

DICKENS AND SOCIAL CRITICISM

WS 2007 - 2008
Tuesdays 4 – 6 PM
Sedanstr.6, Room 2

Midterm

The midterm exam is to be turned in on January 8 at 4 PM without fail. Please answer one of the following questions. As you will see, some of the questions can be related to both *Our Mutual Friend* and *Bleak House*, and some of them can be answered in response to only *Bleak House*. If you answer a question concerning both novels then you will not need to demonstrate that you have read *Our Mutual Friend* in a quiz at the end of term. This may be helpful if you wish to write your term paper about *Bleak House* and not both novels.

In this exam I am interested in your performing close reading of the primary texts and demonstrating that you have thought about the novels carefully. You do not need to use any secondary sources, but you may do so if you wish. I am interested in your showing that you can perform independent analysis of Dickens's work. Please do not summarize the plot of the text, but do show that you have read it carefully by quoting from text that supports your arguments.

Non-native speakers should write a 3-4 page essay with spacing of one and a half lines. Native speakers should write 5–7 pages. Your essay should have justified margins, and each new paragraph should be indented. If you are unsure about how to cite correctly please consult the style sheets for *Literaturwissenschaft* from the English Department. Please consult either Professor Korte's or Professor Fludernik's websites for access to their style sheets. Please use either British or American punctuation consistently. Pay attention to paragraph structure: In English paragraphs generally consist of three or more sentences.

- 1) Describe the effect of the illustrations on one or both of the novels. How do the illustrations in *Bleak House* (and *Our Mutual Friend*) contribute to the reader's experience of these texts?
- 2) Describe the effect of serialization on the reader's experience of *Bleak House*. Consider the techniques that Dickens used to connect instalments to preceding and succeeding ones and to make them stand as single discrete units. According to Lance Schachterle, Dickens achieved this through the following means:
 - a. the conclusions of the instalments
 - b. the transitions between the parts
 - c. the dual narratives
 - d. thematic connections
 - e. linking symbolic images (adapted from Schachterle 218-222).

Which of the instalments are particularly successful in your view?

- 3) Describe how public institutions such as Chancery and the government are criticized in *Bleak House*. Compare this to the criticism of the Work House in *Our Mutual Friend*.
- 4) What is the importance of fog in *Bleak House*? How does this image compare to that of the river in *Our Mutual Friend*?
- 5) What is *Bleak House's* most effective form of social critique? And *Our Mutual Friend*?
- 6) How do narrative techniques contribute to *Bleak House*? Do the two narratives come together at the end of the novel? Is it problematic if they do not?
- 7) What is the effect of the scenes of dying children in *Bleak House*?
- 8) How are the rich and poor shown to be inalienably joined in one or both novels?

Works Cited

Schachterle, Lance (1970) "*Bleak House* as a Serial Novel." *Dickens Studies Annual*
I. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP. 212.-224.