

‘MOUNTING HIS HIGH TOWER’: THE DETECTIVE AS A FUNCTION OF NARRATIVE IN BLEAK HOUSE

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Abstract

In Bleak House, Charles Dickens uses his detective figure, Mr. Bucket, to function as a tool for narrative navigation through a labyrinthine setting and the complicated web of a mystery plot. Bucket has a mystical power of omniscience, controls pace, and effectively converges time and plot to relieve suspense and arrive at moments of resolution. He drives and directs the narrative with a purpose of functioning spatially and temporally, moving action forward amid the backdrop of the vast city of London. This article argues that in these ways, Bucket’s intuitive caliber as a detective is reflective of his faculty as a narrative tool and that Dickens uses Bucket more as a function of narrative than as a human character.

Dickens’s novel of London, Bleak House, situates numerous characters and plots within a labyrinthine cityscape. As the novel progresses, plots and characters converge to moments of encounter, connection, or resolution. A crucial figure in spatial and temporal convergence is Dickens’s detective figure, Mr. Bucket. Critics have established a detective’s role in fiction much positioned around agency. D.A. Miller argues Bucket is representative of all police and therefore of disciplinary power (70), while other critics argue the job of the detective is to return moral order to society. I should like to contend that Bucket’s purpose in the novel is to serve as a vehicle for narrative mobility. There is little evidence that Bucket is driven by a moral compass. Rather, his purpose is a function of narrativity, helping move and shape the narrative much like an independent narrator. Bucket appears when he is needed, and therefore actually does not enter the text until a third of the way through. Once Bucket materializes into the text, though, he drives and directs the narrative with a purpose of functioning spatially and temporally, moving action forward amid the backdrop of the vast city of London. Bucket’s extraordinary omniscience and navigational skills thereby make him less a human character and more a signifier of narrative progression.

Critics of detective fiction tend to focus on the inherent power of the detective figure. For D.A. Miller, Mr. Bucket demonstrates that “law enforcement is capable of showing a human face” (70). Stephen Knight argues that crime narratives serve a moral social purpose. Specifically, in Bleak House, “Bucket’s detection is not as important as, nor key to, the exposition of social crimes that permeate this massive account of nationally perceived threats

and values”(47). Detection, then, becomes a process of maintaining social and moral order, which again gives the detective figure power. Without dismissing the detective figure’s agency, I should like to consider another way he functions within the text. Bucket has noted powers of perception that impress other characters, but he is not limited to solving mysteries in a complex, entangled urban setting; Bucket effectively extends scope of vision and controls pace in the novel. His intuitive caliber as a detective, then, is reflective of his faculty as a narrative tool. This article will argue such a parallelism can be observed through Bucket’s apparent and actual omniscience, his savvy navigational acumen, and his figurative manifestation of time and space convergence.

I. Omniscience

Bucket is capable of traversing landscapes and resolving the novel’s conflicts because Dickens places him on the periphery and gives him omniscience. Bucket, serving as a police detective, is an outsider to the various social circles he must pass through in order to investigate. Yet, it takes an outsider to solve crime because he can see from a wider vantage point. Paradoxically, the outsider is also very much an insider of the city. Bucket sees beyond the normal human scope of vision and seamlessly navigates the city. Therefore, he simultaneously exists within and without in order to solve crime. Bucket’s ease of mobility positions him at various crucial vantage points that aid him in his pursuit of information or people. At times, Bucket physically positions himself in places to witness action, as when he reveals to George, “I know where my man is because I was on the roof last night and saw him through the skylight”(401–2). At other times, Bucket creates the appearance of omnipresence. This occurs in his conversation with Mercury about Lady Dedlock’s evening habits. Bucket tells Mercury he saw him let Lady Dedlock into the garden and approximates a time and her manner of dressing (814–16). This gives the impression he actually saw her, which serves a useful technique in obtaining and verifying information. In this case, pretending to have seen proves just as effective as having actually seen. Such notable powers of vision are noticed by other characters, as Bucket seems to Mr. Snagsby “to possess an unlimited number of eyes”(363). The perception of omniscience is not only crucial to Bucket’s influence over others but also reflective of a mythic ubiquity not granted to other characters.

Bucket has what Emily Heady calls a “detached photographic eye”(334). Bucket’s vantage point actually goes beyond a camera lens’s capacity, for he has apparent superhuman abilities of surveillance: “He has a keen eye for a crowd—as for what not?—and looking here and there, now from this side of the carriage, now from the other, now up at the house windows, now along the people’s heads, nothing escapes him”(Dickens 804). Bucket’s ability to see across the landscape is described literally and figuratively in ways that blur the lines of the real and the imaginary. Bucket is more than a detective, or even a human being; rather, his function is as a signifier of narrative progression to give access to certain views of his

perceptive scope, extend suspense, and eventually resolve plot. The apparent overlap of literal and figurative perception can best be seen in his pursuit of Lady Dedlock as he scans the expanse of the city:

There he mounts a high tower in his mind and looks out far and wide. Many solitary figures he perceives creeping through the streets; many solitary figures out on heaths, and roads, and lying under haystacks. But the figure that he seeks is not among them. Other solitaires he perceives, in nooks of bridges, looking over; and in shadowed places down by the river's level; and a dark, dark, shapeless object drifting with the tide, more solitary than all, clings with a drowning hold on his attention. (864)

The "high tower in his mind" is the exclusive figurative vantage point given to Bucket that the reader has limited access to. We cannot see to the breadth or depth that he sees; and without his interiority, our limited views cannot be meaningfully assembled. Bucket can hover over the city and see questionable figures in various places. He sees a "dark, dark shapeless object," a figurative manifestation of the woman he pursues. Seemingly, he has already foreseen her demise even if he cannot yet physically locate her. The passage evokes Bucket's transmundane vision and momentarily pauses narrative progression as he zooms in on different corners of the labyrinthine cityscape in search of the figure that will tie up a lingering thread of plot.

Bucket's wide vantage point allows him to see across a horizon of the city. Structurally, the narrative form itself provides a framework for multiple horizons. Action is suspended, as the serial form cannot allow for its progression until the "dawning" of the next installment. Dickens creates suspense within his literary horizons rather than closure. It is the prolonged wait for the next installment that engages reader anticipation. Bucket exists within these horizons, detecting from afar with a more expansive vantage point of the city and action than the reader, even though the reader has access to multiple narrative perspectives. For Elana Gomel, the fluctuation of narrative perspective provides a unique positioning for the reader: "'city-ness' is conveyed in *Bleak House* from two different perspectives: that of an omniscient third-person extradiegetic narrator and that of a first-person diegetic narrator, Esther Summerson. The novel's alternation between the bird's-eye view and the human-eye view creates two intersecting configurations of the urban space, the vertical and the horizontal" (300). While Esther's accounts are limited, the third person narrator presents a more expansive view of the city, and then zooms in and out of particular scenes. Yet, while the reader has access to both perspectives, Bucket still sees more than the reader. Both the third person narrator and Esther narrate Bucket's movement, yet cannot penetrate his complete line of sight or interior deductive reasoning. The reader also has limited access to Bucket's narrative perspective. Dickens draws awareness to this third perspective, but does not disclose all Bucket sees or provide all his interior knowledge. In doing so, Dickens

effectively creates suspense within the mystery plot. When Tulkinghorn is murdered, Dickens limits narration to evoke the mysterious atmosphere felt by the other characters. For Ian Ousby, the narrative fluctuations actually distort the reader's understanding of the text: "Like the characters themselves, [the reader] can understand events only partially and make mistaken guesses at their true nature. In these circumstances he relies on Bucket, as he had earlier relied on the third-person narrator, to re-establish the clarity of vision which the shift in narrative method has temporarily destroyed"(106). The reader's reliance on Bucket further extends the detective's powers of narrativity and omniscience. Partial understanding of circumstances will eventually be resolved by Bucket, but in the meantime, the reader is left in suspense and depends upon his movement and presentation of information to fill the gaps in narrative plot.

There is a parallel drawn between Bucket and the third person narrator: both have abilities of omniscience from afar and close up. Peter Thoms argues that a third person narrator "may engender an oppressive sense of widespread surveillance"(84). This is akin to Miller's notion of Bucket as representative of authority. There are few times Bucket's existence reflects a panopticonal oppressiveness, as when Jo is described as "possessed by an extraordinary terror of this person [Bucket] who ordered him to keep out of the way; in his ignorance, he believes this person to be everywhere, and cognizant of everything"(722). Jo fears Bucket's ubiquitous existence because his saturated presence is felt even when absent. George calls Bucket a "rum customer"(722), further suggesting Bucket as a suspicious fellow. While such an impression on other characters may contribute to an authoritative influence, it also adds to Bucket being a perpetually mysterious and even mythical figure. As a figurative representation, both Bucket and his infamous forefinger are used as symbolic physicalities of narration. Mr. Snagsby's mulls on Bucket "with his forefinger and his confidential manner, impossible to be evaded or declined"(407). Here Snagsby notes Bucket's extraordinary abilities. He knows that Bucket and his finger can see all and know all. Therefore, Bucket's position may be best described as inspiring sublime awe, stimulating both fear and wonder.

Due to his mobility and capacity for seeing from wide-range vantage points, Bucket becomes a part of the literary landscape while simultaneously a part of Dickens's cityscape. Bucket can be inserted into any place and time in the novel and successfully investigate and navigate his surroundings. In order to look at the ways Bucket functions within the landscape of the novel, we must first turn to the literal landscapes into which Bucket seamlessly materializes. This occurs with Bucket's first appearance in the novel, introducing his character with a touch of miraculous mysticism. The chapter titled "Mr. Bucket" announces his entrance into the story. However, Bucket does not formally enter into the scene. He is already present in Mr. Tulkinghorn's room when Mr. Snagsby sees

a person with a hat and stick in his hand who was not there when he himself came in and has not since entered by the door or by either of the windows. There is a press in the room, but its

hinges have not creaked, nor has a step been audible upon the floor. . . .Except that he looks at Mr. Snagsby as if he were going to take his portrait, there is nothing remarkable about him at first sight but his ghostly manner of appearing. (355)

Bucket already exists within the narrative landscape when the reader and other characters first encounter him. His sudden appearance in the scene is mystical and “ghostly,” for he does not physically enter, but is markedly already present in the room. This scene suggests Bucket has a superhuman ability of materialization. And as his heightened surveillance abilities enable him to see, in this scene Bucket’s mystical presence allows him to listen. Later, Bucket materializes into a room again: “A servant came to the door to announce Mr. Bucket, which was quite unnecessary, for Mr. Bucket was already looking in over the servant’s shoulder”(943). Bucket appears abruptly to blur the borderlines between his presence and absence in the text, and further impose his omniscience.

As a detective figure Bucket needs to see and hear in order to solve the mysteries of the city. Like his apparent “unlimited eyes,” Bucket’s use of disguise has the appearance of extraordinary transformative powers. While investigating, Bucket seems to magically appear: “the physician stopped, and taking off his hat, appeared to vanish by magic and to leave another and quite a different man in his place”(401). Dickens’s mystical rhetoric, “vanish by magic,” heightens Bucket’s supernatural, superhuman abilities of materialization. Bucket’s magical qualities also extend to his finger: “Mr. Bucket and his fat forefinger are much in consultation together under existing circumstances . . . He puts it to his ears, and it whispers information; he puts it to his lips, and it enjoins him to secrecy; he rubs it over his nose, and it sharpens his scent; he shakes it before a guilty man, and it charms him to his destruction”(803). Again, Dickens evokes a mysticism that surrounds Bucket. He is more than human due to his omniscient abilities but also because he is guided by a mystical voice that speaks to him through his finger. The finger, like Bucket himself, becomes another physical representation of a tool. Knowing information, heightening Bucket’s senses, and manipulating other men, the finger serves as an embodiment of godly power and perception. The finger guides Bucket, who then guides the reader; but since the finger is physically attached to Bucket, its power easily transfers to the man and both collectively work to see and navigate through the narrative.

Bucket’s mobility on the literary landscape also allows him to cross class lines. Through what Ousby calls a “supernatural mobility,” Bucket is not bound by class (99). He knows his way through Tom-all-Alone’s and he has an open invitation to the Chesney Wold, “where he comes and goes as he likes at all hours, where he is always welcome and made much of, where he knows the whole establishment, and walks in an atmosphere of mysterious greatness”(805). Dickens again uses mystical rhetoric to heighten Bucket’s impression on others and further establish his extraordinary existence as a narrative tool. Bucket’s social

mobility, in part, comes from the persona he projects in the company of others. He is able to gain Dedlock's trust so much so that he can come and go as he pleases. The "mysterious greatness" of Bucket reflects the subliminal awe previously discussed, though in this case, it is of admiration. Bucket's ease of mobility through Chesney Wold makes the home a microcosm for the city and for the novel itself. Bucket "knows the whole establishment," demonstrating his powers of omniscience in a domestic setting that is also reflective of his narrative omniscience.

In traversing social hierarchies, Bucket actually resembles a detached narrative perspective. Gomel describes, "The extradiegetic narrator is a detached, disembodied observer, capable of hovering above the busy urban panorama or sliding up and down the totem pole of society because he is not part of it"(302). Bucket functions in the same way as Gomel's extradiegetic narrator, freely moving in and out of different class environments. Bucket also crosses class lines through his knowledge. He says to Dedlock, "I know so much about so many characters, high and low, that a piece of information more or less don't signify a straw. I don't suppose there's a move on the board that would surprise me"(818). Bucket asserts his extensive intellectual and social scope, claiming no action would surprise him. This is the case because he perpetually sees and knows all. Dickens gives Bucket the appearance of visual and knowledgeable omniscience to both influence other characters and direct the reader through a complicated structure of narrative text. For Christopher Pittard, Bucket has a vantage point in the middle of clashing classes: "With Bucket, Dickens at once created the prototype of the literary detective, and emphasised his uncertain status in society, as the figure who stands halfway between respectable society and the criminals." But even positioned in between classes, Pittard notes, "Bucket has an air of omniscience." By not firmly situating his detective figure in a particular class, Dickens allows Bucket the social mobility needed to solve crime. Bucket's influence is perpetuated by his mysterious nature and ubiquitous presence. When Bucket visits George and Mrs. Rouncewell the narrator observes, "He is a sharp-eyed man—a quick keen man—and he takes in everybody's look at him, all at once, individually and collectively, in a manner that stamps him a remarkable man"(759). The narrator again draws attention to Bucket's perceptive vision and acuity while noting his prominence. This observation supports Bucket's incontestable eminence that is later described through his "mysterious greatness" felt in Chesney Wold. Such observations seem to contrast, though, with Bucket's first appearance in the text: "there is nothing remarkable about him at first sight but his ghostly manner of appearing"(355). However, descriptions of Bucket as "remarkable" refer to his actions rather than his physical characteristics. It is his "sharp eyes" looking at everyone in the room that impress George and Mrs. Rouncewell. His "mysterious greatness" in Chesney Wold is noted by his movement through the grounds. And his materialization into Mr. Tulkinghorn's room is the noted remarkable action in Bucket's

first scene. Therefore Bucket's mystical presence creates admirable awe that is heightened by his actions of surveying, moving, and appearing.

With such a narratological ubiquity and influence over other characters, Bucket is the perfect tool for finding missing persons and solving crime. Having a vantage point on the periphery and within domestic intimacies situates Bucket in an ideal place for both permeating and withdrawing from the text. In his analysis of crime and detective fiction, Dennis Porter emphasizes that landscape is: "as ideologically significant as stylistic level and the type of hero"(189). The cityscape of *Bleak House* contains many mysteries within its dark labyrinthine roads and permeating fog. Introducing a crime plot within such a setting requires Dickens to include a detective figure capable of navigating this complicated city. Porter argues, "landscapes appear either as the source and extension of the crimes reported or their antithesis"(190). In *Bleak House*, London is muddy, foggy, and gassy. The landscape's descriptions evoke a feeling of suffocation. Such a setting then, requires someone like Mr. Bucket, who can see and move through the fog. Bucket permeates the text much like the fog; he is ever-present, or at least successfully gains the appearance of ever-presence to continuously gather information and progress plot.

II. Navigation

It is due to Bucket's omniscience and placement within the landscape that he can so skillfully navigate the city. Bucket not only successfully navigates London to find people, he also effectively steers the characters and reader to the solution of the murder mystery and, therefore, to plot resolution. For Peter Thoms, a detective figure has an authorial duty to the reader: "We rely upon the detective to lead us out of the fiction's labyrinthine byways and, like any storyteller worth his salt, to entertain us in doing so"(10). Bucket knows his way around the city and proves skilled in tracking other characters; thus, his position can be likened to both a storyteller and narrator. Many critics regard Bucket's navigational aptitude as representative of his authoritative and disciplinary power. Since Miller argues Bucket is the embodiment of the police, he claims, "when Mr. Bucket escorts Mr. Snagsby through Tom-all-Alone's . . . the detective's thorough knowledge of the place as well as the extreme deference shown to him by its inhabitants (who call him 'master') indicate the degree to which the police have saturated the delinquent milieu"(69). For Miller, Bucket's ubiquity serves an imperialized institutional function. In this light, Bucket may be viewed as less of a human character since he serves as the signifier of a legal and penal system. However, Bucket's navigational skills are also evident of his narratological function of extending vision and mobility while simultaneously serving the need to solve mysteries. Bucket has acquired the skills to move easily through space, as he is a self-proclaimed "man of the world"(Dickens 401). Bucket's mobility within the city allows the reader (and oftentimes other characters) to follow his pursuit of information and people.

To first look at Bucket's navigational skills within the city, we must turn to the scenes when he physically moves through London's streets in search of people. When Bucket takes Mr. Snagsby into Tom-all-Alone's looking for Jo, he has a particular way of moving through the streets: "As they walk along, Mr. Snagsby observes, as a novelty, that however quick their pace may be, his companion still seems in some undefinable manner to lurk and lounge; also, that whenever he is going to turn to the right or left, he pretends to have a fixed purpose in his mind of going straight ahead, and wheels off, sharply, at the very last moment"(357). The narrator struggles describing Bucket's movements, his "undefinable manner," and following Bucket's rationale. Bucket's abrupt changes in direction make him difficult to physically and rationally follow. Neither Mr. Snagsby nor the narrator can explain why he changes direction so quickly, demonstrating his internal compass as inaccessible to others, even an omniscient narrator. Bucket, therefore, is privy to more than the narrator, and possesses an adroit navigational acumen that elevates his narratological aptitude. The reader is left, then, following his movement rather than the reasoning behind it. Without Bucket's interiority or the narrator discerning the reasons behind Bucket's movements, Bucket fulfills his role as a navigator. He is not a rationalizing or moralizing character; his function in the text is to move.

When the narrative perspective shifts to Esther's first person account, Bucket still commandingly directs the movement as they pursue Lady Dedlock. Esther serves, then, as a bystander, a reporter of the action, which she has difficulty with because she lacks both an instinctive compass and knowledge of the city. Esther says,

I was far from sure that I was not in a dream. We rattled with great rapidity through such a labyrinth of streets that I soon lost all idea where we were, except that we had crossed and re-crossed the river, and still seemed to be traversing a low-lying, waterside, dense neighbourhood of narrow thoroughfares chequered by docks and basins, high piles of warehouses, swing-bridges, and masts of ships. (868)

Rather than participating in a Victorian realist tradition, this passage evokes the mysticism that constantly surrounds Bucket's actions. Esther struggles to distinguish the reality of their journey from a dream because the pace of movement causes her to feel lost. Despite noting fixed markers, Esther cannot lucidly follow movement because for her, the city is a labyrinth. Yet Bucket navigates it easily. He provides no explanation for his movements, and instead, just makes Esther follow him. In this way, Bucket's method and skill as a navigator through the city is reflective of his way of navigating the reader through the novel. Such an immense novel, even with two narrative perspectives, frequently leaves the reader in suspense. Bucket, alleviates the suspense when he finds people of interest and solves the mysteries, but first, he must take the reader and characters on journeys to reveal that end.

Bucket's navigation is also dependent on his ability to effectively communicate with others. In this way, he uses socialization to immerse himself in the narrative landscape and facilitate navigation. Esther watches Bucket's process of navigation during his communication with residents: "we stopped at offices . . . and I saw him in consultation with others. Sometimes he would get down by an archway or at a street corner and mysteriously show the light of his little lantern. This would attract similar lights from various dark quarters, like so many insects, and a fresh consultation would be held"(903). Esther watches Bucket consult, but she makes no report of the content exchanged during these encounters. Esther is a mere observer, much like the reader, at an extended distance from Bucket's information and navigational skill. He will lead both Esther and the reader to the objects of their pursuit, eventually. But while he navigates through the city, Bucket further extends his ability to permeate the novel by controlling the movement of the text through both momentarily stopping action and then accelerating pace. As a figurative representation of illuminator—for Bucket will eventually shed light on the mysteries of the novel—Esther also notices how Bucket literally lights their path with his lantern and how this light is used to connect with more people to gather more information, suggesting Bucket is a narrative illuminati.

Bucket's consultations with others also reflect his superior presence in the city. While I have argued such an appearance makes him into a more extraordinary and ubiquitous figure, it also helps him with narrative mobility. The narrator observes Bucket's affability and its effect on his mobility:

Mr. Bucket pervades a vast number of houses and strolls about an infinity of streets, to outward appearance rather languishing for want of an object. He is in the friendliest condition towards his species and will drink with most of them. He is free with his money, affable in his manners, innocent in his conversation—but through the placid stream of his life there glides an under-current of forefinger. (803)

The narrator refers to people here as "his species," suggesting a detachment of sentiment and humanity. Rather, Bucket socializes for the purpose of gaining a wider network of access within the city. Bucket's "under-current of forefinger" again suggests the mystical power of his finger while representing his role as detective and the need for socialization to aid in solving mysteries. Bucket's socialization is immeasurable through a "vast number of houses" and "infinity of streets," further giving Bucket what seems like mythical potency, but which are capabilities of a narrator. He can move anywhere and encounter anyone with a godlike air. Esther refers to Bucket as someone "whom everybody seemed to know and defer to"(869), for he is omnipresent and possesses godly acclaim. Meanwhile, the people of the city become tools for Bucket as he uses them to gain necessary information. Esther's observations suggest Bucket knows what persona to emit to gain access to everyone in the city: "he was up and down at every house we came to, addressing people whom he had never

beheld before as old acquaintances, running in to warm himself at every fire he saw, talking and drinking and shaking hands at every bar and tap, friendly with every waggoner, wheelwright, blacksmith, and toll-taker”(881). Bucket can enter into any domestic space in the text and communicate with ease to people he does not know. He presents an affable personality and gains respect, clearly for influence and obtaining needed information. His permeation through the city makes him capable of navigating the streets and knowing the people. In the scope of the novel, London is presented as such an immense city, but Bucket, because he exists as a tool for navigation, can move through it easily.

Shifting to the textual framework, Bucket also navigates the reader through the narrative plot. Peter Brooks defines plot as “the dynamic shaping force of the narrative discourse”(335). From a structural view of *Bleak House*, the plot has a difficult task in “shaping” due to the inherent largeness of both the city and the novel. Dickens creates networks and connections between various characters through many subplots, but it is Bucket who also greatly contributes to shaping the novel. Bucket’s omniscience and navigational skills help bridge the connections between characters of different social strata and unveil the truths behind the mysteries. The detective figure, then, fulfills a role beyond that of a legal or penal system’s prescribed occupational duties. In his analysis of detective fiction, Peter Thoms argues, “the detective functions as an authorial figure, attempting to uncover the story of crime, and the ‘case’ becomes a story about making a story”(1). This is similar to Franco Moretti’s application of Russian formalist notions of *fabula*, as events produced by the detective, and *sjuzet*, as the events produced by the criminal (146). Because the detective has the power to “produce” narrative, he serves a narratological function to the reader. He is not just another character who is part of the narrative; in establishing *fabula*, he extends himself beyond narratable figure to a figure who narrates. In this case, *Bleak House* becomes a novel about narrative construction. In a monumental novel about a monumental city, Dickens establishes and moves plot through a character who, though a figure within the plot, better serves as a function of the plot.

Concerning the mystery plot in particular, it is useful to consider criticism of detective fiction in conversation with narratology. For Thoms, “Nineteenth-Century detective fiction is an inherently self-reflexive form, which exposes simultaneously the constructedness of its narratives and the motives underlying their creation”(1). Yet, Dickens has imbedded many layers of plot in *Bleak House*, which further extend a challenge in unraveling the narrative construction. To examine Bucket’s contribution to the narrative discourse, we must regard the way he is committed to resolution. Bucket is not present during the first third of the novel because his figure is not yet needed by the characters or even by the reader. Bucket has a purpose of solving mysteries, and in doing so, ultimately guiding the plot to its resolution. Considering the two narrative perspectives, Robert W. Pendleton argues they create two different worlds that Bucket ultimately converges: “By uniting momentarily the two worlds

of Bleak House, Bucket brings the repressed ‘story,’ in Russian Formalist terms, into focus with the ‘plot’”(319). Bucket’s capacity to merge narratives further makes him a function of the novel, successfully driving the text to its denouement. Such a resolution is necessary for plot construction, as R.S. Crane argues the “good” plot is “the final end which everything in the work, if that is to be felt as a whole, must be made, directly or indirectly, to serve”(123). Bucket, by facilitating the movement of plot and narrating the fabula, does lead us to this “final end,” at least for the parts of the narrative he has inserted himself into. His actions help Esther find her mother, solve a murder mystery, reconnect George with Mrs. Rouncewell, and apprehend the actual criminal. Yet, because Bucket is a narratological tool, Dickens is not committed to resolving anything about his character. Bucket’s function is to resolve other plots and make bridges between the fluctuating narrative structure rather than serve as a character with his own story.

Bucket bridges gaps for the reader, filling in needed explanation and alleviating suspense. Dickens uses suspense to heighten the reading experience and prolong arriving at his denouement. As previously noted, Bucket’s mobility adds to the suspense when the reader witnesses his abrupt movements, but not his rationale. Predominantly, it is the absence of information that creates suspense in the novel. Tzvetan Todorov argues the story of the crime “is in fact the story of an absence” because it is not present in the physical text (46). Yet, absence paradoxically stimulates a feeling of presence of suspense, anticipation, and fear created by a mystery with an unknown killer. Bucket’s extended absence from the text also brings awareness to his presence. Bucket, then, is a tool for both prolonging the suspense and eventually relieving the reader from suspense. Critics who discuss suspense look at the ways it functions for the reader and how it anticipates resolution of plot. Miller argues, “the novel dramatizes the liabilities of fragmentation and postponement within the hopeful prospect that they will eventually be overcome”(76). The fragmented narration and lengthy narrative suspends the reader in the text. Further, Brooks discusses Barthes’s hermeneutic code as concerning “the questions and answers that structure a story, their suspense, partial unveiling, temporary blockage, eventual resolution.” He goes on to argue, “the clearest and purest example of the hermeneutic would no doubt be the detective story, in that everything in the story’s structure, and its temporality, depends on the resolution of enigma”(339–40). For Brooks, the detective story is “pure” in building suspense and leading to resolution. Bucket, then, as a tool for creating and relieving suspense, is the embodiment of pure hermeneutic narrativity.

Both Dickens’s suspense and narrative movement are also implicitly related to temporality. In Porter’s analysis of detective fiction, he argues the genre is “committed to recovery” as solving the plot depends on both forward and backward movement (29). He calls this closing the “logico-temporal gap”(30). Bucket’s navigational skills and omniscience allow him to

“recover” what is missing, whether it be people or information, and in doing so, relieve the reader of the built up suspense that the long novel has been committed to building.

III. Temporality

Looking at the plot of *Bleak House* through a temporal lens allows for Bucket to emerge not only as a navigator of plot but also as a device interconnected with time and pace. Plot, which functions as the movement of action over time, depends on novelistic pace to progress. Such movement can be seen through the way Percy Lubbock likens narrative reading to a visual experience in which readers are spectators, as a book is “a procession which passes across our line of sight”(87). Dickens certainly encourages this type of reading experience in *Bleak House*, as readers become followers of Bucket and, therefore, of the plot progression. Readers cannot participate in the plot; they must watch from afar, guided by a tool of novelistic pacing. Peter Brooks argues that plot’s temporal extension is critical to a text, for “narrative stories depend on meanings delayed, partially filled in, stretched out”(342). Extending text and the widening gaps in the story slow the pace of the narrative. For *Bleak House*, Bucket’s lingering movements, social encounters, and physical absences delay plot progression by slowing down the pace until Dickens is ready for him to take us to the conclusion.

The movement of plot contributes to an active reading experience. Gerard Genette articulates the connections between temporality and movement and how they are related to the experience of reading:

The temporality of written narrative is to some extent conditional or instrumental; produced in time, like everything else, written narrative exists in space and as space, and the time needed for ‘consuming’ it is the time needed for crossing or traversing it . . . The narrative text, like every other text, has no other temporality than what it borrows, metonymically, from its own reading. (34)

For Genette, reading becomes an act of moving across the physical space of the novel. Dickens’s long form extends the reader’s journey to “cross” the field of the text. This is especially true for the contemporary serial reader whose time to read was further limited by the publishing pace of the release of installments. Therefore, multiple layers of time exist, as there is the speed of events in the story and the speed it takes the reader to “consume” the text. Bucket can only function in the first case. As he moves toward plot resolution, Dickens extends length with other plots, and publication distribution limits reader fulfillment of the gaps left by suspense.

In *Bleak House*, Bucket affects plot progression because he has spatial and temporal abilities beyond the human faculties of other characters. Dickens even writes, “Time and place cannot bind Mr. Bucket. Like man in the abstract, he is here to-day and gone to-morrow—but, very

unlike man indeed, he is here again the next day”(803). Bucket seemingly exists both within and without the narrative boundaries of text. “A man in the abstract,” Bucket is not a character in a humanistic sense, but a representative abstraction of plot and temporal movement. His existence is perpetual because his absence still brings attention to a presence and crucial functionality within the text. The limitations on Bucket’s physical presence in the novel also serve another purpose: to prevent the story from being uncovered too quickly. Dickens says Bucket is not limited by time and place, for he can navigate any landscape; therefore, in order to maintain his long form, Dickens must limit Bucket’s physical presence in the text.

Bucket has a direct relationship with time in the novel that is not limited to movement. His knowledge of where characters are at any given time puts him in position to intervene with action, merge narrative webs, and, ultimately, use both temporal knowledge and movement to arrive at resolutions. For example, Bucket reveals the murderess to Sir Dedlock after looking at his watch: “The party to be apprehended is now in this house”(829). At this moment, “now,” plot and time converge so that a revelation can be made public. Bucket’s omniscience therefore allows him to fill Porter’s “logico-temporal gap.” Knowing truth and having a relationship with time gives Bucket the ability to relieve suspense and lead to minor and major resolutions of plot.

The moments that Bucket bridges connections or resolves plot serve as time and space convergences. Bucket’s facilitation of such moments make him representative of Mikhail Bakhtin’s chronotope, defined as, “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.” For Bakhtin, “in the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope”(84). In *Bleak House*, Bucket becomes a signifier of time and space convergence by finding hidden characters, solving mysteries, and connecting characters and threads of plot. The scenes where time “takes on flesh” are when Bucket’s movements bring active awareness to pace. For example, a combination of his omniscience, navigational skills, and chronotopic figurativeness allow Bucket to lead Esther to Lady Dedlock’s body. The pursuit of Lady Dedlock is at times rushed so that Esther can hardly keep up, and other times slowed in order for Bucket to interrogate locals, making Bucket in complete control of the novelistic pace. The noted visibility of temporal significance allows Bucket to serve as a figurative chronotope when he finally brings Esther to Lady Dedlock’s body, fusing together not just the pursuit with the object of pursuit, but the history of Esther’s infancy with her mother’s recent struggles.

Serving as a signifier is one way Bucket functions within the text and becomes emblematic of Bakhtin’s chronotope. Bakhtin says chronotopes “are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotype is the place where the knots of

narrative are tied and untied”(250). Bucket, as representative of a chronotope, navigates and moves the text to points of convergence, “the knots.” These serve as moments of discovery. Finding Jo, Gridley, Lady Dedlock, and discovering the identity of the murderess are all moments when plot and time converge and mysteries are unraveled. When Bucket facilitates such moments of discovery, he becomes a figurative chronotope. Robert Pendleton argues that Bucket merges narrative of life and death, and in doing so, “is the surrogate for the invisible artist who kits together the fragments of Bleak House”(318). For Pendleton, Bucket is representative of the storyteller detective who writes the narrative for the reader ignorant to the criminal’s story. Rather than call Bucket representative of an “artist,” I argue that moments of merging, bridging, and converging all demonstrate Bucket’s figurative representation of chronotope. Bucket is not inventing something original, for what has happened in the past is already a part of the story’s history. He does not invent the story of the crime; he merely recounts it. In doing so, Bucket brings the past to light in the present. The moment of awareness to truth is a moment when narratives of different times confront one another. For example, finding Jo in Tom-all-Alone’s is important to Bucket’s pursuit of information to fill in gaps in the mystery. Likewise, uncovering where Gridley is hiding turns into a confrontation between Gridley and the law that Gridley no longer has the strength for. Gridley’s death occurs quickly after the moment of convergence; his independent plot thread cannot be upheld after Bucket’s pursuit brings the men face to face. Ultimately, solving the mystery of Tulkinghorn’s murder and capturing the murderess is Bucket’s greatest moment of plot merging. In the space of Dedlock’s home, Bucket functions as chronotope who brings the action behind the mystery, the story of the crime, to a position of verbal revelation. Bucket finally explains, rather than moves, suspending time to elucidate the circumstances behind the murder.

Bucket serves a purpose in the narrative, not as a character, but as a tool for narrative revelation. In fact, Bucket does not have many characteristics that liken him to the level of other human characters. There are no indicators of his morality, sympathy, or humanity. He is motivated to solve mysteries, but Dickens does not provide what fuels this motivation. The only human qualities he exhibits are an amiable personality and effectiveness as a communicator. But these characteristics serve a purpose of allowing him to manipulate information out of people, as when he learns of Lady Dedlock’s night walks from Mercury (814–16). Since Bucket is not rooted in human essence, and holds many superhuman abilities, his function in the text is not to be read as a character, but used as a narratological tool.

The few moments that Bucket seems human are subverted by their actual narrative purposes. Bucket may appear a neighborly man when he says he is “so fond of children” to Mrs. Bagnet and proceeds to tell a personal story about a friend while playing with the children on his lap

(760). But this moment of human compassion and connection serves a larger purpose. He flatters and tries to please the family in hopes of getting in their good graces. Bucket even sings and expresses a wish for Mrs. Bagnet and Mrs. Bucket to become good friends (764). Yet, Bucket's amiable and playful demeanor is a ruse so he can interrogate and apprehend George. As Bucket says, "I have a duty to discharge" (767), which outweighs a seemingly compassionate personality. Bucket repeatedly refers to his "duty" in arresting George while simultaneously trying to maintain a friendship with him. It may be argued that Bucket knows George is not guilty and is sensitive to his feelings. However, since all evidence points to George, it is likely someone else will apprehend him and the capturer receive reward. Bucket, knowing George is actually innocent, prevents anyone else from capturing him while he continues to investigate the crime. Much of this investigation occurs behind the scenes, for Bucket's next insertion into the novel is as he surveys the funeral and soon after reveals to Dedlock the killer is a woman. His explanation extends the chapter until Mademoiselle Hortense enters and Bucket reveals the whole truth of the murder. Bucket's apprehension of George, then, serves as a narrative stall for building suspense and engaging sympathy for a wrongfully accused man. The reader can well ascertain George's innocence, even if we cannot determine who the actual killer is. The scenes in the prison cell build sympathy for George and allow him to reunite with his mother. Though Bucket is not present in the scene, his actions lead to this reunion, which further demonstrates him as a figurative chronotope. It is through Bucket that profound moments can occur in isolated time and space. For the reader, George becomes a sympathetic subject. But this event also elevates the suspense, begging to question who the actual killer is and if he/she will be found in time to absolve George.

Dickens has Bucket formally depart the narrative when the detective is no longer needed to fulfill a narratological function: "He unbolted the door, called in the bearers, wished us good morning, and with a look full of meaning and a crook of his finger at parting went his way" (947-8). Bucket and his finger exit formally, in contrast to the textual materialization that introduced him. His ability to converge time and plot and unravel mysteries is no longer needed. However, since Dickens has already declared Bucket's omnipresence, his formal departure does not indicate permanence. Bucket will continue to exist on the periphery, watching from his high tower, ready to materialize into a physical presence whenever needed. As an influence on future detective fiction, Mr. Bucket is the embodiment of effective surveillance and tracking, and a vehicle for relief from suspense and to plot resolution. The detective, then, as a new figure in fiction, extends himself beyond the limitations of regular authorities and becomes a figurative representation of moving, merging, and resolving within a narrative framework.

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