

THE POLYPHONIC “VOICE OF SOCIETY”: A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF *OUR*
MUTUAL FRIEND

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My study of *Our Mutual Friend* is restricted to seven chapters, each with the same short list of characters, which introduce or conclude the four books of the novel. Society is the label under which these chapters come, and Dickens probes the meaning of society within them. Society is also important as a key concept for interpretation of the novel because of the frequency of the term’s use. But the structural perspective on society, which is based on the order and the content of chapters, is more stable than the society that emerges from the characters’ or narrator’s use of the term.

Society figures (the characters within the seven chapters) interact by conversing; their manner of expression, which is better described as their style because their dialogue exists only in written text, is what unites them with or distinguishes them from other society figures or other characters in the novel overall. However, being dominated by the narrator’s own bias against society figures or envisioning the narrator as the mouthpiece of Dickens himself restricts the stylistic evaluation of the language of society. Critics

who conflate the narrator and the author of *Our Mutual Friend* are unable to recognize similarities in style between the narrator and society figures. The repeated sharing of stylistic traits between particular society figures and the narrator and the recurrence of particular topics of conversation, such as marriages between persons of unequal class or the acquisition or loss of a fortune, indicate that the society figures form a discourse community which includes the narrator.

Society, however, has a polyphonic voice because some society figures develop a counter-accent to the narrator's description. Mortimer Lightwood shares a social language with the narrator, thus he escapes the narrator's negative criticism and gains the ability to address the implied audience of the novel. But Lightwood falls silent in society's final debate; his silence is one type of counter-accent. Mr. Twemlow stands out among the society figures because he is a representative type (gentlemanly behavior), his speech in the novel overall is dynamic, and because his use of a stylistic trait is set in a positive context. Twemlow's politeness is also a counter-accent to the comments of the narrator which deliberately attack the "face" of society figures. Together Twemlow's tactful speech, Lightwood's silence, and many other voices which are all heavily influenced by the narrator represent the fictional society.

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THE POLYPHONIC “VOICE OF SOCIETY”: A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF *OUR
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Throughout *Our Mutual Friend*, the concept of society glides across the page and eludes any simple definition; the novel concludes, appropriately, with Mortimer Lightwood’s statement still echoing: ‘Now I wonder . . . whether you are the Voice of Society!’ (797, bk.4, ch.17).¹ The term *society* is inescapable within the novel and in criticism based upon the novel, but my aim is not to pay homage to the novel by using its vocabulary but to bring society to the forefront in discussions of the novel. Society’s importance is observable both in the textual frame that encloses the narrative and in the frequency of the term’s use. The narrator and characters alike, although they may employ different meanings of the term, will not permit the critic to ignore the central concept of society by their repeated utterances. Individual characters may use only one meaning of society; the characters must be encountered as a group to communicate the many possible meanings. Dickens showcases his talent by using this concept so adeptly to present many meanings of society through many characters and through the narrator. Any discussion of what society is within *Our Mutual Friend* and how society speaks must attempt to approach the concept in such a way as to acknowledge its complexity of meaning, which results from the contributions of many characters.

Society as a Linear Progression

Society can be described linearly as its scope broadens from step to step. First, one can refer to a subset of persons set apart from a larger group, as Mrs. Boffin does when she yearns to join *good society*. Mrs. Boffin's good society is restricted to a certain London neighborhood, "a particular westward division" of London (749; bk.4, ch. 12) in which the Boffins purchase a mansion. Second, one can refer to a larger group that connects many subsets; there exists, for example, a good society of London at large, an English good society, and so forth. Third, society can become an abstract idea that includes a number of people that cannot be counted or known individually; Charley's description of society as a scale built from these multitudes illustrates the abstraction of the term. The progression from specific to global to abstract provides a model for evaluating the critical approach to society (within *Our Mutual Friend*) and for following this study of *Our Mutual Friend* that begins with subsets of characters, expands to describe the interactions among the subsets, and finally broadens to include society outside of the novel.

Elaine Ostry in *Social Dreaming: Dickens and the Fairy Tale* (2002) argues that Dickens's "desire to reform society through the individual requires a reformation of the social self, a reclaiming of the person for society" (69). Because Ostry's work focuses on the conventions of the fairy tale, she describes characters in relation to society as fairies, those who reform others, or monsters, those who reject others (69-74); she cites Jenny Wren as an example of the fairy type in *Our Mutual Friend*. Ostry's examination is limited to those scenes of reformation; her description of society, as accepting only of those in high ethical standing, is not unlike Mrs. Boffin's and Mr. Fledgeby's within the text of *Our Mutual Friend*. For in both the case of Mrs. Boffin and that of Mr. Fledgeby,

society is a restrictive term. The didacticism of fairy tales perhaps forces Ostry to define society according to ethical standing. Ostry's motivation aside, she makes a choice to limit the concept in this way, and Dickens makes a choice to assign particular meanings of society to specific characters.

In the first book of the novel, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin must decide how to alter their lifestyles after the acquisition of the Harmon fortune. Mrs. Boffin expects an elevated way of life in comparison to her existence living near the dust heaps; she obviously feels that her house, things, lifestyle, and acquaintances are no longer good enough (or never were good). When Mr. Boffin is unable to understand to what Mrs. Boffin alludes when she requests to enter society, she replies, "I say a good house in a good neighborhood, good things about us, good living, and good society. I say, live like our means, without extravagance, and be happy'" (97; bk.1, ch.9). She associates certain neighborhoods and possessions, not readily available to the majority of characters in the novel, with good society. Good society is an ambiguous term because, while it is better for a person's health to live away from the stench of the dustheaps, joining Lady Tippins, Mr. Podsnap, and the other society figures may not have a "good" effect on Mrs. Boffin's morality. Society in the novel does not refer simply to the upper class, and the effects of society are not completely positive or negative.

Mr. Fledgeby also describes society as an exclusive group by referring specifically to a character that he accepts into his society, Mr. Twemlow, and a character that he denies, Mr. Riah. For Fledgeby, there is no society outside of the society that he defines. Fledgeby remarks, "You cultivate society and society cultivates you, but Mr Riah's not society. In society, Mr Riah is kept dark; eh, Mr Twemlow?" (555; bk.3,

ch.13). Mrs. Boffin's assumption that she lived outside of good society and Mr. Fledgeby's assertion that he belongs within it are both ironic. Mr. and Mrs. Boffin were as dependable and generous before Harmon's death as they are afterward. Fledgeby, on the contrary, dwells purposely in the dark to conceal his unacceptable occupation, forcing Mr. Riah to accept the blame for Fledgeby's own unflinching and unforgiving answers to his creditors' pleas for assistance.

The specific or exclusive use of the term *society* by Mrs. Boffin and Mr. Fledgeby and within Ostry's criticism is countered and expanded by other characters and critics. Mr. Wegg refers to the human body as the structure of society; by referring to the shared corporality of all persons, Wegg defines society in a global fashion. The human body is often used to refer to global concepts, as in the phrase *the body politic*. In a conversation with Mr. Venus, who buys and sells bones, Wegg says, "You with the patience to fit together on wires the whole framework of society—I allude to the human skeleton—you to give in so soon!" (466; bk.3, ch.6). The presence of Mr. Venus, the bone collector, makes Wegg's global definition of society possible; the use of the term *society* is, predictably, dependent on context.

Vincent Newey in *The Scriptures of Charles Dickens* (2004) and Efraim Sicher in *Rereading the City: Rereading Dickens* (2002) both expand the definition of society because they call attention to the parallelism between the raiding of corpses' pockets by poor characters and the lethargic lifestyle of the rich characters which is made possible only by feeding on others. For Sicher, the rich scavengers (Lammles, Veneerings, and Mr. Fledgeby) join the poor to form one *waste-producing society* (333) akin to Victorian society; a global definition of society within the fictional work *Our Mutual Friend* allows

Sicher to incorporate Dickens's nonfiction essays promoting better health conditions for the poor in *Household Words* into the reading of the novel.

The socioeconomic emphasis of Newey and Sicher continues in Paul Jarvie's *Ready to Trample on All Human Law* (2005). Jarvie asserts that "the society the novel depicts, seemingly hopelessly implicated in capitalism, is unlikely to leave Rokesmith and Bella undisturbed" after they have "'escaped' from the capitalistic matrix" (137). Charley Hexam's commentary within *Our Mutual Friend* supports Jarvie's description of society, as he views the group not as permanently connected to the ladder of financial success, as Jarvie explains, but as the ladder itself. Charley prohibits Eugene Wrayburn from interacting with his sister; he says, "I am raising myself in the scale of society by my own exertions and Mr. Headstone's aid, and have no right to have any darkness cast upon my prospects, or any imputation upon my respectability, through my sister" (282; bk.2, ch.6). Because Charley's method of advancement is to study, it is not surprising that he describes society abstractly; he belongs to the world of ideas.

Elizabeth Campbell in *Fortune's Wheel* (2003) and Juliet John in *Dickens's Villains* (2001) both limit their definitions to abstract models or patterns. Campbell's description of society is rather like a graph of a wave that undulates along the horizontal axis; her model proposes that to be in society is to be caught in a cycle of profit and loss (174). John adopts the pattern of the dandy, arguing that "society's obsession with genteel appearances works toward that denial of the human which is the essence (or non-essence) of dandyism" (151); the Veneerings represent for John the "inhumanity of human beings" because they exist in the text as intellectual abstractions (168-169).

All of the critics are generally correct in their claims, but their claims do not fully acknowledge the complexity of the concept of society in the novel. While each critic limits himself or herself to a specific, a global, or an abstract definition, the references to society within *Our Mutual Friend* cover a larger spectrum of meaning than the criticism indicates. I will not attempt to define society as presented in the more than forty instances of the term within the novel, especially because so many are carefully chosen and enriched by context. But as mentioned earlier, the concept of society is advanced in the novel both by its frequent use and by the structure of the novel. The barrier of the chapter in the fictional world is as impermeable and divisive as any class distinction.

The Structure of Society

The appearance of some minor characters in *Our Mutual Friend* is restricted by chapter due to a rigid plan of organization on the part of the author. Although the central plotlines of *Our Mutual Friend* are the solution of the Harmon mystery and Lizzie Hexam's rise in the social sphere, Dickens placed chapters at the beginning (book one) or ending (books two through four) of the novel's four individual books to frame the text. These chapters include an ensemble of minor characters rather than the more central figures. These minor characters, whom I am calling society figures because of their association with the term *society* in the concluding chapter of the novel entitled "The Voice of Society," appear in relatively few chapters despite the prominent placement of the chapters. Society figures² appear engaged in conversation as opposed to action and frequently investigate their reactions to the central characters.

The structural perspective on society, which is based on the chapters previously described, is more stable than the society that emerges from the characters' or narrator's

use of the term. The only persons who emigrate into the chapters and immigrate out to the continent after becoming bankrupt are the Lammles. There is not an ever-changing cast within these chapters; by the sixth chapter (chapters are listed in footnote 1) in which the society figures appear, the faces are familiar. But when the characters talk about society, they pull in persons from different groups each time, as Mrs. Boffin, Silas Wegg, and Charley Hexam each sort humanity according to his or her own categories. The humor in the narrator's revelation of the contents of a letter addressed to Mr. Boffin by "the Society for Granting Annuities to Unassuming Members of the Middle Classes" (204, bk.1, ch.17) is in the reader's recognition that this society which the narrator is setting up as a specific club with a list of members also applies to the larger subset of the upper classes in general.

To attempt to describe society according to the character's own definitions is outside the scope of this project, but critics should be aware of the tension between the clear classification of characters according to that chapters in which they appear and the shifting and vague classification of characters according to their own commentary. The contrast between society as described by the characters and society as defined by the chapters seems to indicate that Dickens is drawing attention to his rigid plan of organization and obscuring the clearer definition of society that the structure indicates.

As the characters within the book-framing chapters are, in this structural approach, the members of society, my aim is to investigate how they can be further classified into subsets and to describe the nature of society interactions. In *Our Mutual Friend*, society figures interact by conversing; their manner of expression, which is better described as their style because their dialogue exists only in written text, is what unites

them in or distinguishes them from other society figures or other characters in the novel overall. But by choosing to evaluate society in *Our Mutual Friend* through style, I have inherited some aspects of previous stylistic studies that restrict the critical outlook on the society figures and their language. To be dominated by the narrator's own bias against society figures or to envision the narrator as the mouthpiece of Dickens himself restricts the stylistic evaluation of the language of society.

The Speech of Society

The negative treatment of society in Dickens criticism is perhaps already evident. Members of society have been described as scavengers (Newey, Sicher), trapped in a capitalistic matrix (Jarvie), or caught in a state of instability (Campbell) or nothingness (John). As my study proceeds from characters to their language, the unfavorable description of the characters also extends to their language. Robert Goulding in *Idiolects in Dickens* (1985) describes the genteel person as someone who is "permanently faced by the occasion of Society" (28). He, unfortunately, does not expand upon what constitutes society, but, as we have previously noted, the structure of the novel gives us some clue as to which figures Goulding is referring.

When Goulding introduces the genteel register, his comments imply that the register does not simply apply to all persons attending society functions; to be categorized as speaking in this register a character must be an object of satire in the text. Goulding's definition, which will shortly follow, reads more like a description of a character than of a character's language defined by situation; register is language modified for specific occasions or functions. (Goulding's only example of a speaker for this register is Mrs. Wilfer from *Our Mutual Friend* whose behavior is noticeably

different from that of other members of her socio-economic class. More simply, Mrs. Wilfer puts on airs when entertaining company.) The features listed by Goulding demonstrate his negative bias against speakers of the register, which is implicit in the definition; Goulding's unabbreviated list is as follows:

Long-winded syntax forming a framework to empty, even nonsensical utterances, usually pompous, conceited or patronizing, but in some cases arrogant, in others hypocritical; lexically full of highfalutin, artificial phraseology, words of Latin origin, clichés and meaningless, repetitive adjectives, combined usually with an almost pathological avoidance of what is considered vulgar (although there are some amusing lapses), all this with an exaggerated reverence for rank and title, expressed in frequent use of some respectful salutation or other. (28)

Goulding's chapter on register is based on the premise that Dickens always sought to simultaneously represent and satirize varieties of speech. His emphasis on satire restricts the examples of characters and speech to those that he can incorporate into his definition, and the use of words like *arrogant*, *hypocritical*, and *pompous* to refer to language should prompt critics to question how much the narrator's description of characters influenced Goulding's evaluation of the characters' speech.

My research into the critical treatment of Dickens's style in *Our Mutual Friend* indicates that the impulse to approach society in a one-dimensional way is prompted by the assumption that the narrator's voice is Dickens's voice. The community of scholars that focus on Dickens seem as intrigued by the study of the man himself as they are by his literary works; however, it is necessary that the historical Dickens be ushered offstage

at times. I am reminded of my recent visit to one of Dickens's homes that has been preserved as the Charles Dickens Museum in London. At the top of some steep stairs, a black outline, the shadow of Dickens with all its ghostly implications, is affixed to the wall in front of some empty wooden chairs; this part of the museum is a tribute to Dickens's public readings. When reading and creating a fictional world, some Dickens scholars clearly place themselves in an imaginary auditorium before the author. But by hearing the distinct voice of the narrator as a fictional person that is separable from Dickens himself, we allow more voices to contribute to the description of society in *Our Mutual Friend*.

Criticism and the Narrator of *Our Mutual Friend*

Because the entries in Masahiro Hori's *Investigating Dickens's Style*³ span a great length of time, reviewing the items in the bibliography is similar to tracking the progress of academic studies in style; despite noticeable changes in approach over time, the separateness of fiction and reality or narrator and author are often ignored in the critical works. I turned to the extensive bibliography contained in Hori's book to limit the available materials on the Dickens corpus. The materials selected by Hori for the bibliography would indicate an unexpected continuity of approach to Dickens's style by critics over time. The constancy may be the result of Hori's research methods and his emphasis on journals dealing exclusively with Dickens rather than a reflection of Dickens scholarship⁴ generally.

Stanley Gerson's article *Dickens's Use of Malapropisms* (1965) is the oldest source cited here, although Hori reaches as far back as 1908 in his research. To conclude his sketch of the Dickens corpus that compares earlier and later novels, Gerson writes

that the decreasing use of malapropisms (one example of a malapropism is the substitution of the name Alfred Davis for the legal term affidavit in *Our Mutual Friend*) points to dwindling “joie de vivre” in Dickens himself (42). Gerson is suggesting that the stylistic traits of *Our Mutual Friend* can provide information as to Dickens’s state of mind. The focus on the author prevents Gerson from investigating the many other possible causes for the decreasing number of malapropisms. For instance, were other authors also abandoning this specific stylistic tool at the time?

Gerson’s criticism was published before the release of Roland Barthes’ *Death of the Author* (1967), after which most academic critics abandoned the idea of reaching an author through his or her work and discovering the author’s intended message (or, in Gerson’s case, state of mind). Many academic critics included in Hori’s bibliography, however, continue to ignore the distinction between narrator and author. Norman Page’s article *A Language Fit for Heroes* (1969) is written in opposition to critics arguing that *Oliver Twist* and *Lizzie Hexam*’s ability to speak standard English damages the respective novels from which the characters are taken. Page asserts that Lizzie’s speech changes throughout the novel as a result of education and that her speech also reflects her high ethical standing (1969). He does not attest, as we would expect, that Lizzie’s direct discourse cannot represent the realistic language of a lower-class Londoner. He sidesteps the debate about the relationship between reality and fiction and, instead, explores the connection between direct discourse and a character’s ethical standing.

Michael Lambert in *Dickens and the Suspended Quotation* (1981) explains how readers came to separate the narrator from other characters; a differentiation that perhaps prompts critics to view the narrator as existing outside the fictional realm. He explains

that during the time in which Dickens was writing the use of quotation marks to isolate a character's comments in a different way than the character's comments relayed through the medium of the narrator was new and not uniform. Lambert argues that the use of quotation marks "reflects . . . an attitude toward the integrity of speech" (22-23). The practice of inserting extra spaces before and after lines of dialogue and the use of quotation marks to isolate dialogue was becoming standard. Because Dickens adopted these rules, it is possible for the narrator to have a distinct voice.

Knud Sørensen's *Dickens on the Use of English* (1989) perpetuates the idea of Dickens as narrator when he claims that the narrator's interruption in the following example proves Dickens's own interest in shifts in language use:

You charm me, Mortimer, with your reading of my weaknesses. (By-the-by, that very word, Reading, in its critical use, always charms me. An actress's Reading of a chambermaid, a dancer's Reading of a hornpipe, a singer's Reading of a song, a marine painter's Reading of the sea, the kettle-drum's Reading of an instrumental passage, are phrases ever youthful and delightful.) . . . (528; bk.3, ch.10)

Sørensen attributes the comments in parentheses, which provide multiple examples of how the verb *to read* applies outside of the context of reading a book, to Dickens himself without making the distinction between narrator and author. The parentheses indicate an interruption of the character's direct speech by the narrator, who imitates the character in the repetitious employment of the verb *to charm*; the overlap of the narrator's and character's voice makes it necessary to assign the interest in the verb *to read* to both the character and the narrator but not to Dickens. Sørensen's article *Narrative and Speech-*

Rendering in Dickens published in the same year explores a variety of ways in which the narrator's voice mixes with that of the characters. He agrees with three colleagues (Lambert, Pascal, and Holloway) that the narrator's frequent interruptions of characters' speeches illustrate Dickens's jealousy and desire to remain the central focus of the reader's attention (1989). In Sorensøn's reading, the narrator must be conceived of as a fictional body that Dickens inhabits and through which Dickens expresses his subconscious reactions to his characters.

Even as late as 1990, the historical Dickens is central within studies of the style of his works, as he was for Sorensøn and others. In Philip Allingham's *The Names of Dickens's American Originals in Martin Chuzzlewit*⁵ (1990), he argues that "naming offered Dickens the opportunity to present in compressed form the American myth and its undermining contradictions" and to vent any residual disappointment after his tour of America in 1842 (335). The concept of the implied author emerged in Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* in 1961. But Allingham does not consider, for example, whether or not it is a wise marketing move for the implied author to antagonize the American reading public; the implied author of *Martin Chuzzlewit* may differ here from Dickens as a disgruntled tourist.

The emphasis on author that I have traced through the works of Hori's bibliography results in the absence of explanations of the narrator's role in *Our Mutual Friend*, but my intent is not to replace one tyrant with another. Searching for the *voice of society* does not mean identifying a single representative that epitomizes the group. By shedding a negative view of society as a concept within the novel and the corresponding biased approach to the language of society figures, both of which result from the

narrator's influence, we can begin to visualize society not as a type of representational governmental sending forth a speaker but as a group of subsets that challenge each other's positions. The confusion between author and narrator privileges the narrator's judgmental commentary and leads to an oversimplification of the concept of society.

Methodology

My findings about the voice of society came as a surprise not as a preformed premise; I began my study of *Our Mutual Friend* by creating two sets of tables to conduct a linguistic analysis of syntax. Direct discourse tables contained all of the direct discourse attributable to Mr. Twemlow, Lady Tippins, Mrs. Lammle, Mr. Podsnap, and Mr. Veneering within the six chapters in which those characters interact with one another. Narrator tables contained any text whose primary purpose was to describe the five characters.⁶ I surveyed the tables apart from one another, and the result of this method of inquiry was the identification of three subsets within the society described by the six chapters. The examples used in the tables accompanying the text that follows are extracted from the original comparative tables.

One objection to my methodology and my findings may be that the comparisons between characters' direct discourse and the narrator's commentary blur the line between the spoken and the written as represented in the novel. Sharon Millar's historical justification for my comparison of narrator and character is that, for English-speakers in the 18th and 19th centuries, "the practice of the spoken arts encouraged the notion that speech was spoken writing: the means by which the visual was made audible" (175). Conversely, Mikhail Bakhtin's more contemporary theory of language proposes that "thought itself is but 'inner speech,' and inner speech is outer speech that we have

learned to ‘speak in our heads while retaining the full register of conflicting social values’” (Morrison 85); written text is then recorded inner speech. Bakhtin’s theory of language not only promotes the comparison between the narrator’s and characters’ styles but also helps to justify my assertion that the narrator belongs to the discourse community of the society chapters even though the narrator never directly addresses any of the characters. The narrator’s inner speech is after all a reaction to the other characters’ outer speech whether or not the inner speech is ever outside of the narrator’s mind.

James Paul Gee explains that a discourse community is based on performance (24); Gee’s concept of a discourse community is specially relevant because society in *Our Mutual Friend* is not very aptly described by the members’ bloodlines or bank accounts; there is too much variation to distinguish how much money one must have or how many generations of one’s family tree must be respectable and successful. For example, Lady Tippins lives above a clothing (staymaker’s) shop, and Mr. Twemlow lives about a stableyard; both characters are not at all rich. But both Twemlow and Tippins understand types of behavior that are acceptable in the circle of society.

One type of performance within a discourse community is, of course, the act of communication. Understanding of a discourse is tested when a speaker communicates with members of a discourse community; if the members of the community recognize the speaker’s language as normal, then the speaker has successfully entered the community (Gee 25). The language of a discourse community is distinctive; the topics of conversation are also specific to the community.⁷ The shared stylistic traits of the society figures and the recurrence of particular topics of conversation, such as marriages between

persons of unequal class or the acquisition or loss of a fortune, indicate that the society figures form a discourse community.

Subsets of Society

Michael Lambert in *Dickens and the Suspended Quotation* claims that in Dickens there exists a “great gap between the styles of narrative paragraphs and the styles of quoted speech—especially when the speech is most low, captivating, and eccentric” (78). Lady Tippins, Mr. Veneering, Mr. Podsnap, and Mrs. Lamble, as presented by the narrator, are all low, captivating, and eccentric as characters, but they adopt elements of the narrator’s complex style in their speech. But as my review of scholarship has suggested, critics who conflate the fictional narrator with the historical person of Dickens are unable to notice the similarities of style between the narrator’s discourse and the quoted speech of certain characters.

Sharing stylistic traits. The character of Lady Tippins is one-dimensional and predictable but enormously comical; she is a very fictional character, as opposed to realistic, in her lack of depth. For this reason, it is ironic that her particular idiolect is built upon frequent use of literary allusion, which is a trait shared with the narrator. Lady Tippins is a fictional character drawing attention to her own unrealistic presentation. Table 1 below contains examples of the types of literary allusions made by Tippins and by the narrator within the chapters of my study. The majority of the direct discourse attributable to Tippins consists of creative attempts at flirtation with the younger men of her circle or tales of her amorous intrigues delivered to the younger women of her circle.

Tippins’ direct discourse is very limited as is the text devoted to her in general, and that makes the five allusions stand out more prominently (see table 1 for all of

Tippins' allusions). All of the texts or artistic subjects that she mentions are exotic in place of origin or setting, a characteristic which is part of her creation of self in the public sphere. The one example that stands out is her reference to Cymon because its usage is so uncommon in comparison with Cupid, Don Juan, and Robinson Crusoe. Tippins' reference to Robinson Crusoe elicits an appropriate response from Mortimer Lightwood; he plays along with her game of recognition and makes a joke about civilization being the birthplace of cannibalism. Tippins' penchant for literature does not make her comments unintelligible to members of discourse community, even when the references are more obscure.

Both Tippins' and the narrator's use of literary references embellishes the text only for an audience familiar with the works to which they allude. For example, it is not possible to infer from Tippins' quotation that Cymon is the lover of Iphigenia in Boccaccio's *Decameron* or to guess at the content of the story. Lady Tippins converses within a discourse community whose members have the benefit of an extensive literary education as the text never indicates any miscommunication caused by her remarks. The narrator similarly offers no assistance in explaining the role of Mephistopheles or indicating the dramatic source, Dr. Faustus (see table 1). The narrator seems to belong to the same discourse community as Lady Tippins and the other society figures because of a shared artistic-knowledge base.

A strange parallel exists in the way in which Lady Tippins is introduced and takes her leave. The first image of her is a metaphorical representation of her eating habits which is provided by the narrator; Tippins is likened to "a hardy old cruiser" bringing goods on board for a voyage to the North Pole (11; bk.1, ch.2). In her last appearance,

Table 1: Literary References (Narrator and Lady Tippins)		
Example	Book and Chapter	Quotation
Narrator		
A	1.2	. . . Mr. Veneering having this very evening set up the shirt-front of the young Antinous in new worked cambric just come home, is not at all complimented by being supposed to be Twemlow, who is dry and weazen and some thirty years older. (9)
B	2.16	Twemlow, in a stunned condition, feigns to compare the portrait in his hand with the original looking towards him from his Mephistophelean corner. (407)
Lady Tippins		
C	1.2	'And here is another of my lovers, a rough <i>Cymon</i> at present certainly, but of whom I had most hopeful expectations as to his turning out well in course of time, pretending that he can't remember his nursery rhymes!' (12)
D	1.2	'I banish the false wretch from this moment, and I strike him out of my Cupidon (my name for my Ledger, my dear,) this very night.' (12)
E	1.2	'Falsar man than Don Juan; why don't you take the note from the Commendatore?' (17)
F	4.17	'Long-banished Robinson Crusoe,' says the charmer, exchanging salutations, 'how did you leave the Island?' (795)
Indirect Discourse: Narrator-Tippins Intersection		
G	2.3	Then, my precious child, the fun of it is that nobody knows who these Veneerings are, and that they know nobody, and that they have a house of the Tales of the Genii, and give dinners out of the Arabian Nights ⁸ I call their dinner-table, the Caravan. (243)

Lady Tippins uses her own boat imagery to voice her disapproval of Eugene Wrayburn's marriage to Lizzie Hexam. The narrator seems to set readers up to fear that the Tippins cruiser will wreck Lizzie's rowboat. Lizzie is also introduced in the introductory chapter of the novel as she rows her father in search of floating corpses.

The style of Tippins' expression when belittling Lizzie's lower-class roots is surprisingly similar to the narrator's description of Tippins which appears in the first book of the novel. Table 2 contains examples of both Lady Tippins and the narrator using a string of semantically related verbs in the place of one verb to emphasize the action taking place. The literal meaning of each utterance remains relatively unchanged but the repetition underscores the ridiculousness of the action and person described. The example in table 2 is the only instance in which Lady Tippins makes use of this technique.

The narrator's description of Lady Tippins is extremely harsh; the assertion that she can be peeled or molded is reminiscent of the satire of Johnathan Swift. The narrator's commentary reveals no pity for Tippins as she engages in a futile battle with the aging process, for example, in the suggestion that she wear two golden monocles in place of one to prop up her drooping eyelids (115; bk.1, ch.10). But Lady Tippins' comments about Lizzie Hexam only substantiate her negative portrayal by the narrator. The two examples (A and B) give some indication of the whole of the narrator's description of Tippins, which emphasizes her preoccupation with her own faded beauty and her undaunted flirtatiousness.

Table 2: Semantic Clustering (Narrator and Lady Tippins)		
Example	Book and Chapter	Quotation
Narrator		
A	1.2	She keeps a little list of her lovers, and she is always booking a new lover, or striking out an old lover, or putting a lover in her black list, or promoting a lover to her blue list, or adding up her lovers, or otherwise posting her book. (12)
B	1.10	. . . But you could easily buy all you see of her, in Bond Street; or you might scalp her, and peel her, and scrape her, and make two lady Tippinses out of her, and yet not penetrate to the genuine article. (115)
Lady Tippins		
C	4.17	'I hope she steered herself, skiffed herself, paddled herself, larboarded and starboarded herself, or whatever the technical terms may be, to the ceremony?' (795)

Because the narrator's comments predispose readers to view Lady Tippins in a negative light, the comedic impact of the imagery in Lady Tippins' comments is undercut. Visualizing a context in which Tippins could paint a humorous picture is easily done; Lizzie rowing methodically up the Thames and straight into the church with the train of a wedding gown over one arm is a humorous image. Tippins utters her remarks in the context of a heated debate over the appropriateness of a marriage that links members of different socioeconomic class, so she appears to be mocking Lizzie's previous state of poverty. But there is no given context for the narrator's description of Lady Tippins; she has no history of hardship within *Our Mutual Friend*.

Mr. Veneering provides a second instance of a shared stylistic trait and a differing context. The examples for Lady Tippins appearing in tables 1 and 2 are drawn from

various chapters and are spread out to an extent that the similarity could more easily go unnoticed. But in the case of Mr. Veneering, the examples are drawn from one page of the text, and it seems inconceivable that Dickens as author would not have been aware of the stylistic overlap. Mr. Veneering is organizing a campaign to secure a place in Parliament with the help of his many acquaintances. The narrator's comments (see table 3, example A) prefigure Mrs. Veneering's melodramatic reaction to her husband's campaign announcement. In the narrator's description of Mrs. Veneering, the number of adjectives used per sentence is increased. Also, the adjectives used are not commonly or frequently employed in direct discourse in the chapters of the study. The "bookish" style is used by the narrator in his description of Mrs. Veneering to contrast ironically the lack of importance of Mr. Veneering's run for governmental office to Mrs. Veneering's monumental treatment of the campaign.

The second example in table 3 is the climax of Veneering's public speech; Veneering slows down the pace of the speech and adds as many details as possible to build up a grand vision of Snigsworthy Park.⁹ He then quickly brings the speech to a conclusion by allowing Lord Snigsworth to wrap up the conclusion in a brief remark. His political speech contrasts sharply with his dinner-party speech, which consists of formal statements, for example, welcoming guests. But in his one public appearance as candidate for office, Veneering begins with the familiar metaphor of the ship of state and then proceeds to the second example quoted in table 3. It is interesting not only that Veneering adopts a more literary style in this one instance but also that the narrator's style overlaps with Veneering's in the same page of text. Veneering changes his style in the middle of his speech¹⁰ for emphasis, and Dickens, it would seem, is deliberately

pointing out the shift by placing the narrator’s example in such close proximity to Veneering’s.

Table 3: Adjective Frequency (Narrator and Mr. Veneering)		
Example	Book and Chapter	Quotation
Narrator		
A	2.3	Mrs. Veneering in the same moment relinquishes baby to Nurse; presses her aquiline hands upon her brow, to arrange the throbbing intellect within; orders out the carriage; and repeats in a distracted and devoted manner, compounded of Ophelia and any self-immolating female of antiquity you may prefer, ‘We must work.’ (238)
Indirect Discourse: Narrator-Veneering Intersection		
B	2.3	Suppose I drew my arm through the arm of my respected friend upon my left, and, walking with him through the ancestral woods of his family, and under the spreading beeches of Snigsworthy Park, approached the noble hall, crossed the courtyard, entered by the door, went up the staircase, and, passing from room to room, found myself at last in the august presence of my friend's near kinsman, Lord Snigsworth. (246)

Veneering’s grandiose description of Snigsworthy Park is too good to be true because it is situated within a more skeptical work by Dickens and not within Jonson’s Penhurst. Twemlow is a distant relative, but, as a representative of the family and a family bearing a ridiculous rather than awe-inspiring name, his poverty and his demeanor seem to indicate that the Snigsworth family is not the finest branch of the aristocracy. Veneering’s description like Lady Tippins’ joke about the boating bride is therefore comical. The narrator comically describes Mrs. Veneering by exaggerating her distress with adjectives. However, Veneering’s description of Snigsworthy Park is colored by his

own interest in Lord Snigsworth's support. He abuses his friend Twemlow, Snigsworth's cousin, and endangers Twemlow's financial base by persistently requesting that Twemlow plead for Snigsworth's political backing.

Yet another society figure illustrates the pattern established in the treatment of Lady Tippins and Mr. Veneering. The shared stylistic trait is the heavy-handed use of repetition (which I hope will not be a phrase leveled at my continued emphasis on differing context, shared traits, and a communal knowledge base). But as with Mr. Veneering before, I want to clearly establish how obvious the shared stylistic traits are because of the close proximity of the narrator's and character's examples. The first two examples in table 4 below are taken from the introduction to the chapter *Podsnappery*. The narrator reproduces, exactly, a six-item list four times in succession (I removed one of the iterations to shorten the quotation in table 4). If one were forced to slowly read the list each time rather than swiftly recognizing the repetition, the narrator's sequence would be as obnoxious as Podsnap's attempt at a bilingual conversation (see table 4, examples C,D, and E).

Interestingly, the narrator complains of Podsnap's lack of appreciation for the fine arts. The criticism says as much about the narrator as about Mr. Podsnap; the discussion that follows the introduction is not about the fine arts, but the narrator chooses this method of presenting Podsnap as a misfit amongst his well-bred peers. Evidently, the tension Mr. Podsnap causes within his discourse community is caused by his lack of conformity. As with the literary references discussed in connection to Lady Tippins, the narrator's introduction to Podsnap provides further evidence that the narrator is communicating as a member of the group that he so harshly criticizes.

Table 4: Repetition (Narrator and Mr. Podsnap)		
Example	Book and Chapter	Quotation
Narrator		
A	1.11	Mr Podsnap's notions of the Arts in their integrity might have been stated thus. Literature; large print, respectfully descriptive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. Painting and Sculpture; models and portraits representing Professors of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. Music; a respectable performance (without variations) on stringed and wind instruments, sedately expressive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. (124-125)
B	1.11	Beginning with a good inheritance, he had married a good inheritance, and had thriven exceedingly in the Marine Insurance way, and was quite satisfied. He never could make out why everybody was not quite satisfied, and he felt conscious that he set a brilliant social example in being particularly well satisfied with most things, and, above all other things, with himself. (124)
Mr. Podsnap		
C	1.11	'And Do You find, Sir,' pursued Mr. Podsnap, with dignity, 'Many Evidences that Strike You, of our British Constitution in the Streets Of the World's Metropolis, London, Londres, London?' (127)
D	1.11	'Marks,' said Mr. Podsnap; 'Signs, you know, Appearances—Traces.' (128)
E	1.11	'We call it Horse,' said Mr. Podsnap, with forbearance. 'In England, Angleterre, England, We Aspirate the "H," and We Say "Horse."' (128)

The only mention made of Mr. Podsnap in G. L. Brook's *Language of Dickens* categorizes Podsnap with other Dickens characters showing signs of "British xenophobia" (68-69). Brook mentions Podsnap's dislike of foreigners, but he seems unaware that the introduction to the chapter *Podsnappery* (bk.1, ch.11) indicates that Podsnap's relationship with language is also the object of the narrator's satire. The narrator's comments on Podsnap's view of literature point to his lack of creativity or an inability to play with language because of the stranglehold that devotion to correctness exercises over his speech.

As with Tippins and Veneering, the comedic impact of Mr. Podsnap's use of a stylistic feature, in his case that of repetition, is undercut by the negative context within which the feature appears. Mr. Podsnap struggles to communicate with a French national; the content of Mr. Podsnap's direct discourse can be summarized as his view that Britain is superior to France as a nation-state and his insistence that the visitor adopt a particular English dialect. Podsnap's boorish behavior to his guest removes the possibility that the repetition of the city (example C) and country (example E) is only a misguided attempt at better communication. The terms that Podsnap repeats in both French and English (see table 4) are so similar that knowledge of one language or the other is sufficient to understand the terms in both languages; Podsnap is underestimating the intelligence of his French visitor. Comedy sketches frequently use hand-gestures and abnormal volume in scenes that involve persons communicating despite a language barrier, but Podsnap's repetition is coupled with his rude insistence that the visitor pronounce horse as if he were an Englishman born and bred.

While Mrs. Lammle's use of a shared stylistic trait (with the narrator) is also negative, hers is the only case in which the narrator softens slightly. The narrator's description returns repeatedly to Mrs. Lammle's disappointment (her discovery that she had wed a man with no fortune); her physical posture indicates her emotional state (see table 5). Mrs. Lammle herself uses repetition to remind herself of her error by emphasizing the betrayal and foolishness associated with her marriage. Mrs. Lammle cannot escape from this mistake literally nor would it seem mentally or linguistically. The narrator's repeated description of Mrs. Lammle hanging her head in disappointment is reinforced by her own use of repetition, proving Michael Hollington's assertion that "the harmony of linguistic and gestural physiognomics is highlighted by the carryover of verbal patterns" (58). The narrator's repeated description of Mrs. Lammle hanging her head in disappointment is reinforced by her own use of repetition.

The narrator's repetition reminds readers of the poetic justice and the humor of the Lammle wedding ceremony in which two fortune-hunters came out empty-handed. But as with Tippins, Podsnap, and Veneering, Mrs. Lammle's repetition fails to capture the humor of the situation because of the negative context; her comments in books two and three focus on an irreversible situation, her marriage which occurred in book one, and not on the financial difficulties that she had brought upon Twemlow (Example D) or her sense of relief that the naïve Georgiana Podsnap has averted the danger of an eternal compact with the disreputable Fledgeby. The comedic impact of Mrs. Lammle's continued emphasis on her poor luck is diminished because her comments are presented simultaneously with the equally serious problems of Mr. Twemlow and Georgiana Podsnap.

Table 5: Repetition (Narrator and Mrs. Lammle)		
Example	Book and Chapter	Quotation
Narrator		
A	1.10	She affects not to know that his eyes are fastened on her as she droops her head again. (121)
B	1.10	The mature young lady has mighty little need of powder, now, for her downcast face, as he escorts her in the light of the setting sun to their abode of bliss. (123)
C	2.16	Mrs. Lammle has sat quite still, with her eyes cast down upon the table-cloth. (405)
Mrs. Lammle		
D	2.16	'Mr. Twemlow, I feel my sudden degradation in your eyes; familiar as I am with my degradation in my own eyes, I keenly feel the change that must have come upon me in yours, in these last few moments.' (408)
E	3.17	'I scarcely know why I turned traitress to my husband in the matter, for the girl is a poor little fool. I was a poor little fool once myself; I can find no better reason.' (605)

All four of these society figures (Tippins, Veneering, Podsnap, and Lammle) are presented in the text in the same manner. First, they employ a stylistic trait that the narrator has previously used. The narrator does not introduce each character in the same manner within descriptive paragraphs; thus it is not coincidence that the narrator's style aligns with each of the characters. The narrator shows great versatility throughout *Our Mutual Friend*, but characters do not have the same stylistic breadth. Because the narrator works with such a plenitude of tactics to vary language use and the minor characters aforementioned use so few of these stylistic features, the repeated observance

of overlap between the narrator and character bespeaks deliberate design on the part of the author.

Secondly, the context for the characters' comments in which the stylistic trait appears has negative ethical implications, such as Lady Tippins making light of Lizzie's poverty, but the narrator's comments have no such context. In this absence of context, information about why the narrator is telling the story of *Our Mutual Friend* and in this manner, we have only the general purpose for which any story is told—to entertain. This is the reason for the second conclusion deriving from my earliest perusal of the direct discourse and narrator tables; the narrator's treatment of Mortimer Lightwood is markedly different than that of other characters because, on occasion, Lightwood is also a narrator.

Adopting the narrator's style. Goulding's remarks on Lightwood in *Idiolects in Dickens* are guided by the narrator's commentary on the character. Because the narrator describes Lightwood as a duplicate of Eugene Wrayburn, Goulding argues that the best examples of Lightwood's idiolect occur in the text when the similarity between Lightwood and Wrayburn is most obvious (191). The direct discourse of the character should be the basis of the idiolect analysis and not the narrator's commentary.

Lightwood mirrors the narrator in content and manner of expression.

Mortimer Lightwood's role in *Our Mutual Friend* is more substantial than that of other society figures such as Lady Tippins but less pivotal than that of his friend Eugene Wrayburn. Lightwood functions as an intermediary between members of the upper-class social circles and the working-class world; he is not directly connected to any figures outside the social circle, as Eugene Wrayburn becomes over the course of the novel, and

thus he is never ostracized. Lightwood's speech also seems to be freed from some constraints of a character but with less freedom than the narrator.

Lightwood is an intermediary in another sense aside from the persons with whom he associates within the text; he shares a social language with the narrator. James Paul Gee uses the term *social language* to describe a subset within a discourse; a social language can be explained by the differences in the way the same story is told to two groups that speak the same discourse. Gee's example is a teenager's language when speaking to a friend and to a parent; here two social languages are used within an English discourse (37-41). For Lightwood and the narrator, the discourse is the novel *Our Mutual Friend*. We know that Lightwood and the narrator share a social language because they tell the same story in the same style. Lightwood is not just addressing the society figures when he tells the story of John Harmon's early estrangement from his father; he is addressing the implied audience of the novel as the only source of information on John's defense of his sister, and so he is allowed to tell lengthy stories without interruption.

The sheer amount of dialogue attributed to Lightwood is not as interesting as the content of his dialogue; he provides the background information on John Harmon's early life. Lightwood's story is that of *Our Mutual Friend* in miniature as both he and the narrator are designed to tell of Harmon's disappearance and discovery. The narrator who frequently takes over a character's direct speech if said speech continues for any length of time, in contrast, allows Lightwood to slowly and masterfully weave the tale of the "man from Somewhere." Lightwood takes on the role of story-teller twice (in two different chapters); the second story he relates in the group setting is of Lizzie Hexam's attempt to clear her father's name, which puts her in contact with John Harmon, and her

disappearance from London. The matter of the second story is again part of the major plotlines for the novel, *Our Mutual Friend*. However, not only does Lightwood take for his subject matter that narrator's story but he also employs more stylistic features in common with the narrator than any other society figure.

Lightwood also seems to be omnipresent, as the narrator is, in *Our Mutual Friend*. He witnesses the appearance, disappearance, and rediscovery of John Harmon. Lightwood visits the police station at the outset of the novel where the action begins as the disguised John Harmon meets him over a corpse. Later, he begins the process of unmasking Harmon by accidentally becoming aware of his aliases (Hanford and Rokesmith) after escorting Bella to Lizzie Hexam's wedding and points them out to the authorities. He also witnesses the many stages of Wrayburn's love affair with Lizzie Hexam. Lightwood accompanies Wrayburn for the initial visit to the Hexam waterfront home, attends the wedding, and gleefully listens to Twemlow's defense of the wedding which concludes the novel.

Examples A and B in table 6 should be vaguely familiar because Lightwood employs the same stylistic features that were pointed out in the previous discussion of Mr. Veneering. Lightwood's use of the verb *to anathematize* challenges the magnitude of the event he is describing as did the comparison of Mrs. Veneering to Ophelia. Old Mr. Harmon's unstudied responses to his children are not quite on the same scale as a church's pronouncement of excommunication. Similarly, the epithet used to describe old John Harmon in Lightwood's narrative is venerable parent, a tag that is blatantly false. The use of epithets is a shared trait with the narrator who frequently refers to characters with a two-or three-word phrase; for example, Twemlow is linked to the phrase *mild* or

Table 6: Multiple Stylistic Features (Mortimer Lightwood)		
Example	Book and Chapter	Quotation
Adjectives and Lexicon		
A	1.2	'Immediately, the venerable parent—on a cold winter's night, it is said— anathematized and turned her out.' (14)
B	1.2	Venerable parent promptly resorts to anathematization, and turns him out. (15)
Labels		
C	1.2	'At this stage of the affair the poor girl respectfully intimated that she was secretly engaged to that popular character whom the novelists and versifiers call Another . . . ' (14)
D	1.2	'The pecuniary resources of Another were, as they usually are, of a very limited nature. I believe I am not using too strong an expression when I say that Another was hard up.' (14)
E	2.16	'Artichoke professes his readiness so to do, endeavours to do so, but fails.' (402)
Literary references		
F	2.16	'Nobody believed them, because little Rogue Riderhood—I am tempted into the paraphrase by remembering the charming wolf who would have rendered society a great service if he had devoured Mr. Riderhood's father and mother in their infancy . . . ' (402)

polite little gentleman. More importantly, Lightwood's attempt at comedy is in no way injured by the context provided in the novel. His function, like that of the narrator in *Our Mutual Friend*, is to entertain, and he does so without impediment.

The narrator frequently replaces proper names with other words, such as referring to Lady Tippins as the Charmer. In the story of the death of John Harmon's sister,

Lightwood replaces the name of her spouse with the word Another (examples C and D), which repeatedly reminds Lightwood's listeners that her spouse was another groom than the one intended for her by her father. The one word captures both the romantic and rebellious nature of the narrative. Lightwood's use of language is as skilled as the narrator's; he indirectly explains the origin of Riderhood's (example F) name in the children's story Little Red Riding Hood in the playful manner of Lady Tippins and the narrator.

Lightwood's role as a narrator himself results in fewer interruptions by the narrator of *Our Mutual Friend*. Within the chapters of my study, the narrator expends the least amount of text describing Lightwood than for any other society figure. Lightwood's direct discourse is the only representation of his character in the restricted chapters; by sharing a social language, he escapes the negative criticism of the narrator and gains the ability to address the implied audience of the novel.

Lightwood's role is patterned on the structure of the narrator's role in the novel; in preliminary sections, he provides extensive information and gradually fades into the background. Lightwood trades his role of spokesman with Twemlow, adopting the repetitive questioning manner of Twemlow in the first and second books. "Are you the voice of society?" Lightwood asks repeatedly, echoing the earlier uncertainty of Twemlow in his series of questions ("Are you the Veneering's oldest friend?") The reversal of status from shadow to spokesperson for Twemlow or the converse for Mortimer Lightwood may symbolically represent the triumph of polite language over the trite and sparkling language of society.

Contradictory styles. A character's speech can be static or dynamic, as a character's corresponding identity is traditionally labeled; one such character whose address undergoes significant change over the course of the novel is Twemlow. At the outset of the novel, the narrator lampoons the idea of the gentleman in the character of Twemlow, yet he later becomes the champion of romantic love in his defense of Lizzie Hexam's marriage. Sharon Millar writes in *Ideals of Communicative Competence in Spoken English* that "old notions of the educated gentleman versus the uneducated, common man were maintained, but came under considerable pressure in the nineteenth century when it was assumed that everyone could be a gentleman or lady. However, more genteel notions of the lady and gentleman still existed and were appealed to in many an American elocution manual" (177). Twemlow's connection to Lord Snigsworth and his disassociation with any labor for hire align him with the traditional view of a gentleman, but his own views are progressive as Twemlow explains, ". . . when I use the word gentleman, I use it in the sense in which the degree may be attained by any man" (799). He manages to stand for both the traditional and the progressive without any inconsistency.

The narrator's use of epithets for Twemlow, such as *mild, little gentleman*, and Twemlow's frequent recourse to the theme of honor in his limited dialogue clearly advance the character as a representative type. But despite the fact that Twemlow begins as a victim and a walking punchline, he develops as a character, and his speech, accordingly, becomes more complex. Upon introduction, Twemlow's character communicates indirectly as the narrator relates his thoughts for the duration of the first book of the novel. A series of similarly themed sentences make use of the verb *to think*

(see table 7, stage 1); Twemlow's mental turmoil is caused by his inability to discover whether his friendship with Veneering is genuine or not. The narrator's first comment about Twemlow is a simile likening him to a dining table, a useful object to build a dinner party around. There is some progress between books one and two of the novel. In the second book, Twemlow begins to speak rather than think although he is interrupted by the narrator. Occurrences of the tag interrupting a syntactical structure are in no way extraordinary in *Our Mutual Friend*, but Twemlow is interrupted more often than the other society figures.

Twemlow's ability to utilize polite speech even under stressful circumstances characterizes his direct discourse in the third book of the novel. Mrs. Lamble comes to pay a visit for the purpose of asking Twemlow to be discreet and not release any information he may have gained about her. The visit in itself is impolite because the insinuation implicit in the call is that Twemlow must be told to maintain silence. The formal language in his reply is not polite in and of itself, for as Gudrun Held explains in *Politeness in Linguistic Research*, "researchers realize that linguistic indicators are not in themselves polite, but that the interplay of all the linguistic and situational factors generates a polite effect in the hearer" (135). The situational factors for Twemlow at this moment are the previous discovery of having been double-crossed by Mrs. Lamble and the insult that is the visit itself. Considering Twemlow's treatment at the hands of Mrs. Lamble, his words display a polite restraint on his part.

Having stood up for himself once in private, Twemlow's final stage in the fourth book is to argue in public, although politely, for the rights of a gentleman and to deny even the opinion of Lord Snigsworth, his source of income. Mr. Twemlow is

Table 7: Twemlow's Four Stages		
Stage	Book and Chapter	Example
1	1.10	'Oh!' thinks Twemlow, with his eyes on Podsnap, 'then there are only two of us, and he's the other.' (112)
2	2.3	' <i>On</i> the whole then;—observe me,' urges Twemlow with great nicety, as if in the case of its having been off the whole, he would have done it directly—' <i>on</i> the whole, I must beg you to excuse me from addressing any communication to Lord Snigsworth.' (239)
	2.16	'And ex—' But Twemlow, in his demolished state, cannot command the word, and trails off into '—actly so.' (407)
3	3.17	'Pardon me a moment. I should never have sought you out, madam, to say what I am going to say, but since you have sought me out and are here, I will throw it off my mind Was it quite consistent, in candour, with our taking that resolution against Mr. Fledgeby, that you should afterwards address Mr. Fledgeby as your dear and confidential friend, and entreat a favour of Mr. Fledgeby?' (605)
		'I must confess,' says the mild little gentleman, coming to his answer by degrees, 'that I felt some compunction when Mr. Fledgeby mentioned it. I must admit that I could not regard myself in an agreeable light. More particularly, as Mr. Fledgeby did, with great civility which I could not feel that I deserved from him, render me the same service that you had entreated him to render you.' (606)
4	4.17	'Sir,' returns Twemlow, with his wristbands bristling a little 'you repeat the word; <i>I</i> repeat the word. This lady. What else would you call her, if the gentleman were present?' (798)

introduced in a state of dependence upon the friendship of Veneering and exits in a state of independence founded on his own internal code of ethics. Twemlow stands out among the society figures because he is a representative type (gentlemanly behavior), his speech in the novel overall is dynamic, and because his use of a stylistic trait is set in a positive context.

Richard W. Janney and Horst Arndt define tact as “strategic conflict avoidance,” and tact is the context for Twemlow’s direct discourse (34). Twemlow himself explains that “it has ever been one of the objects of my life—which, unfortunately, has not had many objects—to be inoffensive, and to keep out of cabals and interferences” (604; bk.3, ch.17). The difference between social politeness and tact, according to Janney and Arndt, is that social politeness relates to a larger group and more codified behavior and tact relates more to the individual (22-23). “Tact is rooted in people’s . . . reluctance to deprive others of (face)” (23) where face is taken from the phrase “to save face.”

Twemlow’s verbal trademark is to repeat a phrase while changing the subject either to draw attention to his similitude with a subject or his difference (see stages 3 and 4 in table 7). In his exchange with Mr. Podsnap, Twemlow does not lecture or patronize Podsnap for his lack of manners; he, instead, refers to the code of behavior which they hold in common. When Twemlow asks Podsnap how he would modify his behavior if the couple being discussed (Wrayburn and Hexam) were present, he is both defiant and tactful simultaneously. He leaves Mr. Podsnap with a way to exit the argument without demeaning himself; Podsnap could admit a momentary lapse in gentlemanlike conduct while affirming that others should see him, like Twemlow, as a gentleman. Even though Twemlow becomes more assertive throughout the novel, he does not abandon the

conventions of social politeness or his own sense of tact. At the conclusion of the novel and Twemlow's point of highest confidence, we are asked to identify the voice of society.

Society as a Global Concept: A Polyphonic Voice

Bakhtin's concept of polyphony further complicates the question indirectly posed by Mortimer Lightwood; Lightwood asks, "Are you the voice of society?" Does society have one voice or many? Bakhtin's work on Dostoevsky praises the manner in which the narrator's voice joins with the voices of characters; in *The Hero's Monologic Discourse and Narrational Discourse in Dostoevsky's Short Novels*, he uses Dostoevsky as a model to illustrate his theory of language. Bakhtin's theory proposes that language begins in an atmosphere of "ambivalence, multivocality, conflict, incorporation, and transformation" (Morrison 49). In *The Double*, "one and the same word, idea, phenomenon is passed through three voices and in each voice sounds differently" (Dentith 183).

The narrator's voice in *Our Mutual Friend* stifles many of the other voices. Bakhtin admires Dostoevsky's ability to create narrators who seem to address the characters rather than informing the reading audience about the characters, which Dostoevsky accomplishes by shifting from a plain style to an embellished style, as I will explain later (Dentith 183). In *Our Mutual Friend*, the narrator's introduction to Mr. Podsnap (see table 4) that ridicules his limitations in the artistic sphere inversely exemplifies this principle of establishing a dialogic relationship between narrator and character. Podsnap's devotion to business and the daily grind is understood by the reading audience to be an inappropriate substitution for an appreciation of the fine arts. Podsnap himself could never understand the joke that is being made at his expense; the interaction between Dickens's narrator and Podsnap in this instance is not dialogic.

Bakhtin mentions that the narrator's style shifts out of a "dry, colorless" phase and into a style that mimics a character's speech when entering into dialogue with a character (Dentith 183); the exaggerated style is a counter-accent which strengthens according to the level of exaggeration (Dentith 163). The similarity can be a way for the narrator and character to make contact and present differing perspectives. However, the narrator in *Our Mutual Friend* does not employ a simple style which is embellished to indicate the beginning of a dialogic discourse; the narrator's style is more complex than any character and, thus, able to overshadow the style of a particular character.

The characters cannot enter into a dialogic discourse with the narrator by adopting his style because they repeat the narrator's descriptions of their identities; there is no counter-accent as described by Bakhtin at the beginning of the novel. It is as if Dickens created the narrator's complex style as the well from which the characters draw in specific situations, but in their employment of the narrator's stylistic features, characters seldom oppose the negative image of themselves as described by the narrator. Consider the earlier example of Mr. Veneering's campaign speech in table 3. First, the narrator mocks Mrs. Veneering's enthusiasm for the race; then, Mr. Veneering adopts the narrator's style and confirms the narrator's own description of himself with his willingness to abuse friendship in the face of political gain. Mr. Veneering's discourse does not contain a counterargument to the narrator's descriptive paragraphs that illustrates his genuine concern for his acquaintances and new depths of thought and emotion; Veneering's discourse confirms the narrator's authority.

But by the final chapter of *Our Mutual Friend*, the voice of society has become a polyphonic discourse because of two types of counter-accent not described in the

excerpts from Bakhtin. Changes in the speech of both Twemlow and Lightwood occur by the fourth book. Lightwood relinquishes his role as secondary narrator; he is silent during the final argument. His silence is a counter-accent to the disruptive narrator. Twemlow's politeness is also a counter-accent to the comments of the narrator which deliberately attack the "face" of society figures. The silence of Lightwood combines with the combating voices of Twemlow and the other society figures. The exchange between Twemlow and the combined force of Mr. Podsnap and Lady Toppins becomes a "crossing and intersection . . . of two consciousnesses, two points of view, two evaluations—two voices interrupting one another" (Dentith 176). Podsnap and Toppins echo one another in their sarcastic tone and uniform argument of the unfitness of the match between Lizzie Hexam and Eugene Wrayburn, and they contend with Twemlow who politely defends a gentleman's right to choose his own bride and the obligation of all others to abide by his choice. Although the text begins without the ambivalence and conflict that define language for Bakhtin, *Our Mutual Friend* ends with polyphonic discourse.

Malcolm Andrews in *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves* remarks on the polyphonic voice of the narrator rather than *society* when he describes "Dickens's narrative voice as . . . often polyphonic, slipping in and out of various discursive modes with an energy and panache that sometimes upstage the effervescent characters he summons into life" (200). In the case of *Our Mutual Friend*, the narrator receives some assistance upstaging characters by the deliberate choice of context for shared stylistic traits. The context is the drum roll to the comedy of the narrator, but characters like Lady Toppins, Mr. Veneering, Mr. Podsnap, and Mrs. Lamble are set up to fail with the audience. The polyphony of *society* depends not on the narrator's voice but on the

counter-accents of Twemlow and Lightwood. The polyphonic chorus that includes the polite tenor Twemlow, the fading vibration of Lightwood's powerful bass, and the sometimes hair-raising soprano of the gossiping Tippins creates the rich sound of society.

Society as an Abstract Concept: Dickens and Panorama

Grahame Smith in *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema* posits that *Our Mutual Friend* and other later novels "can be understood as obeying an imperative to re-present Victorian society to itself" with the device of the panorama, which is showing both the small details and the larger picture (34). The camera device of panorama is similar to the use of the term *society* because it can zoom in to a small set of influential people or zoom out to capture everyone. However, I strongly disagree with the practice of making the Veneerings, Podsnaps, and Lammles representative of an entire fictional society that reflects Victorian society. Not only does this omit the important figure of Twemlow and gloss over the conflict within the novel-framing chapters of this study, but it also fails to recognize the many possible meanings of society that the book includes in the commentary of many characters.

Why does Dickens frame the novel and the individual books with the conversations of these society figures? Framing a novel that espouses a global concept of society with chapters that illustrate a specific and exclusive concept of society encourages readers to be more open-minded to avoid being identified with dislikeable society figures. But the judgmental description of society figures by the narrator that makes them dislikeable aligns with the bigotry that the society figures themselves express towards foreigners (Podsnap) or the poor (Tippins). The narrator and the society figures even express their biased attitudes with the use of the same stylistic features. The panoramic

technique may be used here to remind readers that just as Lady Tippins, Podsnap, and the narrator are amusing themselves by taking a stance or passing a judgment on the actions¹¹ of others within the novel so also are all readers in a dangerous position where becoming a part of the exclusive society defined by the novel is entirely possible if they abandon the tact of Twemlow and the search for the best in others.

Notes

¹ My research required that I move back and forth from a hard copy of *Our Mutual Friend* to electronic copies frequently; for this reason, I have used the edition of the novel with which I was most familiar.

² The list of society figures includes the Veneerings, Podsnaps, Lammles, Lady Tippins, and Mr. Twemlow. Mortimer Lightwood is also included, but he appears outside the restricted chapters of the study and is a special case. Boots and Brewer have too few lines to merit any mention as society figures. The chapters studied are as follows: 1.2, 1.10, 2.3, 2.16, 3.17, and 4.17 (the first number indicates the book).

³ This paragraph refers to the section of Hori's bibliography under the subheading *The language and style of Dickens*.

⁴ My own difficulty locating materials with electronic databases leads me to conclude that the study of Dickens's style is limited, although long-standing, and that Hori's use of older works of criticism is prompted by the low quantity of recent criticism.

⁵ Studies of characters' names in the Dickens corpus are part of a long-standing tradition in the *Dickensian*; see William Axton, Donald Hawes, and David Paroissien among many other critics.

⁶ The narrator passages to which I am referring are easily isolated because, as Kathleen Wales writes, "Dickens came to focus his introductions in the first few paragraphs only . . ." (245).

⁷ A discourse community is not defined only by language use, although I am limiting my study in such a way. James Paul Gee writes that a discourse "exists in the abstract as a coordinated pattern of words, deeds, values, beliefs, symbols, tools, objects,

times, and places” (28). Critics in Hori’s bibliography mention the significance of gestures or postures in the Dickens corpus; one such example is included in my study (Mrs. Lammler’s bowed head). As early as 1974, Peter Quirk writes that “mere sounds were not in general to be dissociated from total communicative activity” in Dickens (13).

⁸For those interested in the study of the Dickens corpus, Elaine Ostry mentions the reference to the *Arabian Nights* in connection with Ebenezer Scrooge (91). Studying the types of characters that are mentioned with particular texts may lead to interesting conclusions on intertextuality (Julia Kristeva) and the Dickens corpus.

⁹G. L. Brook in his book-length study of Dickens’s style does not mention the stylistic overlap between the narrator’s description of Mrs. Veneering and Mr. Veneering’s speech. Brook explains Mr. Veneering’s speech as Dickens “taking his revenge for the boredom that had been induced in him by the necessity of transcribing large numbers of bad speeches” (170). Brook’s comments provide yet another example of a critic immediately shifting the emphasis off of the narrator and onto Dickens.

¹⁰Even if example B is an instance of the narrator interrupting Veneering, the narrator is still sharing the stylistic trait with Veneering during the speech. There is no way to decide confidently who is speaking in example B, but the ambiguity of voice is not a problem for this argument.

¹¹Brian Rosenberg, mentioned in Hori’s bibliography, may have influenced my conclusions. Rosenberg writes that, in the decrease of “uncertain” language in descriptions of “deceptive” characters (which occurs in the comparison of earlier and later works within the corpus), we can see Dickens testing “the limits of vision and representation” (98).

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