

## The Importance of “Knowing” in Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*

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**Abstract.** In *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens depicts a society which worships money and feels very little love or charity towards the poor and the deprived. In this society the class barriers are rigid and destructive. The different classes feel nothing for one another but hatred, suspicion and contempt. It follows that in this kind of society secrecy is very important. The more you reveal about yourself the more you find yourself at the mercy of others.

It is, however, highly desirable not only *not* to reveal your secrets, but, more important, to try to learn or “know” other people’s secrets. Knowledge means safety and power. It also helps the individual make money and cope with the ugly realities of everyday life. There are different kinds of knowledge in the novel: inferential, experiential, intuitive or instinctive and knowledge derived from books.

It is the purpose of this study to discuss some of the characters’ attempts at “knowing” and the kind of knowledge that is or becomes available to them through their efforts, and to show how such attempts resound into wider significances that help the writer convey his vision.

In *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) Dickens shows us a society which worships Mammon and feels very little love or charity towards the poor or the deprived.<sup>(1)</sup> In this society the social barriers are rigid and destructive. The different classes feel nothing for one another except suspicion, hatred, contempt and even fear. In each class we find scavengers, parasites and predators who are hypocritical, ruthless, and treacherous, and who are not above committing the most heinous of crimes or ignoring them when they are committed in order to acquire wealth or to keep the status quo which is in their

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favor.<sup>(2)</sup>

It follows that in this kind of society secrecy is very important. The more you reveal about yourself the more you find yourself at the mercy of the next predator.<sup>(3)</sup> Thus, most characters in the novel are seen wearing masks: they use a physical or identity disguise or they exchange roles with others. Thus, John Harmon, the hero of the novel, assumes the name of Julius Handford and then of John Rokesmith. He also disguises himself as the mysterious oakum-headed and oakum-whiskered sailor who intimidates Riderhood. Bradley Headstone also disguises himself by copying Riderhood's clothes. Fanny Cleaver assumes the name of Jenny Wren and her father is given the name of Mr. Dolls by Eugene Wrayburn. Mr. Boffin pretends he has turned into a churlish miser and Mr. Riah is forced to act the part of a greedy money-lender by his master Fledgeby who plays the role of the benevolent and friendly gentleman. The impecunious Lammles deceive their "friends" into believing they are affluent. The rascally Silas Wegg impersonates the part of a literary man and claims he is also an authority on the English language. Mrs. Wilfur acts as if she were a tragic queen in a play while Lady Tippins, who is old and almost senile, flirts with men as if she were young and beautiful. Bella acts as if she were really mercenary and both Eugene and Mortimer behave as if they were hopelessly cynical or indifferent.

It is, however, highly desirable not only not to reveal your secrets,<sup>(4)</sup> but, more important, to try to learn or "know" other people's secrets. If you know another person's secret you have the upper hand and are in a position of power. You can also feel protected, make money, and cope with ugly reality. To be "knowing," therefore, becomes synonymous with being safe, wealthy, powerful, or "established." Accordingly, we will find the word "to know" and its derivatives such as "knowing," "knowingly," and "knowledge" occurring several times in the course of the novel. To "know" becomes the means whereby one determines the kind of relationship one wants to establish with the outside world.

Many other Victorian novelists, such as Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy, were also interested in the problem of knowledge, but their concern was different from Dickens's. Bronte's concern was expressive of the growing feeling of outrage felt by women towards men's tyranny and injustice. Thus in *Jane Eyre* (1847), the titular heroine acquires knowledge and accomplishments that make her Rochester's equal, and in *Villette* (1853), Lucy Snowe acquires enough learning and experience to enable her to set up her own academic establishment and be completely independent

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both socially and financially. In George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) Maggie yearns for all kinds of knowledge and experience in order to fulfil herself and satisfy the yearnings of her rich nature, and Dorothea in *Middlemarch* (1871), gains a redeeming insight into her own nature and into the multilevelled significance of experience. Thomas Hardy was a tragedian who, influenced by Darwin and Greek tragedy, portrayed the "heroic stature" that man acquires "through his struggle against forces that will ultimately destroy him."<sup>(5)</sup> Thus Tess, Jude, and Henchard, are placed in a world which they fail to understand, i.e., know, and are therefore destroyed. Dickens was primarily a social reformer operating through the comic medium. He was therefore interested in the relationship between the individual and society and in *Our Mutual Friend* he dramatized the various attempts which individuals make in order to acquire knowledge, attempts which are viewed within or which resolve themselves in social comedy.

We shall find in *Our Mutual Friend* that the knowledge which is calculating and self-regarding is usually inferential, whereas the non-inferential knowledge that comes spontaneously and instinctively, is usually, though not always, generous, well-meaning or merely self-protective. Exposure to suffering, treachery and danger, however, forces the good and generous characters to rely on inferential knowledge in order to protect themselves or foil the chicanery of the predators and rascals. Other kinds of knowledge include the experiential; the instinctive or intuitive; knowledge acquired from reading books; and the narrow, warped knowledge which excludes whatever is inimical to its interests.

It is the purpose of this paper to discuss some of the characters' attempts at "knowing" and the kind of knowledge that is available to them, and to show how such attempts resound into wider significances that help the writer convey his vision. As the word "to know" and its derivatives occur frequently in the course of this long novel, it would be too tedious to deal with every individual instance of their occurrence. Therefore, only the most significant ones will be isolated for the purpose of the discussion.



John Harmon, the *Our Mutual Friend* of the title and the hero of the novel, is eager to know the identity of the drowned man whom everybody thinks is John Harmon himself: "It is possible I may *know* him" (p.23).<sup>(6)</sup> The drowned man turns out to be George Radfoot with whom John had exchanged clothes and identity. John, however, prefers not to reveal his true identity and will assume a new one, that of Julius Handford

New ) s *Guide to the Nineteenth Century British Novel!A Reader* ·Karl .Frederick R <sup>(5)</sup>  
 .22 ,(1970 ,Octagon Books :York

Our All textual references are to The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens edition of <sup>(1)</sup>  
 .(1902 ,Oxford University Press :London) *Mutual Friend*

which he will soon discard and take on the name of John Rokesmith. He wants to make sure that Bella, whom his father wanted him to marry as a condition of the will, is the right girl for him. Moreover, revealing his identity would put him again at the mercy of other predators like Radfoot.

When he persuades Mr. Boffin to employ him in the position of Secretary he does his best to know everything about Mr. Boffin's affairs: "He anticipated Mr. Boffin's consideration whether he should be advised with on this or that topic, by showing that he already *knew* of it and understood it" (p. 193). Knowledge to him means power and security: "If ... he sought power, it was the power of *knowledge*; the power derivable from a perfect comprehension of his business" (p. 193). Since Mr. Boffin's inherited wealth should actually be his, John will actually be protecting his own interests by protecting Boffin's. As he has already been drugged and robbed (by Radfoot) and then thrown into the river and left to drown, his experience has taught him to be cautious and to try to know as much as possible about the people he deals with. As P.J.M. Scott aptly remarks: "The whole purpose of his hidden probatory life hereafter is to find the answers, in a personal drama, to the challenge which is recurrent and central in Dickens's fiction: what can be thought, known and achieved by the sensitive mind, by the responsible individual, who inhabits a human world informed by so many bad values?"<sup>(7)</sup>

When John disguises himself as a sailor and accosts Riderhood and forces him to write a confession that he has accused Gaffer falsely, he is able to intimidate the sinister and wily Riderhood only because he knows a few things about him such as his being an accomplice of Radfoot's: "The honest witness [Riderhood] rose, and made as though he would fling his glass in the man's face. The man [John] not wincing, and merely shaking his forefinger half *knowingly*, half menacingly, the piece of honesty thought better of it..."(p. 359). Thus he uses his knowledge to perform a good deed: clearing Lizzie's father's name.

His knowledge also leads him to do a charitable and compassionate deed: "But Rokesmith *knowing* it [i.e., that it was too late to save little Johnny], and *knowing* that his bearing it in mind would be acceptable to that good woman [Mrs. Boffin] who had been the only light in the childhood of desolate John Harmon dead and gone, resolved that late at night he would go back to the bedside of John Harmon's namesake, and see how it fared with him" (p. 330).

Since no one knows his real name, John feels he has lost his identity and his place among the living: "... to feel that I no more hold a place among the living than these dead do, and even to *know* that I lie buried somewhere else, as they lie buried here" (p. 366). He does not feel real, but just a shadow. He is like the prince in the fairy tale who

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(7) *Reality*, Scott

is under a curse and has been transformed into an animal or a monster.<sup>(8)</sup> The curse, in his case, is the one associated with his father's money which he is supposed to inherit and thereby to inherit his father's guilt as well. He "never *knew* his father's money to have done any good" (p. 379). On the contrary, his father's miserliness and cruelty broke his sister's heart leading to her own and her husband's death, and drove him, John, away from home to live in exile for many years. Thus, to be "known" by others will mark the beginning of his reacquiring a human form. In other words, when he is recognized by the Boffins, he is able to unite his past to his present and, through Mr. Boffin's inheriting the money and the curse attached to it and then making the money over to him, he is cleared of the sense of guilt which has haunted him. He is thus free to reveal his identity to his wife Bella who, by knowing and accepting him, helps him redeem his future. John, however, reveals himself to Bella only after he is completely sure of her and knows she has outgrown her mercenary views.

John's knowledge is both inferential and instinctive. The former, however, has the upper hand. He never relaxes his caution and never reveals more than he intends to. The price he pays for his self-restraint and for keeping himself in the shadow is that he becomes rather colorless and fails to excite us as a fairy tale prince usually does. Even when Dickens makes him expose Wegg at the end of the novel, his exposure of the rascal Wegg is devoid of heroism since Wegg is already defeated by the discovery of the third will.

The honest and kind-hearted Golden Dustman, Mr. Boffin, is perplexed by the wealth that has come down to him through the capriciousness and sadism of Old John Harmon. He does not know what to do: "I don't *know* what to say about it" (p. 89). When John offers him his services he does not know whether he will need a Secretary, "I no more *know* that I shall ever be in want of any gentleman as Secretary...." (p. 98). He does not even know what the word means (p. 179). He does not know how his wife can be so quick in finding new ways to do good deeds: "And she don't *know* how she does it" (p. 100). So, to the Boffins, knowledge is equated with feelings: and to know means to help, to do good, and to relieve any one who needs their help, charity or relief: "And isn't it pleasant to *know* that the good will be done with the poor sad child's own money?" (p. 101). Old Harmon knew what kind of people the Boffins were. In spite of his warped, sadistic nature, he had to admit what he knew and act accordingly. Here the knowledge of what is good overcomes the knowledge of evil: "But the hard wrathful and sordid nature ... *knew* their moral straightness and respected it" (p. 101).

Both Mr. and Mrs. Boffin are actuated by instinctive feelings and knowledge. When John Harmon starts working for Mr. Boffin and therefore has to go to the Bower everyday, Mrs Boffin feels that there are ghosts in the house: "I *know* it must sound foolish ... I don't *know* that I think I saw them everywhere. I felt them" (p. 190). She

*Texas Studies in "Dickens and Some Motifs of the Fairy Tale"* (See Shirley Grob  
(1976, especially p) 19-26, (1973) 4. No. 10, *Literature and Language*

(<sup>8</sup>)

cannot account for her feelings or explain why she gets this sudden sensation. Neither can she know, since this knowledge is inferential, that she feels this way because she has been seeing John Harmon whom she last saw as a child and whom she believes to have drowned. Nor has Dickens as yet told the reader that John Rokesmith is actually John Harmon. However, through Mrs. Boffin's reactions and apprehension, Dickens is alerting him that some secret is about to be divulged. Mr. Boffin tells her: "We *know* better that this house is not haunted" (p. 191). Later on, Mrs. Boffin will discover, instinctively, that John Rokesmith and John Harmon are one and the same person when she sees him sitting sadly and his face reminds her of the same sad expression she saw on his face when a child. Through her feelings and intuitive knowledge Mrs. Boffin discovers the truth.

Unlike Wegg and Riderhood, Mr. Boffin does not know how a person can give his word without, at the same time, pledging his honor: "My good fellow ... you have my word; and how you can have that, without my honour too, I don't *know*. I've sorted a lot of dust in my time, but I never *knew* the two things go into separate heaps" (p. 577). Wegg and Riderhood are extremely adept at divorcing their words from their intentions or deeds, but Mr. Boffin is not. He knows that his word and his honor are one and the same thing and they both constitute his moral integrity.

In the scene in which Mr. Boffin scoffs at John and humiliates him in front of Bella, Boffin is, as we discover later, only acting a part intended to teach Bella a lesson by showing her, by his own example, how money can change people. He tells those present: "Don't I *know* what grabs are made at a man with money?" (p.591). Knowledge here is of vital importance. Boffin is priding himself on his inferential knowledge, by which he claims to have found out John's mercenary scheme vis-à-vis Bella, while all the time, the accusations he hurls at the innocent John apply to Bella herself. It is worth remarking that he scoffs at John's knowledge of things, a knowledge by which he secured his job with him: "Oh! You are *knowing* enough" (p. 392). Boffin probably means, though he is secretly joking and enjoying himself, that John's knowledge (inferential and experiential) does not impress him, which is true in a sense that he is unaware of. Boffin's spontaneous and instinctive knowledge is superior to any other kind of knowledge. The insistence on knowledge, however, is to shake Bella's reasoned mercenary attitude to life: "How do you reconcile that, with this young lady's being a weak-spirited, improvident idiot, not *knowing* what was due to herself, flinging up her money to the church weathercocks... What is due to this young lady ... is Money, and this young lady right well *knows* it" (pp. 596-97). Boffin (with John's complicity) is trying, as we discover later on, to move her into shedding off her mercenary attitude to life by showing her what an ugly and destructive influence the love of money can sometimes have on people if it is not accompanied by feelings of compassion and benevolence.

Mr. Boffin attributes to John a predatory scheme which is actually being planned by the Lammls against him, Bella and John: "This is a very artful dodge.... See how

patiently and methodically he goes to work. He gets to know about me and my property, and about this young lady...." (p.594). The dramatic irony resulting from our knowing that John is innocent and that the Lammlers are already using their inferential knowledge in order to swindle or exploit Mr. Boffin is very complex. Since we do not know as yet that Mr. Boffin and John have planned the whole charade together in order to set a lesson for Bella, we tend to rejoice that the "corrupted" Mr. Boffin will be hoodwinked by the real crooks, the Lammlers. However, when we discover that John and Mr. Boffin were only playacting, we realize that the knowledge which the Lammlers have formed inferentially about Mr. Boffin, Bella and John and which they intend to use for evil purposes is doomed to failure.

Mr. Boffin is not one of the typical goody-goody characters which abound in Dickens. He can be shrewd and cautious. Thus although Mr. Venus has revealed to him Wegg's plot against him and although he knows Wegg cannot harm him because of the third will which cancels the will in Wegg's possession, he still pretends to be afraid of Wegg. He wants to test Venus and see whether he can trust him until the end: "I don't know how ever I shall go through with it" (p. 652).

Mr. Boffin and John defeat Wegg and foil his mercenary plot because they "*knew* enough" about it (p. 789). And John "*knowing* what" he "*knew*" about the kindness, generosity and honesty of the Boffins, was so incensed by Wegg's ingratitude that he would have liked to "twist" his head off: "And when, knowing what I knew, I saw such a mud-worm as you presume to rise in this house against this noble soul, the wonder is ... that I didn't try to twist your head off. ..." (pp.788-89). Knowledge is thus both safety and power.

Lizzie's knowledge is mainly instinctive and spontaneous. She looks at the fire and finds in it pictures from which she instinctively derives meanings and lessons relating to her and her family (pp. 28-31). When she sees Eugene for the first time, she is afraid he may know, i.e., discover, her father's secret (that he robs the drowned) from the expression of her face: "And I was afraid he might *know* what my face meant" (p. 27). She tells her brother Charlie that he never knew his mother and he answers: "Don't go saying I never knew a mother ... for I *knew* a little sister that was sister and mother both" (p. 28). Here Charlie is still under his sister's influence and can equate knowledge with true feelings. Lizzie instinctively knows, however, that Charlie's ambition to learn and "rise" in society by becoming a teacher has already divided him from her and her father: "But the secret has come to father's *knowledge* long before, and it has divided you from father, and from me" (p. 30). She therefore knows she is the only stay to her father: "In the meantime I *know* that I am in some things a stay to father" (p. 29). She hopes she may have a good influence on her father, though, in her modesty, she does not know what this influence may be or when it will be needed (p. 30). Though she never had any schooling, she does not resent her illiteracy because she knows it is a tie between her and her father who is afraid of learning (p. 30). Thus Lizzie knows she has to keep ties with her past and the people who are good to her. As John

Romano has written: "The defining characteristic of Lizzie's consciousness is a radical apprehension of continuity, in time and in human relationships."<sup>(9)</sup> She can instinctively translate her knowledge into the right feelings. Although she loves Eugene, she knows it is impossible for them to get married, in view of the wide gap that separates her class from his.

In Bella we have a conflict between inferential knowledge and instinctive knowledge. From her family's poverty and the deprivations they suffer, and from the way the poor are treated in her society, she has inferred that money is the most important thing in life. Concomitant with this knowledge is a feeling of guilt on her part that she is mercenary and unfeeling; in this she is like John Harmon whom she is destined to marry. Their guilt-feelings, however, spring from different sources and in both cases, as we have seen, it is Mr. Boffin who acts as a catalyst bringing about the resolution of the problem and the happy ending as well.

When we meet Bella for the first time, she is complaining to her father about her poverty: "I am one of the most unfortunate girls that ever lived. You *know* how poor we are" (p. 36). She is open-eyed enough to perceive that it would have been ridiculous to marry a man (John Harmon) whom she never met and therefore never even liked, just in compliance with his father's will: "It was ridiculous enough to *know* what an embarrassing meeting it would be.... It was ridiculous enough to *know* I shouldn't like him. ..." (p. 37). She is so self-centered that she assumes that everyone knows her situation and is making fun of her widowhood: "And if the truth was *known*, when the Harmon murder was all over the town, and people were speculating on its being suicide, I dare say those impudent wretches at the clubs and places made jokes about the miserable creature's having preferred a watery grave to me" (pp. 37-38). Here we have a clear example of the fear people have of letting their secrets be known to others. In Bella's case, she is afraid people may know about the will and the drowning of John Harmon and may therefore make fun of her instead of feeling sorry for her. Bella knows that she lives in a society of predators and scavengers where pity or compassion are virtually unknown.

Bella's dissatisfaction with her poverty makes her embrace one of the principal beliefs adopted by the society Dickens is portraying, i.e., that poverty justifies dishonesty: "I *know* you want to say so, pa, 'that's neither reasonable nor honest, Bella,' then I answer, 'Maybe not, pa—very likely—but it's one of the consequences of being poor....'" (p. 41). Dickens, however, is careful enough to put in her path people who believe in honesty and disinterested charity such as her father, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, John Harmon and Lizzie—they all help her win the battle against mercenariness and greed. When she watches how Mr. Boffin changes from a paragon of generosity, kindness and courtesy, into a monster of avarice, arrogance, and cruelty, she gets to see

<sup>(9)</sup> (Columbia University Press :New York) *Dickens and Reality* :John Romano  
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in him a living embodiment of what she can turn into through her strong desire to be rich, and she gets scared at the prospect: "I see this, and hate this, and dread this, and *don't know* but that money might make a much worse change in me" (p. 460).

Soon after she repudiates Mr. Boffin because of his cruel treatment of John and her decision to go back to her old house and live there in poverty rather than continue with the Boffins, she has a conversation with John in which the importance of knowing oneself is strongly emphasized. If you know yourself, you will know what you want and you will be less liable to go astray wasting your life, or making other people miserable, as Mrs. Wilfur is doing:

Miss Wilfur," said the Secretary ..."if you could *know* with what delight I make the discovery that Fortune is not spoiling you, you would *know* that it more than compensates me for any slight at any other hand."

"Oh, don't speak of me," said Bella ... "You don't *know* me as well as \_\_\_\_\_"

"As you *know* yourself" suggested the Secretary, finding that she stopped. "Do you *know* yourself?"

"I *know* quite enough of myself. ..." (p. 521.)

Bella thinks she knows herself: she believes she is greedy and mercenary, but Dickens has shown us all along that through her love and compassion for her poor father she is redeemable. When she was poor the knowledge she acquired through personal experience and through inference, did not convert her irrevocably to Mammon's side. Her instinctive goodness, supported by the examples of Lizzie, Mrs. Boffin, John and the "corrupted" Boffin, helps her now realize on which side she wants to be, and she is, in the words of A.E.Dyson: "rescued not from herself but from a false view of herself."<sup>(10)</sup>

When she marries John and is intrigued by the mystery surrounding his life, she trusts to her instincts: "No, John love. I should dearly like to *know*, of course ... but I wait until you can tell me of your own free will" (p.758). Here Bella passes the final test. She puts her faith in her instincts which tell her to trust John rather than in inferential knowledge which would cast doubts on him, considering his repeated refusals to meet Mortimer Lightwood.

Eugene Wrayburn's problem is that he knows too much about the society in which he lives and has, therefore, become disenchanted and disgusted with what he knows. The experiential and inferential knowledge he has acquired has rendered him apathetic and indolent while the absence of love from his life (his father has the typical Victorian fear of showing feelings or affection) has made him afraid of emotional commitment. His life is therefore as arid as a desert and his emotional deprivation has made him act

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cruelly and even sadistically at times so as to compensate for his great need for love and affection and his inability to get them.<sup>(11)</sup> Accordingly, he cannot yield to his emotions or feelings when he encounters true love in Lizzie: "My dear Mortimer, not that tone of melancholy reproach, I entreat. What can I do more than tell you all I *know*, and acknowledge my ignorance of all I *don't know*!" (p. 294). He is clearly greatly perplexed and does not know what to do. His inability to make up his mind about her is not simply because of the wide gap between their respective social classes, although that is a very important consideration, but mainly because he is unable to feel:

'I give you my word of honour, Mortimer... that I don't *know*.'

'Don't *know*, Eugene?'

'Upon my soul, don't *know*. I *know* less about myself than about most people in the world, and I don't *know*.'

'At any rate, you have some subject of interest there which used not to be there?'

'I really can't say,' replied Eugene, shaking his head blankly (p. 285).

Only when Lizzie saves his life and he undergoes a water baptism and resurrection can he renew himself and become capable of knowing and appreciating Lizzie's worth and of finally making up his mind to face all society and marry a girl who belongs to the lower classes.

Eugene knows that Headstone and Charlie are following him. He can even anticipate what moves and strategies they will adopt in their futile efforts to escape detection (pp. 542-43). His knowledge not only affords him amusement at their expense and a means to punish them for invading his privacy, but it also makes him feel superior to them and safe from any dangerous design they may be contemplating against him. This kind of knowledge that he possesses at this stage, however, is dangerous to him because it is defective: it is purely solipsistic and leads to smugness and arrogance.

In his actual encounter with Headstone and Charlie, Eugene demonstrates through the various references to the word "know" and its derivatives how cuttingly and cruelly sarcastic he can be and also how morally and intellectually superior he is to both the upstart Headstone and the self-centered and pedantic Charlie. Headstone may have accumulated more facts than he, but these facts remain abstract or theoretical because they are unrelated to experiential or inferential knowledge. Headstone has little experience or knowledge of life outside the books he has read. Eugene, on his part, shows that his instincts are much nobler than theirs because he knows instinctively how to distinguish between wrong and proper behavior:

:London) *Its Genesis and Structure :The Dickens Myth* (See Geoffrey Thurley <sup>(11)</sup> *Fictions of Resolution* and Deirdre David (١٩٧٦) (Routledge and Kegan Paul .٧٧-٧٤ (١٩٨١) Columbia University Press :New York) *in Three Victorian Novels*

"So much trouble for nothing? You should *know* best, but I think not."  
 "I don't *know* Mr. Wrayburn," answered Bradley, with his passion rising, "Why you  
 address me ---"  
 "Don't you?" said Eugene. "Then I won't."

.....  
 "Mr. Wrayburn," proceeded the boy, "we not only *know* this that I have charged upon you,  
 but we *know* more. It has not yet come to my sister's *knowledge*, that we have found it  
 out.... Why, we find that my sister is already being taught without our *knowledge*."

.....  
 "You think me of no more value than the dirt under your feet," said Bradley. ...  
 "I assure you, Schoolmaster," replied Eugene, "I don't think about you."  
 "That's not true," returned the other; "you *know* better."  
 "That's coarse," Eugene retorted; "but you don't *know* better."  
 "Mr. Wrayburn, at least I *know* very well that it would be idle to set myself against you in  
 insolent words or overbearing manners. That lad who has just gone out could put you to  
 shame in half-a-dozen branches of *knowledge* in half an hour. ..." (pp.289-91).

Headstone's obsession with class and his innate snobbishness, which does not let him forget his low origin, lead him to suspect that everybody is looking down on him and trying to make fun of him.<sup>(12)</sup> Charlie, on the other hand, is too self-centered and too full of himself to realize that he is cutting a poor figure. Both the teacher and the pupil are so absorbed in the literal meaning of knowing or not knowing that they are unaware of the moral implications of the word: to know does not merely mean to have learnt, but also to have understood, to have accepted and to have forgiven. Headstone cannot forgive society his poor origin and what it cost him to "rise," and Charlie cannot understand that his academic achievements do not make him a worthier person nor do they impress anybody. Although Eugene is not very familiar with their backgrounds, he is able to understand their deficiencies and, through the conversation, gets to know enough about their characters and their pretensions. He can therefore expose them both to well-deserved ridicule.

Eugene knows that Lizzie loves him; he "*knew* whatever he chose to *know* of the thoughts of her heart" (p. 406). He also knows his influence upon her: "In the moment ... of his first full *knowledge* of his influence upon her, she dropped and he caught her on his arm" (p. 694). Nevertheless, he again hesitates and cannot make up his mind what to do about her: "But again he subsided into a reminiscence of his first full *knowledge* of his power. ..." (p. 697).

There are a few points of similarity between Eugene and John Harmon. Both men were shown no love by their fathers who tried to control their fates: Eugene's father

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For a psychological study of Headstone and other characters in the novel see Eve Our The Example of :Misogyny and Capital 'Homophobia' 'Kosofsky Sedgwick Steven .ed 'Dickens Critical Reader 'Charles Dickens "'Mutual Friend .97-178 '(1996 'Addison Wesley Longman :Essex)Condor

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made him become a lawyer and wants him now to marry a rich girl he has already chosen for him, while John's father sent him into exile, and in his will, stipulated that he should marry Bella if he wanted to inherit his wealth. Both men were assaulted and an attempt was made on their lives. They were both thrown into the Thames and left to drown. Both survive and live to marry the girl they love. Their courses in life, however, are different. John never ceases to try to know, and the more he knows the more he wants to know. Eugene, on the other hand, wants to escape, to run away from what he knows: from the Veneerings, Mr. Podsnap, and Lady Tippins and what they stand for. He also wants to keep away from his father's tyranny, and forget his knowledge of this latter's attitude to feelings and his own inability to respond to love. When he knows that Lizzie loves him, he is confused and stymied and does not know what to do. The water baptism washes away all kinds of undesirable knowledge, purifies him, and teaches him to forgive his father. He is left with only Lizzie's true love which he now cherishes.

Jenny Wren, the child with a bad back and queer legs and with a father in advanced stages of alcoholism, has to rely on herself in order to survive. Thus she has had to fall back on her Fancy and has built a world entirely her own, a world in which angels come to her in the shape of young children who comfort her, play with her, and relieve her of her physical pain. Her apprehension of this world is through a kind of intuitive knowledge in which she believes so intimately that it becomes like a Blakean vision of transcendent reality. Through her vision of these unearthly children she tries to find solace for her emotional starvation and loneliness, "I used to *know* they were coming" (p. 239).

Jenny, however, has to cope with everyday reality which she knows to be hard and ugly. She has to be sharp and unsentimental, sometimes even to the point of becoming shrewish. Moreover, she has whimsically reversed the father-child role and treats her father as if he were her child: "I *know* your tricks and your manners.... I *know* where you've been to!" (p. 241). She can also scold him while caring for him. Since no adult has given her love or care, she will treat an adult like a child and give him the care she herself never got.

As she has to earn her living and survive in a society that is controlled by people like Mr. Podsnap and that harbors the likes of the hypocritical Fledgeby, the apathetic Eugene, the rogue Riderhood, and the self-centered Charlie, Jenny has to be shrewd and knowing. As Richard J. Dunn has aptly remarked: "Jenny heroically endures alienation from a world lacking both humor and heroism."<sup>(13)</sup> Hence she combines intuitive and fanciful knowledge, which enables her to cope with her physical pain and emotional deprivation, with inferential and experiential knowledge, which enables her to cope with her father and society. As P.J.M. Scott has remarked answering Henry James's unfavorable remarks about her as a fictional character: "She has a fully constituted

<sup>(13)</sup> *Studies in the Novel* "Comic Grotesque-Dickens and the Tragi" (Dunn .Richard J .١٥٣ ،(١٩٦٩Summer) ٢ .No ،١

human reality which exemplifies in an extreme way the problem of living in this society."<sup>(14)</sup>

Thus she instinctively and shrewdly knows why Eugene is interested in Lizzie's education. She knows the purpose behind Fledgeby's seemingly innocent questions about Lizzie's new address. She understands that it is Fledgeby and not Mr. Riah who is the real owner of Pubsey & Co. Moreover, she is indefatigable in her efforts to know how society ladies are dressed on different occasions so that she can make the rightly fashionable dresses for her dolls which she sells for a living. Moreover, she establishes a fanciful relationship with Riah in which she plays the part of Cinderella and he the part of the fairy godmother. In this way she can cope with the hardships of everyday life and temper reality with fancy. As G.W. Kennedy has noticed: "Clearly, the fairy-tale magic of Jenny and Riah is essentially a protective device of the imagination against the eroding force of the public world."<sup>(15)</sup>

Silas Wegg combines speculative (pretentious) knowledge with experiential and inferential knowledge in order to achieve his evil ends and satisfy his innate snobbishness. Thus he pretends to know the inmates of the house against which he has set his basket and wares as well as the layout of the house itself. But as is characteristic of him, he never has access to complete knowledge: "Our House, and, though his *knowledge* of its affairs was mostly speculative and all wrong, claimed to be in its confidence." (p. 45.) Wegg is as sterile as the goods he sells, therefore he is as incapable of instinctive knowledge or spontaneous feeling as he is incapable of appreciating kindness and generosity. Poverty has dried every humane feeling he may ever have had and he has become a potential predator waiting for the right opportunity in order to pounce on his victim.

He is arrogant but pretends to be a plain-speaking honest man: "I don't *know* why Silas, and I don't *know* why Wegg" (p. 48). He pretends to be learned and to be familiar with most books written in English including the "Decline and Fall of The Rooshan Empire": "But *know* him? Old familiar declining and falling off the Rooshan? Rather, sir! Ever since I was so high as your stick" (p. 52). He is surprised to find out that Venus knows about Mr. Boffin's inherited wealth (p. 84). He considers that he is the only one who has the right to know everything about Mr. Boffin, but he does not know

Some of Henry James' remarks on Jenny Wren are: "This young lady is the type of a certain class of characters of which Mr Dickens has made a speciality and with which he has been accustomed to draw alternate smiles and tears" (London: Norman Page, ed., *A Casebook: Our Mutual Friend and Expectations*, The Macmillan Press, 1971, p. 103).<sup>(14)</sup>

"Our Mutual Friend Naming and Language in" W.G. Kennedy, *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, No. 28, (September 1973), p. 173.<sup>(15)</sup>

that Boffin is a silent partner in Venus's business. Though he never met Old Harmon, he still claims he knew him (p. 84).

Although Wegg does not generate the hilarious humor associated with Daniel Quilp, Sairey Gamp, Mr. Micawber, or other "exquisite rascals" in Dickens's rich gallery of scoundrels and rogues, he can occasionally be funny:

"Now, Wegg, Wegg, Wegg," remonstrated the excellent Boffin, "You are too sensitive."  
"I *know* I am, Sir," returned Wegg, with obstinate magnanimity, "I am acquainted with my faults, I always was, from a child, too sensitive" (p. 187).

It is hard to imagine a sensitive Wegg. Wegg's most amusing characteristic is his impudence which knows no bounds: he is the archetypal representative of impudence in Dickens.

Wegg's greed also knows no limit and the best way for him to satisfy it is by exploiting the unsuspecting Mr. Boffin. His plan is to acquire knowledge about the mounds, the source of Old Harmon's and Boffin's wealth (p. 301). True to his predatory nature, he is afraid that the mounds may contain certain valuables which will be lost if the mounds are sold without his knowledge of what they may be hiding. As he considers the mounds rightfully his because he has found the second will, so he is very eager to know: "Because it would be *unknowingly* sold with the mounds else...." (p. 303). Puffed up by his sense of power which his finding the second will has given him, he imposes his greedy terms on his benefactor, Mr. Boffin: "Then you want to *know* what the terms are?" (p. 655).

In his last meeting with Mr. Boffin (John Harmon is also present and actually does most of the talking and threatening), a meeting in which he is finally defeated and exposed as the ungrateful rascal that he really is, Wegg is so impossibly arrogant and impudent and so shamefacedly dishonest that he becomes comical. He thinks he has the right to break the law or prey on Mr. Boffin. He is so thoroughly a rascal that he transcends the society that begat him and seems to inhabit a world of his own with rules of his own making. He is never disturbed by any moral consideration; he is not even aware that morals exist. His self-absorption is so complete that it would be absurd to take him seriously or try to inflict too severe a punishment on him. Dickens shows great subtlety and deep insight in making his defeat and final exit a comic one. Wegg can never win because his knowledge of his environment and the people around him is completely divorced from reality or experience and it stems uniquely from his wishful thinking.

Bradley Headstone's knowledge is acquired through hard work and personal sacrifices which required the suppression of spontaneous feelings and natural affections. It is a knowledge that is narrow and austere. It is impervious to fun and incapable of forgiveness. It consists mainly of slowly collected and stored facts. In his efforts to

acquire knowledge, Headstone was not prompted by a love for learning or a sense of wonder, but by a strong desire to "rise" in the world: he hoped that by becoming a teacher he would gain entry into the middle or even the upper-middle classes. As Richard J. Dunn has remarked: "The schoolmaster concerns himself totally with the idea of social status."<sup>(16)</sup> His knowledge is therefore a reflection of his self-regard and is dissociated from moral values for which it has no use. Accordingly, Headstone (notice the meaning of the name) is incapable of spontaneous or disinterested judgements or objective decisions and whenever he thinks he has some inferential knowledge, which actually derives from his frustrated feelings or base instincts (as when he suspects the kind of relationship between Lizzie and Eugene), he is invariably wrong.

Headstone is so keen on rising in the world that he makes sure everything about him and the people he associates with look decent and respectable. Before he meets Lizzie and is smitten by her, he advises her brother Charlie not to associate with her and to leave her alone because she is no longer worthy of his knowing her:

"Is it well to leave my sister alone, Mr. Headstone?"  
"I don't say so, because I do not *know*. I put it to you. I ask you to think of it. I want you to consider it. You *know* how well you are doing here" (p. 216).

Although he finds Lizzie attractive, he hesitates at the beginning about forming a marriage alliance with a girl so much his social inferior. He overcomes his initial hesitation, however, only when he comes to realize, i.e., know, that Eugene is interested in her. Eugene is a member of a privileged class which he publicly despises but which, deep in his heart, he aspires to belong to. He knows that the price of "rising" in society is a heavy one and therefore, subconsciously, he hates the members of the higher classes who have not had to work hard to be where they are now. His hatred for Eugene becomes an obsession and his attraction to Lizzie, though genuine, becomes also an excuse by which he hides the truth from himself:

"You are willing enough to listen to him. I *know* it as well as he does."  
His head bent down for a moment. ..."I was going on with the little I had left to say. I *knew* all this about Mr. Eugene Wrayburn all the while you were drawing me to you. I strove against the *knowledge*, but quite in vain. ...  
I have stood before him face to face, and he crushed me down in the dirt of his contempt and walked over me. Why? Because he *knew* with triumph what was in store for me tonight.  
"Oh, Mr. Headstone, you talk quite wildly."  
"Quite collectedly, I *know* what I say too well."  
(pp. 399-400)

Headstone, however, does not know what he says "too well." He is not addressing

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<sup>(16)</sup> . . . "Dickens" (Dunn

a class of young children and teaching them a well-prepared lesson. His assumptions and inferences about the world outside the classroom are all wrong. He is wrong about Eugene and Lizzie because his inferential knowledge is warped by his class-hatred and suspicious nature, and his experiential knowledge outside the classroom is extremely limited. As for his instinctive knowledge, it is either non-existent or, if it does exist, it is colored by his prejudiced and jaundiced nature. Deirdre David is certainly right when she writes: "Suppression of so much to make room for so much makes him a constrained bundle of class resentment and sexual jealousy. He refuses, in a sense, to make the acknowledgement of reality which seems to facilitate the escape of Bella and Lizzie from the confinements of their social situation."<sup>(17)</sup>

As is to be expected, Headstone gradually loses control of himself and the monster buried in his subconscious emerges: a monster created and fostered by repressed instincts, suppressed feelings and blind hatred. He knows his condition and knows he revels in it. He does not try to overcome it because he thinks he is justified:

The state of the man was murderous, and he *knew* it...And he *knew* as well what act of his would follow if he did, as he *knew* that his mother had borne him... He *knew* equally well that he fed his wrath and hatred, and that he accumulated provocation and self-justification.... *Knowing* all this, and still always going on. ...  
(pp. 546-47)

When he finally assaults Eugene physically and batters him almost to death and then throws him into the river leaving him to drown, he feels no remorse. On the contrary, when he learns that Eugene has been saved and that he has miraculously recovered from his wounds, he becomes livid with rage and is haunted by the knowledge that he might have committed his crime in a more efficient manner (p. 791). Because of his monomaniacal pride, he feels angry and mortified because Eugene did not report him to the police: "Bradley would far rather have been seized for his murder ... *knowing* himself spared, and *knowing* why" (p.792). Headstone's knowledge can never bring him happiness or fulfilment.

Headstone's experiential and inferential knowledge is so limited and so wrong that he underestimates Riderhood's cunning, greed and wickedness. He judges him from a quasi-academic perspective: "Having paid him handsomely for the support and accommodation he had had at the Lock-House, and *knowing* him to be a very ignorant man who could not write, he began to doubt whether he was to be feared at all, or whether they need ever meet again" (p. 792). His miscalculations prove fatal and he pays for them with his own life.

Riderhood is the most evil predator and scavenger in the novel. He is treacherous, unscrupulous, greedy and merciless. He will not hesitate to commit murder or any other

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<sup>(17)</sup> .٥٧ ،*Fictions of Resolution* ،David

crime in order to get money. He is practical and calculating and makes it his business to know about people. His knowledge is experiential and inferential but it is trained on the immediate needs of his senses and therefore cannot encompass or understand the depths of passion or despair.

Consumed by jealousy and envy, he wants to know why Miss Potterson, the proprietress of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters denies him admission while she allows Gaffer to frequent the inn (p. 64). He then starts maligning his ex-partner and turning false accusations against him, "As such I *know* more of the ins and outs of him. ..." (p. 64). He also boasts to the Inspector that he "*knows*" all Gaffer's working habits (pp.167 and 174).

His low cunning leads him to infer correctly from the condition of Headstone's clothes that the latter must have carried out his evil purpose against Eugene (p. 704). And when he follows Headstone, he "*knew* how to take advantage of the ground..." (p. 707). He also infers why Headstone has been wearing clothes very similar to his. He realizes that Headstone wants to frame him by drawing suspicion to him as having perpetrated the assault on Eugene. He goes to Headstone's school and sneers at him and the kind of knowledge he imparts to the students. He lets him know through the repetition of the word "know" that he is on to what he, Headstone, was trying to do and that he intends to make him pay for it. To Riderhood, knowledge is power and a source of income (pp.793-94). What we have in the confrontation between the two is a travesty of both knowledge and the methods of education used:

"How do you *know* it [the bundle of clothes] was sunk there by the man who wore it?"  
asked Bradley.  
"Cause I see him do it," said Riderhood,  
...

"... I wish to *know* what you want with me?"

(pp. 795-97)

Headstone's weakening is underscored by the fact that it is he, the schoolmaster, who wants to know. Riderhood has become the schoolmaster: they have reversed roles. Riderhood's knowledge, as he says above, is also based on verification. First, he inferred that by wearing the exactly same clothes as the ones he was wearing, Headstone intended to frame him; then by following him and seeing him take off his clothes and bury them, he could verify his inference.

In spite of his practical knowledge of life and people, Riderhood makes the same mistake about Headstone as the latter made about him: each miscalculates what the other can do. Thus, he does not know what Headstone, when driven to the wall, is capable of doing. Riderhood has only animal instincts and is completely devoid of any finer

apprehension of spiritual or mental suffering. His knowledge is confined to whatever is physical, and when he presumes to think he knows about Fate and Providence (as when he thinks that because he nearly drowned once, he can never die by drowning), his knowledge is mere superstition. His deficient knowledge and insensitivity cost him his life.

Podsnap is the arch-philistine in the novel. He belongs to the upper echelons of society and by virtue of his wealth and position is responsible for the conditions prevalent in it. He is a champion of laissez-faire and is opposed to every change or reform in society. He mistrusts the arts and represents British insularity at its worst. He is therefore responsible for the misery of the poor and the ugliness and shabbiness that pervade London. "Podsnappery," as Dickens calls his philosophy, is based on a kind of knowledge that is neither inferential nor experiential. It is a very narrow and exclusive kind of knowledge that is fed by self-consideration and is directed towards self-comfort, ambition and financial success. His is a knowledge that is indifferent to morality and unaware of the need for charity and compassion. It is an absolutely utilitarian kind of knowledge that worships solidity, bulk and weight at the expense of beauty, taste and refinement. Accordingly, Podsnap's knowledge is an extremely perverse kind of knowledge actuated by a monstrous selfishness, exaggerated self-importance and unshakeable smugness.

Podsnap's motto when he hears of anything disagreeable which may shake his faith in his belief that he is living in the best of all possible worlds is "I don't want to *know* about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it" (p.128). His arrogance and complacency are such that he even presumes to think that his ways and the ways of Providence are one and the same. He not only thinks so, he also *knows* it is so: "As a so eminently respectable man, Mr. Podsnap was sensible of its being required of him to take Providence under his protection. Consequently he always *knew* exactly what Providence meant" (p. 129). When the meek man tells him that many people have died in the streets of starvation, Mr. Podsnap refuses to believe him and waxes pompously angry. He even accuses the man of plotting to disrupt the political structure of English society: "I *knew* it from the first. Centralization. No never with my consent. Not English" (p. 140). He then tells the man he knows that Providence has ordained that we should always have the poor in our society: "You *know* what the population of London is, I suppose.... And you *know*; at least I hope you *know* ... that Providence has declared that you shall have the poor always with you.... It is not for me to impugn the workings of Providence. I *know* better than that, I trust, and I have mentioned what the intentions of Providence are" (p.141).

Typically enough, he summarily and contemptuously dismisses Eugene and Lizzie's marriage: "It offends and disgusts me—that it makes me sick—and that I desire to *know* no more about it" (p. 818). Accordingly, if Dickens in *Our Mutual Friend* presents us "with a rendering or translation of English society in the 1860s—a society the inequalities, injustices, and barbarism of which the novel wants passionately to

expose,"<sup>(18)</sup> he has created in Podsnap the embodiment of such inequalities, injustices, and barbarism.

The Lammles are predators who use their knowledge of other people's affairs in order to exploit or prey on them. Their knowledge is thus mainly inferential and experiential. Mr. Lammler does not seem to have instinctive feelings or knowledge of anything beyond his personal interests and needs. His wife, on the other hand, suppresses what natural or instinctive kindness she may have and decides to emulate her husband's example.

Their knowledge is based on down-to-earth pragmatism. When they discover their mutual deception, they decide to accept their fate and waste no time in useless recriminations: "We *know* very well how it was" (p. 125). They do not want to go through the "mortification of being *known* to have been done" (p. 126). They no longer entertain any illusion about each other: "We *know* one another perfectly" (p. 126). Their strategy is to lure innocent people, like Georgiana Podsnap, into their spider's web through flattery and by pretending to know their real qualities better than they do (pp. 136-68).

As is the case with all the other rascals in the novel, Mr. Lammler is endowed with a great amount of vanity: he thinks he is smarter and more knowledgeable than anybody else, which makes it easy for Fledgeby, another predator, to dupe him. Thus Mr. Lammler thinks that he is too intelligent not to know that Riah the Jew is the real owner of Pubsey & Co. and that it is he who ruthlessly sells his insolvent debtors into bankruptcy and social disgrace. Fledgeby in the meantime amuses himself at his expense: "Mr. Lammler joined in the laugh and looked *knowing*; and the more he did both, the more exquisite the secret joke became for Mr. Fledgeby" (p.424).

When they fail with Georgiana, the Lammles try to use their knowledge about the Boffins in order to exploit them and further their own interests. To achieve this, they will not scruple to betray other people's confidence (pp.558-59). They have no compassion or compunction. However, for people like the Lammles who operate in the high circles of society, knowledge and experience are no substitute for wealth. In order to catch a victim, they must inspire confidence by appearing very rich themselves, but they lack the means to do so and have to go and live in the colonies leaving England to other predators.

The Veneerings have risen from the middle to the upper-middle classes and are in the habit of giving sumptuous dinners to which they invite people who do not know or care about them and whom they do not know or care about (pp. 7,8,110,120 and 249). As their surnames imply, they are nothing but surface glitter with no substance or reality

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and *Desires Bodies Dickens Refigured* "Our Mutual Friend" Nicholas Royle <sup>(18)</sup>  
 .27 (1996) Manchester University Press :Manchester) *Other Histories*

underneath the surface. The guests are either superficial and foolish people who go to parade their self-importance; predators and scavengers like the Lammles who go there to eat their food and look for victims; or idle and indolent people like Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn who have nothing better to do with their lives than to attend the dinners and watch the affectations of people like Lady Tippins. As P.J.M.Scott has aptly remarked: "In the High-Society scenes of *Our Mutual Friend*, for example, we are offered an account of a human group in which no real principle of community consists: it is a sort of fatuous echelon or *corps de ballet* which is instinct with dullness, with intellectual and moral vacuity; its very rituals oppose generous and feeling values."<sup>(19)</sup>

Mr. Veneering encourages the marriage of Sophronia and Alfred (the Lammles) knowing,i.e., thinking they are both rich. In fact, they are both poor and are on the lookout for a rich spouse:

"I asked Veneering, and he told me you were rich."  
 "Veneering! ... And what does Veneering know about me?" ...  
 "But you asked somebody too.... You asked somebody?"  
 "I asked Veneering."

"And Veneering *knew* as much of me as he *knew* of you, or as anybody *knows* of him" (p. 124).

Although he knows nothing about politics or about the borough of Pocket-Breaches which he wants to represent in the House of Commons, he spends a large sum of money to buy the seat and flatters Podsnap to get his support although he knows that the latter cares nothing for Parliament (p. 247).

The Veneerings finally and inevitably go bankrupt (p. 815). Mr. Veneering's financial collapse is the result of his not knowing and not caring to know beyond the mere surface or glitter of things. A person like Mr. Veneering is both dangerous and harmful to society. His superficial knowledge leads, as we have seen, to the disastrous marriage of the Lammles, which hardens them in their future predatory course, and brings financial disaster on himself as well. His vanity and superficiality abet and encourage *laissez faire*, consolidate the position and authority of people like Mr. Podsnap, and allow crime to have a free rein.

We also find some of the minor characters making various uses of the words "know" and its derivatives. Thus Mrs. Wilfur, who is in the habit of making her husband feel guilty and who believes that by doing so she is maintaining her status which, she thinks, she has lost by marrying a man socially so much her inferior, uses the word "know" to drive the point home to him: "And when you *know* how those circumstances...." (p. 36). She is also sure that by marrying John Rokesmith, Bella has allied herself to a beggar: "I may feel—nay, *know* that in uniting herself to Mr.

<sup>(19)</sup> .٣٤ ،Reality،Scott

Rokesmith she has united herself to ... a Mendicant" (p. 677). Mrs. Wilfur's kind of knowledge reflects her extremely narrow and warped attitude to life. She views everything from the snobbish perspective of class, and thus reveals her pomposity and incapacity to feel or sympathize with others. She is a thoroughly ridiculous figure who lives entirely in her illusions and delusions.

Pleasant Riderhood turns down Venus's marriage proposal because "She *knows* the profits of it [his business], but she don't appreciate the art of it, and she objects to it. 'I do not wish... to regard myself, nor yet to be regarded, in that bony light'" (p. 84). Thus in spite of her surroundings, and in spite of her being Riderhood's daughter, Pleasant has taste and sensitivity and is therefore redeemed through her discriminating knowledge which is based on spontaneous or instinctive preference for the beautiful over the merely lucrative.

Fledgeby knows nothing about courtship, courtesy, or the other refinements of life. In spite of the Lammlers' efforts to educate him in these matters and make him respond and woo the future heiress, Georgiana, they do not succeed: he is too gauche to learn. All he can do is "trying to look as if he *knew* anything about it" (p. 263). Fledgeby, however, has a great deal of experiential and inferential knowledge, but disclaims he has any: "I don't cut things so fine as to *know* one from t'other. But I *know* this is a place where every man of business needs his wits about him" (p. 570). As "this place" actually belongs to him, Fledgeby is obviously amusing himself at the expense of Twemlow, just as he was amusing himself at the expense of Alfred Lammler in the passage quoted above. Fledgeby uses his knowledge in order to satisfy his own sadism: "Well, I *knew* you were a hard customer," he tells Mr. Riah, "Why should you, Mr. Riah? You *know* I *know* all about you.... And don't ... be so devilish meek, for I *know* what'll follow if you are" (p. 572). He exults in his hypocrisy and the power and amusement that his knowledge gives him.

*Our Mutual Friend* shows that the various characters embrace different approaches and attitudes towards "knowing" and "knowledge." The characters who attain to a true knowledge of themselves and life can achieve inner harmony and contentment and can live happy lives. As for those characters whose calculating and self-regarding egotism and greed preclude them from such a knowledge end up by losing everything. The epistemological problem is thus closely related to the characters' awareness of their environment and their own plight and as such it becomes intertwined with ontological considerations as well. The novel, however does not offer any viable solution to the problems of poverty, administrative inadequacy, and self-serving laissez-faire. In the upper echelons, people like Podsnap, Brewer, Boots, Buffer, The Contractor and others like them will continue to oppose and hamper reform and uphold laissez-faire because it is favorable to their own interests. The lower strata will, on their part, continue to wallow in the ooze and filth which are perpetuated by the Podsnaps and will, therefore, continue to beget monsters and birds of prey like Riderhood, Gaffer and Wegg.

As for the good characters, each finds a different kind of contentment, but the happiness that they attain does not constitute a comprehensive or coherent solution to the problems of society. The John Harmon-Bella Wilfur love story belongs to the tradition of romance and fairy-tale. They both deserve to be happy because they have come to "know" the consequences of selling one's soul to Mammon. Their happiness, however, is possible only because they were lucky enough to have Mr. and Mrs. Boffin to support and guide them. Mr. and Mrs. Boffin themselves are fairy-tale characters. The Harmons and the Boffins, however, can have very little impact on the kind of society depicted by Dickens.

The Eugene Wrayburn-Lizzie Hexam love story is, likewise, socially ineffectual. As a result of his rescue (by Lizzie) from drowning and his miraculous recovery from the almost-fatal wounds inflicted on him by Headstone, Eugene undergoes a "river" change and is a reborn man. He has come to realize, i.e. know, that what really matters are personal qualities and worth and not mere social status. Nevertheless, although he can defy his class-conscious society and outrage members of his own class by marrying Lizzie, the female waterman and factory worker, he cannot change this society. All he can do is keep away from it, which is shown by his absence from the last dinner given by the Veneerings prior to their departure for France. In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens writes "with the awareness of the possibilities of indeterminate meaning and solipsism," but he writes "against the very indeterminacy" he reveals. His major characters "struggle to reconstruct a world deconstructing, like modernist texts, all around them."<sup>(20)</sup>

Thus, in spite of the happy ending, we are left with the uncomfortable feeling that conditions in this society are not likely to change radically. The final chapter is monopolized by the Veneerings, Mr. Podsnap and Lady Tippins. Dickens's vision in *Our Mutual Friend* is a pessimistic one. He shows that knowing that compassion, generosity, gratitude and personal courage are more important than inherited social status or material success, can be beneficial only to the few individuals who know or come to know it. These individuals are endowed with special qualities or receive help from other individuals. Unfortunately, with all their knowledge, these individuals are too ineffectual and cannot stand up to the Podsnaps who control society.

## أهمية "الدراية" أو "المعرفة" في رواية ديكنز "صديقنا المشترك"

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أستاذ مشارك، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة الملك سعود،  
الرياض، المملكة العربية السعودية

**ملخص البحث.** إن هدف من هذا البحث هو استعراض ومناقشة ودراسة "المعرفة" أو "الدراية" عند بعض الشخصيات الرئيسية في الرواية ومحاولة بعض الشخصيات الأخرى للحصول عليها. ويقوم البحث كذلك بتحليل أنواع هذه المعرفة أو الدراية التي توصلت الشخصيات إليها، وكيف أن مثل هذه المحاولات يكون لها مغزى كبير لمساعدة الكاتب في توصيل رؤيته عن المجتمع الفيكتوري الذي كان فيه عدد كبير من الناس يعبد المال، الأمر الذي نتج عنه عدم الشعور بالتعاطف أو الشفقة تجاه الفقراء والمحرومين، فأصبحت مشاعر الكراهية والاحتقار والشك هي المشاعر السائدة بين الطبقات الاجتماعية.