny (the orphan the Boffins intend to replace him with), Julius Handford (his first alias at the riverside scene),

and John Rokesmith (his second and most lengthy alias, under which identity he befriends the Boffins and marries Bella Wilfer) (155). The unravelling process of revealing the identity of the man from "somewhere" and "nowhere" (*Our Mutual Friend* 12) is as transformative as the demolishing and reconstruction of London's urban landscape in the novel. His role as not only a character, but as a *story* in the text emphasizes the novel's commodification of narratives and identity. Consequently, I analyze the liminal role of John Harmon as non-protagonist and mystery, including how he subverts the typical protagonist role and the orphan trope established by Dickens in his prior novels.

The critical discussion of the orphan trope has been a staple feature in scholarly analysis of Dickens's major works (*Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*). In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens is inventing a new take on this trope by examining the life of an adult who, after years in exile, is struggling to reconstruct an identity that was denied him by the force of paternal cruelty. His miserly father destroyed the lives of his wife and children with his obsessive desire to impose his will on them, both in his life and after his death. Harmon returns to London after his father's death to reclaim his fortune and identity but is constrained by the demands of his father's will, including an intended wife who is "left to him… like a dozen of spoons" (*Our Mutual Friend* 37), and the implications of gaining a vast amount of wealth, which include an attempt on his life. His return to London is reminiscent of Magwitch's return after exile as a criminal in *Great Expectations*; neither can claim their identity without danger upon their return, but it is Harmon's class privilege that allows him to recover his identity while Magwitch can only claim death to avoid re-incarceration. Harmon is an atypical orphan figure, but in a mirroring of the orphan making his own way in the city, Harmon makes his own way in the British colonies, and hesitates to reclaim his true identity upon his return to the city. What makes

the Harmon character stand out the most in the novel is not his central position, but his chameleon-like quality: he molds and adapts his identity in his search for a life that is governed by his own choices, not those of others. As he moves throughout different areas of London in disguise, manipulating his identity, he makes a strong case for the importance of the city on the formation, presentation, and even reinvention of character. Harmon is, according to Zigarovich, "no one and everyone," and is "quite literally dispersed (or dismembered) throughout the text" (157). Leslie Simon reiterates this concept, writing that Harmon is "a mutual friend to various characters," and "is defined relationally rather than individually, and, as such, belongs everywhere and nowhere, to everyone and to no one" (226). In Harmon's own words, he "come[s]… from many countries" (*Our Mutual Friend* 96). Analyzing Harmon's identities as they relate to his movements throughout the city establishes that the city directly impacts identity and that the shifting perspectives, characters, and identities of *Our Mutual Friend* reflect the shifting nature of the city.

At the outset of *Our Mutual Friend*, John Harmon is introduced as a disembodied figure: the "man from Somewhere," existing only as a presence in a tale told by Mortimer Lightwood at the Veneerings' dinner party (*Our Mutual Friend* 12). Reluctantly convinced to tell what he knows by his prying fellow diners, Mortimer is unwilling to provide specific details, but still communicates the story of John Harmon's circumstances, and eventually, his 'death.' Responding to the lack of detail, one of the nameless 'Buffers' at the dinner party ironically suggests that Harmon is a "man from Nowhere, perhaps!" (12). While Mortimer is only invited to the dinner party as a source of information for the others to consume, he can reveal nothing specific: "Sorry to destroy romance by fixing him with a local habitation, but he comes from the place, the name of which escapes me, but will suggest itself to everybody else here, where they

make the wine" (13). Ironically, Mortimer's apology for "destroying the romance" is irrelevant when his statements only serve to spin a more fantastical narrative. In the entire tale, Mortimer only names him as 'Harmon' once, preferring instead to refer to him as the "man from Somewhere."[16] Harmon, stripped of his identity, becomes a spectral presence that haunts the dinner table as the lack of fixed identity allows his story to become *their* story. The fact that Mortimer does not know the dark ending of Harmon's story when he begins to tell it is indicative of the role that this narrative will play in the rest of the novel: it is this story, not Harmon himself, which drives the rest of the action. When Charley Hexam arrives with the dark conclusion in a scrawled note, Mortimer's explanation still refuses to identify Harmon. He announces: "The story is completer and rather more exciting than I supposed. Man's drowned!" (17). The supposed death of John Harmon gives a false ending to an already incomplete tale; nearly all markers that would place or identify it are omitted.

John Harmon's first *physical* appearance in the novel, which occurs at Gaffer's home in Limehouse, is not under his own name. Not only is Harmon not himself in this scene, but he is also in an unfamiliar part of the city: he is identified as nothing more than "an extremely pale and disturbed face" (*Our Mutual Friend* 23), a fragmentation of his body that reflects the fragmentation of his identity. The face proclaims, "I am lost!" (23). In fact, he is lost on two levels: lost in an unfamiliar area of the city and lost through the 'death' of John Harmon, his true identity. When he announces to Gaffer that "I — I— am a stranger, and don't know the way" (23), he is not only speaking to his company, but to himself; the new persona that emerged from the river and stumbled across his 'own' body is unfamiliar even to him. This uncertainty can be contrasted with the crucial moment that begins *Great Expectations* when Pip, through a

[16] Larisa Tokmakoff Castillo notes that Mortimer only gives Harmon a name when he "describes John's role in the will, his position as inheritor," conflating his identity with the power of the document (54).

recognition and acceptance of his family's identity that he achieves from reading their tombstones, confidently claims his identity. The novel opens: "My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip" (*Great Expectations* 39). In contrast, as Keith Easley attests, Harmon is "literally faced with a dead man disconcertingly like himself and wearing his clothes, and unable in his traumatized state to understand the mystery of his own near drowning… [he] knows only that the other person has deprived him of his identity, and he is dead in the world's eyes" (300). During their accidental meeting in Limehouse, Mortimer Lightwood associates the man's 'strangeness' with the fact that he is unfamiliar with London: "You said you were a stranger in London?" says Mortimer, and Harmon/The Stranger replies, "An utter stranger" (*Our Mutual Friend* 24). Identity and London are immediately intertwined. Lawrence Frank writes: "Disguised as Julius Handford, Harmon is literally and figuratively 'lost': a stranger in the city he has not seen for years; a stranger to his own self, which he is in the process of reconstructing, first as Julius Handford, then as John Rokesmith" (152). Like Podsnap's placement of "London, Londres, London" at the centre of the world (*Our Mutual Friend* 132), this argument suggests that anyone who cannot be identified as an Englishman is regarded as being from 'nowhere.' John Harmon was a child in the city, but one confined to the walls of Harmony Jail, the ironic name given to his father's refuse dumps for the waste products of London, and is therefore unfamiliar with the rest of the city. The docks and the river are so drastically unfamiliar that even without his apparent death, John Harmon cannot exist as John Harmon in this space. J. Hillis Miller argues: "Each character in *Our Mutual Friend*… is the unique possessor of a circumambient world which is both spatial and temporal. This world surrounds them and is as intimately present to them as their own self-consciousness"

(283). Because John Harmon, upon his first appearance in the novel, is *not* surrounded by his 'own' world, his lack of identity due to his 'death' means his "own self-consciousness" is no longer viable. It is this moment of identifying himself as a stranger to London and recognizing that he is lost that prefigures the splitting of his identity into three distinct individuals that exist in different areas and social circles of the city. He effectively creates a world and a self-consciousness for each. While Pip claims his true identity based on heritage despite his lack of knowledge, Harmon manufactures an identity based on falsehood when the knowledge of his own identity is jeopardized by 'death.' When the police officer demands an identity, Julius Handford is created: he does not have a "card" to give, but he manufactures a name and address that will, from this moment, be his identity in the riverside circle. "Mr. Julius Handford," he declares, "Exchequer Coffee House, Palace Yard, Westminster" (*Our Mutual Friend* 26). Indeed, G.W. Kennedy argues that "Dickens transforms the assumption of a pseudonym into the central act of salvation within the social environment of greed, dust, and empty words that makes up most of the world of *Our Mutual Friend*" (168). Later, Harmon will manufacture the identity of John Rokesmith to ingratiate himself into the Boffin's newly wealthy world while remaining in a firmly lower-middle-class position as a secretary. Further, returning to the "scene of [his] death," in Limehouse Hole (*Our Mutual Friend* 366), he dons a disguise that likens him to George Radfoot, his physical double who, it is later revealed, is the owner of the body that was assumed to be his own.

This return to the 'scene of his death' occurs midway through the novel; Harmon finds himself lost again, where he was first lost, and where he manufactured his first false identity. He "attempts to find a site of origin" to "solidify his identity," which he searches for at this scene of his near-drowning in the hopes that it "will allow him to redefine himself in his own terms… yet

he finds that origin elusive" (Castillo 55). He ponders: "I have never been here since that night, and never was here before that night, but thus much I recognise. I wonder which way did we take when we came out of that shop. We turned to the right as I have turned, but I can recall no more" (*Our Mutual Friend* 365). Drugged and disoriented, his partial memory is also indicative of his unfamiliarity, but I propose further that he cannot recall the path he took fully because, in the period when he navigated his way around the river, and eventually into it, nearly drowned, he is no longer John Harmon, but is not yet Julius Handford or John Rokesmith; he is in a liminal position, reflected in the symbolic liminal position often represented by the river. Additionally, this chapter is the first moment in the novel when the multiplicitous identity of the central figure is made clear. Looking to retrace his steps from his previous identity-changing route, Harmon finds himself lost: "Like most people so puzzled, he again and again described a circle, and found himself at the point from which he had begun" (365). His futile pursuit to find his way, which Harmon compares to "narratives of escape from prison" (365), again invoking a comparison with Magwitch, is the point at which the novel becomes self-conscious, the first time it shifts into the first-person, and the only point at which it appears to have a protagonist as Harmon recounts the story of his 'death' to himself. It is when he shifts into the soliloquy that he physically removes his disguise of "the oakum-headed, oakum-whiskered man" and "in the breast of the coat he stow[s] the bristling hair and whisker," all designed to hide his manufactured identities and liken him to yet another individual identity (365). The man that emerges becomes "as like that same lost wanted Mr. Julius Handford as never man was like another in this world" (365), and further, "in that same moment he was the Secretary also, Mr. Boffin's secretary… John Rokesmith, too, was as like that same lost wanted Mr. Julius Handford as never man was like another in this world" (366). In this moment of stillness and confusion,

isolated from the rest of the urban environment and unaffected by the identity-affirming aspects of the city when it is familiar, Harmon is broken down into his three central identities. Further, standing near the site of his death, Harmon views himself as between living and dead, and "by existing as two, he exists in alternate temporalities and in alternate spaces simultaneously" (Castillo 55).

Harmon's soliloquy is a turning point in the novel where his true identity becomes explicit, even though Dickens acknowledges in the Postscript that he "foresaw the likelihood that a class of readers and commentators would suppose that [he] was at great pains to conceal exactly what [he] was at great pains to suggest: namely, that Mr. John Harmon was not slain, and that Mr. John Rokesmith was he" (*Our Mutual Friend* 821). It is also the point at which John decides to bury his true identity in a process of walking through the city:

> He went down to his room, and buried John Harmon many additional fathoms deep. He took his hat, and walked out, and, as he went to Holloway or anywhere else — not at all minding where — heaped mounds upon mounds of earth over John Harmon's grave. His walking did not bring him home until the dawn of day. And so busy had he been all night piling and piling weights upon weights of earth above John Harmon's grave, that by that time John Harmon lay buried under a whole Alpine range; and still the Sexton Rokesmith accumulated mountains over him, lightening his labour with the dirge, 'Cover him, crush him, keep him down!'. (378)

The metaphor of 'mounds of earth' in this passage directly echoes the descriptions of the mounds of waste that tower over the narrative, but what is more important for my interpretation is the process of walking that allows him to complete this action, and the metaphorical layering that happens to 'permanently' transform Harmon into Rokesmith. Ultimately this process is

unsuccessful and eventually Harmon *does* reclaim his identity, indicating that anything that is covered over must eventually come to light, and no amount of transformation or hiding can fully destroy that which already exists. In this sense, like the city, John Harmon is a palimpsest of identities. Even when he is determined to remain Rokesmith, the intrinsic factors that contribute to identity and which make him John Harmon are always already present. By the end of the novel, Mrs. Boffin identifies him as John Harmon when she sees him sitting by the fire, with a childlike, disappointed smile, that likens him to the child John that she knew and loved, and he is instantly familiar.

Why is it only in this moment that John Harmon is recognized? It is only a shadow of the past that allows Mrs. Boffin to finally recognize John Harmon, and she recognizes him as the little boy he used to be. David Lowenthal studies the concept of history and the past in *The Past is A Foreign Country — Revisited*, and he argues that the past, in many ways, becomes its own version of an imagined city or world. Lowenthal writes: "Past and future are alike inaccessible. But though beyond physical reach, they are integral to our imagination. Reminiscence and expectation suffuse every present moment" (23). The past of John Harmon's childhood is no longer accessible, but the shades of it that continue to exist, marked on his adult self, allow reminiscence and imagination to be mapped onto the unfamiliar man and transform him into someone that Mrs. Boffin knows quite well. While this moment of recognition is revealed at the end of the novel, it occurred chronologically much earlier, and was the catalyst for Mr. Boffin's performance as a miser to test Bella Wilfer's capacity to choose mutual respect over material advantage. By removing the moment of revelation from the text and only revealing it as a recounted narrative, Dickens rejects his traditional attempts to build these identity-confirming revelations to a climax at the end of the novel. John Kucich writes: "It is true that Dickens's

endings do attain a degree of 'rest.' They push beyond mere chronicity into repletion" ("Action in the Dickens Ending" 96). *Our Mutual Friend*, however, denies the reader the chronicity of John Harmon's reveal when it is recounted retrospectively.

While the question of John Harmon's identity, the mystery of his 'death,' and the circulation of his story are the driving factors in this novel, John Harmon himself is not the central character. For only a single chapter does *Our Mutual Friend* offer an omniscient view of his perspective, and his actions are mainly followed on the periphery of the novel's other plots. His lack of identity as 'the man from somewhere' that is transitioned into multiple identities over the course of the novel is a prime example of how the novel treats identity and characterization as a whole. His life reverses the orphan trope that Dickens used in his earlier novels, and he is represented in relation to London, to the other characters, and to the overall structure of the novel. This reversal represented by Harmon's shifting identity illustrates the transitional nature of Dickens's writing in *Our Mutual Friend.*

4.2 Taking to the Streets: Female Journeys through Public Spaces – Bella Wilfer, Lizzie Hexam, Jenny Wren

While *Our Mutual Friend*'s narrative centres around the mystery of John Harmon and his role in London's society, the female figures of Bella Wilfer, Lizzie Hexam, and Jenny Wren depart substantially from Dickens's earlier representations of women in the city. The movement of these female characters through the streets of London illustrates how contrasting areas of the city are used to parallel the redistribution of power and authority in the narrative structure. Unlike the men in this novel who have the privilege to travel through the city independently, Bella, Lizzie, and Jenny must overcome both physical and social obstacles, and they do so by unsettling their expected roles in society. In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens is dismantling the

traditional feminine roles and values that his earlier works popularized; Bella, Lizzie, and Jenny represent a parodying of prior 'Dickensian' female tropes when they independently and consciously choose to act with more autonomy and authority. Bella undermines the passive role of the 'angel in the house' and the poor woman elevated through marriage, Lizzie overcomes the 'fallen woman' trope by adamantly refusing the advances of a wealthy man, and Jenny destabilizes the stereotypes of the 'disfigured' daughter and the compassionate maternal caregiver. Each woman demonstrates an ability to move independently through the city and adapt to her surroundings, taking control of her means of survival, rejecting dependence, and pushing against the idea that the 'ideal' woman must stay in the domestic sphere.

As in *Our Mutual Friend*'s other layered narratives, Bella, Lizzie, and Jenny are interconnected in the text: they represent reflections of each other and the stereotypes of being a woman in Victorian society. Bella Wilfer is uniquely situated between two of these stereotypes: the beautiful young woman fantasizing about marriage to a wealthy man who will raise her from her lower-class status, and the youthful tragic widow, forever frozen in her unmarried status.[17] While John's father sought to use her as a punishment for his son by mandating their marriage, Bella subtly pushes against the role that his last will and testament have forced onto her. She may appear mercenary and selfish, but Bella possesses an astute awareness of these traits in herself and the workings of the world that will satisfy or dissatisfy her. This awareness allows her to move independently through the city. In dramatic contrast with Bella, Lizzie Hexam is born into a different class and has a starkly different upbringing. Bella's mother, obsessed with appearances, is a "worthy woman" whose "specialties" lie in "an amazing power of gratifying

[17] Bella's position between eligible young woman and tragic widow, in which she is defined only in relation to marriage, places her between two of Dickens's other most notable female characters, Estella and Miss Havisham from *Great Expectations.*

her splenetic or worldly-minded humours by extolling her own family" (*Our Mutual Friend* 35) and a figure in a "chronic state of dignity" (207), while Lizzie's father is a man who has "no fancies" (*Our Mutual Friend* 5) and "travels on the solid ground of reality," whose "fundamental ignorance is emotional stinginess and defensiveness" (Newsom 46). Bella, although decidedly lacking wealth, lives fairly comfortably in a respectable, lower middle-class neighbourhood with a respectable family and marriage prospects; Lizzie is raised among the scum of the river by a father who detests upward mobility and whose profession borders on the criminal (*Our Mutual Friend* 3). Nevertheless, both women follow similar trajectories in their movement and elevation, and eventual marriages. On the other hand, Jenny Wren is a curious character with a curious appearance.[18] She is arguably the most independent character in the novel, despite her youth and disability, and she does not marry, even though the novel's ending implies a relationship between Jenny and Sloppy. She meticulously forms her own perceptions, and expresses her independence and judgement by navigating between the East End and the West End of London, ensuring her own survival. Like Lizzie, she occupies an in-between space: between health and sickness, parent and child, and life and death. In this urban triad that combines to illustrate the different kinds of women in the city, Lizzie acts as the connecting factor. Bella and Jenny meet only once, at Lizzie's wedding (752), but they both form intimate connections with Lizzie, bringing Jenny into the fold of the Harmon plot at the end of the novel when she is commissioned to create a doll for 'the Inexhaustible,' John and Bella's daughter.

While Bella undergoes a moral transformation throughout the novel, manipulated or not, it is how she interacts with the city that is crucial to an understanding of her role in the novel. When she is introduced, she is ensconced in the domestic sphere, and, initially, the novel appears

[18] 'Jenny Wren' is, in fact, an assumed name, taken from a plain brown songbird, for the child/woman born Fanny Cleaver.

to follow the typical route of a young woman moving from her father's home to her husband's home: Bella moves from her lower-middle-class childhood dwelling, to the Boffins' mansion, back to her father's home, to a small cottage on Blackheath as a newlywed, and then back to the Boffin mansion which becomes the Harmon mansion at the end of the novel. However, Bella's progress as she moves through the city relatively unattended reflects her transformation. When readers are introduced to Bella, she is unnamed: "A girl of about nineteen, with an exceedingly pretty figure and face, but with an impatient and petulant expression both in her face and in her shoulders (which in her sex and at her age are very expressive of discontent)" (*Our Mutual Friend* 34). Bella's first appearance is reduced to her looks and a judgement of her attitude; the unnamed narrator recognizes only her 'petulance,' leaving her will, her desires, and most of her personality unacknowledged. However, this initial introduction is crucial to the transformation that Dickens works to portray throughout the novel. Keith Easley suggests that Dickens reveals the mystery of the Harmon plot halfway through the novel to set up the real mystery of Bella's transformation: "The readers need to know who Rokesmith is, if we are to understand that the later revelation to Bella of the mystery of *her* true self is the real denouement of the Bella/Harmon romance narrative" (312, original emphasis). The mystery is not the one that Dickens took "great pains to suggest" (*Our Mutual Friend* 821) but the one that he took great pains to conceal, which many critics and scholars assume was not planned because it was *not* suggested so successfully: the "pious fraud" (771).[19] The contradiction between the unnamed narrator's introduction of Bella and her independence demonstrated in the text is perhaps part of the reason that critics are divided about the implications of this "pious fraud" on Bella's

[19] Sarah Gates wrote that "readers have been objecting to the Harmon marriage plot since the earliest reviews of *Our Mutual Friend*," citing the *Long Review* from October 1865 which stated that the resolution was rushed — "roughly torn open" rather than "worked out 'by a slow and natural process'" (231).

character: Sarah Gates contrasts the 'defenders' of the fraud, who "identify with the moral teachers or artists who have concocted the plot" and read this action as "Bella gain[ing] integrity instead of losing vitality," with the fraud's detractors, who "identify with Bella as the defrauded party — deceived by an arrogant guardian, an ego-centric suitor husband, and a manipulative author" (232). However, neither of these perspectives recognizes Bella's authority in her own life and journey through the city. Daun Jung is incorrect when he states that, in contrast to John Harmon's circuitous movements throughout the city, "Bella remains at home grieving over the mysterious death of her unacquainted future husband" (212). She is in control of her decisions, despite the restrictions placed on her by her sex, and she evolves away from the portrayal of dependent femininity recognized in earlier Dickens texts.[20]

Two of the most revealing moments for Bella's character occur during parallel visits to London's financial district when she visits her father at his place of work, uninvited. Both instances involve Bella travelling through the London streets into an area occupied mainly by men and, when contrasted, these journeys illustrate how movement through the city influences character development. During the first journey, she is under the persona of the "lovely woman," a "slap-up gal in a bang-up chariot" according to an observer from R. Wilfer's office (*Our Mutual Friend* 314-315). She is portrayed as a 'lady' sending for her father as if he is a proper gentleman being summoned with a calling card, causing "so great an excitement in the counting-house" that Rumty Wilfer is followed out of the office, and the surprising sight does nothing to lessen "the agitation" (314). From the perspective of the onlooking clerks, Bella occupies an elevated social position, and she is able to translate the monetary privilege gifted by Mr. Boffin into a type of independence as she makes choices and navigates her way to her father's place of

[20] Examples include, but are not limited to, Rose Maylie, Little Nell Trent, Esther Summerson, Amy Dorrit, and Florence Dombey.

business. Dickens writes: “When Bella was seated in the carriage, she opened the little packet in her hand. It contained a pretty purse, and the purse contained a bank note for fifty pounds. ‘This shall be a joyful surprise for poor dear Pa,’ said Bella, ‘and I’ll take it myself into the City!’” (314). The events that follow are an inverted fairy-tale-like ‘happily-ever-after’ moment between the father and daughter and a reversal of the parent-child relationship when the daughter clothes her father, elevates his social status, and treats him to an evening outside his typical means. Not only is her ability to be selfless revealed, but Bella’s independence is underscored when she firmly exclaims that she will take the money *herself* into the City. This statement is both a declaration of her actions and a clear intention to venture into the male-dominated financial centre of London. Although she is “uninformed respecting the exact locality of the place of business of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles,” her father’s workplace, she “knew it to be near Mincing Lane” and “she directed herself to be driven to the corner of that darksome spot” (314). Despite her ignorance to the location, she demonstrates an ability to identify the character of “that darksome spot” and manipulates it, and her perceived elevated status, to her advantage.

Bella’s next visit to the City is decidedly different from her journey in the carriage when she independently finds her way on foot, relying on the signs and symbols of the streets and its inhabitants to navigate the space. This second journey begins when Bella flees on foot after the culmination of Mr. Boffin’s miserly performance, reversing the ‘Cinderella’ story by choosing to leave behind her carriage and fancy gowns in favour of the dress she arrived in (*Our Mutual Friend* 601). Bella is no longer the naïve young woman travelling in a carriage at the beginning of the novel. She resolves now to “begin again entirely on [her] own account” and take the “trying” path (601). This moment is when we begin to see the emergence of her resolve and

ability to act unaided by others. As such, it is not surprising that the account of her second journey is much more detailed:

> The City looked unpromising enough, as Bella made her way along its gritty streets. Most of its money-mills were slackening sail, or had left off grinding for the day… There was a jaded aspect on the business lanes and courts, and the very pavements had a weary appearance, confused by the tread of a million of feet. There must be hours of night to temper down the day's distraction of so feverish a place. As yet the worry of the newly-stopped whirling and grinding on the part of the money-mills seemed to linger in the air, and the quiet was more like the prostration of a spent giant than the repose of one who was renewing his strength. If Bella thought, as she glanced at the mighty Bank, how agreeable it would be to have an hour's gardening there, with a bright copper shovel, among the money, still she was not in an avaricious vein. Much improved in that respect, and with certain half-formed images which had little gold in their composition, dancing before her bright eyes, she arrived in the drug-flavoured region of Mincing Lane. (603)

During her first journey, Bella simply directs her carriage to Mincing Lane, remaining relatively removed from the streets, and as a result, her journey is condensed into a single sentence in which she "directed herself to be driven" to that spot (314). During this second trip, however, the journey and the location are articulated in detail. By taking to the streets on foot, she is better able to recognize the City up close and acknowledges it in a way that her first journey did not.[21] Like the social status that she has re-assumed, the City she enters this time is "gritty," "grinding," "jaded," "weary," and "feverish" (603). Dickens parodies the standards of duty and

[21] Bella's two journeys to the City can be read in terms of Michel de Certeau's two versions of the city — the one seen while walking, and the one seen from above as a voyeur ("Walking the City," *The Practice of Everyday Life*).

propriety that he often mapped onto his female characters in earlier works when Bella enters this space that is both masculine and dominated by money: he utilizes a domestic metaphor of gardening, aligned with Bella's status still as a marriageable young woman, to indicate that she is strictly removed from the traditionally masculine, capitalist endeavours of the City. This domestic image of a gentle woman gardening with a copper shovel emphasizes an urban/pastoral juxtaposition, where the financial business of the district is metaphorically compared to the workings of a factory ('money-mills'), the ultimate image of the industrial city. This juxtaposition is not unfamiliar to Dickens, who in prior novels embraced the fact that "the experience of the city was one of profound dislocation, of being cut off, physically and psychologically, from one's roots and one's community" (Schwarzbach 10). However, this gardening metaphor indicates how far *Our Mutual Friend* has come from the possibility of a pastoral haven; like the mill Lizzie works in upriver and the rooftop garden of Pubsey and Co., the gardening in this passage is "among the money" and contains the double meaning of sowing urban wealth. Contradictorily, Bella is able to catalogue and recognize the urban space she moves through on her own while also being unaffected by its commodification and greed: the "half-formed images" in her eyes are of independence and the possibility of love, not wealth.

A passing encounter, although brief, puts Bella in direct contact with the other side of the feminine figure in the urban space, and the mirror of what she might have become: the working-class woman, exiting a public-house and likely 'fallen.' Her veiled attempt to appear honourable is laughable in comparison with the emphasis on Bella's morality: "The counting-house of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles was pointed out by an elderly female accustomed to the care of offices, who dropped upon Bella out of a public-house, wiping her mouth, and accounted for its humidity on natural principles well known to the physical sciences, by explaining that she had

looked in at the door to see what o'clock it was" (*Our Mutual Friend* 603). Deborah Parsons discusses the feminine role in the city as contrasted with the flâneur, indicating that the trend was for the female presence to be related to "spectacle… presumably due to the idea of women in the nineteenth-century city as displaying themselves as objects of an erotic gaze (as prostitutes, performers, débutantes) and 'for sale'" (38). While Dickens implies that the woman with whom Bella speaks is from a lower moral standard and class, Bella, a female navigating the streets on her own, looks to this unknown woman as a source of information because, ironically, her 'fallen' status means she has knowledge of the streets that Bella needs. This elderly woman serves as a foil for Bella, who has just entered the streets wearing her 'poor' clothing and in many ways assumes the same appearance as this unnamed woman. Dickens seizes the opportunity to reiterate Bella's morality and her reformed mercenariness when she is not tempted by vice as the unnamed woman is. She remains 'pure' and sticks to the standards of propriety,[22] evidenced when she reaches the counting-house and "was considering, as she approached it, could there be any precedent in the City for her going in and asking for R. Wilfer" (*Our Mutual Friend* 603). Her father's astonishment and exclamation of "My gracious me!" is a telling response (603). He echoes the surprise of the reader at Bella's state and the shock of seeing the 'lovely woman' in lowly clothes, on foot, standing in the City.

Bella and her father's visit to Greenwich after her first journey to his workplace illuminates their relationship and emphasizes the futility of escaping to a pastoral space. The idyllic space of Greenwich is portrayed as a domestic haven removed from the grit and smoke of London and the City, but it also represents a place where Bella can play the part of the "lovely woman" (*Our Mutual Friend* 315), a dependent role that is undermined by the reversal of the

[22] The idea that a woman must remain morally pure is old-fashioned, but despite the display of female independence in this novel, this tradition is one that Dickens did not attempt to leave behind.

parent-child relationship and the triviality of their evening, in contrast to the independence she adopts in the city. During their retreat, everything about their experience is deemed 'delightful': "The little expedition down the river was delightful, and the little room overlooking the river into which they were shown for dinner was delightful. Everything was delightful. The park was delightful, the punch was delightful, the dishes of fish were delightful, the wine was delightful. Bella was more delightful than any other item in the festival" (318). The fairytale quality of the Greenwich scene and the reversal of fortunes places Bella as the fairy-godmother of her own father, and the descriptions of Greenwich are in direct contrast to the descriptions of the City. While the City fosters images of death, violence, and want, Greenwich fosters images of abundance, life, and frivolity. However, it is surface level, as the repetition and reiteration of 'delightful' denotes a shallow effort to describe the scene and ironically proves its superficiality. The repetition in this passage is not a lack of creativity by Dickens, but a parody of his old tactics which greatly emphasized such familial connections and pastoral escapes; the shallowness here is self-conscious, and ironically emphasizes the falsity of the image it portrays. Regardless, it is notable that the 'staple' of London landmarks remains in the frame; during their "delightful" evening they repose in a "little room overlooking the river" (318). While Bella and her father are enjoying their escape from the city to the pastoral space of Greenwich, their view of the river also keeps London in their sights. While they are able to leave the city, the city does not leave them. Bella must remain connected to London because it is the only space in the novel in which she is able to assert her independence.

Bella and John Rokesmith (Harmon) are married in the 'idyllic' Greenwich, and live in a quaint cottage there, playing at a pastoral life in which Bella assumes the role of the typical middle-class Victorian housewife, but it is necessary for them to return to London for their

narrative to conclude, for Bella to re-affirm her independence, and for Rokesmith to be revealed as Harmon. The moment of revelation occurs due to a spontaneous moment of coincidence that can only occur in the city; Michael Shapiro notes how the novel as a whole is reliant on these occurrences and recognizes it as "a complex set of relations [which] develop spatially and temporally as characters from diverse parts of the city are brought into encounters" (17). While this moment of coincidence is notable for Harmon, it is also significant for Bella, whose pastoral life collides with city life while she makes conscious choices that are important when the 'pious fraud' is uncovered: "She went up to London one day, to meet [John], in order that they might make some purchases. She found him waiting for her at her journey's end, and they walked away together through the streets" (*Our Mutual Friend* 756). It is notable that their meeting is the culmination of two journeys: John's from his daily business, and hers from the household, the two opposites of society. Thus, their meeting point is a liminal space in which they can walk together in mutual harmony because they are, for a moment, outside of their gendered roles. It is in this liminal space that imagination can enter, and John presses Bella to make believe that they are wealthy, heading for a fine home in a fine carriage (756). Despite Bella being hesitant, eventually "she was led on to confess that she would like to have for the inexhaustible baby such a nursery as never was seen," and that it was to be "a very rainbow for colours" and to have "exquisite flowers" and "the loveliest little birds" (756). This moment displays Bella's creativity, which usurps her past desire to gain wealth and replaces it with the creation of beauty and sanctuary. The fact that this happens in the liminal space of the London streets indicates their transformational nature; like the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters public house, which is between the land and the river, the streets are a public space between the spheres of domesticity and business. As such, the streets provide an avenue for clarity in identity and performance, followed by an

avenue for revelation, when Bella's imaginings "were in a moment darkened and blotted out. They turned a corner, and met Mr. Lightwood. He stopped as if he were petrified by the sight of Bella's husband, who in the same moment had changed colour" (756). In this moment, her husband's mystery comes to a head and Bella is 'tested' for the final time, but it is her display in these final moments that firmly situates her identity and allows the conclusion to the 'fraud,' when the power is returned to Bella, and she can either accept or deny the events that have taken place. Kayla Kreuger McKinney notes how this final 'exhibition' of Bella proves her to fit her elevated status, and while "the return to London returns Bella to her former exhibitionary space," it also allows Harmon to view her as more than a pretty face when he "comes to admire his wife as an extension of his life rather than as the pretty object that originally caught his eye" (191). She has returned to the space where her life of 'wealth' began, but now she is the woman of the house and assumes the position of authority. She has imagined it into being, with the rainbow colours and exquisite flowers, and she now slides into her role effortlessly: "There was nothing to see but Bella in a musing state of happiness, seated in a little low chair upon the hearth, with her child in her fair young arms" (*Our Mutual Friend* 778). To appreciate the importance of Bella's movement in the novel, it is important to look beyond her role in the domestic sphere and to accept the strength of her will, her capacity to think and act independently, and her role in the creation of her own happiness. While Bella might make the typical journey from her father's home to her husband's home, the circuitous route she takes, controlled by her own actions and decisions in moving about London, is the true catalyst for her transformation and situates her in contrast to other married women in Dickens's novels who do not hold such authority.

Lizzie, like Bella, journeys between several London neighbourhoods, showing her ability to walk independently through the city without becoming the stereotypical female 'streetwalker.'

One of the first times readers meet Lizzie in the riverside neighbourhood she comes from, the passage is permeated with dark colours, ominous tones, and destructive imagery:

> The white face of the winter day came sluggishly on, veiled in a frosty mist; and the shadowy ships in the river slowly changed to black substances; and the sun, blood-red on the eastern marshes behind dark masts and yards, seemed filled with the ruins of a forest it had set on fire. Lizzie, looking for her father, saw him coming, and stood upon the causeway that he might see her… A knot of those amphibious human-creatures who appear to have some mysterious power of extracting a subsistence out of tidal water by looking at it, were gathered together about the causeway. (*Our Mutual Friend* 74)

The first sentences that set the scene juxtapose the frosty winter morning with the heat and danger of a forest fire, brought together in the solitary image of the blood-red winter sun, a contradiction in itself as a day that burns bright and cold. This early juxtaposition foreshadows the second contradiction in the section, between Lizzie and the "knot of… amphibious human-creatures," including her father. While Lizzie is a part of this community, the image of her looking on from the causeway (in this case, a raised platform above the muddy ground) sets her literally and morally above the other members of this community who stand in the mud. Like Bella, who takes responsibility for her own moral judgement when she is faced with the potential of immoral action, Lizzie remains morally elevated even as she is steeped in the filth and disreputability of the riverside. In his earlier works, Dickens's working-class women were not presented as being capable of respectable action; Ian Ward noted that "no-one… created more literary prostitutes than Charles Dickens" (128), but in *Our Mutual Friend*, this is not the case. The middle-class Rose Maylie in *Oliver Twist* was an early iteration of Dickens's incorruptible woman figure ('the angel in the house'), but situating an urban working girl with this same moral

standard is a departure from earlier patterns. Lizzie is continually placed in situations in which a woman would typically 'fall,' and repeatedly prevails: the death of her father, forcing her independence as a young woman; her brother rejecting her; living alone and working in the city; being pursued by a wealthy bachelor above her class; and working in the mill.

Lizzie's movement in and around London is punctuated by moments of liminal spaces, most notably the river. Throughout the novel, Lizzie cannot manage to leave the Thames completely, and while it is other characters who are submerged in the river and re-birthed, Lizzie is the character closest to the river in the text. She was raised on its dregs, and her father emphasizes that it is "meat and drink" to her (*Our Mutual Friend* 3), for without his scavenging she would have no food, furniture, or wood for the fire. Lizzie herself says, "I am not here selfishly… To please myself, I could not be too far from that river," and "I can't get away from it, I think… It's no purpose of mine that I live by it still" (228). In fact, it also comes to represent the divide between Lizzie and her brother Charley, a selfish boy who views Lizzie's soft heart and forgiving nature as a liability to his advancement in society, and her refusal or inability to leave the river as a stain on their family. Unlike Lizzie, Charley "looked doggedly at the river," and upon Lizzie's insistence that they are connected to it as the site of their father's death, he replies in an "ill-used tone" that "it'll be a very hard thing, Liz, if, when I am trying my best to get up in the world, you pull me back" (227). Like most crucial moments in Lizzie's life, one of their last civil conversations happens on the banks of the river. At its conclusion Charley and his schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone, cross the river, putting its expanse between them and Lizzie: "Being by this time close to Vauxhall Bridge, they resolved, in consequence, to take that way over the Thames, and they left her; Bradley Headstone giving her his hand at parting, and she thanking him for his care of her brother" (229). This moment illustrates the divide between the

siblings as the river is put between them; in Charley's estimation, "Lizzie chooses familial loyalty over respectability and personal happiness, risking being tarred herself with the same 'dirty brush' that ruins her father" (Wilkes 311). It is symbolic that Charley and Bradley, both aggrieved, frustrated, and self-important men, leave Lizzie behind in a place they disapprove of, while on the street they pass Eugene Wrayburn, "coolly sauntering towards them… [with] a certain lazily arrogant air" (*Our Mutual Friend* 229). Eugene, against both their wishes, will eventually elevate Lizzie through marriage and himself be saved from death by her knowledge of the river and her history with it. On the liminal space of the bridge, Lizzie's potential futures pass each other: the wealthy Eugene Wrayburn who could ruin her if she gave in to him, the middle-class school master who wishes to possess her, and the brother blinded by ambition who would have her bend to his will and make herself small for his own personal gain. They pass each other on the bridge because, as an in-between space, it represents the uncertainty of these competing futures. Just as the streets act as an in-between space in which Bella can re-assert her independence after the pastoral interlude in Greenwich, Lizzie's position on the banks in contrast with the men on the bridge makes her the decisive figure in her own life. She dismisses both romantic offers, accepts her brother's rejection, and finds independent work after she escapes Headstone's violent advances. After she saves Eugene's life, Lizzie accepts a role as his mutual companion, having overcome their class disparity. Lizzie, on the banks of the river instead of the bridge, is the most stable character in this scene: stable in her morals, her beliefs, and her intentions.

Lizzie's association with liminal spaces means that her movement in, out, and around London contrasts the inconclusiveness of these areas with the harsh reality of the city, representing Lizzie's ability to elevate herself above the 'scum' and dictate her own existence

through her movement. When Bradley Headstone proposes marriage to her, it is in a church courtyard surrounding a graveyard with "a paved square court, [and] a raised bank of earth about breast high, in the middle, enclosed by iron rails. Here, conveniently and healthfully elevated above the level of the living, were the dead" (*Our Mutual Friend* 394). This place is for both the living and the dead, and so it operates as an in-between space. Ironically, the choice Lizzie must make in this space is between the life and death of her individual will: accepting Bradley's proposal would mean submitting to him fully, while rejecting him means allowing her freedom and independence to survive. Lizzie rejects Bradley and chooses life, escaping the graveyard, while her ability to leave the space emphasizes her free will. Additionally, Lizzie is included in Jenny's rooftop paradise that is in-between life and death, where "[they] see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets… and [they] feel as if [they] were dead" (281). In this liminal space, the comparison is reversed, and 'death' represents freedom from the suffocating presence of the city. Both moments, however, take the 'life or death' paradigm to represent the importance of free will and choice, a rare ability for a woman navigating the city. Interestingly, it is moments of premonition that punctuate Lizzie's liminal status: when she 'reads' in the fire, she is existing in a world that is elevated beyond the one in which she physically lives. These moments of reading the future in the flames occur during intimate moments in the home, when Lizzie is removed from the city and the role that it dictates for her, but nevertheless the elevation that occurs reflects Lizzie's physical status that tends to elevate her or remove her from the common people or immoral tendencies. Even away from the city, in the factory town to which she flees to escape the advances of Headstone and Wrayburn, she is not tempted by frivolity: "Lizzie… avoided the noise and the Saturday movement of people in the straggling street, and chose to walk alone by the water until her tears should be dry… The peaceful serenity of the hour and place…sank

healingly into its depths… [and she] was turning homeward, when she heard a strange sound" (698-699). In this instance, Lizzie removes herself from the eyes and ears of the streets and creates her own peace, drawing comfort from the water, which is an interesting fact considering the threatening nature of the Thames in the novel and the actions that are about to take place immediately following this passage, prefigured by the 'strange sound' she hears; namely, Eugene Wrayburn being attacked by Bradley Headstone. Dickens subtly portrays Lizzie as 'above' her station, recalling his prior treatment of females being 'saved' or elevated from poverty or disgrace by male intervention or marriage (for example, Esther Summerson of *Bleak House* and Rose Maylie of *Oliver Twist*). However, *Our Mutual Friend* once again inverts the traditional roles when Lizzie physically saves Eugene, facilitating their marriage and reversing the 'damsel-in-distress' narrative. Ironically, it is the knowledge gained from her working-class status on the river and in the city that saves him: "Her old bold life and habit instantly inspired her. Without vain waste of breath in crying for help where there were none to hear, she ran towards the spot from which the sounds had come" (699). By referring to Lizzie's upbringing as a waterman's daughter, Dickens imbues Lizzie's independence and ability with the consistency and permanency of the river as she moves around the city, but never far from the river's banks. As Bella conquers the streets with her morality and determination, assuming her power through her role as a matriarch in the Harmon plot, Lizzie conquers the river and pulls her own future out from its depths.

While the unnamed narrator of *Our Mutual Friend* offers brief moments of omniscient narration, Jenny Wren is the only named character in the novel who provides a sort of omniscient voice as her ultimate role is established as an overseer of the city. She observes the city's inhabitants in the streets, and, like Dickens, records what she sees through her medium of doll's

dressmaking. She is a child in years but an adult in struggles: her disability weakens her physical ability, and her drunken father's inability to care for her or himself leads her to assume a parental role. One of the keys to Jenny's character is this reversal of the parent-child relationship, which John Lucas notes as an "obsessive theme" of Dickens, pervasive especially in the later novels (178), and which also occurs in the lives of Bella and Lizzie. However, the example Lucas provides is of David Copperfield and the Micawbers, and he notes that David "never degenerates into bitterness" (Lucas 178). Obviously, Jenny's relationship with her 'bad child' is the complete opposite: it is nothing but bitterness, outside of a brief moment of remorse for his death, "because after all a child is a child, you know" (*Our Mutual Friend* 734). There is no redemption for Mr. Dolls (a name given to Jenny's alcoholic father by Eugene Wrayburn), and Jenny is prematurely aged and resentful of the emotional role she must play. Miss Abbey Potterson asks Mr. Riah if Jenny is "child, or woman," and Riah answers that she is "child in years… [but] woman in self-reliance and trial" (439). Amongst this 'trial,' Dickens portrays Jenny through the discourse of fairytales, parodying the happily-ever-after narrative with Jenny's struggling existence. Her long golden hair is reminiscent of Rapunzel (438-439), and she often refers to herself as Cinderella with Riah as her godmother (433). Like the female protagonist of a fairytale, Jenny is the object of the male gaze, but this gaze is contemptuous, not desirous. She assumes a hard exterior for defense that quips quickly and lashes out at her dissenters, directly exposing the hypocrisy and menace of men she encounters (233-234; 238-243). Brutalized by a life of poverty and abuse, Jenny turns the tables by making the city and its inhabitants her subjects and twisting them to her will no matter their status, much as her imagination bends reality into a more acceptable space for her troubled life. She expands beyond pitiable victim to resourceful woman and artist figure, which allows her to move through London despite her

physical limitations and map the identities of the city's prominent, but puppet-like figures by miniaturizing them as her dolls.

In contrast to the apparent weakness of her small stature and crippled body, Jenny's wits are razor-sharp. She works as relentlessly and knowledgeably as she observes the world around her: "The dexterity of her nimble fingers was remarkable, and, as she brought two thin edges [of material] accurately together by giving them a little bite, she would glance at the visitors out of the corners of her grey eyes with a look that out-sharpened all her other sharpness" (*Our Mutual Friend* 222). Jenny's characterization becomes almost synonymous with her work; like Old Harmon's dust and Venus's bones, Jenny's dolls reflect her character when she fashions her identity just as she nimbly fashions dresses, and the narrator likens her sharp motions to her sharp attitude. Her grey eyes represent the female gaze in the novel, but it is not submissive or naïve: Jenny's gaze is knowing, intelligent, and wary of the (male) subjects it lands upon. The grey of her eyes indicates that while Jenny may have fancies, she does not view the world through rose-colored glasses. While physically or mentally 'different' characters often assumed the role of comic relief or villain in Dickens's novels (notably, the stunted Daniel Quilp of *The Old Curiosity Shop* [1840], the exploitative Mr. Smallweed of *Bleak House*, or even the frozen-in-time Miss Havisham of *Great Expectations*) Jenny is neither. She may seem to resemble "the vivid caricatures of Dickens's first period," but the resemblance is "merely superficial, for her strangeness is not an arbitrary conception with a life of its own, but is subordinated entirely to the economy of the book as a whole" (Smith 368). There is nothing ridiculous about Jenny, and although she may be scorned by Eugene Wrayburn, and demonized by literary critics (Wilkes 316; Smith 368-369), she never allows herself to be a victim. Despite an attempt to criticize a society that does not respect her true worth by mimicking the stereotypical derogatory discourse

used in response to disability, the unnamed narrator still weakens her: "The dolls' dressmaker had become a little quaint shrew… Poor dolls' dressmaker! How often so dragged down by hands that should have raised her up; how often so misdirected when losing her way on the eternal road, and asking guidance! Poor, poor little dolls' dressmaker!" (*Our Mutual Friend* 243). Despite the subtle satire, this commentary by the narrator diminishes Jenny's authority, assuming that being "full of sordid shames and cares" (243) must make her pitiable when, in fact, it makes her character a genuine representation of the human response to abuse, and not a caricature. Her ability to navigate these emotions and surpass them, providing for herself and "that abased figure" who is her father (243), indicates her determination and respectability in spite of the literary scholars who assume that her lashing out against her father for his behaviour means "the heavenly wren becomes a pedagogical shrew in the blink of an eye" (Wilkes 316). Peter Smith critically notes: "Although Jenny is undoubtedly a victim, and what is more possesses pathos and even a certain charm… we see that her abrasive side amounts to a good deal worse than cutting words and a crotchety manner. Dickens has in fact gone to considerable lengths to show us a streak of sheer cruelty" (368-369). Smith attempts to argue that Jenny's 'cruelty' is designed to prevent "the reader's natural sympathy with affliction" (369). However, this supposed 'cruelty' only emerges when she is scorned. Smith calls on the examples of Jenny wishing to lock up the children of the neighbourhood, saying "I'd open one of those doors, and I'd cram 'em all in" (*Our Mutual Friend* 224), and her laughter while rubbing pepper into the wounds of Fascination Fledgeby (724; 728). What Smith fails to note is that in punishing the children who mercilessly tormented her and the man who exploited her 'fairy godmother,' Mr. Riah, Jenny is entirely justified. She does not act except in retaliation. Hence, Jenny is no static victim, but a dynamic agent in the novel whose independence and fierce will is unparalleled.

Regardless of her life circumstances and solitary suffering, Jenny does not lose her sense of fancy or imagination; in fact, it is her ability to see beyond her tormented state that carries her through the city and allows her to survive a cruel world. She illustrates her brilliant ability to escape from the 'real' world at interesting times, particularly when she wishes to startle someone for her own protection. In one case, it is Eugene Wrayburn. Jenny wonders "how it happens that when I am work, work, working here, all alone in the summer-time, I smell flowers" (*Our Mutual Friend* 238), and while Eugene is "weary" of her and counteracts her fancy with the notion that she *does*, in fact, smell flowers, she persists, reiterating that "this is not a flowery neighbourhood. It's anything but that. And yet as I sit at work, I smell miles of flowers… all sorts of flowers that I never was among. For I have seen very few flowers indeed, in my life" (238-239). Despite being tiresome to Eugene, Jenny does not back down; she rationally persists in valuing her own judgement, and is not threatened or intimidated by Eugene's social status. Blinded by his own ego, Eugene sees only the material reality of the world, while Jenny, despite her sufferings, can still see a reality beyond the physical. In this way, Jenny is perhaps the only true artist figure in the text, as she manufactures beautiful imagery from nothing. In moments of pain and 'work, work, work' Jenny creates forms of utopia, foreshadowing the utopia she invents on the rooftop of Pubsey and Co. She escapes the torment of the cruel children of the neighbourhood by imagining a group of kind children who would "come down in long bright slanting rows," who "were not like [her]; they were not chilled, anxious, ragged, or beaten; they were never in pain" and who "never mocked [her]," but lifted her out of her pain and comforted her, making her "light" (239).[23] Jenny has no solace in her life, so she creates it for herself. She manufactures friends and caretakers who exist outside of the cruel city and, although fanciful,

[23] This passage offers echoes of William Blake's poem "The Chimney Sweeper," published in two parts in 1789 and 1794.

they act as a currency on which she can survive. Although she makes a living from watching women in the city, Jenny's life is remarkably lonely, and as such, she forms relationships with those who understand her marginalized position; as another outsider, Riah is invited into her fantasy. Jenny says to him: "You *are* so like the fairy godmother in the bright little books! You look so unlike the rest of people" (434). Indeed, Jenny and Riah both look different, and it is within the margins of society which they both occupy that Jenny and Riah form a home. G.W. Kennedy argues: "This fairy-tale aura comes to life whenever Jenny finds someone who will freely share in it… [Riah] freely accepts his fairy-tale name 'godmother' and gives Jenny the equally magical name 'Cinderella'… Momentarily at least, the fairy-tale milieu that the two create becomes a kind of magic island within the dust heaps" (173). By freely sharing in the fairy-tale, Jenny and Riah are both able to remove the constraints that society, capitalist commodification, and class roles would put upon them, and independently move through the city.

Removing Jenny completely from the streets, literally raising her above the city, facilitates her strongest fancy in the novel: the rooftop garden of Pubsey and Co. where she meditates on the freedom of death. This technique of removal from the city is familiar in Dickens's novels (for example, Oliver's time in an idyllic garden with the Maylie family during his escape from the city [*Oliver Twist* 253-254]), but in *Our Mutual Friend* the trope is undermined by the position of the utopia *within* the city and the fact that only characters who have been rejected by society can access it, however briefly. Dickens employs subtle metaphors and personification to turn the rooftop garden into a fairy-tale space where "the encompassing wilderness of dowager old chimneys twirled their cowls and fluttered their smoke, rather as if they were bridling, and fanning themselves, and looking on in a state of airy surprise" (*Our*

Mutual Friend 279). There is a parody of luxury on the rooftop working to elevate Lizzie and Jenny not just in location but in status, and their need to work and to struggle amongst the streets is eliminated. Jenny explains to Fledgeby:

> 'But it's so high. And you see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and you feel as if you were dead'… 'How do you feel when you are dead?' asked Fledgeby, much perplexed. 'Oh, so tranquil!' cried the little creature, smiling. 'Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets, and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange good sorrowful happiness comes upon you!'… 'But *you* are not dead, you know,' said Jenny Wren. 'Get down to life!'. (281)

In this passage, going 'down to' the city is considered 'life,' but this life is an entrapment: it is 'close' and 'dark.' Instead, death is associated with the utopia that is removed from the city, with pastoral imagery mixing with fairy-tale imagery and figurative language in the rushing clouds and golden arrows to illustrate the difference from the streets. Dickens is no stranger to contrasting cityscapes with pastoral utopias, but it is unique that the pastoral space in *Our Mutual Friend* is present *in* the city, just simply above it. To live in the city is to suffer, and to die and rise above it is 'tranquil,' 'peaceful,' and 'thankful.' Indeed, it was a common Victorian literary device to compare the hellish city to the Edenic pastoral country (Schwarzbach 16), but it is different to place these spaces so close together, layered one on top of the other, in stark juxtaposition. As happens throughout the rest of the novel, this passage correlates identity with roles in the city, specifically through being 'alive' and 'dead': Fledgeby, who is so intertwined

with the business of the world that it becomes an immoral and irremovable identity, is "perplexed" by Jenny's fancy and forced to "get down to life!". He cannot shed the chain that has been shed by Jenny and Lizzie, and which Riah is able to periodically put down when the "wind blew upon him" (*Our Mutual Friend* 281).[24] Unlike in earlier novels where escape is possible, in *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens emphasizes that the only way to transcend the grimness of the city streets is through the imagination. Ironically, it is only marginalized characters who have been shunned by society that have this ability. *Our Mutual Friend* does not emphasize the garden's pastoral nature, but instead the futile attempts of its inhabitants to remove the chains of the city, even while the city must remain beneath, and they must return to the ground.

As much as Jenny's elevation away from the streets of the city defines her character, she also nimbly and expertly navigates its streets, observing the female inhabitants and miniaturizing them into dolls as her trade. Jenny not only fashions dresses for dolls, "for presentation at court, for going to balls, for going out driving, for going out on horseback, for going out walking, for going to get married, for going to help other dolls to get married, for all the gay events of life" (*Our Mutual Friend* 435), but she also fashions them to reflect and fit women of society she watches carefully on the streets, and she is quite successful. Her dolls can be seen in "a dazzling semi-circle… in all the colours of the rainbow" in a "brilliantly-lighted toy-shop window" (435). Jenny makes the streets her workspace when she uses them to find inspiration, prepare her dolls' clothes, and then 'try them on.' She explains her process to Riah:

> 'Look here. There's a Drawing Room, or a grand day in the Park, or a Show, or a Fête, or what you like. Very well. I squeeze among the crowd, and I look about me. When I see a great lady very suitable for my business, I say "You'll do, my dear!" and I take particular

[24] The chain metaphorically worn by the people who must 'get down to life' is an interesting inversion of the chains worn by the spirits of the dead who lived selfish lives in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* [1843].

> notice of her, and run home and cut her out and baste her. Then another day, I come scudding back again to try on, and then I take particular notice of her again. Sometimes she plainly seems to say, 'How that little creature is staring!'… and I am making a perfect slave of her, with making her try on my doll's dress. Evening parties are severer work for me, because there's only a doorway for a full view, and what with hobbling among the wheels of the carriages and the legs of the horses, I fully expect to be run over some night. However, there I have 'em, just the same. (436)

Not only does Jenny observe the city, but she also turns its inhabitants into commodities for her own gain, and she does it by navigating spaces in which she is excluded by society. She must constantly be out of sync with the patterns of the higher classes, dodging "the wheels of the carriages and the legs of horses," yet she makes the women she watches into her slaves. The critic Daun Jung draws on De Certeau's use of tactics when discussing the movement of the women in the novel, arguing that Jenny "is the most tactical user (although not that much of a physical walker) … making creative stories and linking different points of contacts among people" (209). However, despite her disability, Jenny *does* walk through the city, using the resources available to her just as she uses the scraps from Pubsey and Co. to create her dolls' dresses: "Set down by the omnibus at the corner of Saint Mary Axe, and trusting to her feet and her crutch-stick within its precincts, the dolls' dressmaker proceeded to the place of business of Pubsey and Co." (*Our Mutual Friend* 725). Jenny can 'trust her feet' to navigate her way through the city and amongst society, for the most part undetected, and thus embraces her movability that is in direct contrast to her physical ailment. The city becomes a space for her autonomous action, as it does for Bella and Lizzie. It is equally surprising and significant that Jenny becomes the character closest to Dickens himself in the text: "[She] walks out on the streets of London to

make patterns out of ladies' real bodies. Such walking becomes an important daily practice for Jenny to observe real people to create new dolls as an artisan just like Dickens the author created the novel by observing Victorian London" (Jung 222). As Dickens walked the city and wrote it (Tambling, *Going Astray* 1), he manufactured a space and often inserted himself into his texts in the form of young orphaned or lonely boys who navigated the streets with great difficulty and great reward, helped along by friendly figures (notably, David Copperfield and Mr. Micawber, as well as Oliver Twist and Mr. Brownlow). Indeed, Julian Wolfreys argues that: "The walker's reading of the city is a motion that rewrites, re-presents the image as if before him once again. In his reading/writing London, there is, through the agency of memory and pen, an 'eye' that does more than simply observe; it records. In doing so, it plays back the experience, presenting a 'performance' of the city" (55). Jenny also reads and 'writes' the streets through her dolls, and in some ways is helped along by the friendly Mr. Riah, but instead of creating her as his representative, Dickens permits her to use his tactics; he does not remove her from the city streets to a kind and loving home where she relies on another, but allows her a public space where she creates that sanctuary for herself. When her father dies, it is the final step in her transition to independence, illustrated by her use of her tactics during the funeral when she does the necessary work that will later help her create a clergyman doll to marry her friends (*Our Mutual Friend* 734). By losing her father, Jenny gains an independence which is different from that of characters in prior texts who must rely on a male figure to find agency; she does not need a guide to support her, she supports herself. Thus, in her final scene, when Sloppy arrives to retrieve the doll made for Bella and John's 'inexhaustible' daughter, the relationship that it is hinted will grow between them is based on a mutual appreciation for their respective trades and Sloppy's acceptance that Jenny will never be subservient.

Apart from destabilizing prior feminine roles Dickens employed in his earlier texts, Bella, Lizzie, and Jenny assume roles that are in direct contrast to feminine roles of the period. Bella may be a devoted wife, but she is also an ambitious woman who, no matter how she is influenced by her surroundings, also influences them herself to achieve what she most dearly wishes for. Lizzie may appear to fulfill the fairy-tale role of marrying above her class and thus elevating her *social* status, but she actually becomes her husband's saviour when she rescues him from certain death, allowing her marriage to happen and elevating Eugene to her *moral* status. Finally, Jenny, who is a disabled and suffering figure taking a maternal responsibility for her debased father, assumes the role of artist in the city, reflecting Dickens himself who walked the streets for inspiration. It is the relationship between these characters and their spaces and movements that is crucial to the use of the city in the text and how it differs from the representation of gender and the city in prior texts.

Conclusion – "Chapter the Last": Endings and New Beginnings

As a transitional novel, it is unsurprising that *Our Mutual Friend*'s ending is atypical. The usual 'marriage-plot' conclusion is reworked by placing the two marriages in the middle of the text. While the climax of the novel is the revelation of the 'pious fraud' and the amalgamation of the plots by collecting the varied individuals at the new Harmon mansion, this apparently happy scene is not where the novel ends. The final chapter is titled "The Voice of Society," and the novel returns to the Veneering dinner table, where the story of John Harmon was first introduced. Bookending the novel is Mortimer Lightwood, again acting as a means of information for the 'Voices of Society,' and once again giving them something to narrate and comment on; this time, it is the scandalous marriage of Eugene Wrayburn and Lizzie Hexam, a cross-class union that those at the dinner table can only interpret as a ghastly mistake by Eugene. This interjection of criticism by society to close the novel taints the superficial 'happily-ever-after' image that is presented on the surface at the Harmon mansion in the penultimate chapter, but it must also be noted that the happy scene is already complicated by the subtle conflict amongst its players: most obviously, the continued animosity of Bella's mother and Eugene's worry about the class difference between himself and Lizzie despite his father's acceptance of the marriage.

The concluding scene of *Our Mutual Friend* suggests that despite the revelations that have occurred amongst the major characters, little to nothing has changed amongst the wider interactions and experiences of the city and its habitants. Even though Twemlow denies the criticism and compliments Eugene's actions in the pursuit of happiness, his words are a "wet blanket" on the company (*Our Mutual Friend* 820), and all but Mortimer brush his opinion aside.

Twemlow, an older character from an era before the rapid industrialization and modernization of the city hit its peak, represents the voice with which Dickens usually concludes his novels, the voice that calls for happiness, justice, and union in marriage as a reward for the moral action of the participants. The dismissal of Twemlow's opinion by the *nouveaux riches* is congruent with Dicken's recognition in *Our Mutual Friend* that, with regret, he can no longer support the view of the city as a place for such gentlemanly feelings. Previous Dickens endings saw the protagonist recapture their true identity and regain fortune (*Oliver Twist*), escape their incarceration, gain wealth, and win the affections of their desired (*Little Dorrit*), overcome hardship and 'duty' to marry for love and earn wealth (*Bleak House*), and overcome greed and ambition to accept a simple, hardworking life, even if it is not the life that was desired (*Great Expectations*). While John Harmon's identity is revealed and his wealth restored in *Our Mutual Friend*, these resolutions are undercut; the novel features "two villains punished, two marriage plots achieved …[in] an ending both happy and symmetrical… yet the narrative continues, for neither marriage nor death is sufficient to disentangle this text's complications and bring it to closure" (Coleman 146).

Amongst the demolition and eradication of communities and traditions in the rapidly changing city of the late nineteenth century, Dickens no longer has faith in the possibility of ordinary working-class individuals escaping the cynical contempt of those who hold power and authority in London, power which was gained by a new and exploitative focus on industry, commerce, and Imperial trade. This lack of faith is the catalyst for *Our Mutual Friend*'s lack of closure; even *Great Expectations*, with its dual endings and ambiguous treatment of Pip and Estella's relationship, finds closure in Pip's reformation and personal growth. *Our Mutual Friend*'s closing statement simply reiterates the futility of trying to change the beliefs and

processes of London society, even as society falters in the changing city: "When the company disperse – by which time Mr. and Mrs. Veneering have had quite as much as they want of the honour, and the guests have had quite as much as *they* want of the other honour – Mortimer sees Twemlow home, shakes hands with him cordially at parting, and fares to the Temple, gaily" (*Our Mutual Friend* 820). Thanking Twemlow for his minor stand against 'society,' Mortimer "leaves gaily," placing the cynical criticisms aside and recognizing that although Twemlow's stand may not change the opinions of their acquaintances, it can give their voices pause. However, while Twemlow's optimism may quiet the criticism, it is not enough to stop the more powerful implication in the text that such fancies can no longer remain in the changing city. Victorian optimism and belief in progress are replaced with an acceptance of the futility of any individual holding authority over the massive structures that govern Victorian society and the environment of urban life.

J. Hillis Miller argues that "if *Pickwick Papers* was a farewell to the eighteenth century, *Our Mutual Friend* is on the threshold of the twentieth" (292-293). The city and society that are reflected in this novel are drastically different from those Dickens was writing at the beginning of his career, so it is only fitting that he would adapt his writing techniques and narrative patterns to reflect the rapid changes he was witnessing and writing. Dickens was not slowing down at the end of his career, but rather ramping up his artistic development in writing *and* performing. While scholars wish to place it as a culmination, *Our Mutual Friend* is not a conclusion, but a transition. In this thesis, I have argued that *Our Mutual Friend* grows away from Dickens's prior novels by repurposing and adapting his former methods to reflect a changing world that his prior approach could not accurately reflect. This change is illustrated through a new way of representing, manipulating, and interpreting the city of London and its effect on the people who

lived there. Through a series of close readings, I have examined the ways that this novel adapts and changes the role of the narrator, multiplies the perspectives that are offered of the city, both exterior and private, and uses male journeys through urban space to articulate change and identity. Further, I have analyzed this novel's lack of protagonist through the mystery of John Harmon's subversion of the orphan plot and his incorporeal role as a 'story' in the text, and explored the treatment of womanhood as three female characters seize their access to the city as a means for independence, in contrast to prior iterations of 'Dickensian' women. By emphasizing the text's structure, language, and differences, it is evident that this novel marks a change in Dickens, fostered by a change in the city he was writing. While he was unable to continue this transition due to his untimely death, it does a disservice to his work and the intricate structure of *Our Mutual Friend* to read it only as his final novel.

Nicholas Freeman wrote that "London was a … central component of Dickens's imagination, and a key element of his success… [He] created a powerfully mythic locale, one to which visitors almost inevitably compared the actual city, rather than vice versa" (20). Thus, it is commonplace to discuss Dickens's relationship with the city, but less commonplace to discuss how this relationship evolved throughout his career as he created new ways of writing the city. As the last completed novel in a chain of successful works, in *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens is creating new ways of writing the city in response to the decades of rapid change in London which spanned his career. By comparing it to his prior novels, and his representations and uses of the city, I conclude the 'new' London that is represented in this novel through juxtaposition and fragmentation sets a standard for viewing and interpreting cities not only as places to be finitely understood, but also to be read and re-read through countless perspectives. *Our Mutual Friend* represents a point of departure in Charles Dickens's literary career, but one which opens a new

journey of exploring the remnants and recreations of the city which will forever be associated with his name.

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