

“Members One of Another”:

Heteroglossic Utterances as Critiques of Injustice in Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*

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Introduction

Charles Dickens's ninth novel, *Bleak House*, stands as one of Victorian England's most prominent and impressive works. The work itself was the most popular of Dickens's at the point of its serial publication, outselling even *David Copperfield*, the novel immediately preceding, by nearly 10,000 copies a month. *Bleak House*'s early success, however, was not necessarily indicative of its early critical reception. Grahame Smith deems the work "experimental" as Dickens creates two separate narrators—the third-person narrator and Esther Summerson—while also trying to weave together his most elaborate plot yet, one that would expose and critique several social injustices.

Many argue that Dickens's experimental interweaving of several social issues was a failure. In his book about *Bleak House*, Graham Storey addresses Dickens's treatment of five major issues that were prevalent in 1851: the injustices of the court of Chancery, the newly established Roman Catholic hierarchy in England, political "misgovernment," the disparity of the rich and the poor, especially in the London slums, and what Dickens calls "telescopic philanthropy," or the exoticism of missions to other countries at the expense of the poor in London (1). Because of the breadth of social issues addressed in *Bleak House*, much early criticism argued that Dickens's plot falls apart, ultimately forming a disjointed novel. For instance, an early review in the *Spectator* claims that while Dickens certainly has great power in "amusing the book-buying public of England," the "novelty of his style has passed away" (Dyson 55). In the same review, *Bleak House* is charged as a work with a plot in "absolute want of construction" (56). Other early reviews in *The Illustrated London News*, *Bentley's Monthly Review*, *Westminster Review*, *Putnam's Magazine*, and the *Eclectic Review* all echo this same sentiment.

Not all critics, however, found *Bleak House* in “want of construction,” but instead, as critics began to recognize the grand interweaving of the story’s narrative, criticisms started shifting to praise. For instance, Dickens’s biographer and close friend, John Forster, considered the book nearly perfect, arguing that *Bleak House* was Dickens’s best work (427). Later critics, such as John Butt, Kathleen Tillotson and Smith, have noted the plot’s complex interconnection, praising the novel’s unity and aesthetic beauty (106, 41). Many of the plot’s interconnecting points specifically reveal an unassuming unity between social classes. For instance, Graham Storey and Norman Page discuss how the spread of smallpox from Jo to Esther shows the unity of the low and middle class (7, 52). G.K. Chesterton and Smith have noted the weather as an interconnecting piece throughout the novel (942, 39). Despite the disparity between social classes, all the characters are moving in and through the same foggy injustices of Victorian London, and they all bear the same responsibility for their actions regarding social issues. Philip Collins even argues that responsibility, or the lack of it, is the great unifier, and he stresses how poorly the characters bear the responsibility of doing one’s duty to their neighbors—as in the case of the irresponsibility of Mrs. Jellyby’s and Mrs. Pardiggle’s ignorance of the poor in London, the injustice of the legal system, the disparity among the classes, and the thematic failure to care for children (37).

Critics such as Smith, Collins, Storey, George Gissing, and Edgar Johnson have all identified the Court of Chancery as the central unifier. Everything in the story comes back to Chancery, and nearly every character is linked to the court in some way. Smith says that “the mention of Chancery and Jarndyce and Jarndyce rings constantly in our ears. In fact, the centrality of Chancery is so great that although it is easy to recognize as omnipresent, it is very difficult to disentangle clearly in all its manifold ramifications” (44). The case of *Jarndyce and*

Jarndyce holds the weight of Esther's fortune, and it destroys Richard and the potential of his future family with Ada. The two most prominent lawyers, Mr. Tulkinghorn and Mr. Vholes, are venomous characters, using the law ultimately to serve their own ends. Even poor Jo gets caught within the court's drama as he is questioned about his relationship with Nemo. Throughout the entire story, Chancery looms large, and Dickens links nearly every advancement in plot to the court in some way.

As the studies of the interconnected plot within *Bleak House* have grown more detailed, seeing one part of the novel as disconnected from another becomes increasingly more difficult. To highlight the unity of such an immense work, Norman Page has pointed to the imagery of a spider's web weaving throughout the seeming disunity between social classes. The "web" becomes clear when Allan Woodcourt consoles Jo before his death in the chapter titled, "Jo's Will": "There, too, is Mr. Jarndyce many a time, and Allan Woodcourt almost always; both thinking, much, how strangely Fate has entangled this rough outcast in the web of very different lives" (608).¹ Smith also points out this web imagery: "The image of a spider's web, spreading over and unifying a large expanse is close to one's total sense of the novel and in the link from Lord Boodle down to Noodle there is a little parody of the links that exist in *Bleak House* from Lady Dedlock down to Jo. We can also move down from Sir Leicester to as low as Krook and find that even he is not as isolated as he appears to be" (43). The web imagery presented in "Jo's Will" exemplifies the unified interconnectedness of all parts of the novel. No one character is entirely disconnected from the others, and all hold responsibility for the enactment of justice within London.

The interconnectedness of every detail within *Bleak House* presents a challenge for

¹ Quotes from *Bleak House* will be from the Barnes & Noble Classics edition, 2005.

criticism regarding the novel. Since *Bleak House* is such a complex work, isolating one theme for the sake of analysis is difficult. Examining every detail for the sake of finding *the* central unifying element of the novel is nearly impossible:

The novel is a seamless web to a degree that poses great problems for critical discussion, which always involves some element of abstraction from the flux of the work of art. And the kind of artificial separation of parts necessary for critical understanding is a particularly daunting task with *Bleak House* because of the sheer difficulty for examining one aspect of the book in isolation from the others. (Smith 33)

Finding *the* central unifying factor separated from all the other unifying elements of the work would fail to value the novel as an interconnected whole; therefore, it is important to recognize each piece of criticism as it relates to the novel's web of interconnection. Robert Donovan points out that "*Bleak House* is a novel without a center. There is no single character to whom the events of the story happen, or with reference to whom those events are significant. It is not even possible . . . to understand the novel as a unified system of co-ordinate plots or of plot and sub-plots" (39). Instead, the plot works together to form a seamless web that is the dysfunction of Victorian London, and criticism must rest within this web if it is to analyze the work well.

Most of the work studying the interconnectedness of *Bleak House*'s narrative centers on the imagery, symbolism, or themes threading throughout the work. However, the study of interconnectedness within *Bleak House* does have one critical hole: Dickens's language as a unifying force within the novel. That is not to say that Dickens's language in *Bleak House* has not been studied. For example, Page has highlighted Dickens's ability to create recognizable characters based on unique idiolects and speech patterns within their dialogue. Critics including Miller, Storey, and Norman Friedman have shown Dickens's mastery of language through his

diction, imagery, and symbolism. In fact, through his mastery of language, Dickens has drawn many comparisons to Shakespeare. Within the study of Dickens's language, however, most of the analysis tethers itself to Dickens's images, diction, and themes as points of interconnection, neglecting *how* his language accomplishes his exposure and critique of injustice.

Despite the ample praise surrounding Dickens's use of language, there is still room for further analysis. In reviewing Jacob Korg's and A. E. Dyson's collections on *Bleak House*, Trevor Blount points out that "neither volume can offer any very successful attempt to deal adequately with the richness of Dickens's style" (58). Quoting Blount's article, Smith also highlights the critical gap surrounding the study of Dickens's language, arguing that the "fairly widespread" gap is mostly a result of trying to study a novel of such a large scale. He argues that such a study would rely too heavily on quotes and on the reader's prior knowledge of the novel (48). However, to rectify these issues and to help fill the critical gap regarding Dickens's language, this thesis uses Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of heteroglossia and dialogism to approach the language of the novel as a means of further appreciating the interconnected unity of the work. Bakhtin's work on the multi-layered nature of language will help focus this study of the language in *Bleak House* so as to not construct an analysis that quotes the work ad nauseum. Using Bakhtin's framework for the theories of heteroglossia and dialogism, this thesis shows how Dickens uses the multi-layered nature of language to expose the injustice surrounding class disparity. Throughout *Bleak House*, the high and low classes have both passively and actively been isolated from each other, and Dickens uses the heteroglossic nature of language to critique this separation and to promote a more unified London society.

Some critics have used Bakhtin as a means of examining Dickens's work, but no one has used Bakhtin's study of language to show how exactly Dickens exposes and critiques injustice.

For instance, Elana Gomel uses Bakhtin's framework for the chronotope—the interconnected nature of temporal and spatial relationships—to examine Dickens's narrative architecture. Also using Bakhtin, David Cowles and Kieron Hara examine Dickens's use of the “dialogized heteroglossia” to analyze whether or not Dickens was successful in critiquing social systems—including class systems, the courts, the church, and the patriarchy. Drawing on Dickens's value of Christianity, Janet Larson specifically uses Bakhtin to bear on Dickens's use of Scripture within *Bleak House*. Perhaps most helpful to a consideration of Dickens's language as a means of exposing injustice is Wendell Harris's work in the article, “Bakhtinian Double Voicing in Dickens and Eliot.” In this article, Harris specifically examines how Eliot and Dickens use “double voicing”—Bakhtin's phrase for the use of multiple voices within one consciousness—to create intriguing narrators, and while his analysis does not include any specific readings of *Bleak House*, his work with Dickens's narrators still provide a helpful study for the analysis of the novel.

These Bakhtinian analyses of Dickens's work provide helpful starting points for continuing the work; however, the critics who have used Bakhtin have, so far, only considered the language of the novel to highlight a more compelling urban space, to critique Dickens's evaluation of social systems, to analyze the complexity of inserting Christian language, or to examine the many-voiced nature of Dickens's narrators. Criticism has yet to show specifically *how* Dickens uses the heteroglossic nature of language to expose and critique injustice. Therefore, this thesis gives a more focused application of Bakhtin to show how Dickens's dialogic and heteroglossic language in *Bleak House* ultimately exposes class disparity and issues a social critique of the isolation of one class from another. In so doing, *Bleak House* exposed the people of Victorian London's indifference, calling for a more just and loving society.

Mikhail Bakhtin and the Foundation for Heteroglossic Analysis

Literary critics did not heavily use Bakhtin's work until it was translated into English in the latter half of the twentieth century. His two works which garner the most attention are *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *The Dialogic Imagination*. These groundbreaking works provided entirely new frameworks for approaching the novel and specifically the discourses therein. For Bakhtin, the meaning of every word or phrase shifts depending on the context in which it is uttered. His understanding of the constantly shifting interpretations of language—in definitions, in connotations, in contexts—informs his reading of the novel, and to explore these contextual shifts, Bakhtin coins the term “heteroglossia.” In the glossary for *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin gives a straight-forward definition for heteroglossia:

It is that which insures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve. Heteroglossia is as close a conceptualization as is possible of that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide. (428)

Every uttered word, phrase, or figure of speech is always uttered among other voices, and each utterance will call to mind specific connotations depending on the time and place in which it is uttered.

In his definition of heteroglossia, Bakhtin promotes the “primacy of context” when determining the meaning of an uttered word, focusing specifically on the centripetal and centrifugal forces of language. The centripetal forces of language work towards “verbal and

ideological unification and centralization” (Bakhtin 271). Bakhtin argues that *any* language aiming for unification—such as Aristotelian poetics, the poetics of Augustine, the poetics of the medieval church (271)—or aiming at “linguistic norms” ultimately gives “expression to the same centripetal forces in socio-linguistic and ideological life” (270-71). Centrifugal forces, on the other hand, involve the stratifying, shifting nature of language itself—a nature that continues to shift as long as language remains alive (272). These two forces continuously collide within every utterance and every instance of discourse. For Bakhtin, “Every utterance participates in the ‘unitary language’ (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)” (272). Therefore, as the centrifugal stratifications of language collide with the centripetal forces of “unitary language,” heteroglossia emerges.

In “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin also subsumes the idea of dialogism under his theory of heteroglossia:

Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so and in what degree is what is actually settled at the moment of utterance. (*The Dialogic Imagination* 426)

Bakhtin argues that once words or phrases are uttered, there can be no actual monologue or unitary language because the forces of heteroglossia are too strong and will always overpower any pursuit of a unitary language—hence, dialogism.

Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism changes the approach to the novel because one must examine a dialogical work—or a work that shows the interaction of multiple voices within itself

and echoes alongside the multiplicity of other voices in a specific culture—as it relates to the language outside of the novel itself. Andrew Robinson explains this concept in detail: “A dialogical work constantly engages with and is informed by other works and voices, and seeks to alter or inform it. It draws on the history of past use and meanings associated with each word, phrase or genre. Everything is said in response to other statements and in anticipation of future statements” (“In Theory Bakhtin”). A dialogical work must be analyzed through its place among other utterances—whether that be other novels, the language of news reports, or even the everyday language of discourse. Knowing and understanding the plurality of meanings within dialogical discourse helps the reader critique and understand how an author uses the heteroglossic nature of language to call to mind specific social and cultural constructs.²

In Bakhtin’s exploration of heteroglossia within the novel, the first novelistic type that he discusses is the comic novel, under which Bakhtin places Dickens. Within the comic novel, Bakhtin says, is “an encyclopedia of all strata and forms of literary language,” including courtly language, the language of news reports, business language, the language of scholars, Biblical language, and the speech of a character, among others (301). Above all, Bakhtin argues that authors use “common language,” or the “the average norm of spoken and written language for a given social group” (301), as the primary language within the comic novel.

According to Bakhtin, the author takes the common language as the “common view” and then separates him or herself from it, objectifies it, and forces his or her own intentions through it (302). Bakhtin argues that the author’s relationship with the common view is not static, but constantly oscillating—sometimes distancing him or herself to expose the common language’s inadequacy for description and other times merging with the common view. Bakhtin includes a

² Dialogism within *Bleak House* will specifically bear weight within this thesis in the fourth chapter as Esther is placed *dialogically* alongside the third-person narrator.

few examples from Dickens's *Little Dorrit*. In a description of Mr. Merdle, Bakhtin quotes a passage in which Dickens merges with the common view to then expose the irony of that common view:

It was a dinner to provoke an appetite, though he had not had one. The rarest of dishes, sumptuously cooked and sumptuously served; the choicest of fruits, the most exquisite wines; marvels of workmanship in gold and silver, china and glass; innumerable things delicious to the senses of taste, smell and sight, were insinuated into its composition. *O, what a wonderful man this Merdle, what a great man, what a master man, how blessedly and enviably endowed*—in one word, what a rich man! (qtd. in Bakhtin 304; emphasis Bakhtin's)

Bakhtin points out how “the chorus,” indicated through the italics, represents the common view of Mr. Merdle; however, there are no dialectal markers indicating that these glorifications are the view of another and not of the narrator. The chorus refracts the concealed speech of another, listing glorifying terms such as “wonderful,” “great,” “master,” and “endowed.” The narrator goes on to unmask the view of the author when he reinforces the glorifications of Mr. Merdle through the single word “rich.” This authorial unmasking shows how “rich” has become synonymous with the glorifying words, and this reinforcing of the chorus's view exposes the irony and the hypocrisy of the common view itself (Bakhtin 304).

For Bakhtin, this merging with the common view is central within the comic style. He says that that the speech of another and the authorial speech constantly oscillate:

Another's speech—whether as storytelling, as mimicking, as the display of a thing in light of a particular point of view, as a speech deployed first in compact masses, then loosely scattered, a speech that is in most cases impersonal (‘common opinion,’

professional and generic languages)—is at none of these points clearly separated from authorial speech: the boundaries are deliberately flexible and ambiguous, often passing through a single syntactic whole, often through a simple sentence, and sometimes even dividing up the main parts of a sentence. This varied *play with the boundaries of speech types*, languages and belief systems is one of the most fundamental aspects of comic style. (308)

In the case of the chorus glorifying Mr. Merdle, the flexible boundaries between the two voices of the chorus and the narrator show the oscillation of different voices passing through a single syntactic whole. Within this specific oscillation, the narrator plays with the boundaries of speech to 1) show the belief system regarding the glorifying of the rich man and 2) to show Dickens's ironic exposure of the hypocritical equating of glorification and wealth.

Another subtle example of this interaction with the common view comes through in *Bleak House* in one of Dickens's early descriptions of Mr. Tulkinghorn. In this case, the narrator distances himself from the common view, rather than merging with it: "The old gentleman is rusty to look at, *but is reputed to have made good thrift out of aristocratic marriage settlements and aristocratic wills, and to be very rich*. He is surrounded by a mysterious halo of family confidences; of which *he is known* to be the silent depository" (26; emphasis added). This example particularly shows Dickens's insertion of the "common view" as it can be assumed that Tulkinghorn "is reputed" and "is known" by a specific party; in other words, the "common view" is that Tulkinghorn is known to make good thrifts and he is known to be the silent depository of the Dedlock household.

Bakhtin argues that without these oscillations within the relation to language, the author's style would be monotonous and would not properly represent or interweave heteroglossia within

the novel (302). How an author combines different voices within the novel serves to form his or her own unique style. Bakhtin says, “It is precisely the diversity of speech, and not the unity of a normative shared language, that is the ground of style” (308). Put in a different way, Robinson says that for Bakhtin, the creativity of an author is not in the words he pens—for Bakhtin all words are borrowed—but more precisely, “the originality is in the combination” (“In Theory”). Within the novel, an author uses the ambiguous and flexible boundaries between his or her own voice and the inserted voices to create a unique style and to represent heteroglossia within the novel.

Dickens was a comic master of interweaving different voices in order to expose and critique the injustices within his society. Drawing on the heteroglossic nature of language, Dickens used the plurality of contextual meanings within different words, phrases, and figures of speech to amplify the injustice surrounding the characters and events in *Bleak House*. Dickens’s use of heteroglossia was the crux of his social critique as he exposed the isolation of one class from another within Victorian London.

Mikhail Bakhtin and the Foundation for Ethical Analysis

Since Dickens sought to give a realistic picture of Victorian London, the novel was not concerned with justice as an abstract ideal, but was deeply concerned with the real injustices of London. Dickens’s work as a social novelist often produced great change, and Bakhtin’s earlier work in philosophy helps show how the language of *Bleak House* also connects to the ethical appeal within the novel. In *A Theology of Reading: A Hermeneutics of Love*, Alan Jacobs praises Bakhtin for the way his work often blurs the lines between ethics and hermeneutics. He says Bakhtin’s work almost always applies “equally well to what is usually called ‘ethics’ (involving relations among persons), on the one hand, and what is usually called ‘hermeneutics’ but what

Bakhtin calls ‘aesthetics’ (involving persons’ encounters with texts), on the other. For Bakhtin. . . acts of interpretation are always ethically fraught, whereas ethical questions always assume hermeneutical form” (161-62). As a result, reading *Bleak House* through Bakhtin’s hermeneutical framework crosses into the Bakhtinian ethical appeal of Dickens’s social critique.

Before Bakhtin was a literary critic, he was a young thinker working within the tradition of German philosophy. A fragment remains of Bakhtin’s earliest work, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, in which he discusses the disparity between abstract philosophy and the immediacy of one’s experience. In this work, Bakhtin opposes the Kantian idea of “possible experience” and how Kantian philosophy helps inform judgments made “as if” a particular circumstance might occur. In the foreword to *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Michael Holquist calls this Kantian approach “a philosophically refined, rationally motivated version of the golden rule” (x), building philosophy and ideals around circumstances “as if” they were to occur in a specific way. To oppose abstract “as-ifs,” Bakhtin discusses the nature of the unique self and his or her relationship with the world. While this thesis does not have the space to discuss every aspect of Bakhtin’s framework of the self and of the self in relationship to the other, Bakhtin’s understanding of the nature of responsibility within the self’s immediate existence is pertinent within Dickens’s social critique.

As Bakhtin discusses one’s responsibility in relating to the world, he urges the importance of a “loving contemplation” that “lingers intently” over its object (*Toward a Philosophy of the Act* 64). Bakhtin’s idea of lingering shows an attentiveness that sculpts every detail of its object—whether that object be a culture, a self, or even a text—and this attentiveness is crucial for an observation of the novel and, more broadly, one’s unique life. As Bakhtin promotes attentiveness, he avoids the schematic generalizations of persons or culture,

highlighting, much like he does within his heteroglossic framework for language, the centrifugal forces that influence the self and the culture. In their work on Bakhtin, Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson connect Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia to one's moment-to-moment life. They point out that, for Bakhtin, centrifugal forces are "an essential part of our moment-to-moment lives, and our responses to them record their effect on all our cultural institutions, on language, and on ourselves" (30). The schematizations of texts, selves, or cultures can never be truly realized because "[I]anguage and all of culture are made by tiny and unsystematic alterations (30). Therefore, as these centrifugal forces continue to exist, one's ethical responsibility involves a loving attentiveness that treats each unique moment with the attention it deserves.

Since Bakhtin avoids generalizations about texts, selves, and cultures, wholeness is, as Morson and Emerson would say, "always a matter of work; it is not a gift, but a project," a project of ethical responsibility (30-31). This ethical pursuit, however, can only be fruitful within the frame of a loving attentiveness. In order to understand how one might show this loving attentiveness within a non-schematized world, it is helpful to turn to Bakhtin's proposition of one's "non-alibi" in existence, which he describes in full in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*:

The world in which an act or deed actually proceeds, in which it is actually accomplished, is a unitary and unique world that is experienced concretely: it is a world that is seen, heard, touched, and thought . . . The unitary uniqueness of this world . . . is guaranteed for actuality by the acknowledgment of my unique participation in that world, by my *non-alibi* in it. This acknowledged participation of mine produces a concrete ought—the *ought* to realize the whole uniqueness, as the utterly irreplaceable uniqueness of being, in relation to every constituent moment of this being. (56-57)

For Bakhtin, one's life involves one utterly unique moment after another, and an individual is never excused from the ethical responsibility that each of these concrete moments presents—hence, one's "non-alibi" in existence. Once one has acknowledged his or her non-alibied existence, then he or she can face the concrete ought of showing a loving attentiveness in each given moment. In the same way that context influences utterance through Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia, one's non-alibied existence reveals an ethical responsibility that urges the individual to pursue wholeness and face the ethical responsibility of attentiveness within every moment and every individual act.

One can only achieve true loving contemplation when, within one's non-alibied existence, one recognizes the uniqueness of every individual moment, text, or person. Otherwise, one will fall victim to what Bakhtin calls lovelessness or indifference, which eventually "impoverishes and decomposes its object: it seeks to pass over the object in all its manifoldness, to ignore it" (*Toward a Philosophy* 64). Instead of indifference, Bakhtin proposes a loving attention that accepts the responsibility of a non-alibied existence and thus lingers intently: "The valued manifoldness of Being as human (as correlated with the human being) can present itself only to a loving contemplation. . . Lovelessness, indifference, will never be able to generate sufficient power to slow down and *linger intently* over an object, to hold and sculpt every detail and particular in it, however minute" (*Toward a Philosophy of the Act* 64). Lovelessness and indifference will cause the individual to drift into schematized generalizations of objects—or of texts, individuals, and cultures—creating a posture that does not lead to any fruitful pursuit of wholeness. One must realize the nature of one's non-alibied existence and face the responsibility of an attentiveness that lies within recognizing the uniqueness of every moment.

When one recognizes this responsibility of love within one's non-alibied existence, he or she can then render an approach to the novel that is fruitful for a pursuit of wholeness in life. Drawing on Bakhtin, Jacobs says that "loving attention always recognizes the 'manifoldness'—that is, the irreducibly complex wholeness of a work (or a person, or an event)" (53). He says that failing to recognize the wholeness of a work is ultimately a failure of ethical responsibility (Jacobs 54). While a responsible, or loving, approach to a work of art, or a novel, ultimately leads to a loving contemplation that "keeps centrifugal and centripetal forces in balance with one another" (Jacobs 54)

Within *Bleak House*, Dickens used the heteroglossic nature of language to show his readers that their lives did not function within a vacuum isolated from other individuals or groups. Dickens lingered intently over London and its injustices and thus showed a loving attention to the city he inhabited. Dickens's act of love within *Bleak House* was one of simply paying attention to the ailments of his society. In so doing, Dickens exposed the ignorant lovelessness of London society and called attention to the injustices therein. Through his use of heteroglossia, Dickens showed that instead of seeking a better, more just London, individuals ignored the state of their civilization, embodying the indifference that Bakhtin argues will inevitably lead to decomposition. In this case, the object being ignored was low-class London, or more broadly, the state of justice in London. The people of London failed to linger intently on their surroundings, failed to show attention to those in need, and ultimately failed to love well. Dickens, however, used the heteroglossic nature of language within *Bleak House* to show the Londoners' failure to love, not letting readers continue in their ignorance; instead, he lingered over the class disparity and showed readers what they willingly ignored.

As Dickens acts within his own "non-alibi" in being, he used the heteroglossic nature of

language to attentively linger over London in such a way that he showed the disparity between social classes—specifically, the disparity in wealth and the disparity of the high attention shown to the upper class with little consideration of the lower class. In exposing the unjust gap between social classes, Dickens forced his readers to face their own non-alibi in being. While his readers were not necessarily thinking within this philosophical framework, Dickens's ability to bring readers into a fictional London—one not much different than the unjust, real-life London—empowered his work to expose injustice and promote change. In other words, Dickens's love within his own non-alibied existence begot other acts of love that were capable of producing change within London.

The analysis of language in *Bleak House*—specifically dealing with the third person narrators' utterances regarding the settings within London, Lady Dedlock, and Jo—will show how Dickens's organization of heteroglossia exposes and critiques injustice, revealing to his readers their loveless indifference. The heteroglossic utterances both surrounding these characters and the utterances spoken by these characters reveal the unjust isolation of the upper and lower classes. Alongside the heteroglossic utterances of the third-person narrator, Esther also serves to critique injustice. Through Esther's dialogic function beside the third-person narrator, she exemplifies an attentive narrator that loves the classes that have previously been isolated from each other, showing the responsible, loving attention that Dickens achieves through his own work.

Chapter One: An “Over-Sleeping” Society: Dickens’s Heteroglossic Characterization of Victorian Neglect

The Third-Person Narrator and Hybrid Constructions

As noted in the introduction, *Bleak House* is unusual in that Dickens presents the plot through two narrators. The third-person narrator seems to hold an omniscient position, narrating the events throughout half of the novel. However, the narrator is a bit more complex than one with a panoramic view that might imply omniscience. Graham Smith has suggested that the third-person narrator acts as a character, adding another voice to this many-voiced work. To support the view that the narrator acts as his own character, Smith highlights the narrator’s comedic flexibility between “a high level of generality and little flashes of intimate detail” (10). He argues that the third-person narrator “is very much a presence in his own right” (10), describing the character as “urbane, witty, cultured, in short, a man of the world, but a man of the world whose poise never degenerates into cynicism” (12-13). Most of the heteroglossic utterances in the novel that reveal and critique injustice are uttered through this narrator.³

The third-person narrator acting as a separate character is typical within a heteroglossic work. Bakhtin argues that in such a novel, the author inserts his or her point of view—through the speech, the language, and the story—alongside the view of the narrator. The reader’s job involves parsing, as it were, the characterization of the narrator while still understanding the story being told by the author. According to Bakhtin, “We puzzle out the author's emphases that overlie the subject of the story, while we puzzle out the story itself and the figure of the narrator as he is revealed in the process of telling his tale. If one fails to sense this second level, the intentions and accents of the author himself, then one has failed to understand the work”

³ Esther’s narrator will be discussed more at length in Chapter Four.

(“Discourse in the Novel” 314). In order to understand *Bleak House* well, it is important to note the heteroglossic utterances that reflect the “intentions and accents” of Dickens himself while also understanding the function of the third-person narrator as his own character.

According to Bakhtin, comic novels introduce and represent all levels of literary language. Bakhtin notes that “[t]he so-called comic novel makes available a form for appropriating and organizing heteroglossia that is both externally very vivid and at the same time historically profound. . . . In the English comic novel we find a comic-parodic re-processing of almost all the levels of literary language, both conversational and written, that were current at the time” (301). One of the most common ways of interweaving heteroglossia within the comic novel is that of “hybrid constructions,” or “double voicing.” Hybrid constructions happen when the author simultaneously refracts multiple voices through a single consciousness—most often, through a narrator. Bakhtin says that a hybrid construction is “an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems” (304). In *Bleak House*, Dickens implements hybrid constructions to critique the state of justice in London. As Dickens describes the settings of his fictional London, he, at times, refracts different voices within the consciousness of the third-person narrator, and at other times, he simply inserts biblical and literary language to expose the injustices within Victorian society.⁴

The Neglectful Injustice of the Court of Chancery and the Upper Class

Dickens begins *Bleak House* by describing the setting of his fictional London, so it makes sense to start the analysis of his language by examining his use of heteroglossia within these

⁴ It is important to note that any time an extratextual voice is introduced, it is introduced by Dickens, not the narrator. While the narrator is the one telling the story, Dickens is the one introducing extratextual voices.

descriptions. The first chapter, “In Chancery,” opens through the lens of the third-person narrator uttering one single word: “London” (17). In opening with this single word, the narrator begins the story by describing the setting of London, and the second full sentence of *Bleak House* immediately introduces a biblical voice to set the stage for the state of justice in London: “Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth” (17). Contextually, muddy streets were a problem in Victorian London. F. S. Schwarzbach says that “[t]he mud of mid-century London was . . . quite different from the harmless messy stuff children today make into pies” (124). Instead Victorian mud was compiled of soot, ashes, street litter, the fecal matter of horses, and sewage overflow (Schwarzbach 124). However, instead of merely describing the mud of the streets, Dickens introduces a biblical voice through the narrator to leverage a subtle critique regarding the primitive state of justice within Victorian society.

In the phrase “but newly retired from the face of the earth,” Dickens introduces a biblical voice that describes the flood in the book of Genesis: “After the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated” (Gen. 8:3). Through Dickens’s insertion of this biblical voice, connotations of the biblical flood inform the description of the mud in London in such a way that it shows the primitive nature of the city. The overarching narrative of the biblical passage includes the fact that the flood was caused by the Old Testament God to enforce judgment on people characterized by “only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Including the voice from Genesis that describes the ancient biblical flood pulls the connotations of the extratextual biblical voice into the context of *Bleak House*, characterizing London as a place where evil abounded while justice suffered. Paul Schlicke says that the early description of London shows “a vision of active uncreation, with London reverting to a primeval, inchoate mass of fog and mud” (49). Therefore,

as *Bleak House* begins, the work immediately introduces the heteroglossic voicing of the Bible in such a way that Dickens—not yet leveraging any *specific* critiques of injustice—prepares the reader for a Victorian London that is not well.

As the third-person narrator describes a sick London, he begins moving into one of the causes of such sickness: The Court of Chancery. David Sugarman highlights that the Court of Chancery dealt with “the adjudication of wide-ranging disputes over land-ownership, inheritance, trusts, debts, and business transactions, with its own distinctive procedures and remedies” (70). In *Bleak House*, Dickens focuses on the injustices surrounding the court, and as the narrator describes Chancery in this opening chapter, he begins to show the court’s insufficiencies:

On such an afternoon, some score of members of the High Court of Chancery bar ought to be—as here they are—mistily engaged in one of the ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities, running their goat-hair and horse hair warded heads against walls of words, and making a pretence of equity with serious faces, as players might. (18)

In the narrator’s description of Chancery, he uses language that seems out of place for a court setting, which serves to reveal the refraction of another voice within the narrator’s description. In his article on Bakhtin’s double voicing, Wendell Harris points out that another voice might be refracted through a narrator through what “H. P. Grice calls violation of the Cooperative Principle” (454)—or the linguistic understandings and acceptance of how one speaks in certain spaces, such as a court. When a narrator violates the Cooperative Principle, “Single words clash with the context in which they are used as that context is informed by knowledge and values external to the text” (Harris 454).

In the case of the Court of Chancery, Dickens's third-person narrator violates the linguistic Cooperative Principle by introducing phrases that do not fit within the external knowledge and values of a court context. For instance, phrases like "mistily engaged," an "endless cause," and "tripping" on "slippery precedents" do not fit the extratextual or cultural understanding of the court's duty to uncover and enforce a *concrete* justice. They all imply that the Court is dysfunctional and engaged in cases that have no end or are, at best, misty or slippery. According to Harris, "The momentary incongruity is resolved by attributing these word choices to another voice" (454). Therefore, within the Court of Chancery, the incongruous phrases actually refract the voice of another, showing Dickens's critique of the Court's failure to enforce the justice that it is responsible for achieving.

As the third-person narrator continues in his description of the Court of Chancery, Dickens introduces the voice of a Greek proverb to provide a more explicit critique of the Court:

On such an afternoon, the various solicitors in the cause, some two or three of whom have inherited it from their fathers, who made a fortune by it, ought to be—as are they not?—ranged in a line, *in a long matted well (but you might look in vain for Truth at the bottom of it)*, between the registrar's red table and the silk gowns. (18; emphasis added)

Tatiana Holway highlights that the well was an area reserved specifically for counsel within the court (826). Dickens, however, points to the insufficiency of this place of counsel by introducing the voice of a Greek proverb through the narrator. According to Holway, the proverb says, "Of truth we know nothing, for truth is in a well" (826).

The understanding of truth being "at the bottom" comes from the Greek philosopher, Democritus, who believed that truth was not easily attainable or evident to humankind. According to Nikolaos Bakalis, Democritus deemed truth as nearly unattainable because of the

subjective nature of every man's individual senses. Truth could only be grasped by means of the intellect (Bakalis 85). Within the court, however, the "truth," or the verdicts of specific cases, should not be "impossible," but instead, verdicts should be realized by a rightly functioning court. Through the third-person narrator, Dickens subverts the proverb to show the insufficiencies of the Court of Chancery and its solicitors. As they drown in "bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, mountains of costly nonsense, piled before them" (18), Dickens introduces the voice of the proverb to show that there seems to be no sufficient end to all their work—no truth at the bottom. The Court of Chancery, much like London as a whole, has fell into disarray and now fails to actually fulfill the duty of finding the truth at the bottom of each court case.

After Dickens introduces the voice of the Greek proverb to expose the dysfunction of the Court and its duties, the narrator continues in the description of Chancery. So far in the narrator's descriptions, Dickens has used the extratextual voices to show the primeval nature of London and the dysfunctional court that serves to proliferate London's sickness. However, as the description continues, Dickens inserts the literary voice of a Wordsworth poem in order to show the ultimately destructive nature of Chancery itself:

This is the Court of Chancery; which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn out-lunatic in every madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor, with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance; which gives to monied might, the means abundantly of wearying out the right; which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope; *so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart.* (19; emphasis added)

This passage begins with the infectious nature of Chancery, which has its tie to every person in such a way that it exhausts finances and virtues. At the end of the passage, Dickens inserts a Wordsworthian voice—"so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart"—connected to the poem "Michael."

In the same way that the biblical passage associated London at large with the evil men prior to the flood, the Wordsworthian voice introduces this heteroglossic utterance to associate the Court of Chancery with the debauchery of the son in the poem, "Michael." In the poem, Luke, the son of Michael and Isabel, has to leave the family in order to help pay a debt incurred by his father. After he leaves, however, the poem says, "Luke began / to slacken in his duty; and, at length, / He in the dissolute city gave himself / To evil courses: ignominy and shame / Fell on him, so that he was driven at last / To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas" (Wordsworth 62). Michael grieves over his son's evil, but the poem offers solace in the strength of Michael's fatherly love. Wordsworth says, "There is a comfort in the strength of love; / 'Twill make a thing enduring, which else / Would overset the brain, or break the heart" (62). In the narrator's description of Chancery, Dickens includes the Wordsworthian voice associated with an oversetting brain and a breaking heart, but he does not include any mention of the comfort or solace found in love. The Court simply causes distress and turmoil.

The introduction of the Wordsworthian voice associates the Court of Chancery with the evil ways of Luke. Instead of offering comfort through love as the poem does, Dickens inserts the Wordsworthian voice, leaving the results of evil without the comfort of love. In so doing, he takes the critique of Chancery a step further than the previous heteroglossic utterance, which exposed Chancery's general incompetence. In the heteroglossic introduction of the Wordsworthian voice, the destructive nature of the infectious court is clear, oversetting brains

and breaking hearts instead of seeking the justice it is supposed to embody.

Through the extratextual voices so far introduced by Dickens, there are certainly various centrifugal elements at play, as each voice could be interpreted differently within each text's respective contexts. However, each of these voices are pulled into the centripetal context of *Bleak House*, revealing meanings that ultimately serve to show the primeval state of London and the dysfunction of the Court of Chancery. The connotations of the biblical flood show the lack of progression in justice since the ancient days of Genesis, the violation of the Cooperative Principle shows the refraction of another voice exposing the dysfunction of the Court, the Greek proverb reveals the inability of the court to see cases to their ends, and the Wordsworthian voice shows the Court's ultimately destructive nature. As these voices interweave through the third-person narrator, the heteroglossic nature of Dickens's descriptions of place emerges and he leverages a critique towards Victorian London about the dysfunctions that have proliferated throughout the society.

As "In Chancery" wraps up, the chapter, "In Fashion," begins with the narrator's description of the world of fashionable society, or upper class, wealthy London. In the opening of the second chapter, the narrator draws a distinct parallel between the Court of Chancery and fashionable society, and since this study is primarily concerned with the disparity between the upper and lower classes, the parallel between the Court and the upper class is pertinent: "It is but a glimpse of the world of fashion that we want on this same miry afternoon. It is not so unlike the Court of Chancery, but that we may pass from the one scene to the other, as the crow flies. Both the world of fashion and the Court of Chancery are things of precedent and usage" (23). In these opening lines of "In Fashion," Dickens subtly illustrates the closeness of the two societies—both subsumed under the sick whole of London—through the image of a crow flying

from one scene to the other, stating that the two places are not so unlike each other.

In the phrase immediately following the parallel, Dickens inserts the literary voice of Washington Irving to show the common vice that the two societies have fallen victim to. So far, through the use of heteroglossia, Dickens has exposed the dysfunction within the Court of Chancery, but has yet to truly show or critique any specific vice of the society. However, as the narrator moves forward, Dickens inserts the next literary voice to critique how the society's ignorance has ultimately led to London's lack of well-being. He says that the Court and the fashionable society are both "over-sleeping Rip Van Winkles, who have played at strange games through a deal of thundery weather" (23). Through this literary insertion, Dickens ties both the Court of Chancery and fashionable society to Rip's "over-sleeping." Within Irving's story, "the great error in Rip's composition was an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor" (6). He was quick to help others, but did not work to help himself or tend his own household: "In a word, Rip was ready to attend anybody's business but his own; but as to doing family duty, and keeping his farm in order, he found it impossible" (6).

Eventually, Rip retreats from his home to find respite in the woods, and he encounters a stranger who leads him to the top of the mountain where he enjoys some liquor among a strange group of men, all with beards and grave faces, playing a thunderous game of ninepins. After enjoying the liquor, he falls asleep, but when he wakes up, twenty years have passed, and Rip has missed the growing of his village and the growing up of his children. Irving's story has often been seen as a satirical take on the American Revolution. However, as Dickens inserts this literary voice into the centripetal context of *Bleak House*, the specific context of this heteroglossic utterance produces a different and specific critique within the novel. Dickens ties both the Court and fashionable society to Rip's negligent "over-sleeping." Through the intrusion

of Irving's literary voice within *Bleak House*, Dickens draws on the neglectful character of Rip and his twenty-year slumber. Much like Rip, the Court of Chancery and fashionable society were neglectful of the justice of their society, leading to societal dysfunction and sickness. Instead of serving London well, the Court and fashionable society have fallen into a state of "over-sleeping," and their negligence in *Bleak House* shows how Victorian society has ultimately fallen "asleep" to the greater needs of London.

Within the first several pages of *Bleak House*, Dickens, as Bakhtin would say, reflects the state of his "social atmosphere":

The novelistic word . . . registers with extreme subtlety the tiniest shifts and oscillations of the social atmosphere. . . The social and historical voices populating language, all its words and all its forms, which provide language with its particular concrete conceptualizations, are organized in the novel into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch. ("Discourse in the Novel" 300)

Through the use of the biblical voice, the refraction of a voice within the violation of the Cooperative Principle, and the literary voices of Wordsworth and Irving, Dickens inserted his own critique of the dysfunctional *negligence* of the Court and the Victorian upper class. As the opening voices describe a London that is not well, Dickens eventually shows that London's sickness comes back to the fact that the Court and the fashionable society were ultimately "asleep" to the greater needs of London, exhibiting the lovelessness and indifference that Bakhtin says "impoverishes and decomposes its object" (*Toward a Philosophy of the Act* 64). In their over-sleeping, they failed to show a loving attentiveness, ultimately contributing to the primitive "uncreation" of London.

The Neglected Slums: Tom-all-Alone's

Dickens's interweaving of heteroglossia serves to expose the lovelessness and indifference of the upper class, but he also introduces other multi-voiced utterances in order to show more specifically what the upper class was neglecting: the London slums. According to Graham Storey, Dickens thought that slum reform took precedent above all other reforms (7). In *Bleak House*, Tom-all-Alone's is a slum riddled with filth, homelessness, and disease.⁵ For instance, in one of the earliest descriptions of the slum, the narrator speaks of Jo, the crossing sweeper, and he says that "Jo lives—that is to say, Jo has not yet died—in a ruinous place" (220). The ruinous place is Tom-all-Alone's, a slum where death is inevitable.

Later in the novel, the narrator speaks of Tom-all-Alone's as if the place represents its own person, referencing the place simply as "Tom." In speaking about Tom, Dickens's third-person narrator shifts to a parodic stylization of parliamentary eloquence. Parodic stylization, Bakhtin says, is often one of the first forms represented in the comic novel ("Discourse in the Novel" 301). Within the parodic stylization, the narrator mentions all the institutions that could make Tom right:

Much mighty speech-making there has been, both in and out of Parliament, concerning Tom, and much wrathful disputation how Tom shall be got right. Whether he shall be put into the main road by constables, or by beadles, or by bell-ringing, or by force of figures, or by correct principles of taste, or by high church, or by low church, or by no church; whether he shall be set to splitting trusses of polemical straws with the crooked knife of his mind, or whether he shall be put to stone-breaking instead. In the midst of which dust and noise, there is but one thing perfectly clear, to wit, that Tom only may and can, or

⁵ Marina MacKay points out that all of Dickens's early titles for the work referenced Tom-all-Alone's (115).

shall and will, be reclaimed according to somebody's theory but nobody's practice. (590)

Against the backdrop of parliamentary eloquence, the narrator parodically establishes all the theories or systems that might enact positive change in Tom's neglected condition. However, Bakhtin points out that these "parodic stylizations" are "sometimes interrupted by the direct authorial word" (302), and within the comic novel, the direct authorial word is often inserted through "stylizations of rhetorical genres," including the moral-didactic (302). Within moral-didacticism, the author directly inserts his or her own voice to teach the audience. In the specific case of "Tom," the direct authorial word is inserted through a moral-didactic critique that seems to reflect the view of Dickens himself—a view indicating that while people may discuss or *theorize* the potentials for change in Tom's condition, these theories are useless without any individual *action*.

Through the direct authorial word of his own moral-didacticism, Dickens critiqued Victorian society's over-reliance on cultural schematizations to accomplish the work of societal reform. The culture's sheer dependency on the schematizations of "constables," "beadles," "correct principles of taste," "high church," "low church," or "no church" ultimately failed to recognize the non-alibied existence—Bakhtin's term for the individual responsibility of each unique person in each given moment—of the individual. As the individuals in London relied too heavily on generalized theories or schematizations of different groups, London continued in its neglect of the lower class and thus failed to face the responsibility of true societal reform.

After the narrator swings to Dickens's moral-didactic voice to show how theories without action ultimately result in further neglect, he returns to speaking of "Tom." He speaks of Tom's "vengeance," inserting a biblical voice to reflect the eventual outcome of Victorian society's neglect.

He has his revenge. . . There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. . . There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not the obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high. *Verily*, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, *Tom has his revenge*. (590; emphasis added)

The last line of this passage inserts and reinterprets a biblical voice from Matthew 6. In the biblical passage, Jesus warns against the pious practices of the religious leaders, specifically against their actions done only for the praise of men: "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward" (Matt. 6:16). The religious leaders in this passage are working to be *seen* by men. In *Bleak House*, however, Dickens inserts the biblical voice in order to reflect the "vengeance" of those that go *unseen*.

Dickens reinterprets the insertion of the biblical voice in the sense that Tom enacts vengeance instead of receiving a "reward." However, Tom's vengeance is not malevolent in nature. In the biblical voice, Jesus refers to the "reward" that the religious leaders' piety has *already* afforded them. In the same way, Tom inevitably has his vengeance. Tom has been neglected by society, and eventually, as seen through the overarching narrative of *Bleak House*, Tom's "vengeance" spreads through society in the form of Jo's disease—specifically as the disease spreads to Esther. Storey aptly notes that "disease is no respecter of class" (7), and the vengeful disease that spreads out of Tom-All-Alone's is due to the fictional London's neglect of Tom.

Within *Bleak House*, the fictional London neglects part of its own body, and that part of the body grows sick and spreads to the rest of the city. As the disease spreads, Dickens literally shows what Bakhtin argues is the decomposing nature of lovelessness and indifference. He also showed that the Court's dysfunction and the upper class neglect did not exist in isolation from the rest of society, but instead, the dysfunction and negligence had a direct effect on the well-being of London as a whole. He opens the novel by showing a London that is sick, and ultimately, this sickness directly correlates to the negligence by the Court and the upper class of the London slums. As Dickens exhibits his own attentiveness to the dysfunctions of London, he pushes his readers to attentively and responsibly turn from their negligence and love their city well.

Chapter Two – The Fashionable Intelligence: Lady Dedlock’s Heteroglossic Representation of the Upper Class

Through his use of language, Dickens builds on the isolation of social classes seen in his descriptions of a fictional London by also inserting various extratextual voices in his characterization of Lady Dedlock and the upper class. A close examination of Lady Dedlock and the upper class will provide a “top-down” approach to Dickens’s use of language as Chapter Three will examine Dickens’s use of language regarding Jo and the lower class. As Dickens inserts various voices in the third-person narrator’s descriptions of Lady Dedlock, he continues to show the upper class’s negligence within Victorian society. Through the insertions of a continually present journalistic voice, biblical voices, literary voices, and the refraction of the “common voice,” Dickens exposes the isolation and the unjust privileging of the upper class. He shows their elitism and lack of hospitality, and he shows how the upper class is virtually worshipped by the other classes. Through the injustice born out of their privilege, the upper class becomes isolated from the rest of society, and instead of using their resources in a hospitable way for the betterment of Victorian London, the upper class idly remains in their isolation.

The Upper Class According to The Fashionable Intelligence

The second chapter of *Bleak House*, “In Fashion,” gives the novel’s first look at the upper class, or fashionable society. Since the chapter primarily deals with the nobility present within the Dedlock family, relating the family and its class to what is “in fashion” shows Victorian society’s tendency to follow and even ascribe worthiness to the high-class way of life. Within “In Fashion,” the “fashionable intelligence” announces Lady Dedlock’s actions. The narrator says, “My Lady Dedlock has returned to her house in town for a few days previous to her departure for Paris, where her ladyship intends to stay some weeks; after which her movements are uncertain.

The fashionable intelligence says so, for the comfort of the Parisians, and it knows all fashionable things” (24; emphasis added). The “fashionable intelligence” was also the name for a real-life newspaper column within Victorian London that described society news (Dickens 24). Dickens draws on this “reporterly” language to give a heteroglossic utterance regarding the way society follows the upper class. This heteroglossic introduction of the fashionable intelligence’s journalistic voice gives an initial look into society’s obsession with Lady Dedlock’s actions.

Following the initial report, the heteroglossic voice of the fashionable intelligence continues to follow Lady Dedlock throughout the novel. The next appearance of this journalistic voice appears on the next page when the narrator says, “Wealth and station, added to these, soon floated her upward; and for years, now, my Lady Dedlock has been at the centre of the fashionable intelligence, and at the top of the fashionable tree” (25). This report not only shows the continual presence of the fashionable intelligence, but it also shows that Lady Dedlock finds herself atop the upper class, making her a fit subject for review within society, as she acts as the head that characterizes the status and actions of her entire class.

Throughout the entirety of *Bleak House*, the heteroglossic voice of the fashionable intelligence continually emerges through the third-person narrator. Often, the voice is subtle, but it remains consistently present at Lady Dedlock’s side: “My Lady Dedlock is restless, very restless. The astonished fashionable intelligence hardly knows where to have her” (219). At other points, the fashionable intelligence is confused by Lady Dedlock’s actions: “She has flitted away to town, with no intention of remaining there, and will soon flit hither again to the confusion of the fashionable intelligence” (220). Yet mostly, the journalistic voice merely reports her actions: “the fashionable intelligence proclaims one morning to the listening earth, that Lady Dedlock is expected shortly to return to town for a few weeks” (376). The voice functions as if a journalist

were following Lady Dedlock's every move, showing that the presence of the fashionable intelligence presents a heteroglossic voice that shows a constant attention given to upper class movements.

As the fashionable intelligence follows Lady Dedlock, Dickens begins to include other voices alongside this journalistic voice. As Bakhtin points out, "In the English comic novel we find a comic-parodic re-processing of almost all the levels of literary language, both conversational and written, that were current at the time" (301). While most of the utterances involving the fashionable intelligence are simple and straightforward, many utterances include the fashionable intelligence alongside other heteroglossic voices. For instance, not long after the first mention of the fashionable intelligence, the journalistic voice appears in the same sentence as a literary utterance that includes a Shakespearean voice, adding an entirely new connotation to this opening phrase: "*With all the perfections on her head*, my Lady Dedlock has come up from her place in Lincolnshire (hotly pursued by the *fashionable intelligence*), to pass a few days at her house in town previous to her departure for Paris, where her ladyship intends to stay some weeks, after which her movements are uncertain" (emphasis added; 26).

Through the opening phrase, "with all the perfections on her head," Dickens alters a quote from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. As the ghost of Hamlet's father describes the moment of his murder, he says, "No reckoning made, but sent to my account / with all my imperfections on my head (*Ham.* 1.5.78-79). In the ghost's case, his "imperfections" indicate that he had no opportunity to repent of his sins or pay penance before his death. Dickens, however, alters the phrase to reference the "perfections" on Lady Dedlock's head. Dickens characterizes Lady Dedlock through the fashionable intelligence in a way that satirically represents the "perfections" of the upper class. In Lady Dedlock's case, she has no need for repentance because the voice of

the fashionable intelligence has deemed Lady Dedlock perfect. If she is indeed perfect, then she does not need to repent in the same way as every other individual in Victorian London.

Therefore, the Shakespearean voice alongside the constantly present fashionable intelligence serves to elevate Lady Dedlock above the rest of society, nearly deifying her and the upper class.

The next utterance including the fashionable intelligence is littered with voices that continue to build on the Victorian elevation of the upper class. The passage remarks on the hospitable care of Mrs. Rouncewell as she awaits the Dedlock's return from Paris:

Mrs. Rouncewell is full of hospitable cares, for Sir Leicester and my Lady are coming home from Paris. The fashionable intelligence has found it out, and communicates the glad tidings to benighted England. It has also found out that they will entertain a brilliant and distinguished circle of the *élite* of the *beau monde* (the fashionable intelligence is weak in English, but a giant refreshed in French), at the ancient hospitable family seat in Lincolnshire. (157)

This multi-voiced passage opens with the fashionable intelligence informing “benighted England” of the Dedlock's return. As this journalistic voice continues to follow the Dedlock family, the third-person narrator—through the lens and, presumably, the voice of the fashionable intelligence—describes the rest of England as intellectually and morally bankrupt.

The second voice inserted in this passage builds on this idea of intellectual authority as the passage literally includes the French language within the narrator's voice—though, the inclusion of the French is still expressed through the fashionable intelligence. This small aside indicates the pompous elitism and education surrounding the upper class. For instance, as the text itself notes, Dickens includes the French here merely because the fashionable intelligence considers the language more beautiful than the English version, “distinguished circle of the *élite*

of the *beautiful world*.” The French adds a more fashionable quality, revealing the higher level of education not associated with “benighted England” but only with the upper class.⁶ In this case, the insertion of the French language shows the subtle injustice in the elitism of the upper class. The voice of the fashionable intelligence flaunts the upper class education in the face of “benighted England,” which ultimately serves to isolate the educated from the uneducated.

Along with the inclusion of the French in the narrator’s description of the Dedlock’s return, there is also what Bakhtin calls a “hybrid construction,” or “double voicing,” in the two meanings of the word “hospitable.” As noted in Chapter One, hybrid constructions happen when the author simultaneously refracts multiple voices through a single consciousness—most often, through a narrator. Bakhtin says that it is “an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two ‘languages,’ two semantic and axiological belief systems” (304). In this passage, Dickens refracts two different voices through his use of the word “hospitable.” The first use of “hospitable” references the genuine hospitality of Mrs. Rouncewell as she awaits the Dedlock’s return. The second use of “hospitable,” however, does not refer to a genuine hospitality; instead, this hospitality refers to the “ancient” hospitality of the Dedlock family and all the *lack* of hospitality that the household has shown to the rest of Victorian London. While the lower classes struggle to financially support themselves—some even struggling to find homes—the Dedlocks’ failure to use their resources hospitably only allows the injustice of fiscal class disparity to continue.

After the Bakhtinian hybrid construction reveals the Dedlocks’ lack of hospitality, Dickens introduces a biblical voice through the narrator to show the darker side of the

⁶ Education will be unpacked more fully during the analysis of Jo, the street sweeper

fashionable intelligence's continuous concern with the upper class. The narrator speaks of the mirrors at Chesney Wold as if they keep the reflections of all who have passed through the mansion:

All the mirrors in the house are brought into action now: many of them after a long blank. They reflect handsome faces, simpering faces, youthful faces, faces of threescore-and-ten that will not submit to be old; the entire collection of faces that have come to pass a January week or two at Chesney Wold, and which *the fashionable intelligence, a mighty hunter before the Lord*, hunts with a keen scent. (emphasis added; 163)

Following the description of the mirrors, Dickens describes the fashionable intelligence as “a mighty hunter before the Lord,” introducing a biblical voice that compares the journalistic presence to Nimrod from Genesis 10:9. In the biblical passage, Nimrod is a part of the generations of the sons of Noah, and is, word for word, described as a “mighty hunter before the Lord” (*King James Version*, Gen. 10:9). It is important to note that the genealogy in Genesis includes more about Nimrod than any of the other members of the generations of the sons of Noah. Within the extra details surrounding this biblical character, *The Moody Bible Commentary* notes that he was the first individual in Scripture to whom a kingdom was attributed (65). He is also noted as the leader of a rebellion against Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. This implied rebellion is strengthened by the meaning of his name—“we will rebel”—and by the following verse: “And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel” (Gen. 10:10). This appearance of “Babel” is the first mention of this place in Scripture, and the location is later associated with the land of Israel's enemies and Israel's eventual exile—the Hebrew word for Babel is the same for Babylon elsewhere, and Israel was eventually exiled to Babylon as a judgment from God (*Moody Bible Commentary* 65).

Not only is Nimrod associated with a rebellion against God, but his description as “mighty” connects to the same “mighty,” yet corrupt, men of Genesis 6:4. Therefore, “mighty” implies a negative connotation within this Scriptural reference, and *The Moody Bible Commentary* affirms this view, as it has been consistently recognized by traditional Jewish and early Christian sources (65). The term “mighty” (*gibbor*) connects to men with proven killing abilities (such as Goliath in 1 Sam 17:51) who were even killing members of their own family (66). Therefore, Dickens’s introduction of the biblical voice in this case provides the reader with a quick, yet potent, use of heteroglossia as the heteroglossic nature of language exposes the injustice of the “mighty” fashionable intelligence. With Dickens’s reference to Nimrod, he establishes completely new connotations introduced through the biblical voice. Dickens reveals the unreliability of a voice now re-colored through a biblical character associated with rebellion, destruction, and depravity. While the fashionable intelligence serves to report the comings and goings of Lady Dedlock, Dickens’s heteroglossic introduction of the biblical voice shows the unreliability of the voice itself.

The journalistic voice of the “fashionable intelligence” never leaves Lady Dedlock’s side, and through the nearly obsessive following, Dickens begins to show the injustice surrounding the upper class. The fashionable intelligence views Lady Dedlock as “perfect,” nearly deifying her as she sits atop the upper class. Later, Dickens inserts the French to show the elitism of the upper class as they stand above “benighted England,” and in the same way, the Bakhtinian hybrid construction shows the inhospitable exclusivity of the Dedlock household. Much like the descriptions seen in Chapter One of this study, these different voices certainly have their own centrifugal interpretations within each text’s specific context. However, as each of these voices are interwoven within the third-person narrator, the centripetal forces of *Bleak House*’s context

produce a common thread within each of these injustices as the upper class *isolates* itself from the rest of Victorian society. Through the “perfections,” the elitism, and the exclusivity, the upper class remains in an idle isolation as much of Victorian London struggles. Through their isolation, Dickens associates the voice of the fashionable intelligence directly with rebellion and corruption through his insertion of the biblical voice, ultimately exposing how the journalistic privileging of the upper class mirrors a state of rebellious depravity.

The Upper Class According to the “Common View”

As discussed in the introduction, the novelist introduces the “common language,” or “the average norm of spoken and written language for a given social group” (301), within his or her own view, constantly oscillating between the two. According to Bakhtin, “every extra-artistic prose discourse—in any of its forms, quotidian, rhetorical, scholarly—cannot fail to be oriented toward the 'already uttered,' the 'already known,' the 'common opinion' and so forth” (279). Therefore, when Dickens introduces the common view through the common language, he is drawing from the “already known” views of common society. Bakhtin says that “[t]his 'common language'. . . is taken by the author precisely as the *common view*, as the verbal approach to people and things normal for a given sphere of society, as the *going point of view* and the *going value*” (301).

Dickens often introduces the common view through the narrator’s voice—as seen in the Tulkinghorn example from the introduction when the common view was refracted through phrases that said Tulkinghorn “is reputed” to make good of marriage settlements or “is reputed” to be wealthy, revealing that the “common view” is the voice reputing these traits about him. However, Dickens does not only introduce the common view through the narrator; he also introduces it through the common language of his characters. In *Bleak House*, Dickens includes

the common view through the Dedlock's maid, Mrs. Rouncewell, to show how the lower classes often unjustly privilege the upper class. Introducing the common view through the voice of Mrs. Rouncewell expands the heteroglossic characterization of the Dedlock's in a way that adds a new perspective to the general society's view of the upper class.

Instead of the upper class being followed by the journalistic voice of the fashionable intelligence, Dickens expands the voice of the heteroglossic narrator by characterizing the upper class through the common voice of Mrs. Rouncewell. When Mrs. Rouncewell tells the story of the Ghost Walk, she considers the Ghost—what most might consider a “universal” phenomena—a privilege that only the high class deserves. The narrator says, “Mrs. Rouncewell holds this opinion, because she considers that a family of such antiquity and importance has a right to a ghost. She regards a ghost as one of the privileges of the upper classes; a genteel distinction to which the common people have no claim” (100). The voice of Mrs. Rouncewell shows that the “common view” of the lower class considers something as universal as a ghost as a privilege merited only to those of high distinction.

Mrs. Rouncewell continues to voice the common view when she dialogues with her grandson, Watt, justifying the Dedlock's pride. Within the dialogue, Dickens adds another voice to the two-person dialogue as Watt questions the Dedlock's pride through the voice of *The Book of Common Prayer*. Speaking of Lady Dedlock, Watt says,

"I beg your pardon, grandmother. But she *is* proud, is she not?"

"If she is, she has reason to be. The Dedlock family have always reason to be."

"Well!" says Watt, "it's to be hoped they line out of their Prayer-Books a certain passage for the common people about pride and vainglory. Forgive me, grandmother! Only a joke!"

"Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, my dear, are not fit subjects for joking." (162)

Watt sarcastically alludes to *The Book of Common Prayer*, "jokingly" checking the Dedlocks' pride against a widely accepted religious prayer. The prayer is one of deliverance "from all blindness of heart; from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness" (127). While Watt says he was only joking, a hint of seriousness clearly underlies his sarcasm. Mrs. Rouncewell, however, elevates the Dedlocks to a status above being the subject of a joke. After Mrs. Rouncewell's corrects Watt, Watt quickly falls in line with the "common view," saying, "'Sir Leicester is no joke by any means, . . . and I humbly ask his pardon'" (162). Watt takes back his sarcasm and merges with the "common voice" of Mrs. Rouncewell by posturing himself in deference solely because of the Dedlock's class status.

Through the use of the common language, Dickens continues to pull on the thread of the upper class's ongoing isolation from the rest of society. Mrs. Rouncewell shows how the common view of the lower classes has privileged the upper class solely on the basis of class status. First, the common view somewhat comedically isolates the upper class through Mrs. Rouncewell claiming that only the upper class is privileged enough to warrant their own ghosts. Next, Mrs. Rouncewell prescribes her deference of the upper class onto her grandson, and eventually Watt merges with her view; the Dedlocks are not fit for joking because they are elevated, and thus isolated, among the rest of the upper class. The common voice holds no true respect for the Dedlocks, but instead, it represents a view that says the Dedlocks merit respect from the lower classes *only* because they are in the upper class.

"Bored to Death": Lady Dedlock's Perspective

The journalistic voice of the fashionable intelligence shows the general society's unjust

attention shown to the upper class, and through Mrs. Rouncewell, the “common view” emerges to expose the elevation of the upper class. Alongside these perspectives, Dickens also introduces a Tennysonian voice to show Lady Dedlock’s perspective. Within the voice of Lady Dedlock, Dickens includes this Tennysonian voice to more explicitly show her isolation from the rest of society.

In the chapter “In Fashion,” the third-person narrator describes Lady Dedlock as looking from her boudoir into the early twilight. She observes smoke rising out of a chimney and a child running out to meet a man, presumably the child’s father. As she observes the scene from her bedroom, she says she has been “bored to death” (Dickens 24), and this deathly boredom draws on the voice of Tennyson’s early poems. The “bored to death” phrase—one which appears throughout the novel—presents a voice that parallels Lady Dedlock to the maidens in Tennyson’s early poems, especially the maiden in “Mariana.” In this poem, Tennyson depicts a lonely maiden, isolated from the world around her, awaiting the return of her lover. Similar to Lady Dedlock, Mariana observes, “Old faces glimmer’d thro’ the doors / Old footsteps trod the upper floors, / Old voices called her from without” (Tennyson 6). In both cases, the two women feel isolated, alone, and are bored to the point of feeling or desiring death. In “Mariana,” each stanza ends with, “She only said, ‘The night is dreary, / He cometh not,’ she said; / She said ‘I am aweary, aweary, / I would that I were dead!’” (Tennyson 4-6). Mariana’s desire for death parallels Lady Dedlock’s boredom except, instead of merely wishing for death, Lady Dedlock expresses that she has indeed been “bored to death.”

While there is a parallel between Lady Dedlock’s “bored to death” phrase and “Mariana,” there is a key difference between the two maidens. Mariana is depicted as a lonely maiden, separated from the rest of society, stuck in her “moated grange” (Tennyson 4). As she awaits her

lover at her country home, Mariana seems truly alone. That is not to say that Lady Dedlock does not or cannot feel lonely; however, her loneliness is presented through a life surrounded by more luxury than any Victorian citizen could ask for. Along with a loving husband, she has all the material luxuries of Chesney Wold. Nevertheless, she still feels trapped within her desolate boredom. Maria Frendo describes Lady Dedlock as “an older and guiltier relative of Mariana” (255)—guilty by her hidden adultery and by the upper class isolation encompassing her boredom. While Mariana awaits her lover in true loneliness, Lady Dedlock’s boredom is composed by luxury and company.

Later in the novel, Dickens illustrates Lady Dedlock’s luxurious boredom when he inserts the Tennysonian voice to show how her vain enjoyments no longer provide any true fulfillment. As she leaves from her vacation in Paris, the narrator says, “Sooth to say, they cannot go away too fast; for, even here, my Lady Dedlock has been bored to death. Concert, assembly, opera, theatre, drive, nothing is new to my Lady, under the worn-out heavens.” (158). Even through the luxuries of her vacation, Dickens continues to parallel Lady Dedlock’s boredom to that of the lonely maiden in “Mariana,” further drawing on the Tennysonian voice to characterize her luxurious life.

In this specific passage, Dickens also draws on an Ecclesiastical theme—a lack of fulfillment through the luxuries of life—reintroducing the biblical voice into his heteroglossic characterization of Lady Dedlock and the wealthy upper class. Solomon, the wealthy Israelite king, which most biblical scholars believe penned the book of Ecclesiastes, also held every luxury known to man. He was the richest king in Israel’s line of kings, and he was known for having many wives to keep him company. As King Solomon reflects on his luxuries, however, he says, “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which

shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9). Dickens draws on this Ecclesiastical passage to parallel the wisdom of Solomon with the boredom of Lady Dedlock. No luxury presents any kind of fulfillment for Lady Dedlock because for her, there is nothing new "under the worn out heavens." The luxuries of her life have become mundane, and she has drifted into an ultimately unfulfilling boredom.

Immediately following the heteroglossic introduction of the Ecclesiastical voice, Dickens includes a passage with a Bakhtinian hybrid construction that continues to characterize Lady Dedlock's view of her mundane luxuries. Dickens describes the Elysian fields of Paris through the poor, yet gay, wretches who enjoyed the festivities of "dancing, love-making, wine-drinking, tobacco-smoking, tomb-visiting, billiard, card, and domino playing, quack-doctoring, *and much murderous refuse*, animate and inanimate" (emphasis added; 158). This hybrid construction reinforces the luxuries of Paris through the final description of "much murderous refuse." While most individuals would revel in the festivities listed here, Dickens refracts another voice—presumably the voice of Lady Dedlock as informed by the previous Ecclesiastical insertion—through the third-person narrator to explicitly show Lady Dedlock's distaste for these luxurious activities. The "murderous refuse" of these enjoyments are completely repugnant for My Lady as she still finds herself "in the desolation of Boredom" (158).

Not only is there a hybrid construction within the passage, but Dickens also says that "my Lady" is trapped within "the clutch of Giant Despair" (158). Here, Dickens introduces a literary voice from *Pilgrim's Progress*. Within *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian and Hopeful stray from the King's highway within the celestial country, only to be trapped in the Doubting Castle by the Giant Despair. Within the Doubting Castle, Christian and Hopeful are beaten by the Giant Despair, and find their escape through the key of promise (Bunyan 88-92). For Lady Dedlock,

however, there seems to be no escape as she only resents the luxuries of the people around her because of her own isolated boredom; therefore, she truly is “stuck” within the clutch of Giant Despair.

The Tennysonian “bored to death” voice continues to reveal Lady Dedlock’s unjust actions—or more accurately, her inaction—within her place atop the upper class. As Lady Dedlock sits in a place of privilege, the innumerable centrifugal forces of the Tennysonian and Ecclesiastical voices are specifically recolored within the centripetal context of *Bleak House* to further reveal the isolation of the upper class from the rest of society—especially through the ironic mundanity within luxury. Instead of choosing to use her wealth to help other parts of society, Lady Dedlock remains idle and isolated.

The final passage involving the Tennysonian voice of being “bored to death” epitomizes the unjust privileging of the upper class through the deification of Lady Dedlock. While Lady Dedlock may have been *nearly* deified before—especially through the voice of the “fashionable intelligence”—Dickens now actually uses the common voice to illustrate an unjust deification. After Mr. Tulkinghorn informs Lady Dedlock about Nemo's death, Dickens introduces another “common voice”: the voices of the “worshippers.” He says, “They meet again at dinner—again, next day—again, for many days in succession. Lady Dedlock is always the same exhausted deity, *surrounded by worshippers*, and terribly liable to be bored to death, even while presiding at her own shrine” (170). Within this passage, Dickens again inserts the common view, except this time, he satirically exposes the common view through the metaphor of worship. Lady Dedlock is not literally surrounded by worshippers nor is she literally sitting on a shrine, but Dickens—presumably not deifying Lady Dedlock himself—satirically includes the common view that Lady Dedlock is indeed deserving of worship. As noted earlier through the voice of the

fashionable intelligence, much of Victorian society views the upper class within this deific light, and throughout the novel, the voice of Lady Dedlock's worshippers never seem to leave her side.

As Dickens satirically exposes this common view, he revisits and shows the extent of society's obsession with the upper class Dedlocks. He also shows that Lady Dedlock is not only "bored to death" as she is surrounded by luxury, but also "terribly liable to be bored to death" in the face of her worshippers. As evidenced through the "Mariana" connotation of the "bored to death" voice, Lady Dedlock feels isolated from the other classes; however, instead of "descending" to find company or pursuing a more unified society, my Lady remains indifferent, idly sitting at her shrine.

Lady Dedlock Grows Helpless

Through the voice of the fashionable intelligence and through the "common voice" of the lower classes, Dickens shows how Lady Dedlock eventually becomes helpless in her state of high-class deification. For instance, near Lady Dedlock's entrance into the novel, Dickens mentions her expectations of being worshipped, as he uses highly eloquent language to characterize her and the upper class:

There are deferential people, in a dozen callings, whom *my Lady Dedlock suspects of nothing but prostration before her*, who can tell you how to manage her as if she were a baby; who do nothing but nurse her all their lives; who, *humbly affecting to follow with profound subservience*, lead her and her whole troop after them; who, in hooking one, hook all and bear them off, as Lemuel Gulliver bore away the stately fleet of the majestic Lilliput. (27; emphasis added)

Within this heteroglossic description of Lady Dedlock, two different speech patterns emerge through the voice of the narrator with the Bakhtinian hybrid construction. In this case, the third-

person narrator uses his normal tone alongside a parodic use of high eloquence (seen through the italics) to show the general subservience that Lady Dedlock pridefully expected. According to Norman Page, this high eloquence is characteristic of the language surrounding the Dedlocks and the upper class (83). Dickens also exposes Lady Dedlock's helplessness by paralleling her to a baby, eventually leading up to Jonathan Swift's satirical language, which shows the behind-the-scenes indulgences that ultimately lead Lady Dedlock to the same tiny and helpless, yet proud and pretentious state of the Lilliputians in *Gulliver's Travels*. These subtle intrusions of language in this passage show that, though Lady Dedlock expects worship from those lower than her, she cannot function without them because of her general helplessness.

The final heteroglossic passage revealing the unjust privileging of Lady Dedlock comes back to "In Fashion," also near her entrance into the novel. Dickens's Bakhtinian double-voicing reveals the unfulfilling qualities of her high-class status, showing that Lady Dedlock is no longer excited by any "interest or satisfaction." He says, "An exhausted composure, a worn-out placidity, an equanimity of fatigue not to be ruffled by interest or satisfaction, are the trophies of her victory. She is perfectly well-bred. If she could be translated to Heaven to-morrow, she might be expected to ascend without any rapture" (25). Exhaustion, worn-out placidity, fatigue, and the inability to be excited are not generally recognized as "trophies." In the case of Lady Dedlock, however, these are the rewards for being at the top of the social and economic classes. This double-voicing reinforces the helpless parts of her character through the lens of trophies because in Victorian London, upper class living is worth the personal ailments that might ensue. Dickens goes on to say that Lady Dedlock could be expected to ascend to Heaven tomorrow without any rapture, or any pleasure or joy. Heaven, the religious place *most* characterized by pleasure and joy, would still not raise the excitement of Lady Dedlock because the "trophies" of her upper-

class living have ultimately led her to a completely unfulfilled life.

Lady Dedlock's inability to grow excited and her inability to provide help for herself further reveals the indifferent isolation of the upper class. Through the heteroglossic inclusions of the literary language of Jonathan Swift, the double voicing of Lady Dedlock's trophies, and the religious inclusion of Heaven, Dickens shows how the upper class isolation eventually leads to Lady Dedlock's helplessness.

Ethical Failure Surrounding the Upper Class

As Bakhtin illustrates through *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, every individual lives within a non-alibied existence where he or she must face the responsibility of each unique moment and each unique action. Within one's non-alibied responsibility, one must reckon with the art he or she encounters. Dickens brings his readers face to face with their own actions, or inaction, through the characterization of Lady Dedlock. Through the heteroglossic voices of the fashionable intelligence, the Tennysonian "bored to death" passages, and the literary and biblical voices within these utterances, Dickens sheds light on the unjust isolation of Lady Dedlock and the upper class. While Lady Dedlock enjoys the luxuries of sitting atop the upper class, she sits idly by as the lower classes of Victorian London are in want of basic needs. As illustrated through her boredom, she has let the isolation of her wealth push her into inaction, and her inaction has pushed her to a poor attentiveness within her own non-alibied existence as a fictional character. In exposing Lady Dedlock's complacency, however, Dickens did not give an in-depth explanation of what she should "do better" in order to be a better citizen in Victorian society. Instead, he merely used the heteroglossic nature of language to expose the irresponsibility within Lady Dedlock's lovelessness and indifference.

Dickens not only exposes the injustices of the upper class, but through the fashionable

intelligence and the “common view” of Mrs. Rouncewell and Watt, he shows the backwards thinking surrounding the obsession with and privileging of the upper class by the lower classes. While Lady Dedlock is certainly in the position to enact change with her resources of wealth, the lower class is not totally innocent; the fashionable intelligence and the common voice’s tendency to put the upper class on a pedestal unjustly enables Lady Dedlock to continue to complacently and pridefully sit in her isolation. Therefore, Dickens shows that the actions of those holding this “common view” only furthers the unjust class disparity present within Victorian culture, and in the same way that he brings the upper class into a participative experience of their complacency, he brings the middle to lower class into a participation of their own unjust praise of the upper class. Through his social critique, Dickens pushed readers, upper and lower classes alike, to face their indifference and to responsibly and attentively live within their own non-alibied existence. Otherwise, the society would continue to remain in the sick and decomposing state that Dickens exposed through the heteroglossic depictions of his fictional London.

Chapter Three – The “Depraved” Poor: Dickens’s Heteroglossic Exposure of Mistreating the Poor

Through the heteroglossic utterances inserted within the descriptions of Lady Dedlock, Dickens shows the unjust nature of the Victorian upper class’s isolation. Along with these heteroglossic utterances, Dickens interweaves heteroglossia throughout the third-person narrator’s descriptions of Jo and his dealings with other characters. Within *Bleak House* criticism, critics have almost universally praised the character of Jo. Jacob Korg indicates that Jo has been “widely admired” (1), and Graham Storey, going further than *Bleak House*, says that many of Dickens’s contemporaries considered the scene of Jo’s death one of the “most powerful scenes in all his writing” (80). Norman Page adds that an early review of Jo says that Jo had “already become a proverb” by the time *Bleak House* was released as a novel (qtd. in Page 34). Alongside the wide admiration of Jo, there is still room to examine his character through the lens of Bakhtin’s framework for heteroglossia to examine how Dickens’s language regarding his character helps expose Victorian neglect.

The poor boy Jo is introduced in the novel as “the boy that sweeps the crossing down the lane over the way round the corner” (153-54). Dickens’s choice of giving Jo the job of a cross-sweeper sets Jo up to embody what Tatiana Holway says, in a footnote to the text, is “the very image of Victorian child labor” (837). Holway indicates that Dickens drew the cross-sweeper out of Henry Mayhew’s series titled “Labour and the Poor,” which was printed in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1849-50 (837), revealing that Jo’s character echoes alongside real-life cross-sweepers within London. In Volume II of Mayhew’s work, he describes the occupation of cross-sweeping as “the last chance left of obtaining an honest crust” (465). Cross-sweepers—which made up most of the Metropolitan poor (Mayhew 465)—truly were the poorest in London. By

including Jo as a cross-sweeper, Dickens introduces the boy as the embodiment of the Victorian poor; his very job contextualizes him as such. Therefore, within *Bleak House*, Jo acts as the representative of low class London society much in the same way Lady Dedlock acted as the head of the privileged upper class.

When Jo appears in the novel, Dickens inserts heteroglossic voices similar to the voices that show the isolation of the upper class—namely, biblical language, Shakespearean language, and common language. As Dickens introduces these different voices, he begins to expose the neglect and unjust treatment of the poor throughout the novel. Along with these multi-layered voices, Dickens also uses the heteroglossic nature of dialogue to embody different social classes in order to show an unjust treatment of Jo and of the lower class in London.

The Voice of The Metropolitan Police Act: “Move on”

As the comic-novel parodically “reprocesses” all current “levels of literary language, both conversational and written” (Bakhtin 301), Dickens draws on the everyday language of policemen enforcing the law to draw out a specific critique of Victorian neglect of homelessness. In the chapter, “Moving on,” a police constable shows up at Mr. Snagsby’s shop, holding Jo by the arm: “‘This boy,’ says the constable, ‘although he’s repeatedly told to, won’t *move on*-----’ / ‘I’m always a-moving on, sir,’ cries the boy, wiping away his grimy tears with his arm. ‘I’ve always been *a-moving and a-moving on*, ever since I was born. Where can I possible move to, sir, more nor I do move!’” (264; emphasis added). The constable’s plea for Jo to “move on” introduces a voice from The Metropolitan Police Act (1829). According to Holway, this act allowed policemen “to question and, if deemed appropriate, apprehend loiterers. Crossing sweepers were either permitted by policemen to remain at their locations or told to ‘move on’” (845). Through the heteroglossic voice of the Metropolitan Police Act within the constable’s plea

for Jo to “move on,” Dickens includes the voice of this law to show how even the law oppressed the poor, specifically cross-sweepers, into a cyclical state of moving even when they had nowhere to go.

After Dickens draws on the language of The Metropolitan Police Act through the constable’s orders to Jo, Jo asks where he might move to. Mr. Snagsby echoes Jo’s question, and the constable replies by ignoring both of their questions: “My instructions don’t go to that . . . My instructions are that this boy is to move on” (265). After the constable gives this unsatisfactory answer, the narrator chimes in with his own thoughts. As he chimes in, the passage continues to echo the language of “moving on” while also showing the insertion of a Shakespearean voice to add to the exposure of injustice within this law:

Do you hear, Jo? It is nothing to you or to any one else, that the great lights of the parliamentary sky have failed for some few years, in this business, to set you the example of moving on. The one grand recipe remains for you—the profound philosophical prescription—*the be-all and the end-all* of your strange existence upon earth. Move on! You are by no means to move off, Jo, for the great lights can't at all agree about that. Move on! (265; emphasis added)

The narrator seems to speak directly to Jo within this passage, and as he speaks, he makes it clear that Jo has been made the example of moving on, and that the “moving on” has become “the be-all and the end-all” of his existence. Within this phrase, Dickens inserts a Shakespearean voice from his play *Macbeth*, recontextualized here to further expose the injustice surrounding this law.

In Shakespeare’s play, *Macbeth* contemplates the potential consequences for murdering Duncan. He says, “If it were done when ’tis done, then ’twere well / It were done quickly. If the

assassination / Could trammel up the consequence, and catch, / With his surcease, success, that but this blow / Might be *the be-all and the end-all* here, / But here, upon this bank and shoal of time, / We'd jump the life to come" (*Mac*.1.7.1-7). In Macbeth's case, he realizes that murdering Duncan would not end in the here and now; his actions would not be "the be-all and the end-all." Instead, his actions would return to plague him. Dickens, however, modifies this phrase, parodically inserting this Shakespearean voice to show that the profound philosophical prescription, or the be-all and the end-all of Jo's strange existence, is to "Move on!" (265). The Shakespearean voice shows that even though Jo has nowhere to go, it is philosophically imbued into his existence that he is to keep moving. The law simply does not make sense, and these heteroglossic inclusions of the real-life language of the law and the literary language of Shakespeare expose the injustice surrounding the nonsensical and neglectful nature of The Metropolitan Police Act. The Act itself shows a Victorian neglect that epitomizes the society's treatment of the poor. The poor have nowhere to move to, but the society is bent on pushing the low class away so that they can remain in their idle ignorance.

Nemo's Inquest: The Character Zones of Mrs. Piper and Jo's Testimonies

Bakhtin argues that within the comic style, another's speech patterns might intrude into the narrator's normal speech patterns. At times, the narrator may speak "in *concealed* form, that is, without any of the *formal* markers" that usually accompany the switch into someone else's speech (303). This concealed shift from one voice to another often takes the form of what Bakhtin calls "character zones," and it is within a character zone that Jo is introduced into *Bleak House*. Bakhtin defines a "character zone" in full in "Discourse in the Novel":

Heteroglossia . . . is also diffused throughout the authorial speech that surrounds the characters, creating highly particularized *character zones* . . . These zones are formed

from the fragments of character speech, from various forms for hidden transmission of someone else's word, from scattered words and sayings belonging to someone else's speech, from those invasions into authorial speech of others' expressive indicators (ellipses, questions, exclamations). Such a character zone is the field of action for a character's voice, encroaching in one way or another upon the author's voice. (316)

Within a character zone, the character is not directly speaking, but instead, the narrator—at a distance from the character—speaks within the dialect of the character. According to Bakhtin, an important character within a novel has “a zone of his own, his own sphere of influence . . . a sphere that extends—and often quite far—beyond the boundaries of the direct discourse allotted to him. The area occupied by an important character's voice must in any event be broader than his direct and ‘actual’ words” (320).

When Jo first appears in *Bleak House*, the narrator occupies two different character zones at Nemo's inquest: the “zone” of Mrs. Piper and the “zone” of Jo. Mrs. Piper, a woman who lives in the Court, comes forth at the inquest as the Coroner listens to any details she might add regarding Nemo's death. Dickens begins her testimony with, “Why, Mrs. Piper has a good deal to say, chiefly in parentheses and without punctuation, but not much to tell” (153). Within Bakhtin's description of character zones, he mentions expressive indicators—including ellipses, questions, and exclamations—and in Mrs. Piper's testimony, her expressive indicators often appear in the form of her parenthetical insertions and lack of punctuation. Her character zone is simple to detect because the narrator announces at the outset the indicators of her speech. Within the character zone of Mrs. Piper, the third-person narrator gives Mrs. Piper's testimony, littered with her own expressive indicators:

Mrs. Piper lives in the court (which her husband is a cabinet-maker), and it has long been

well beknown among the neighbours (counting from the day next but one before the half-baptising of Alexander James Piper aged eighteen months and four days old on accounts of not being expected to live such was the sufferings gentlemen of that child in his gums) as the Plaintive—so Mrs. Piper insists on calling the deceased—was reported to have sold himself. Thinks it was the Plaintive’s air in which that report originatinin. See the Plaintive often considered as his air was feariocious and not to be allowed to go about some children being timid (and if doubted hoping Mrs. Perkins may be brought forard for she is here and will do credit to her husband and herself and family). (153)

Mrs. Piper’s testimony continues on within this same character zone for about half a page. The narrator continues to describe her testimony through her specific voice—including the expressive indicators of her parenthetical asides, lack of punctuation, and mispronunciations—showing how she truly does have “a good deal to say . . . but not much to tell” (153).

Mrs. Piper’s testimony is longwinded and ultimately unhelpful, but it is important to note the refraction of her voice through the third-person narrator in the form of a character zone because Dickens implements this same heteroglossic technique when he introduces Jo more fully on the next page. Jo’s character zone, however, sounds much different from that of Mrs. Piper’s because of his clear lack of education:

Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on. Don't know that everybody has two names. Never heerd of sich a think. Don't know that Jo is short for a longer name. Thinks it long enough for *him*. He don't find no fault with it. Spell it? *He* can't spell. No father, no mother, no friends. Never been to school. What's home? Knows a broom's a broom, and knows it's wicked to tell a lie. Don't recollect who told him about the broom, or about the lie, but knows both. Can't exactly say what'll be done to him arter he's dead if he tells a

lie to the gentlemen here, but believes it'll be something wery bad to punish him, and serve him right—and so he'll tell the truth. (154)

In the same way that the narrator enters into the character zone of Mrs. Piper, he shifts into Jo's character zone at his entrance into the novel. The narrator switches voices in this court session, and while this dialectal technique provides the reader with a level of entertainment, these character zones ultimately reveal an important injustice regarding how Jo's lack of theological understanding eventually causes the Coroner to silence him.

Within the character zone of Mrs. Piper, the narrator somewhat makes a fool of her through her longwinded speech and unnecessary parenthetical asides. He makes his mockery clear through the opening sentence when he explicitly notes her lack of punctuation and lack of information "to tell." The Coroner, however, still listens to Mrs. Piper's testimony regarding the witness of the crossing-sweeper because she does not indicate any clear lack of education—specifically regarding theological knowledge. After she mentions the cross-sweeper, the Coroner immediately summons Jo to see if he could offer any helpful information regarding Nemo's death. This attention that the Coroner extends to Mrs. Piper is not extended to Jo when the narrator shifts into Jo's character zone.

When Jo gives his testimony, the Coroner immediately responds, "This won't do gentlemen!" and when a Juryman presses the Coroner further about Jo being of potential help, the Coroner replies again, "Out of the question . . . You have heard the boy. 'Can't exactly say' won't do, you know. We can't take *that* in a Court of Justice, gentlemen. It's a terrible depravity. Put the boy aside" (154). While the Coroner lets Mrs. Piper have her voice—even through the mockery of her character zone—Jo's voice is silenced because of his lack of theological knowledge regarding the afterlife. Mrs. Piper's testimony is riddled with unnecessary asides, but

the Coroner still listens to her because she does not indicate these explicit signs of theological ignorance—seen especially in her aside about the “half-baptising,” or baptismal service for a dying child, regarding her son (153). These heteroglossic shifts between narrative voices show that Mrs. Piper was not really any more equipped to serve as a witness in the court than Jo was.

Jo’s Dialogical Echo of George Ruby

It is worth noting here that this court session had precedent within real-life Victorian London. As alluded to above, scholars have recognized that Dickens based Jo’s character on George Ruby, a cross-sweeper in London whose voice is also dismissed in a court case. This point about Ruby is important because it shows the dialogic nature of Jo’s entrance into the novel. As noted in the introduction, Bakhtin says, “Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others” (426). Therefore, a dialogical work—or, again, a work that shows an engagement of multiple voices within itself and echoes alongside the multiplicity of voices in a specific culture—will engage with the socio-historical voices of the cultural moment. Robinson notes that within a dialogical work, “everything is said in response to other statements” (“In Theory Bakhtin”), and in the case of Jo, Dickens introduces a character that dialogically echoes alongside Ruby and his similar experience within the court.

Jo’s voice reflects Ruby’s in that they were both uneducated, and their voices were both dismissed in court for not having common theological understanding. Much like Jo, Ruby was dismissed within a court setting for not knowing the catechism (Holway 837). Trevor Blount adds that Ruby reported to an alderman that he did not know “what an oath is, what the Testament is, what prayers are, what God is, what the devil is. I sweeps the crossing” (qtd. in

Blount 328-29). Ruby's ignorance reflects Jo's ignorance when the narrator, in Jo's character zone, says that Jo "Knows a broom's a broom and knows it's wicked to tell a lie" (154). In response to Ruby, the alderman, much like the Coroner in *Bleak House*, said, "in his experience he had never met with anything like the deplorable ignorance of the unfortunate child in the witness box. He, of course, could not take the evidence of a creature who knew nothing whatever of the obligation to speak the truth" (qtd. in Blount 328). The interaction between the alderman and Ruby nearly parallels the interaction of Jo and the Coroner. Like Ruby, Jo was theologically ignorant, and he certainly did not know the catechism, and like the alderman, the Coroner refuses to listen to Jo because of this ignorance. Therefore, through Jo's character, Dickens dialogically *responded* to the real-life injustice of the negligence shown to George Ruby in a Victorian Court. While Dickens did not necessarily use the exact language from Ruby or the alderman, his heteroglossic shift into Jo's character zone and the voice of the coroner still drew upon their real-life interaction.

Jo's "Depravity": The "Common View" of Jo's Low Class Status

After the initial court session, the narrator again speaks of Jo; however, instead of introducing him within his character zone, the narrator speaks directly to Jo and about Jo regarding his future. As the narrator speaks of Jo's future, Dickens includes a biblical voice to oppose the silencing voice of the Coroner: "Jo, is it thou? Well, well! Though a rejected witness, who 'can't exactly say' what will be done to him in greater hands than men's, *thou art not quite in outer darkness*. There is something like a distant ray of light in thy muttered reason for this: 'He was wery good to me, he wos!'" (157; emphasis added). In this instance, Dickens draws from the biblical parable in Matthew 22 about the kingdom of heaven. In the parable, a king sends his servants out to invite guests to a wedding banquet for his son. Many are indifferent

about the king's invitation, and some even kill the king's servants. The king, enraged by the mistreatment of his servants, sends out his armies to destroy the murderers and their cities. Finally, the king sends his servants out again to invite guests to his wedding banquet. However, when the king enters to meet his guests, one man stands without a wedding garment; as a result, the king says to his servants, "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:13).

The outer darkness stands in stark contrast to the celebration of the wedding feast, and it refers to some sort of separation from the king and the celebration within. In *Bleak House*, Dickens refers to this passage as the narrator says to Jo, "Thou art not quite in outer darkness." However, no one in *Bleak House* has directly said that Jo is separated from the inner celebration or the king. Therefore, there must have been a "common view," or "the going point of view" (Bakhtin 301), that the poor, or the theologically "uneducated" were separated from the Christian blessing. This heteroglossic inclusion of the biblical voice exposes the fact that some considered Jo's lack of education regarding his eschatological destiny to seal his fate as one thrown into the outer darkness. As the Coroner originally stated, it truly was a "terrible depravity" that Jo "can't exactly say" what will happen after he dies. However, Dickens shows, through both the character zones at Nemo's inquest and through this biblical voice, that the true depravity here is the Coroner's prescription of depravity for an educational lack that Jo never actually had the chance to gain. Instead of listening to Jo's voice, the Coroner silences him, revealing an oppressive neglect that only manifests itself further throughout Jo's appearances in the novel.

Heteroglossic Dialogue: Jo's Speech Patterns

As Jo begins to interact with other characters in the novel, the dialogues between them reveal important social and moral views regarding the poor in London. When characters in a

higher class than Jo speak to him, they often silence his voice, exposing an unjust marginalization of the poor. Bakhtin makes an important claim about how dialogue within the novel embodies a “microcosm of heteroglossia” (411), arguing that the novel must contain “all the social and ideological voices of its era” in order to form this microcosm (411). He goes on to say that each individual’s dialogue represents real social groups’ socio-ideological views: “A language is revealed in all its distinctiveness only when it is brought into relationship with other languages, entering with them into one single heteroglot unity of societal becoming. Every language in the novel is a point of view, a socio-ideological conceptual system of real social groups and their embodied representatives” (411). Through individuals in the novel, these speech diversities help reveal the embodiment of different social groups and the “societal becoming” that happens when each group interacts with each other. Dickens was masterful in varying speech patterns between different individuals and, more broadly, different social classes. Page points out that Dickens “drew on his wide observation, aided by a very acute ear and a passionate interest in language, of the speech habits of different groups within English society. From the upper-class speech habits of the Dedlocks and their relatives to the debased English spoken by the uneducated Jo . . . the dialogue in *Bleak House* covers the entire range of urban society” (83). As Dickens begins to show this range, he exposes the unjust treatment of the poor in the dialogues with Jo.

Some of the eloquent speech patterns surrounding the upper class Dedlocks were noted in the second chapter, and now, the lower class speech patterns of Jo show the “social language” of lower class London. The reader encounters Jo’s first direct lines of dialogue following the court session regarding the cause of Nemo’s death: “‘He wos wery good to me,’ says the boy, wiping his eyes with his wretched sleeve. ‘Wen I see him a-layin’ so stritched out just now, I wished he

could have heard me tell him so. He was very good to me, he was!” (155). Within Jo’s first lines of dialogue, the reader immediately sees Jo’s “debased” English through his mispronunciation and even combination (hear and heard) of various words. Page points out that Jo’s speech patterns were likely very close to that of the real slang within the London slums. Drawing on Mayhew’s work about the London poor, Page mentions that a crossing-sweeper once told Mayhew, “When we are talking together we always talk in a kind of slang” (qtd. in Page 83). Dickens intentionally draws out Jo’s slang to show his lack of education, and while Jo still represents his own individual, Dickens socially embodies the poor through Jo’s voice—accomplishing exactly what Bakhtin says is characteristic of heteroglossic dialogue in the novel.

Heteroglossic Dialogue Between Chadband and Jo

While Jo himself presents his own concrete speech diversity, Bakhtin argues, as noted above, that “[a] language is revealed in all its distinctiveness only when it is brought into relationship with other languages, entering with them into one single heteroglot unity of societal becoming” (411). He also argues that every language reveals a specific “socio-ideological conceptual system of real social groups and their embodied representatives” (411). However, this “heteroglot unity of societal becoming” does not always imply that the language of these embodied representatives forms a more unified society. Rather, language can often serve to isolate one individual from another, and this isolating use of language becomes central in various dialogues involving Jo.

For instance, in one of Chadband’s sermons, his dialogue, loaded with Christian cant, shows a Christian preacher so concerned with his own view that he hinders Jo from even having his own voice. Chadband debases and isolates himself from Jo when he invites him in and calls Jo his “spiritual profit.” After listing a slew of his and his friends’ “Christian blessings”—such as

physical comforts and the “fatness of the land”—Chadband asks his friends if they have “partaken of anything else” as he calls Jo to come forward: “Of spiritual profit? Yes. From whence have we derived that spiritual profit? My young friend, stand forth!” (269). Jo steps forward, revealing that Chadband is referring to Jo himself as the “spiritual profit” that he and his friends have gained. Chadband’s spiel continues when he asks Jo if he knows why he is considered spiritual profit—which Chadband equates to “a pearl,” “a diamond,” “a gem,” and “a jewel” (269). Jo replies with his only words in the entire interaction: “I don’t know. . . I don’t know nothink” (269). Chadband, however, does not show any signs of truly caring about Jo’s lack of knowledge. He simply continues on with his sermonette, revealing, through his dialogue, that he is not concerned at all with Jo’s voice.

At the outset of this dialogue, Chadband devalues Jo and his poor status, championing Jo as “spiritual profit” for him and his friends. As he continues, he takes Jo’s lack of knowledge and bends it to his own ends, claiming that it is actually on the basis of Jo’s lack of education that he is considered spiritual profit:

‘My young friend,’ says Chadband, ‘it is because you know nothing that you are to us a gem and jewel. For what are you, my young friend? Are you a beast of the field? No. A bird of the air? No. A fish of the sea or river? No. You are a human boy, my young friend. O glorious to be a human boy! And why glorious, my young friend? Because you are capable of receiving the lessons of wisdom, because you are capable of profiting by this discourse which I now deliver for your good, because you are not a stick, or a staff, or a stock, or a stone, or a post, or a pillar.’ (269)

After proclaiming the “value” of Jo’s lack of education, Chadband feels the need to clarify that Jo is indeed *not* one of the beasts mentioned in the creation account from Genesis. After making

that devaluing clarification, Chadband disingenuously proclaims that Jo is a human boy. However, Jo's humanness is only "glorious" by the sheer fact that Jo is now "capable of profiting by this discourse which I now deliver for your good" (269). Therefore, while Chadband clarifies that Jo is indeed human—a clarification that is unjust in and of itself—he goes on to dehumanize Jo further by declaring that his humanness is glorious only because it allows Jo to be shaped by *his* teaching.

Within this dialogue between Chadband and Jo, Chadband isolates himself from Jo and uses his Christian cant to forcibly mold Jo into "spiritual profit." To be clear, Chadband does not represent the socio-ideological views of *all* Christians from Victorian London. Bakhtin makes it clear that "the abundance of embodied points of view to which the novel aspires is not a logical, systematic, purely semantic fullness with every possible point of view represented" (412). Nonetheless, one's language does reveal a "socio-ideological conceptual system of real social groups and their embodied representatives" (411), and Chadband's language reveals the domineering and devaluing approach of many Christians to the poor around them. Since Jo has made it clear that he "don't know nothink," Chadband's Christian cant only serves to isolate himself from Jo. Blount says that Christians often used this sort of isolatory language: "Seeming, in intention, to want to establish contact, preachers like Chadband and the other 'genlmen' pervert the medium of communication that they employ into a means of hardening the barriers that already exist. Instead of helping Jo and his kind, they degrade the missionary impulse to a verbal narcissism" (Blount 333). Rather than actually teaching Jo, Chadband appropriates Jo's lack of education for his own gain of "spiritual profit," which silences Jo and ultimately devalues his status as a "human boy."

Chadband's isolating speech only continues in each of his appearances in the novel—

especially when he says that Jo is a Gentile and a Heathen because he does not have “the light of Terewth” (348)—to the point that Jo finally says to Mr. Woodcourt right before his death that those Christians “all mostly sounded to be a-talkin to theirselves, . . . and not a-talkin to us” (609). Through their dialogue, Chadband’s isolating language directed at Jo ultimately shows a picture of “societal becoming” where the Christian devalues the poor through what Bakhtin calls a loveless inattention. Instead of letting Jo have a voice in their conversation, or even listening to Jo when he says he “don’t know nothink,” Chadband sounds off as a character only “a-talkin” to himself. Much like the Coroner in the court session, Chadband’s isolation is manifested most clearly through his unwillingness to let Jo have his own voice. Chadband, a member of a religion that is supposed to embody love, ultimately isolates himself from Jo through his language, and thus fails to love him well.

Heteroglossic Dialogue Between the Rich and the Poor

Bleak House also shows a dialogue between Lady Dedlock and Jo—the two embodiments of high and low class society—to further reveal the immense chasm between social classes in Victorian London. Within their dialogue, Lady Dedlock domineers over Jo, continuing to show a “heteroglot of societal becoming” where she reveals the “socio-ideological conceptual system” of an oppressive upper class. Page argues that some of the most dramatic scenes happen within the dialogue of individuals from two separate social classes, and that these confrontations “play an important part in stressing the social gulf” (83). In the dialogue between Lady Dedlock and Jo, Lady Dedlock begins by asking him a couple of questions: “‘Are you the boy I’ve read of in the papers?’ she asked behind her veil. / ‘I don’t know,’ says Jo, staring moodily at the veil, ‘nothink about no papers. I don’t know nothink about nothink at all.’ / ‘Were you examined at an Inquest?’ / ‘I don’t know nothink about no—where I was took by the beadle, do you mean?’ says

Jo. ‘Was the boy’s name at the Inkwhich, Jo?’” (225). The first lines of dialogue within this confrontation reveal the educational divide between Lady Dedlock and Jo. Jo begins by again admitting that he “don’t know nothink about nothink at all,” and he goes on to mispronounce “inquest,” a word he just heard Lady Dedlock say.

As Jo’s dialogue socially embodies the uneducated lower class, Dickens shows how the unjust privileging of Lady Dedlock eventually leads her to domineer over Jo—similar to the way Chadband did—instead of actually dialoging with him. Lady Dedlock questions Jo about the inquest and about Nemo’s condition at the point of his death. Jo catches on to her questions and the dialogue proceeds with Lady Dedlock demanding Jo to be quiet: “‘Hush! Speak in a whisper! Yes. Did he look, when he was living, so very ill and poor?’ / ‘O jist!’ says Jo. / ‘Did he look like—not like *you*?’ says the woman with abhorrence. / ‘O not so bad as me,’ says Jo. ‘I’m a reg’lar one, I am!’” (225).

Lady Dedlock’s abhorrence and distaste with Jo reveals an important point about her socio-ideological view of Jo. Within Bakhtin’s earlier work, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, he makes an important point about how the intonation of the uttered word is inextricably tied with one’s responsible act. While he had yet to write more extensively about language itself, in this earlier work, he says, “the word does not merely designate an object as a present-on-hand entity, but also expresses by its intonation my valuative attitude toward the object, toward what is desirable or undesirable in it, and, in doing so, sets in motion toward that which is yet-to-be-determined about it” (32-33). Explaining Bakhtin’s point further, Don Bialostosky says, “If, as Bakhtin writes, ‘emotional-volitional tone is an inalienable moment of the actually performed act’ (33), and if emotional-volitional tone is expressed in the intonation of the living, full word, then expression, actual or thought, in the living, full word is an inalienable moment of the

actually performed act. Tone in language is not coincidental and subordinate to the act . . . but essential and inalienable” (93). As Lady Dedlock expresses abhorrence towards Jo’s appearance, her disgusted tone reflects a “valuative attitude” that ultimately serves to devalue what is, for Lady Dedlock, “yet-to-be-determined” about Jo himself. Therefore, her tone immediately “acts” to devalue what she has yet to give attention to, revealing an immediate oppressive attitude and hindering any true potential for a loving attentiveness.

While Lady Dedlock speaks with Jo, she is disguised as a servant, so she is not seen conversing with Jo; however, her privileged superiority leaks through the cracks of her disguise. Dickens’s subtle hint at the “servant’s” privilege strategically uses Bakhtin’s theory of the socio-ideological nature of dialogue to embody the privileging of the upper class, especially when the upper class clashes with the lower class. Though Lady Dedlock’s physical disguise hides who she is, her *dialogue* makes it impossible to truly hide the self-perceived social superiority that her upper class privilege produces. As she continues to question Jo about Nemo, she eventually silences Jo and his asides, only to reveal the true source of her power:

‘Listen and be silent. Don’t talk to me, and stand farther from me! Can you show me all those places that were spoken of in the account I read? The place he wrote for, the place he died at, the place where you were taken to, and the place where he was buried? Do you know the place where he was buried?’ / Jo answers with a nod; having also nodded as each other place was mentioned. / ‘Go before me, and show me all those dreadful places. Stop opposite to each, and don’t speak to me unless I speak to you. Don’t look back. Do what I want, and I will pay you well.’ (225)

Lady Dedlock’s bullying of Jo reaches its peak as she forcefully commands Jo not to speak to her unless he’s spoken to. To Lady Dedlock, Jo’s place within the lower class does not give him

the freedom to have a voice—much like the Coroner silencing Jo for his lack of education and like Chadband speaking so much that Jo simply did not have a chance to speak. By silencing Jo, her dialogue continues to reveal a social position that says her upper class position privileges her voice above Jo's.

Within her previous words, the isolation that results from the socio-ideological position revealed in her dialogue only becomes more explicit. She commands Jo to stand farther from her, creating a literal divide between her and Jo, and through this physical divide, the dialogue embodies the literal desire for upper class distance from the lower class. After Lady Dedlock commands physical separation, she fires a series of questions at Jo as he obediently nods, agreeing to do what she asks. After he agrees, her questions turn into commands as she drifts back into domineering over Jo. Finally, she reveals the source of her privilege, and she says, “I will pay you well” (225), as if monetary payment justifies her previous mistreatment of Jo. Through this statement, Lady Dedlock shows that she believes the material possessions of her upper class position empower her to dehumanize and neglect Jo and his voice.

The dialogue ends with Jo expressing himself again through his slang and with Lady Dedlock more explicitly addressing her dehumanizing view of Jo: “‘I’m fly,’ says Jo. ‘But fen larks, you know! Stow hooking it!’ / ‘What does the horrible creature mean?’ exclaims the servant, recoiling from him” (225). This last bit of dialogue epitomizes the social gulf that their interaction has thus far drawn out. Jo speaks within his normal slang, and Lady Dedlock ceases to even understand him, which is not necessarily surprising, but still stresses their social separation. At the end of their exchange, Lady Dedlock expresses explicitly what she has been implicitly representing through their entire interaction; she reverts to dehumanizing the poor boy by calling him a “creature” on the basis of class disparity, of physical appearance, and of simple

lack of understanding.

As noted earlier, Bakhtin argues that within dialogue, every language reveals a specific “socio-ideological conceptual system of real social groups and their embodied representatives,” and that these embodied representatives enter the novel together “into one heteroglot unity of societal becoming” (411). Through Lady Dedlock’s dialogue, Dickens exposes how her domineering social position ultimately produces a “societal becoming” that dehumanizes Jo and the poor. While Lady Dedlock is physically disguised throughout this scene, her dialogue hinders her from hiding the oppressive socio-ideological view of Jo from her place atop the upper class. Though the high and low class are interacting here, the societal becoming fails to form any true sort of unity as Lady Dedlock’s aggressive domineering ultimately furthers the class divide and furthers the deterioration seen thus far throughout this study.

Ethical Failure Within the Victorian Treatment of the Poor

Through the heteroglossic insertions of the Metropolitan Police Act, the biblical voices, a Shakespearean voice, and the embodied voices of dialogue, Dickens again brings his readers face to face with the injustices permeating Victorian culture. He forces his readers to face the ethical irresponsibility of their actions, or more specifically, their lack of action. As stated in the introduction, Dickens’s main act of love was his willingness to pay attention to the ailments of his culture and to “linger intently” over every facet of Victorian London. Through the loving contemplation of his surroundings, the heteroglossic nature of language shows the people of London their loveless neglect of poor society.

In one of the descriptions of Jo, the narrator describes how “strange” it must be to live like poor Jo, and in so doing, he reveals a key element in bridging the social gap:

It must be a strange state to be like Jo! To shuffle through the streets, unfamiliar with the

shapes, and in utter darkness as to the meaning, of those mysterious symbols, so abundant over the shops, and at the corners of streets, and on the doors, and in the windows! To see people read, and to see people write, and to see the postmen deliver letters, and not to have the least idea of all that language—to be, to every scrap of it, stone blind and dumb!
(222)

Within this description of Jo, the narrator describes the comings and goings of Victorian society—an example of Dickens’s intent lingering over the London streets. As the narrator observes through Jo’s eyes, however, it is ultimately language that separates Jo from the rest of his society. Language, while thus far used as a means of isolation from Jo, could also become a means of unification. Instead of using language as a means of distance from the poor, Dickens’s readers would have to face their loveless irresponsibility and reckon with the non-alibi—or their continuous participation in the world—of their existence.

At the point of Jo’s death, the narrator speaks directly to the audience of *Bleak House*, explicitly calling on readers to face the ethical responsibility of their non-alibied lives: “Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day” (610). The narrator speaks directly to every person of Victorian society—from the queen all the way down to simple men and women with the potential for compassion in their hearts—to call attention to the fact that the poor were perishing around them every day because of their lovelessness and indifference. Dickens continues to expose how Victorian London’s indifference decomposes their very society. Through Jo’s death, what an early spectator called “a proverb” (qtd. in Page 34), Dickens beckons each reader to lovingly linger over the ailments of the society and to responsibly love—both in their actions and with

their language—every individual within London.

Chapter Four – London’s Rehabilitation: Dialogic Warnings of Watchfulness and Charity

Throughout half of *Bleak House*, Dickens shows London’s injustice through the heteroglossic language within his third-person narrator. However, the other half of the novel is narrated by his first-person narrator, Esther. Thus far, this study has shown Dickens’s interweaving of different voices through his third-person narrator to leverage specific critiques about the isolation of the upper class from the rest of London and the society’s mistreatment of the poor. The “top-down” approach of examining the language regarding Lady Dedlock followed by an analysis of Jo gives an overarching picture of how Dickens uses language to show the injustice exhibited by the high class and experienced by the low class. Esther’s social position within society is much different than both Lady Dedlock and Jo as she is an orphan who gets thrown into the injustices of London when she enters into the care of Mr. Jarndyce. As Esther begins narrating the story, Dickens continues to leverage the same critiques of injustice, but through the first-person point of view of an observant orphan.

Dickens’s use of heteroglossia within Esther’s narration is a bit more narrow than that of the complex third-person narrator, but she is still worth analyzing because she narrates half of *Bleak House*. Since Esther’s narration is from the first-person point of view, the same oscillatory freedom that Dickens has with the third-person narration is not afforded here. The story is simply from Esther’s perspective, which means that she cannot oscillate into other voices as freely as a third-person, omniscient-like narrator. Within Esther’s point of view, Dickens almost exclusively includes biblical voices, and this seems significant as many of these biblical voices serve as warnings that *dialogically* echo alongside the critiques leveraged within the third-person

narrator's telling of the story.⁷ Esther's dialogical function as a narrator is crucial in understanding Dickens's use of language because two distinct voices tell the story, and they bring two different perspectives into the work. As noted in the introduction, Bakhtin defines dialogism as

the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so and in what degree is what is actually settled at the moment of utterance. (*The Dialogic Imagination* 426)

Within *Bleak House*, Dickens dialogically places his two narrators side by side. By nature of the first-person point of view, Esther's voice reflects heteroglossia more narrowly than the third-person narrator, but her voice still serves alongside the third-person narrator to dialogically bolster the critique of the injustices exposed throughout the other half of the novel.

Dickens's more narrow use of heteroglossia within Esther's narration might seem to lessen the scope of the heteroglossic interweaving surrounding her character, but her dialogic function alongside the third-person narrator only serves to further the critiques seen throughout the rest of *Bleak House*. When Dickens includes extratextual voices within Esther's narration, these voices *always* dialogically echo alongside the third-person narrator, and these utterances must be analyzed as doing so because they serve to bolster the overall critiques of London's injustice.

It is worth noting that critics have often expressed distaste at Esther's character because

⁷ Scholars have discussed whether or not Dickens was himself a Christian. For more on Dickens's Christianity, see *God and Charles Dickens* by Gary Colledge, *Dickens and Religion* by Dennis Walder, *Charles Dickens, Resurrectionist* by Andrew Sanders, *My Dickens, Christianity and "The Life of Our Lord"* by Gary Colledge

these critiques might cause some to question whether examining Esther's language is a worthwhile endeavor. Early after the publication of the novel, Charlotte Brontë noted, "I liked the Chancery part, but when it passes into the autobiographic form, and the young woman who announced that she is not 'bright' begins her history, it seems to me too often weak and twaddling; an amiable nature is caricatured, not faithfully rendered, in Miss Esther Summerson" (qtd. in Collins 16). Echoing Brontë's assessment of Esther, many critics have cited Esther's coyness as ground for critique. Summarizing many critics' distaste, J. Hillis Miller says, "Esther has been much maligned by critics for her coy revelations of how good she is, how much she is loved, and for her incorrigible habit of crying for joy" (32).

Despite many critics' aversion to Esther's character, Miller notes that she is indeed a plausible character (32), while Graham Smith notes that the reader should not be irritated with Dickens himself when irritated by Esther's character (16). With these "irritations" out of the way, the reader is then able to examine Dickens's language—separated from Esther's character—which he inserts *through* Esther's narration. Alex Zwerdling makes an important distinction about analyzing Esther, saying, "Such a narrator is not a transparent medium for the author's impressions. We are asked to look very much *at* Esther rather than *through* her, to observe her actions, her fantasies, even her verbal mannerisms with great attention" (38). As the reader looks *at* Esther to examine her as a character, he or she is then able to look *through* her language to identify the heteroglossic voices that Dickens inserts to expose Victorian injustice. When her language is analyzed in light *Bleak House's* larger exposure of injustice, Dickens's critiques begin to hold more weight because the dialogic function of these heteroglossic critiques more explicitly bolsters the overall critiques leveraged in the other half of the novel.

Esther: Echoing Alongside Extratextual Orphans

Upon Esther's entrance into the novel, she is immediately characterized as an agent for enacting change within Victorian London by virtue of her Christian name. Her name draws on the connotations from the biblical orphan, Esther, and her lack of family only builds on that biblical connotation. Esther Summerson—much like the biblical Esther who is raised by her uncle, Mordecai (Esth. 2:7)—enters the novel as an orphan. Throughout the biblical book of Esther, the orphan eventually shows the courage to approach the king without being summoned—an act punishable by death—and through her favor with the king, she eventually delivers the Jews from being killed by the king's head official.

To build on the initial characterization of her name, Dickens inserts fairy-tale language to connote an even broader context for Esther's character. She says, "I was brought up, from my earliest remembrance—like some of the princesses in the fairy stories, only I was not charming—by my godmother" (30). These two short examples use the heteroglossic nature of language by including biblical and literary voices to contextually define Esther's characterization as an orphan. Both of these characterizations add to her status as an orphan by placing her beside other biblical and literary orphans who have been agents of change. As a result, these heteroglossic utterances characterize Esther in light of other characters that have redemptive and influential stories.

Dialogic Warnings: "Watch ye therefore! Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping"

While Esther's name and her mention of fairy-tales reflect the heteroglossic nature of language to dialogically place her alongside other orphans, Dickens begins to include biblical voices that provide further warnings for the injustice and neglect seen in the other half of *Bleak House*. Through Esther's narration, Dickens includes a biblical voice through her godmother in order to warn Esther about generational sin—specifically the sin of Esther's mother, which the

novel later reveals is Lady Dedlock. The godmother says, “For yourself, unfortunate girl, orphaned and degraded from the first of these evil anniversaries, pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written” (32).

Within the godmother’s words lies a warning for Esther from the Old Testament, and this warning dialogically relates to the negligence of Lady Dedlock. The book of Numbers says, “The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” (Num. 14:18). Through Dickens’s heteroglossic inclusion of the biblical voice, Esther’s godmother includes a warning which connotes an ominous generational sin that Esther must watch out for. While this biblical insertion does not seem to directly relate to any specific injustice within Victorian London, the warning becomes more pertinent when considering how the warning dialogically sits alongside the heteroglossic exposure of indifference and neglect seen throughout Lady Dedlock’s time in the novel. Although Esther does not know that Lady Dedlock is her mother, Lady Dedlock’s sins are still present within the godmother’s warning—namely, the neglect that Lady Dedlock shows to the rest of Victorian society. The godmother’s words dialogically echo alongside the third-person narrator’s exposure and critique of Lady Dedlock’s unjust idleness. The insertion of the biblical voice into Esther’s narration provides an explicit warning for Esther not to fall into the same negligence.

After the godmother gives Esther this warning, Esther jumps two years into the future, and Dickens includes two insertions of the biblical voice to serve as further warnings against this negligence:

It must have been two years afterwards, and I was almost fourteen, when one dreadful night my godmother and I sat at the fireside. I was reading aloud, and she was listening. I

had come down at nine o'clock, as I always did, to read the Bible to her; and was reading, from St. John how our Saviour stooped down, writing with his finger in the dust, when they brought the sinful woman to him. / 'So when they continued asking him, he lifted himself and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her!' (33-34)

As Esther reads the words from the Bible, she directly quotes the New Testament. In the biblical narrative, the scribes and the Pharisees bring Jesus "a woman taken in adultery," citing Moses's law that says the woman should be stoned because of her sin (John 8:4). Jesus, however, stooped down, wrote something in the dirt, and charged that whoever was without sin should cast the first stone. The Pharisees and the scribes, realizing that they themselves were not without sin, trickled away from the woman without casting a single stone. As they realized their own sinfulness, the woman received mercy. After they left, "Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, [so] he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:10-11). Upon an initial reading of this passage, Dickens's choice for Esther to read these biblical words simply seems to imply mercy for the sins of those caught in sin—especially adultery, since the novel later reveals Lady Dedlock's actions. While Esther's reading of this extratextual passage certainly does imply connotations of mercy for the sinful, the godmother interrupts Esther's reading with another biblical voice that will serve to more explicitly show the dialogic relation of these biblical insertions to the other half of the novel.

After reading the passage from the Bible, Esther is interrupted by her godmother rising up and yelling "from quite another part of the book": "Watch ye therefore! Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!" (34). The godmother's

words allude to Jesus's words when he warns his followers of his return in Mark 13: "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:35-37). Before Jesus ascends into heaven within the biblical narrative, he promises his followers that he will return (see also Matt. 24). Jesus tells his followers to be watchful for his return, and Esther's godmother echoes these words in the midst of Esther sharing the biblical story of the adulterous woman who is shown mercy because of the ubiquitous nature of all people's sinfulness.

As these two biblical insertions are uttered beside each other, they dialogically function alongside the critiques of the third-person narrator to warn against the unjust neglect seen in the other half of the novel. The first biblical voice connotes a plea for mercy. Esther simply reads the passage to her godmother, but the connotations of mercy are still there as the biblical woman is shown mercy despite her adultery. Immediately following this passage, the godmother includes another biblical voice regarding watchfulness for Jesus's return, "lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping." Through these connotations of mercy and watchfulness, Esther's narrative serves to dialogically interact with the upper class's neglect and indifference seen throughout the third-person narrator's descriptions of a sick London. For instance, the warning against sleeping specifically interacts with the literary language that Dickens inserts in his critique of the "oversleeping Rip Van Winkles" within Chancery and the world of fashion.

Through the insertion of the biblical voices in Esther's narrative, the exchange between Esther and her godmother implies a warning for the rest of the novel—and to Victorian society—against a sleeping that produces a merciless, neglectful, and unjust society. The intrusions of the biblical voice within Esther and her godmother promote a watchfulness that mirrors the

attentiveness that Bakhtin says is every individual's ethical responsibility. As these passages dialogically interact with the other half of the novel, *Bleak House* ceases to merely expose and critique injustice, but instead, the work issues a plea for an attentive justice in a city full of neglect.

Dialogic Warnings: The East Wind

As Esther's narrative progresses, she begins to concretely interact with the neglect reflected through the third-person narrator, and Dickens includes another biblical voice through her guardian, Mr. Jarndyce, to provide further warning for the injustices of Victorian London. When Esther first meets Mr. Jarndyce, he asks her about what she thinks of Mrs. Jellyby. While Mrs. Jellyby concerns herself with charity work in Africa, the children at her home are neglected and in clear need of attention. Esther replies, "We rather thought," said I, glancing at Richard and Ada, who entreated me with their eyes to speak, "that perhaps she was a little unmindful of her home." When Mr. Jarndyce presses her to be a little more specific, she continues, "'We thought that, perhaps,' said I, hesitating, 'it is right to begin with the obligations of home, sir; and that, perhaps, while those are overlooked and neglected, no other duties can possibly be substituted for them'" (76). Within Esther's response, she expresses her and her companions' confusion regarding Mrs. Jellyby's neglect of her own home, and she hesitantly asserts that Mrs. Jellyby should concern herself with the needs of her home before she worries about anyone else.

Mr. Jarndyce responds, and in so doing, Dickens includes a biblical voice within his words to show the danger of Mrs. Jellyby's neglect: "'She means well,' said Mr. Jarndyce, hastily. 'The wind is in the east'" (76). Mr. Jarndyce's mention of an east wind here ties Mrs. Jellyby's neglect to a biblical sign that eventually brought destruction. In the Old Testament, the Egyptian Pharaoh dreams an east wind will bring famine to the land—a reality that Joseph later

confirms as imminent (Gen. 41:6). An east wind does indeed come and bring famine to the land, and if it were not for Joseph interpreting the dream before the famine, Egypt would have fallen into disarray and the entire civilization would have collapsed.

The biblical voice is included in the narrative right as Esther discusses the dangerous neglect she witnessed at Mrs. Jellyby's home. As Dickens includes the biblical voice within Mr. Jarndyce's speech, the voice dialogically echoes alongside the unjust neglect seen throughout the other half of the novel, and the voice serves to further warn against the society's indifference. For instance, Tatiana Holway points out that an East wind could also bring inclement weather and was typically "associated with trouble" (831). She highlights that the East Wind could carry pollution from the East End of London, specifically the neglected slums in Spitalfields and Whitechapel (831). Therefore, the east wind could carry disease from the slums. While the insertion of the biblical voice within Mr. Jarndyce's words only seems to directly relate to Mrs. Jellyby's neglect, the ominous east wind also dialogically echoes alongside the neglect of the poor seen through Dickens's insertions of extratextual voices within the third-person narrator. Mrs. Jellyby's neglect is indicative of the neglect of Victorian London at large. As Esther's narrative dialogically echoes alongside that of the third-person narrator, Mrs. Jellyby's neglect simply shows a singular incident of the society's larger problem.

London's Rehabilitation: "Covering a Multitude of Sins"

After the two warnings of being watchful and of the East Wind, Dickens inserts another biblical voice that gives a glimpse of action that might serve to rehabilitate Victorian society's injustice.⁸ In the chapter "Covering a Multitude of Sins," the chapter title itself includes a biblical voice that serves to inform the actions of the chapter as a whole. Within the title of the

⁸ To be clear, Dickens is not providing an "answer" for the unjust neglect seen throughout the novel. However, Esther's actions within this chapter do show the attentiveness that Victorian London lacked.

chapter, a biblical voice is inserted: “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins,” and in the verse immediately following, it says “ Use hospitality one to another without grudging” (1Pet. 4:8-9). Dickens includes this biblical voice within the chapter title to urge charity and hospitality as a primary mode for healing within a Victorian London that is not well.

The biblical voice of the chapter title colors the charitable actions of Esther and Ada, and while this study is more concerned with language than it is with actions, the chapter title’s language of “covering” sins make the actions of this chapter pertinent for London’s rehabilitation. In the chapter, the two characters perform an act of charity in the midst of another Mrs. Jellyby-esque character: Mrs. Pardiggle. Mrs. Pardiggle praises Mrs. Jellyby for her work, and she praises her sons—whom she has named after saints—for their donations to charities. Esther notes, however, that she “had never seen such dissatisfied children” (110), and they later tell her that their mother forces them to give away their money. Mrs. Pardiggle, along with Esther and Ada, visits a Brickmaker’s home located within another neglected slum. The family there is hostile towards Mrs. Pardiggle, but that does not stop her from reading Scripture in a tone that Esther notes is “too business-like and systematic” (116). One of the men, knowing that Mrs. Pardiggle is merely there to spout off her own Christian voice, hurries her, so he can return to his pipe. Despite his hurrying her, Esther notes that Mrs. Pardiggle still “took the whole family into custody. I mean religious custody, of course; as if she were an inexorable moral Policeman carrying them all off to a station house” (117). After Mrs. Pardiggle finishes her obnoxious reading, Esther and Ada approach a woman with her child by the fire. They quickly realize that the woman’s face is bruised and that the child has died. While Mrs. Pardiggle obnoxiously

“serves” the characters at the Brickmaker’s, Esther and Ada tend to the needs of the grieving mother, returning later that night with a gift for her.

The chapter’s title serves to color Esther and Ada’s actions within the biblical voice that says acts of charity cover a multitude of sins. While Mrs. Pardiggle’s reading has the appearance of charity, Esther’s and Ada’s actions are truly charitable and hospitable. Along with their actions in the chapter, the biblical voice also dialogically sits alongside the sins exposed through Dickens’s use of language in the other half of the novel. Dickens exposes many instances of neglect and lack of hospitality throughout his heteroglossic descriptions of Lady Dedlock. Within this chapter, however, he includes a biblical voice that dialogically echoes alongside My Lady’s injustices to show the immense weight—covering a *multitude* of sins—of simple acts of charity. Esther and Ada’s actions in this chapter serve as a small-scale example of the loving attention seen within charitable acts, and these charitable acts might serve to begin healing the sickness caused by Victorian society’s negligence and indifference.

Esther’s Loving Attentiveness

Throughout the third-person narrator’s telling of the story in *Bleak House*, Dickens inserts and refracts various voices to expose and critique the destructive indifference manifested throughout Victorian London. Through Esther’s narrative, however, Dickens issues more direct warnings through these biblical voices as they dialogically echo alongside the critiques issued by the third-person narrator. Esther’s godmother somewhat manically yells the biblical passage, “Watch ye therefore! Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping” before she collapses on the floor. This warning echoes alongside the indifferent, over-sleeping London that is only spiraling into more injustice. After Dickens issues this warning through Esther’s narrative, Esther exemplifies the loving attention that Bakhtin says is an ethical responsibility within every

individual's non-alibied existence. As she shows this attentiveness to her surroundings, Dickens inserts the biblical voice to show how her loving attentiveness "covers a multitude of sins" and ultimately serves to begin rehabilitating a decomposing London.

Conclusion

The Bakhtinian approach to *Bleak House* adds to the field of Dickens criticism by going beyond a mere analysis of Dickens's critique on the injustices of Victorian London. Dickens's heteroglossic method of exposing and critiquing injustice truly does draw on "all the levels of literary language, both conversational and written, that were current at the time" (Bakhtin 301), and his complex use of these languages draws on extratextual voices to bring his readers face to face with a fictional London not much different from their own. Many critique Dickens—and often rightfully so—for his moral-didacticism; however, analyzing his language through this Bakhtinian lens shows that his work is imbued with all the complexities of language, revealing that his critiques are never cheaply drawn out. Instead, his work accurately depicts London's true injustices in such a way that his readers must personally reckon with the work they have encountered.

As Dickens draws on all the complexities of heteroglossia, his experiment with a dual-narration shows dialogism in a way not yet seen within the novel. Dickens inserts and refracts numerous extratextual voices through the third-person narrator to leverage specific critiques about London's indifference regarding class disparity. During the other half of the novel, Esther's voice dialogically echoes alongside these critiques, affording Dickens the opportunity to closely follow a young orphan stuck within the injustices of the city. While his heteroglossic techniques are not as complex within Esther's narrative, the insertions of the biblical voice dialogically echo alongside the critiques of the third-person narrator to provide pertinent warnings for London.

Dickens also shows that it was through language that many Victorian citizens furthered the unjust isolation of social classes. The Coroner, Chadband, and Lady Dedlock all fail to use

language well in their interactions with the poor, and their misuse of language only allows them to continue in their unloving indifference. As Dickens lingers intently over Jo, he draws out how language might actually serve to unify the class disparity. As noted in the third chapter, Jo observes writing as “mysterious symbols, so abundant” throughout the city. He observes people reading, writing, and receiving letters, but he has not “the least idea of all that language” (222). Jo has no idea what all of it means, which reveals a subtext within *Bleak House* that urges citizens to use their language as a means of understanding, not of further isolation.

Through Jo’s inability to understand all that language, Dickens shows that unifying the class disparity has to start with understanding another’s language. The Coroner, Chadband, and Lady Dedlock all fail to understand Jo, and in turn, he has no opportunity to understand them. The upper class’s failure to use language well only further feeds into the decadence of their society. Within their failure, these Victorian citizens ultimately show the lovelessness and indifference that Bakhtin says, “will never be able to generate sufficient power to slow down and *linger intently* over an object, to hold and sculpt every detail and particular in it, however minute” (*Toward a Philosophy of the Act* 64). Their failure to linger intently over their own oppressive use of language or over Jo’s language only isolates the two classes further.

By using the complexities of the many voices of Victorian London, Dickens lingered intently over the city in order to show his readers what they had grown indifferent to. As he exposes the ailments of Victorian London, Dickens forces his readers to face what Bakhtin says is the ethical responsibility of a non-alibied existence. Readers had to start facing the unique context of every individual moment and every individual person in such a way that they started by seeking understanding. Norman Page points out that “[n]ot far from Dickens's mind seems to be St. Paul's declaration (Eph. 4.25) that we are all ‘members one of another’” (53). Dickens uses

language to show the closeness of every individual within *Bleak House*, and he urges his readers to use their language in a way that sought deeper understanding of others and unity within London. His interweaving of heteroglossia shows his own intent lingering over the city, calling on every individual to do the same.

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