Presentiment, contrast and ambiguity in fictional space:
The London novels of Charles Dickens and Peter Ackroyd

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This paper addresses the part that depictions of space and time play in the London novels of Charles Dickens and Peter Ackroyd. Just as architects envision and give a material form to the environments that their clients will eventually occupy, so writers imagine, shape, project and describe the settings that are inhabited by their characters. Dickens is widely regarded as one of the first ‘modern’ authors, whilst Ackroyd is usually described as a typical ‘postmodern’ writer, so one might expect that, even though the two writers are inspired by the same place, the atmosphere of London that each evokes might draw on different aspects of the urban environment that afford different properties and qualities to their fictional characters, as well as reflecting their dissimilar life histories. Authors are socially situated and, to a greater or lesser extent, even though their stories may be fictional their books deserve consideration as social documents in their own right. Six representative novels by each author have therefore been examined for ‘thick spatial description’, which has been compared with its corresponding map of London. It is suggested that Dickens proposes a ‘geography of presentiment’ and a ‘meteorology of foreboding’, whilst Ackroyd draws attention to the ambiguous nature of reality through motifs that establish a pattern of ideas about the ‘spirit of place’. Both these literary devices are arguably ‘romanticist’ and require a ‘willing suspension of disbelief’, but whereas Dickens’ use of environment has more in common with Wordsworth, Ackroyd’s approach to space and time shares a common thread with Coleridge. The paper concludes by suggesting ways in which the study of fictional space can inform and even inspire novel architectural practises.

1.0 Introduction

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was a prolific author, who wrote fifteen complete major novels during his lifetime, as well as numerous sketches, short stories, Christmas stories, children’s books and historical accounts. Peter Ackroyd (b.1949) is an equally productive English biographer, novelist, critic and historian, with fourteen major novels to his credit. Over the course of the past century and a half, Dickens’ novels have generated a plethora of academic papers dedicated to examining his characters and plots, but less has been said about the fact that his novels paint vivid and credible descriptions of environmental settings that seem to reinforce the moral messages inherent in his writing. Ackroyd’s novels are characterised by non-linear time and temporal displacement, to such an extent that the reliability of the senses of an experiencing subject and the nature of reality itself are called into question. Superficially, Dickens appears to explore the potential of space and Ackroyd to be more concerned with time, yet if there is one thing Ackroyd is known for, it is for his evocations of ‘spirit of place’ in London.

Both authors are novelists inspired by London, but whether each is best described as a chronicler, historiographer, raconteur, storyteller, fabulist or even prophet is open to debate. Critics differ as to whether Dickens is a predominantly a ‘realist’ who is concerned with factual depictions of contemporary life and society, or a ‘romantic’ who draws for his effects on the aesthetic potential of strong emotions like shock, revulsion or awe. Ackroyd is usually described by critics as a practitioner of, ‘historio-
graphic metafiction’. The term is due to Hutcheon (1983, 1988), who draws attention to the new role that history has assumed within architecture at the end of the twentieth century as a resource of prototypes and patterns that can be endlessly plundered and recombined in an archly self-referential way to create new effects, ‘My model here is postmodern architecture, that resolutely parodic recalling of the history of architectural forms and functions,’ (Hutcheon, 1983, p.3). She goes on to suggest that the text has assumed a similar role in literature, ‘The term postmodernism, when used in fiction, should, by analogy, best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past.’ (ibid., p.3). In other words, the genre treats texts as artifacts that provide the raw material out of which new texts can be self-consciously and playfully constructed.

This paper does not pretend to make a contribution to these literary controversies, but rather it addresses directly the use of space and time in the novels of Dickens and Ackroyd, to explore the messages that can be deciphered there that might be of value to spatial morphologists. The paper, which began as a ‘voyage of discovery’ dictated by a hunch that the novels of these particular writers would bear comparison, does not conform to the rules of engagement that underpin conventional literary criticism because its principal concern is with the depiction of the spatiotemporal environment in the novels. However, insofar as architects are concerned with the shaping of space and arguably of time, they are also interested in how other disciplines (such as philosophy or literature) conceive of space, time, identity and reality, and the paper specifically addresses these issues from the position of an informed and inquiring architect. The principal objective of embarking on such a comparison is to show that attending to depictions of fictional space can illuminate historical and contemporary spatial practices and has the potential to inspire today’s architects and urban designers to consider novel approaches to place making.

Concentrating on their representation of London’s urban environment, six examples have been selected from each author’s oeuvre, as sufficient to illustrate the principles underpinning their respective depictions of time and space. The key spatiotemporal features of each author will be described as a prelude to drawing out a number of key unifying themes that distinguish Peter Ackroyd’s use of environmental setting from that of Charles Dickens. As direct quotations from the selected novels constitute the main body of evidence about how the two authors have depicted London’s varied spatiotemporal milieux, significant numbers of extracts have been reproduced from the primary sources to illustrate the propositions advanced in the paper. Moreover, as it is unlikely that readers will recall all of the fine detail pertaining to Dickens’ and Ackroyd’s novels, the selected quotations should give readers a flavour of how each author has chosen to portray London’s built environment. Although any paper that sets out to analyse authorial mastery of spatiotemporal setting in fiction should not take itself too seriously, it is suggested that Ackroyd’s use of context, like that of his predecessor Dickens, is both serious and deliberate, and therefore worth consideration in order to illuminate wider socio-cultural forces and movements with respect to the built environment.

Just as an author brings ideas and assumptions to the creative act of writing, so readers are active agents who generate additional meanings through their experience and interpretation of the written word. Readers and writers are alike in bringing their ideas and experiences to a work of literature or an academic paper, and each may reach a new level of understanding through their encounter with the text. Having acknowledged this to be generally the case, this particular paper can be read at a number of levels. At its simplest, it aims to show that the way novelists describe the built environment has inherent
or intrinsic value for architects and urban designers, even though their works are ostensibly fiction; that is, imaginary and invented by the author. These descriptions are worth reading for the simple ‘pleasure of the text’ (Barthes, 1973), as entertainment that does not challenge the reader but can be enjoyed at face value and for its own sake. Delving more deeply, the borderline between fiction and faction (reference to real people, places and events) may be imprecisely drawn, so that the narrative is believable and suggestive of the significance that space, time and reality may have in the lives of individuals or wider society. To the extent that this is so, fiction may help designers to empathise with the end users of buildings and places and gain insight into and interpret the values that are placed on space and time by others.

The authorial proposition that the environment can set the tone of a story, enhance the atmosphere in which events take place or even contribute directly to the shaping of the action is not without interest to architects and designers, as it suggests a role for architecture that is more ambitious than the Modernist proposition that ‘form follows function’. Rather it hints at a larger role for the environment, such as metaphor, symbolism or ‘affordance’ (Gibson, 1977). Even where the events that are described may be regarded by a sceptical reader as implausible or impossible, such as where Ackroyd’s modern day reality dissolves and merges with that of the remote past, this may provoke thoughtful readers to re-examine their previously-held ideas about reality. A challenging narrative may stimulate the reader to break out of an entrenched subject position and explore novel propositions by suggesting ways in which their understanding of space, place and time might be radically incomplete.

Reading accounts of space and place from sociology and anthropology has long been acknowledged as a useful contribution to the education of an architect. This paper suggests that the architectural imagination can equally well be stimulated by reading the creative writing of one’s own culture, and further expanded by exploring the literary output of other cultures. The unexpected consequence of having embarked upon this comparison between Dickens’ and Ackroyd’s London is a novel observation that contextualises the two authors within the tradition of English Romantic writing, but the main message is that their nuanced awareness of fictional space-time can pave the way to more sophisticated architectural practices.

2.0 The Authors

Dickens’ London was very different, physically and experientially, from the London that Ackroyd encounters today. All of the senses of a twenty-first century pedestrian, miraculously transported to walk about London in Dickens’ time, would be unbearably assaulted by the experience. Yet some aspects of the metropolis remain largely unchanged, and it is these similarities and differences that make the Dickens-Ackroyd comparison telling to spatial morphologists. As both Dickens and Ackroyd draw heavily on their personal experiences of London to ground the major themes of their novels in lived reality, it may be helpful to give an account of the salient features of their lives, before moving on to consider their fictional narratives.

Dickens was born in Portsmouth, where his father John Dickens worked in the Navy Pay Office. In 1815, when Charles was three, the family moved to London and took lodgings in Norfolk Street (now renamed Cleveland Street). The workhouse there may be the inspiration for that described in *Oliver Twist*. Two years later, the family moved to Chatham in Kent, where Charles spent the happiest years of his childhood. Whilst living there, John Dickens commended Gad’s Hill Place, a substantial country house near Rochester, to his young son as a suitable gentleman’s residence. Dickens never forgot this advice and he acquired the house in later life,
thus realising his father’s ambition.

In 1822, Dickens’ family moved back to London and settled in Camden Town, which was only just being developed. Dickens recalls this in *David Copperfield*, in which the suburb is described as wearing, ‘an indescribable air of faded gentility’ (p.343, DC). In 1824, Dickens’ father was imprisoned for debt in the Marshalsea Prison, which Dickens later describes as, ‘an oblong pile of barrack building, partitioned into squalid houses standing back to back, so that there were no back-rooms; environed by a narrow paved yard, hemmed in by high walls duly spiked at the top’ (p.58, LD). At this time, Dickens was forced to leave school to work in Warren’s Boot Blacking Factory at Hungerford Stairs near the Strand, on the site of what is now Charing Cross Station, and he lodged in an attic room across the river in Lant Street, Southwark, near the Marshalsea, for a while. The factory makes a cameo appearance in the semi-autobiographical novel, *David Copperfield*,

‘Murdstone and Grinby’s warehouse was at the water-side. It was down in Blackfriars. Modern improvements have altered the place; but it was the last house at the bottom of a narrow street, curving down hill to the river, with some stairs at the end, where people took boat. It was a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting the water when the tide was in, and on the mud when the tide was out, and literally overrun with rats. …the dirt and rottenness of the place, are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant.’ (p.135, DC)

Although Dickens was able to resume his education, the traumatic experience left an indelible mark, but for a while he was left to his own devices, which granted him the freedom to explore the streets of the capital, building his knowledge and experiences of London and its occupants in ways that he could draw on later as a writer. Amy Dorrit’s experiences in the novel *Little Dorrit* clearly resemble Dickens’ own as a boy of twelve, ‘This was the life, and this the history, of Little Dorrit; turning at the end of London Bridge, recrossing it, going back again, passing on to St George’s Church, turning back suddenly once more, and flitting in at the open outer gate and little courtyard of the Marshalsea.’ (p.77, LD). Amy is purposeful and busy, but David Copperfield wanders aimlessly about the city, ‘I used to look at the venison-shop in Fleet Street; or I have strolled, at such time, as far as Covent Garden Market, and stared at the pineapples. I was fond of wandering about the Adelphi, because it was a mysterious place, with those dark arches.’ (p.140, DC). Like Dickens, young David is unhappy but self-reliant, ‘I walked to and fro daily between Southwark and Blackfriars, and lounged about at meal-times in obscure streets.’ (p.148, DC). His favorite lounging place is on ‘old London Bridge, where I was wont to sit in one of the stone recesses, watching the people go by’ (p.147, DC).

In *Bleak House*, another street urchin, Joe the crossing sweeper, passes time on another bridge at Blackfriars that Dickens used regularly when visiting his father at the Marshalsea. Joe

‘finds a baking story corner, wherein to settle to his repast. And there he sits, munching and gnawing, and looking up at the great Cross on the summit of St Paul’s Cathedral, glittering above a red and violet-tinted cloud of smoke. From the boy’s face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the great confused city; so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach. There he sits, the sun going down, the river running fast, the crowd flowing by him in two streams – everything moving on to some purpose and top one end – until he is stirred up, and told to ’move on’ too’ (p.235, BH).

Surely Dickens is recalling his childhood memories here?

In 1827, aged fifteen, Dickens finally had to leave school as his father was once more in debt, in order to make his own way in the world. Dickens found employment as a junior solicitor’s clerk (accounts of
the law feature in several of his novels) but he taught himself shorthand and, at the age of eighteen, he enrolled as a stenographer at Doctors’ Commons, a law court that used to sit near St Paul’s in the City of London. Dickens describes it as, ‘a little out-of-the-way place, where they administer what is called ecclesiastical law’ (p.295, DC).

In the autumn of 1833, Dickens published his first short story. Eight more short stories rapidly followed, which combined the incisive observation and powerful storytelling that was to become the hallmark of his narrative style. His first novel, a compilation entitled Sketches by Boz was published in 1836 and a second, The Pickwick Papers, followed in installments during 1836-7. At that time, serialisation of fiction was not new in itself, but writing new, illustrated stories in monthly parts that could be bought for a shilling was, and it proved highly successful. Four hundred copies of the first installment had risen to forty thousand by the final one, an innovation in popular publishing to a mass readership that amounted to the creation of ‘a national audience’ (Ackroyd, 2012, p.110).

Oliver Twist, the first English novel that takes a poor, deprived orphan as its central character, was published in monthly installments between 1837 and 1839, along with Nicholas Nickleby, which Dickens was writing simultaneously during 1838 and 1839. The success of these novels allowed Dickens to move with his wife, and sister-in-law Mary Hogarth, to a large house in Doughty Street, Pentonville, that is now the Charles Dickens Museum. When Mary died there aged only seventeen, Dickens was so powerfully affected by her untimely death that he immortalised her in a series of idealised feminine heroines who also died young. It was whilst writing Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby that Dickens made his first ethnographic expeditions outside London; to experience at first hand the living conditions in the notorious Yorkshire boarding schools that starved and ill-treated their young pupils, and to Manchester to inspect the industrial working environment of the Lancashire cotton mills.

Dickens moved his growing family to a grand house in Devonshire Terrace, opposite Regents’ Park, in 1839. The Old Curiosity Shop (1840-41), another contemporary ‘child story’, this time featuring the exploits and untimely death of a little girl called Nell, and an historical novel, Barnaby Rudge (1841) were written there. Dickens visited the manufacturing city of Birmingham in 1840 to gather material for Nell’s wandering journey with her grandfather away from the dangers and temptations of London. By now, Dickens had been the centre of public attention for five years. He decided to take a complete break from writing in 1842, in order to visit America. When the American poet, Longfellow, returned the visit later the same year, Dickens took him to visit London’s ‘rookeries’ to demonstrate his concern for public health. The venture also led to Dickens’ next novel, Martin Chuzzlewit (1843-4), which was set largely in America. During the mid 1840s Dickens wrote several Christmas stories, travel notes and religious essays and he tried his hand at amateur dramatics, editing a newspaper and setting up a refuge for homeless women, but his next great novel Dombey and Son did not emerge until 1846-8.

Dickens had achieved fame and adulation by the mid 1800s, but by this time he had become only one of a significant number of English authors (Thackeray, the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell) and it has been suggested (Ackroyd, 2012, p.300) that from this point on Dickens became both more subtle in his social criticism and more reflective about his childhood memories. It is perhaps no accident that in mid-life Dickens drew on his childhood to write his favorite novel, David Copperfield (1849-50). The following year, 1851, the Dickens family moved into a large house in Tavistock Square, Bloomsbury, where over the course of almost a decade Dickens was to produce Bleak House (1852-3), a dark, disturbing and oppressive London novel that featured the vast,
unknown and mysterious city as a major protagonist, *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1855-7), and his second historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), set during the French Revolution. To create authentic atmosphere and lend credibility to these mature narratives, Dickens continued to visit locations such as the Marshalsea Prison, Birmingham, Preston, Paris and, as ever, the East End of London.

In 1853, Dickens had given the first of what was to become many public readings from his work for charity and, from 1858 until his farewell performance in 1870 when he was already seriously ill, he gave many profitable public readings in London and embarked on physically punishing tours through the UK and in the USA. During the 1860s he wrote two more novels, *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5). When he died of a stroke at Gad’s Hill Place at the relatively young age of fifty-eight, Dickens was actively engaged on a sixteenth novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Far less is known about the life of Peter Ackroyd. He was born in 1949 in East Acton, an outer London borough. A working class boy, he was raised on a local housing estate by his mother and grandmother after his father left the family home. A powerful recurring motif in Ackroyd’s novels, especially in *Hawksmoor*, is that of an indistinct person in front of the narrator who appears to be walking away, ‘he could see someone walking in front of him…who was wearing some kind of dark top-coat or overcoat…although the man seemed still to be walking forward he was at the same time coming nearer’ (p.44, H). Maybe this is a conscious or unconscious recollection of a type of movement observed on many modern housing estates that early space syntax studies described as the ‘disappearing back phenomenon’, because the morphology of the estate tends to behave like a centrifuge that spins its inhabitants from the interior to the periphery at certain times of day.

Ackroyd published his first novel, *The Great Fire of London*, in 1982. Significantly for this paper, this was a reimagining of Charles Dickens’ novel *Little Dorrit*. The transition from poetry to novels was unexpected, as Ackroyd revealed during an interview given relatively early on in his career as a novelist, ‘I enjoy it, I suppose, but I never thought I’d be a novelist. I never wanted to be a novelist. I can’t bear fiction. I hate it. It’s so untidy. When I was a young man I wanted to be a poet, then I wrote a critical book, and I don’t think I even read a novel till I was about 26 or 27.’ (McGrath, 1989)

Ackroyd’s first novel introduced his readers to his trademark depiction of space and time, which he habitually explores by interlinking episodes set in the past with action set in the present.

Like Dickens, Ackroyd is a prolific writer. His first novel was followed rapidly by *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1983), a fake autobiography, and then by *Hawksmoor* (1985), a novel that was partly inspired by Iain Sinclair’s poem *Lud Heat*, which suggests that Hawksmoor’s East End churches serve to concentrate mystical power. Ackroyd was later to say of this novel, ‘The modern sections are weak, not in terms of language, but weak in terms of those old-fashioned characteristics of plot, action, character, story; they are rather sketches, or scenarios, and that rather disappoints me about it. But at the time I didn’t know anything about writing fiction, so I just went ahead and did it. It’s only recently I’ve come to realize you’re meant to have plots and stories and so on.’ (McGrath, 1989)

London’s artists and writers through bio-fiction. In this respect, it is noteworthy for this paper that Ackroyd has a particular interest in Charles Dickens; ‘Dickens was such a large figure, such an amorphous figure, he takes whatever shape you want him to take’. (McGrath, 1989) and in 2000 he published a fictional ‘living biography’, The Mystery of Charles Dickens, narrated by the actor Simon Callow. This was followed by The Clerkenwell Tales (2003), The Lambs of London (2004) and The Fall of Troy (2006). His most recent novels are The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein, (2008) and The Canterbury Tales a retelling (2009).


3.0 Research Methodology
Although most of Dickens’ and Ackroyd’s books were already ‘old friends’, every novel by each author was reread several times in the date order of their production, with the specific purpose of regaining familiarity with the narrative, identifying the descriptive place-specific content, extracting ‘thick spatial descriptions’ and establishing recurring themes. The term ‘thick description’ is due to the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), who coined it to describe his ethnographic method. He suggests that, ‘doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript-foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior’ (p.3).

According to Geertz, the value of ethnographic description is that it fixes the transient flow of social discourse in a retrievable way, it attends to the small and the everyday in a way that addresses large issues, and it provides a vocabulary to interpret and theorise about the role of culture in human life.

‘Thick description’ has been adopted in the branch of literary criticism known as ‘New Historicism’ (Greenblatt, 1982), which seeks to situate literary works in their historical context and reciprocally to understand cultural and intellectual movements as evidenced through works of fiction. ‘Thick spatial description’ or ‘spatial ethnography’ are more specific terms that describe Hanson’s (1976) method for distilling accounts of the configuration or morphology of built environments, both observed first-hand in fieldwork and as recorded in the writing of anthropologists, including the ways in which space expresses, organises and shapes human spatial behaviour. In this paper (and not for the first time - see also Hillier, Hanson and Stansall, 1978), Hanson’s method for describing how space embodies socio-cultural practices has been adapted from ethnography to fictional writing. However, it should be borne in mind that the project is not intended to make a contribution to literary criticism, but rather to space analytics. The assumption behind this paper
is that, by condensing the descriptions of space-time that support the narratives and searching them for pattern and meaning, it may be possible to illuminate not just the actions of the fictional characters in the novels themselves but also the theoretical preoccupations of the author, seen in the light of the socio-cultural context that gave rise to the novels in the first place. This gives the research a wider meaning and purpose.

Both authors are so prolific that inclusion and exclusion criteria are required, in order to make a reasoned selection of their novels. For each author, excluding the novels that do not deal with London, six examples equates to roughly half of their total output, which should be sufficient to identify key characteristics in their respective depictions of space and time. A shared criterion for inclusion is that each work under consideration should contain ‘thick spatial descriptions’ of the urban environment of London. It is not sufficient that places, routes and buildings are referred to by name: they should also be described in some considerable detail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year Published</th>
<th>Spatial Setting/s</th>
<th>Temporal Setting/s</th>
<th>Cartographic Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Twist (OT)</td>
<td>1837-1839</td>
<td>Chertsey, Clerkenwell, Jacob’s Island, Pentonville, Safron Hill, Smithfield, Spitalfields, Whitechapel</td>
<td>1830s</td>
<td>A-Z of Victorian London (V)</td>
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<td>The Old Curiosity Shop (OCS)</td>
<td>1840-1841</td>
<td>Aldgate, Bevis Marks, City of London, Drury Lane, London Bridge Tower Hill, Whitechapel</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Copperfield (DC)</td>
<td>1849-1850</td>
<td>Blackfriars, Covent Garden, Camden Town, Doctors’ Commons,</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bleak House (BH)</td>
<td>1852-1853</td>
<td>Holborn, Inns of Court, Mount Pleasant, St. Giles</td>
<td>1820s-30s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Dorrit (LD)</td>
<td>1855-1857</td>
<td>Borough, The Marshalsea</td>
<td>1820s, (1826)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Expectations (GE)</td>
<td>1860-1861</td>
<td>Newgate, Smithfield, Barnard’s Inn, Soho</td>
<td>1812, 1826-1828</td>
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Dickens’ novels tend to be broadly contemporaneous, though he has a predilection to situate his novels in the near past; Ackroyd’s temporal trademark, on the other hand, is to layer incidents experienced in the same place in a way that transcends time. *The Great Fire of London* (1982) is included not only because it is Ackroyd’s first novel but also because it provides such a clear comparison with Dickens’ treatment of space-time. The five other novels by Ackroyd that are examined in this paper encompass his career as an author of fiction and, taken together, they describe a wide range of London street settings that shed further light on Ackroyd’s use of space and time as an authorial device, both to enhance his narrative and to theorise about the nature of reality.

| ACKROYD |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Title** | **Year Published** | **Spatial Setting/s** | **Temporal Setting/s** | **Cartographic Resource** |
| The Lambs of London (LL) | 2006 | Inns of Court, City of London | | A-Z of Regency London (Reg) |
| The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein (VF) | 2007 | Limehouse | | A-Z of Victorian London (V) |
In addition to analysing the descriptive writing of the two authors, the cartographic record of London has been consulted, to elucidate the extent to which the fictional spatial descriptions of London in the selected novels are grounded in the alternative representation of reality afforded by maps. London enjoys a particularly rich cartographic record but, for the purpose of this exercise, the useful and informative series of historical street atlases, the A-Z of Elizabethan, Restoration, Georgian, Regency, and Victorian London, (reprinted in 1979, 1992, 1982, 1985 and 1987, respectively) has been consulted, alongside the modern A-Z of Greater London (2001). The historic atlases reproduce the streets, lanes, courts and alleys of London as they existed in c1560, 1676, 1747, 1792-9 and 1888, respectively. Their map references are prefaced in this text by the initials, E, Rest., G, Reg., V and M, respectively.

Since the A-Z map series used in this paper is not available online, websites hosting the full-scale maps have been identified and pointed at in the table below. These can be consulted and explored online, but note that the page referencing system used to pinpoint key locations in the paper will not apply to the online resources. Likewise, where an important site or location is mentioned in the text for which a website can be consulted, its address has been given so that the reader may read interactively between this text and relevant online resources. This experiment in accessing visual resources is in keeping with the spirit of the paper and it may also be more appropriate to an online journal than the inclusion of static photographic images.

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<tr>
<td>E</td>
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<td>Rest</td>
<td>Ogilby &amp; Morgan</td>
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<td>Reg</td>
<td>Horwood</td>
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<td>V</td>
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Almost as valuable as the set of atlases are the indexes they contain, as these enable the reader to find any street that existed at the time, as well as the majority of well-known locations and public buildings. This greatly facilitates a search for locations referred to in the novels. Where a place named in a novel does not exist in the index to the relevant street atlas, it is unlikely to have existed in real life and is probably a fiction. Even the characters in novels consult these resources for, as John Cree, a character in Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem suggests, a prudent fictional protagonist should...
prepare adequately for an excursion into the urban environment by consulting an up-to-date map, “You see how I had studied the streets? I had purchased Murray’s “New Plan of London”, (the book referred to here is actually called “Murray’s Handbook for Modern London: Modern London; or, London as it is.” And was published by John Murray in 1851) and had plotted all my exits and entrances’ (p.27). Ackroyd is clearly enjoying a double entendre here, as this is a novel about the theatre.

Modern cartographic techniques and sophisticated surveying equipment develop the impression that maps are objective, scientific and therefore trustworthy. For space syntax researchers, maps are an invaluable starting-point for analysis, yet it is important not to lose sight of the fact that all mapmaking relies on conventions such as orientation, projection, use of symbols and generalisation to represent the phenomena under consideration. Maps therefore create, represent and also distort versions of reality to suit human social purposes, every bit as much as written records, and in that sense they are also a kind of fiction. Map and text are alternative versions of London, but to a greater or lesser extent, each is a narrative that exists to illustrate some property of the city that is significant for the author and the reader.

Useful and fascinating as these documents are, space syntax analysis has not been attempted in this instance. The subject matter of the paper is, after all, fiction! Nevertheless, the account is informed by a syntactic approach, and the findings may encourage scholars to diversify the means by which the relationship between space and society can be usefully explored. Space syntax is not a method for extracting social information from space: this is too crude and exploitative an approach to any phenomena that may be under investigation. It is a ‘way of seeing’ (Berger, 1972) that helps to phrase questions and may offer interpretations, but it rarely if ever provides definitive answers.

Given the current interest in narratives of all kinds, it should not come as a surprise to discover that the relationship between maps and texts is currently experiencing renewed interest from the interdisciplinary scientific and artistic communities. In their Editorial to a recent issue of the quarterly ‘Cartographic Journal’ (Vol. 48, No. 4. November, 2011) dedicated to ‘the geography of literature’, guest-editors Barbara Piatti (literary studies) and Lorenz Hurni (cartography) point out the added value of combining their respective academic disciplines;

‘A literary-geographical reading can change our understanding – not only of books, but of the world we live in. It creates knowledge. Through literary geography, we learn more about the production of places, their historical layers, their meanings, functions and symbolic values. If places emerge from a combination of real elements and fictional accounts, then literary geography and literary cartography can work as a very effective eye-opener.’ (p.218-223).

This paper is intended to make a small contribution to this shared understanding of the relationship between maps and narratives, and also to the social logic of the urban built environment.

The attentive reader will already have noted that the style of this paper departs from the conventional academic practice of reporting in the past tense, adopting instead the present tense for all but the actual events that were milestones in constructing its narrative. Unlike the earlier paper (Hanson, 1976) on space and time in nineteenth century novels, which was ‘modern’ paradigmatically and relatively unselfconscious in its authorial intentions, this paper is more self-aware, in keeping with postmodern feeling and thought. Here, the novels are treated as artifacts that have an independent existence and are therefore assumed to be present in the discourse that they stimulate, hence the majority of the paper is written in the present tense. The authorial voice remains neutral.
4.00 Real places and realistic journeys v. imprecise locations and improbable journeys

Many of the places Dickens refers to in his novels are real. Dickens’ London has already attracted a great deal of attention from literary critics and social geographers. One map of central London (Perdue, 2012) contains one hundred and fourteen locations mentioned in Dickens’ novels, within an area bounded by Camden Town to the north, Aldgate to the east, Borough to the south and Hyde Park to the west.

However, most places are just mentioned and are not described in any detail; they would, after all, be familiar at least to Dickens’ London readership. It is therefore noteworthy to study the conditions under which Dickens considers an extended spatial or environmental description worthwhile. Some real places visited by important characters and some journeys taken by them are pictured in great detail, but other accounts given by Dickens’ of spatial settings are quite sketchy and imprecise and some journeys undertaken by a novel’s protagonists appear either improbable or downright misleading. This is unlikely to be the result of simple error as Dickens meticulously researched the contexts for his novels.

Likewise, Ackroyd’s novels draw on an extensive repertoire of real places and occasionally describe realistic trips within the urban fabric, whilst others sound equally plausible but turn out to be unrealistic. Ackroyd’s blend of real and imaginary settings seems playfully, perhaps willfully, deliberate. He sets out to test his reader’s knowledge by alluding to real phenomena in a way that may be analogous to psychological transference, whereby events associated with a place that is significant to one character’s life history are projected onto that of another character or relocated to another spatial setting. In what follows, just a few typical examples serve to illustrate the many instances of the use of space and time in this way by each author. The analysis of place and route in the novels of Dickens and Ackroyd will be prefaced by a brief summary of each of the twelve novels consulted for this paper. Map references are given in the following order: name of map, easting or horizontal axis, northing or vertical axis, and page number, separated by commas.

4.01 Background to Dickens’ novels

Ackroyd (2012) suggests that Dickens created so many pen portraits that it is impossible to count them all. His novels contain almost two thousand different characters (p.2), yet in a sense they are all semi-autobiographical and tell just one story, that of Dickens himself ‘coming of age’ by losing trust and innocence whilst gaining in experience and wisdom. Likewise, Dickens’ novels draw on many different settings as the action shifts frequently from place to place, but the environmental phenomena also tell a consistent story about the worst excesses of urban life, something that fascinates Dickens throughout his life.

Dickens’ novels read as if they were written to be spoken out loud, and his characters have a presence and immediacy that is almost theatrical. His authorial voice occasionally intrudes, notably when he addresses politically or socially significant themes such as poverty, working conditions or public health, but for the most part his stories emerge through a series of directly described scenes and conversations, and Dickens gives little or nothing further away in advance about the individual characters than can be inferred from their surroundings, so that the attentive reader has to follow the narrative closely in order gradually to discern their history, motives and the part they play in advancing the narrative. Moreover, a typical novel by Dickens comprises several narrative strands featuring different characters and voices that begin independently and initially seem to bear no relationship to one another, but gradually approach one another and eventually come together at the novel’s climax. This
makes his plots almost impossible to condense into short summary and, for the sake of brevity, most of the twists and turns of the action have necessarily been omitted from this account.

The story of Oliver Twist is set during the 1830s. Born in the country to an unmarried mother who dies in childbirth, Oliver grows up as a parish orphan. Having famously asked for ‘more gruel’, he runs away to London where he meets Fagin and his crew of boy pickpockets. He also encounters the burglar, Bill Sykes, and his lover, Nancy. After experiencing numerous trials and tribulations, Oliver is discovered to be the heir to an inheritance. Sykes dies, having killed Nancy, and Fagin is hung for his crimes so that right triumphs over might and all the principal characters receive their just deserts.

Oliver Twist has an adolescent boy as a hero; The Old Curiosity Shop takes an old man as its narrator and a young (nearly fourteen) teenage girl, Little Nell, as its heroine. The elderly narrator encounters Nell by chance, thus piquing his interest in her welfare. The story he then tells, features a variety of characters linked to Nell and her grandfather’s shop. Threatened by debts, Nell and her grandfather leave London and embark on a journey – almost a pilgrimage - across England, encountering a variety of picaresque characters along the way. A second strand of the narrative remains focused in London, following other characters who are united by their shared interest in, or concern for, Nell. The two strands come together at the climax of the novel as Nell’s whereabouts are revealed, only for the reader to discover that she has died.

David Copperfield is yet another example of the genre known as a ‘coming of age’ novel. In the author’s preface, Dickens refers to it as ‘a favourite child’ (p.3), and the story is narrated in the first person, so that Dickens’ voice merges with that of the fictional hero, Copperfield, as he recounts the story of his life from childhood to maturity. David’s young mother, prematurely widowed, meets and marries a fortune hunter, who packs his unwanted stepson off to London to work in his factory. David runs away to search for his last living relative, an elderly maiden aunt who lives in Dover. David grows up and, once his education is complete, in another reference to Dickens’ own career he returns to London to make his way as a lawyers’ clerk. After various adventures that include marriage to an unsuitable child bride, the seduction of David’s childhood playmate by his best friend, and the loss and recovery of a fortune, Copperfield learns to distinguish true friends from false ones and marries the love of his life.

Bleak House is the first of Dickens’ great pannomic novels, in the sense that it focuses more on the state of the nation and the social conditions of the day, rather than on the personal growth and development of a specific individual like Oliver, David or Nell. The novel follows a lawsuit over a large but contested inheritance. The novel’s young heroine who narrates part of the story, is adopted by Jarndyce after the death of her godmother. He is a protagonist in the lawsuit. Esther becomes companion to Jarndyce’s young wards, who are also contestants in the lawsuit. The aristocratic Dedlocks are also involved in the lawsuit. It turns out that Esther is the illegitimate daughter of Lady Dedlock, the result of a liaison formed long before she married into the aristocracy. After a long and complicated series of machinations that involve illness, disguise, murder and blackmail, the Chancery lawsuit is wound up as the disputed inheritance has been dissipated on the costs of the case. Around this bald narrative swarm a host of characters, many of them humourous or picaresque, but others forming a vehicle for Dickens’ campaigning journalism.

Little Dorrit opens as the hero, Arthur Clennam, returns from China. Arriving in London, he determines to have nothing to do with the family business, run by his cold, invalid mother. Whilst visiting his mother, Clennam meets Little (Amy) Dorrit, a selfless young woman who does sewing to support
her family. Amy lives in the Marshalsea Prison with her debtor father and her siblings. Sensing that his family fortune is somehow bound up with the fate of the Dorritos, Arthur enquires after Mr. Dorrit’s debts. He establishes that Mr. Dorrit is the heir to a great estate, which precipitates his release from the Marshalsea, but Mr. Dorrit disowns Clennam’s part in his release. The Dorritos travel in Europe, where Amy sees the shallowness and pretentiousness of the society she has been forced to enter. Dorrit returns to London and invests his fortune with a banker, Merdle. Arthur also invests everything with Merdle. Just when Merdle’s stock can seem to rise no higher, the financier is exposed as a swindler and he commits suicide, leaving all his clients mired in debt. Clennam is imprisoned in the Marshalsea, living in the very room that the Dorritos had occupied. It eventually materialises that Mrs. Clennam is not Arthur’s real mother. She is also implicated in depriving Amy Dorrit of a fortune. In a sudden act of contrition, Mrs. Clennam regains the ability to walk and she rushes to confess everything to Amy, who naturally forgives her. When William Dorrit’s will is read, it is revealed that there is nothing left for his children to inherit. Clennam’s business partner secures his release from prison and Arthur and Amy declare their love for one another.

Great Expectations follows the growth and personal development of yet another orphaned boy, Philip (Pip) Pirrip. Whilst Pip is visiting his mother’s grave, he is accosted by an escaped convict, whom he helps. Pip is summoned to visit a rich, reclusive spinster, Miss Havisham, in her dilapidated home, Satis House, to play with her young ward, beautiful but proud Estella. Estella looks down on Pip because of his humble origins, but he nevertheless falls hopelessly in love with her. Miss Havisham arranges for Pip to be apprenticed to a blacksmith and he is dismissed from Satis House, dashing all his expectations, but one day he learns that he has an anonymous benefactor. He is sent to London to become a gentleman. Pip assumes that Miss Havisham has ordered this change in his circumstances. He works as an accountant, makes new friends and gets into debt. Pip’s illusions are shattered again when he discovers that his benefactor is the convict Magwitch, whom he had helped as a boy. Magwitch has returned to England from Australia under an assumed name, to see Pip. At first Pip is horrified to realise the source of his wealth, but he eventually comes to respect and care for his benefactor. Miss Havisham repents of her cruelty to Pip but she is badly burned in a fire at Satis House. Magwitch is caught and dies in prison. Many years later, a kinder Estella meets an older and wiser Pip in the ruins of Satis House. They agree to become friends and the possibility is raised that, in time, they might become even closer.

4.02 Background to Ackroyd’s novels

Ackroyd’s novels are, if anything, even less straightforward and more slippery to pin down than those of Dickens. Most are based on real people, but the events that occur in Ackroyd’s fiction do not bear close scrutiny as biography. The title of Ackroyd’s first novel, The Great Fire of London, does not refer to the Great Fire of London of 1666, but to a conflagration that consumes a film set built for a modern adaptation of Dickens’ 1857 novel Little Dorrit. Set in the 1980s, Ackroyd’s principal spatial setting is on the streets around Borough High Street in Southwark, where the notorious Marshalsea used to be. A second important spatial setting for the novel is Wormwood Scrubs Prison, immediately adjacent to Hammersmith Hospital and not far from East Acton, where Ackroyd was born. Spencer Spender, the filmmaker and ‘hero’ of the novel (his name combines those of two English poets) determines that he should make a film of Little Dorrit, using the Scrubs as his setting. This device allows Ackroyd to explore a transcendent spatial theme that proved equally fascinating to Dickens, the relationship between
city streets and their antithesis, the prison. The novel ends as his film set burns and sets light to a large part of central London. The narrative therefore concludes with an apocalyptic vision for the future city, whilst at the same time a power failure at the Scrubs paradoxically allows all of the prisoners to be set free.

Hawksmoor is a complex narrative that shifts in time between the London of 1711-1715 and that of the 1980s. The novel’s title ostensibly refers to the celebrated architect Nicholas Hawksmoor, who worked first for Sir Christopher Wren and then for Sir John Vanburgh on many great Restoration buildings. In 1711, Parliament passed an Act to enable the building of fifty of London’s churches, and Hawksmoor was appointed as one of two surveyors for the works. Only twelve churches were built before the commission was wound up in 1733, six of which were designed wholly by Hawksmoor and are considered to be his most significant works of architecture. These real churches feature prominently in Ackroyd’s novel and give it solidity and place-fixity. Ackroyd’s preface refers to the Act of Parliament but, in the novel, his eighteenth century architect is called Nicholas Dyer, whilst the name Hawksmoor is reserved for a modern Detective Chief Superintendent, who is investigating a series of murders that take place in the grounds of Dyer’s churches.

The House of Doctor Dee is at least partly based on an historical character, Dr. John Dee (1527-1608/9), the English philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, astrologer and alchemist. In Ackroyd’s novel, his two main protagonists are Dr. Dee, living in a temporal setting of about 1570, and a modern 1980s historical researcher, Matthew Palmer, who inherits a house in Clerkenwell from his father. The house, which in the novel turns out to have been owned by Dr. Dee (p.93), is a major presence in the novel as Matthew gradually comes to feel that the spirit of Dee still inhabits the house.

Ackroyd states in the Acknowledgements to English Music that his inspiration for this novel is, yet another real person, the eminent Victorian clairvoyant, medium and psychic healer, Daniel Dunglas Home (1833-1886). Home’s autobiography, Incidents in my Life, includes a short account of his son Gregoire, who apparently serves as an inspiration for Ackroyd’s hero, Timothy Harcombe. In alternate chapters Harcombe either directly tells his life history or, in a dream or trancelike state, he talks to historical and fictional characters, some of which are based on, or as Ackroyd says ‘appropriated from’, other English writers. The music of England refers not just to composed music, but to examples of distinctively English literature, history, painting and mythology, which are surveyed and integrated by Tim’s i.e., Ackroyd’s, imagination. As one of Ackroyd’s characters declares, ‘English music rarely changes. The instruments may alter and the form may vary, but the spirit seems always to remain the same. The spirit survives, I suppose that is what we mean by harmony’ (p.128, EM). The novel is an exploration of what it means to be English, at a time when there seems to be something of a national ‘identity crisis’ as Englishness is increasingly called into question.

The subjects of The Lambs of London are two minor historical figures, the poet and essayist Charles Lamb (1775-1834), and his older sister Mary (1764-1847), with whom Charles was extremely close for most of his life. Typically, in writing The Lambs of London Ackroyd has borrowed from and re-imagined these events in the life of the Lamb family, not as biography but as fiction, a device that allows him to invent characters, describe imaginary settings and change the course of events in the lives of his protagonists to suit his evolving narrative and plot. As he says in his preface to the book, ‘This is not a biography but a work of fiction. I have invented characters and changed the life of the Lamb family for the sake of the larger narrative’. However, as in previous novels, Ackroyd makes
reference to contemporary historical figures and to real places in London, thus lending the novel a sense of authority and realism.

The main protagonist of the novel, Victor Frankenstein, is an already well-known fictional character, the 'hero' of the 1818 novel, Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus, written by Mary Shelley (1797-1851), wife of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, who may have served as a model for Frankenstein's character. Ackroyd's novel re-imagines and narrates Frankenstein's story. In this novel, water in general and the Thames in particular become an alternative continuous medium of spatial communication to the streets of the city, through which the monster of Frankenstein's creation is able to move, or rather swim, at will.

4.03 Real Places
Dickens often utilises real places to lend authority and realism to his narratives and some locations occur in several books. Whilst he was writing Bleak House, Dickens was a member of Middle Temple, (Parker, 2009) and the Inns of Court (map reference V, 20/21, L/M 15) occur frequently, both in this and in other novels, as a setting for action that moves the plot forward. Dickens has an intimate knowledge of them, and he usually gives a quick pen portrait of each Inn as he introduces it, for the benefit of the reader who may not have visited this more secluded, protected and literally cloistered part of London. For example, the lawyer Tulkinghorn's house at 58 Lincoln's Inn Fields is the real address of Dickens' friend and biographer, John Foster; ‘In a large house, formerly a house of state, lives Mr. Tulkinghorn. It is let off in sets of chambers now; and in those shrunken fragments of its greatness, lawyers lie like maggots in nuts.’ (p.114, BH). Dickens even deliberately exploits the surprise that visitors usually feel when they enter the Inns of Court from the street for the first time, as the buildings muffle the noise and activity of the surrounding streets so that they appear other-worldly;

‘We passed into a sudden quietude under an old gateway, and drove on through a silent square until we came to an odd nook in a corner, where there was an entrance up a steep, broad flight of stairs, like an entrance to a church. And there really was a churchyard, for I saw the gravestones from the staircase window.’ (p.25, BH)

The church alluded to here is Lincoln’s Inn Chapel.

From the seventeenth century onwards, it became fashionable for bachelors unconnected with the law to lodge in chambers in the Inns of Court and Chancery and, aware of this tendency, Dickens accommodates several of his unmarried male characters here. In Great Expectations, Pip lodges at Barnard’s Inn:

‘the dingiest collection of shabby buildings ever squeezed together in a rank corner as a club for Tom-cats….we were disgorged into a melancholy little square that looked to me like a flat burying-ground. I thought it had the most dismal trees in it, and the most dismal sparrows, and the most dismal cats, and the most dismal houses (in number half a dozen or so) that I had ever seen.’ (p.148, GE)

Symonds Inn, in Chancery Lane, can be traced back to the early seventeenth century. Dickens is probably exaggerating its decrepiture for comic effect when he describes it as;

‘a little, pale, wall-eyed, woebegone inn, like a large dustbin of two compartments and a sifter. It looks as if Symond were a sparing man in his way, and constructed his inn of old building materials, which took kindly to the dry rot and to dirt and all things decaying and dismal, and perpetuated Symonds’ name with congenial shabbiness…..a smell as of unwholesome sheep, blending with the smell of must and dust…..the atmosphere is otherwise stale and close.’ (p.466, BH)

It was demolished in 1873.

Other real locations that lend Dickens’ fictional narratives verisimilitude are far too numerous to dwell on here, but a small selection serves to illus-
trate how he uses place-specific settings to convince the reader of the reliability of his account. For example, Bleeding Heart Yard, off Greville Street, Hatton Garden, (V, 21, L,15) is a real cobbled yard that takes its name from a local legend that has grown up about the seventeenth century beauty, Lady Elizabeth Hatton, who was allegedly found murdered there in 1662. Dickens is undoubtedly familiar with the place, and wants to take advantage of its notoriety by deploying it as a setting for Doyce’s factory in Little Dorrit, describing it thus;

‘As if the aspiring city had become puffed up in the very ground on which it stood, the ground had so risen about Bleeding Heart Yard that you got into it down a flight of steps which formed no part of the original approach, and got out of it by a low gateway into a maze of shabby streets, which went about and about, tortuously ascending to the level again.’ (p. 128, LD)

Turning to Ackroyd’s first novel, its main setting, the Marshalsea, was demolished in the 1870s and all that remains today is a brick wall that marks its southern boundary and separates a local lending library from a small public garden (M, 47, Sb, 91). A council plaque on the boundary wall identifies the site of the prison. The spot is visited by several of Ackroyd’s characters. For example, it features prominently in the opening chapter, as the site where Arthur Feather, the proprietor of a small amusement arcade on Borough High Street, chases and kills a little girl in the park at the site of the old prison under the Marshalsea plaque. It is also where Rowan Philips, a noted Dickens expert, encounters Tim Coleman, a local resident. Tim recalls where the site of the Marshalsea might be, ‘and there it was, down Tabard Street on the left. A small open space with two or three benches in the middle; it was surrounded by large tower blocks, so that it resembled a small wound that had never healed’ (p.24, GFL).

Ackroyd seems to have slightly moved the location of the prison as it is described here in the novel, and the wall plaque that features in Ackroyd’s novel does not resemble the real one. Ackroyd also invents a story that the prison was destroyed by fire in 1885. This adaptation of reality to conform to the demands of his fictional account is a characteristic feature of Ackroyd’s work.

A second important spatial setting for the novel is in Wormwood Scrubs Prison (M, 44, Wa, 88). In the novel, Spender directly refers to the significance of the opposition between street and prison, ‘these two aspects of the film – the prison and the city – were the ones that would lend it atmosphere and authority’ (p.106, GFL). Foucault’s (1975, 1977) seminal ‘Discipline and Punish’ offers an interesting theoretical reference point for the comparison. Whilst Spender is filming in Wormwood Scrubs Prison, the narrator remarks that it is, ‘a perfect setting for Marshalsea – although constructed on different, in fact harsher, principles than the old debtors prison, the Victorian design perfectly suited Spenser’s vision of decaying and repressive authority...he wanted to contrast the rough and open life of the city with the bright but enclosed life of the city’s debtors – its victims’ (p.120, GFL).

Elsewhere, in another scene from the novel, Tim draws attention to the ambiguous and illusive nature of urban and institutional spaces when he is invited to visit Rowan in Cambridge, which strikes Tim as like, ‘a large open-air prison’ (p.130, GFL).

In the novel, Hawksmoor; Dyer is commissioned to design and erect seven new parish churches. Six mirror Hawksmoor’s real edifices, but in addition Ackroyd adds a seventh, the Church of Little St. Hugh, in a fictitious location, Black Step Lane, (p.7). Dyer’s church at ‘Spittle-Fields’ is described by Ackroyd as rising ‘above a populous Conjunction of Alleys, Courts and Passages, Places full of poor People’ (p.11, H), which the map of Georgian London (G, c, A, 6) suggests is an accurate portrayal of the locality at the time. Ackroyd accurately
observes the appearance of some of the churches, like ‘the oddly shaped tower of St George’s-in-the East (which) seemed to have burst through the roof rather than simply to rise from it’ (p.134, H). Looking at the building (G, a/b, A, 15), a reader might be persuaded that a murder could take place here. Likewise, Ackroyd describes the main facade of St Mary Woolnoth (G, a, b, 13), realistically, thus;

‘he saw a curved window with pieces of glass as thick and dark as pebbles, and then above it three smaller square windows which gleamed in the autumn light…..as Hawksmoor’s gaze crept upward six broken pillars were transformed into two thick towers which seemed to him like the prongs of a fork which impaled the church to the earth’ (p.190-91, H).

However, the date of the construction that is allegedly inscribed on a stone tablet set into the façade, is given as 1714, not 1716 when the church was actually completed.

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<td>Christ Church, Spitalfields</td>
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<td>St Anne’s, Limehouse</td>
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<td>St George-in-the-East, Wapping</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Mary Woolnoth, Lombard Street</td>
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<td>St George’s, Bloomsbury</td>
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<td>St Alfege’s, Greenwich</td>
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In a revelatory moment whilst examining a pile of junk mail about the murders from cranks and amateur detectives, Hawksmoor sees that one of the letters contains a diagram,

‘the shape was familiar to Hawksmoor; and suddenly it occurred to him that, if each cross was the conventional sign for a church, then here in outline was the area of the murders – Spitalfields at the apex of the triangle, St George’s-in-the-East and St Anne’s at the ends of the baseline, and St Mary Woolnoth to the west’ (p.207, H).

This even hints at a Hägerstrand-like (1975) ‘space-time geography’ of murder.

Ackroyd gives accurate details for the addresses of several of his characters. Dee recounts how;

‘I…..found lodgings for myself in Sea-cole Lane….it runs down into Fleet Lane but not before it turns into another called Wind-again Lane, which is so named because it stops at the Fleet brook and there is no way over. So back again and, in imagination, join me as we tread a few paces northward to Holborn Bridge and Snow Hill…then stepping southward, retrace the ditches of Fleet Lane by the very wall of the prison and go on to Fleet Bridge and the City Wall.’ (p.61-62, Dee).

All these details are correct on Ogilby and Morgan’s map, except that Wind-again Lane is actually called Turnagain Lane (O+M, G, 6, 23). Likewise, Hawksmoor lodges at Grape Street near Seven Dials in Covent Garden, a real location (M, 44, Nb, 90, EM). The intersection of Narrow Street and Rope-Makers Field, where the modern-day vagrant and victim, Ned, has his lodgings, is also a real location (M, 45, Zb, 92).

In The Lambs of London, Charles Lamb works at East India House as he did in real life, (p.7, LL). Its portrayal in the novel is realistic and its location in Leadenhall Street is true to life (Reg., c, D, 15). In the novel, it is correctly described as ‘an old mansion house, from the days of Queen Anne, built of brick and stone’ (p.28, LL ). This building was demolished and rebuilt in a neoclassical style in 1799-1800, after the action of the novel took place. The Billiter Inn, Billiter Street (p.31, LL) is described in the novel as a regular ‘watering hole’ for the young clerks from East India House, and is mentioned at intervals throughout the novel whenever the action requires Charles to meets with his friends from work. Billiter Street also exists; it is directly off Leadenhall Street.
just a step away from Company House (Reg., c, D, 15). The East India Company owned numerous warehouses in the area.

In the same novel, Ackroyd sets Samuel Ireland’s meeting with his publisher (p.72-5, LL) at the offices of the Gentleman’s Magazine in St John’s Gate at Clerkenwell (Reg. d, C, 4). There was such a ‘magazine’: it was the first periodical to use the term when it was founded in 1731 by Edward Cave, as a monthly digest of news and commentary. The magazine’s offices were over St John’s Gate, which was illustrated on the front page of each issue. The Gentleman’s Magazine also makes an appearance in The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein (p.96, VF).

Elsewhere in that novel, Victor is told that he can locate the resurrectionists at the ‘Fortune of War Tavern’ in Smithfield, opposite St Bartholomew’s Hospital (p.99-100, VF). This was a real tavern, which stood at the junction of what is now Giltspur Street and Cock Lane (V, L, 22, 16), until it was demolished in 1910. A cherubic statue outside the inn commemorated the eastern extremity of the Great Fire. Until the end of the nineteenth century, it was the chief house for the resurrection men north of the river, being the official place where people who had drowned in the Thames were taken. It is also mentioned by Dickens in A Tale of Two Cities, as the place where one of the characters ‘moonlights’ as a resurrection man.

4.04. Realistic Journeys

When Bill Sykes takes Oliver off to ‘break and enter’, their journey across London is set out in some detail:

‘Turning down Sun Street and Crown Street, and crossing Finsbury Square, Mr. Sykes struck, by way of Chiswell Street, into Barbican; thence into Long Lane; and so into Smithfield, from which latter place arose a tumult of discordant sounds that filled Oliver Twist with surprise and amazement.’ (p.135, OT)

This is a straight east-west route that can be picked out clearly on the map (V, L, 22/23/24, 16).

Dickens even makes jokes for readers with a local knowledge of London. Considering the wide choice of routes that exists to walk between Drury Lane, where Dick Swiveller has his lodgings, and his destination in the Strand, (V, L/M, 20, 15) he must have owed money to a large number of shopkeepers all over town if there is only one route left open to him down which he would not be assailed by his creditors;

‘I enter in this little book the names of the streets that I can’t go down while the shops are open. This dinner today closes Long Acre. I bought a pair of boots in Great Queen Street last week, and made that no thoroughfare too. There’s only one avenue to the Strand left open now.’ (p.59, OCS)

Examples such as these abound in the novels of both authors.

4.05 Imprecise Locations

Old Curiosity Shop is perhaps one of the best known buildings in the whole of Dickens, but its location is described with both precision and vagueness, so that it is pointless to try to identify this location on a map. Thanks to John Crowther’s (1837-1902) widely-reproduced watercolour painting of a sixteenth century, timber framed shop that bears the same name and is still extant at 13, Portsmouth Street in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, passers-by imagine that this is a famous literary landmark. The premises in Portsmouth Street claim to be the oldest shop in central London and it seems to fit the popular image of Dickens’ shop of the same name. However, the shop’s name is thought to have been painted on the façade after the eponymous novel was published. Master Humphrey narrates how he takes pains to approach the shop obliquely when accompanying Nell home, so that she would remain with him and not run away, ‘I avoided the most frequented ways and took the most intricate. Thus it was not until we arrived in the street itself that she knew where we were’. (p.5-6), OCS. Later (p.76), it is revealed that
the shop stands opposite an archway, and that the local area is linked together by many passages, but when Nell and her grandfather leave for the countryside, we are told that they looked to both the left and the right, but not the direction that they set off in. (p.96, OCS) At the very end of the novel, the reader is discouraged from searching for the shop by being told that it has been demolished; 'the old house had long ago pulled down, and a fine broad road was in its place' (p.544, OCS).

Quilp's residence is on Tower Hill, but its address is so imprecisely specified by Dickens that it is not possible to locate it on the relevant map. The most that can be deduced is that Quilp's home is conveniently located within a short walking distance of the City and Bevis Marks, as it is described as being close to London Wall and St Mary Axe where Quilp's solicitor, Brass, has his office in, 'a little habitation, which is so close to the footway that the passenger who takes the wall (the inside of the pavement) brushes the dim glass with his coat sleeve' (p.240, OCS), but it is also within easy reach of the Tower and St Katherine's Dock where Quilp 'collected the rents of whole colonies of filthy streets and alleys by the waterside' (p.28, OCS). He also had 'a small rat-infested dreary yard' on the south bank of the Thames called Quilp's Wharf where he broke up and salvaged decommissioned ships. This location is, needless to say, fictitious.

The place where Dyer's church in Spittle-Fields is supposedly located in the novel, a street intersection where Mermaid Alley, Tabernacle Alley and Balls Alley meet (p.11, H), does not exist. Mermaid Alley is in Borough near the Marshalsea Prison, which features in Ackroyd's first novel (G, C, a, 13); Tabernacle Yard and Balls Alley are in the area of Christ's Church, but are two small turnings at either end of nearby Wheeler Street (G, B, a, 6). By the following chapter set in 1980s London, this still-fictitious street intersection has changed its name slightly to Mermaid Alley, Tabernacle Close and Balls Street (p.34). This is the sort of transformation in nomenclature that often happens over the course of history, which does not make the location any more real but does make it more credible, as Ackroyd's well-observed and subtle name changes lend authenticity to the wholly fictional narrative at this point. The location of Dyer's second church at Limehouse is given as 'in Hang-Man's Acre, by Rope Makers-Field and Vyrgyn-Yard' (p.76, H). This is a fictitious location. Real St. Anne's, Limehouse, is shown right at the eastern extremity of the map (G, a, C, 16) at the intersection of Rose Lane, Sermon Lane and Three Colt Street. However, there is a Ropemakers Field quite close by. Some of the other phenomena referred to in the novel (like the notorious Ratcliffe Highway murders) are real events that are either set out of the novel's historic time or located beyond the confines of its place-setting, yet these references to a reality outside the novel encourage the reader willingly to suspend disbelief.

In like manner, Dr. Dee's house seems to be precisely located by Ackroyd near Clerkenwell Green, but it is a fictitious address. The hero, Matthew explains;

'I had looked up Cloak Lane in a London atlas, and in my imagination I had already placed it among other streets packed with shops and offices: but as I made my way down Turnmill Street towards Clerkenwell Green, I realised that it was like no other part of central London. It seemed both more open and more desolate, as if at some point the area had been laid waste.' (p.2, Dee)

Cloak Lane does not exist in Ogilby and Morgan's edition, at the site described, (Rest., A/B, 4, 2). There is, however, a Cloak Lane in the City of London, off Dowgate Hill, (Rest., I, 12, 36). There is still a Cloak Lane in the modern atlas, in the heart of the City near the Mansion House (M, 45, Sb, 91). Small wonder, then, that Matthew cannot easily find it;

*Cloak Lane itself was difficult to find. I estimated that it was some thirty yards north-west of the Green, but when I walked in that direction I found
myself circling around Clerkenwell Close and the Church of St James.’ (p.2, Dee)

Ackroyd clearly enjoys teasing the reader with plausible but completely fictitious addresses. Chatterton, a book that is not looked at in detail in this paper, begins with the hero Charles making his way into Dodd’s Gardens. The manifest precision of the address, at the postcode ‘W14 8QT’ (p.7) serves only to emphasise that the place defies precision in relation to time and place. Other addresses are deliberately misleading; William’s lecture on Shakespeare’s tragedies in The Lambs of London is said to be given at the Mercers’ Hall in Milk Street (p.142, LL); yet the real Hall is in Ironmonger Lane (Reg., c, B, 15).

Perhaps to add verisimilitude, paint a more authentic picture of the scene or even tantalise a reader with local knowledge, Ackroyd adds touches of detail about the appearance of the fictitious theatre where Tim Harcombe’s father gives his séances, and the area in which it is located,

‘It was a typical London building of the late Victorian period, but on a scale appropriate to the narrow streets and small houses that had spread across this area of Hackney near the City Road. Close by was Bunhill Fields, the final home of William Blake and John Bunyan, and the hall itself was supposed to have been built on the site of a Dissenters’ chapel which had been destroyed in the East end riots of 1887.’ (p.2, EM).

A glance at the Victorian map is revealing in this respect. East of the City Road, the street grid tightens and the size of the urban blocks reduces considerably (V, J/K, 22/23, 43). Ackroyd’s reference to the real cemetery at Bunhill Fields, (V, K, 23, 16), reminds the reader that the poet-painter William Blake and the author-preacher John Bunyan (among other notable Nonconformists) are buried there. The cemetery was closed to burials in 1854 and is now a community garden.

The improbably-named ‘Salutation and Cat’ Tavern (p.10, LL) in The Lambs of London is a real tavern that was located, not in Hand Court near Lincoln’s Inn Fields as in the novel, but at 17, Newgate Street (Reg., b, D, 14) almost opposite to Christ’s Hospital, where the real Charles Lamb went to school. The poet Coleridge, Charles’ real-life friend, used to drink there. In the same novel, a key meeting between the actors takes place at Church House beside St. Mildred’s Church, Fetter Lane (p.67, LL). There was indeed a chapel in Fetter Lane, a turning off High Holborn, in 1790, but St Mildred’s (a Wren church) was in Bread Street, a turning to the south of Cheapside. (Reg., c, A, 15). The poet Shelley was married there in 1816. The church was destroyed by bombing in 1941 (LL). These are typical instances of the muddying of reality and fiction that Ackroyd rejoices in.

4.06 Improbable Journeys

In Dickens’ Oliver Twist, when Oliver is mistaken for the thief and arrested, he is taken on a journey ‘through two or three streets, down a place called Mutton-hill, where he was led beneath a low archway, and up a dirty court, into this dispensary of summary justice by the back way’ (p.63, OT). Mutton Hill never existed, though there is a Mutton Lane in Clerkenwell that gives onto the Green. The ambiguity of place name allows Dickens to dispense summary justice to Oliver to advance the action. When Oliver is exonerated, and his rescuer and patron takes him from the courtroom by coach, it rattles away,

‘down Mount Pleasant and up Exmouth Street, over nearly the same ground as that which Oliver had traversed when he first entered London in company with the Dodger and, turning a different way when it reached the Angel at Islington, stopped at length before a neat house in a quiet shady street near Pentonville’ (p.69, OT).

This is not a probable journey either, as it would take the coach on a very circuitous and roundabout route (V, J/K, 21,15).
Likewise, in Hawksmoor, when travelling from his office in Whitehall towards the City, Dyer remarks that:

‘the Crush of the Carriages was so great when we were got up into Fenchurch-Street that I was forcd to step out at Billiter Lane and mobb it on foot along Leaden-Hall Street; at last I managed to shoot myself thro’ a Vacancy between two Coaches and cross’d the Street that went up into Grace-Church Street. I walk’d into Lime Street, for I knew my path now and passed thro’ many ways and turnings until I was got into Moor-Fields’ (p.8).

This journey (G, a, BC, 13) is possible but not probable even though the names are all well known streets in the City, as the initial stages describe a figure-of-eight.

Similarly, in Ackroyd’s The Lambs of London, Holborn Passage, an alley that Charles Lamb walks down regularly on his way to work in Leadenhall Street, does not seem to have existed; it is not listed in the index to The A-Z of Regency London. In the story, Holborn Passage is said to be a turning off High Holborn, which is such a long street that it could plausibly be anywhere in the area (Reg. a/b, C/D 13 and a, A, 14) but Ackroyd describes it, to conjure it up for the reader;

‘Holborn Passage itself was a little more than an alley, one of those dark threads woven into the city’s fabric which accumulate soot and dust over the centuries. There was a pipe shop here as well as a mantua-maker, a carpenter’s workshop and a bookshop. All of them wore with resignation the faded patina of age and abandonment’ (p.14, LL).

Later, it is depicted in more detail, as it carries Charles Lamb, ‘past Snow Hill and Newgate, along Cheapside and up Cornhill; until he found himself in Leadenhall Street. It was as if he had been fired from a cannon into the pillar ed portico of East India House’ (p.28, LL). The reader is also told that Holborn Passage gives onto King Street, (p.53, LL), which is distinctly unhelpful as there are thirty-two King Streets in Regency London, several of which are in the vicinity of Holborn!

5.00 Spatiotemporal themes in Dickens and Ackroyd

Realism or otherwise in the depiction of settings is important for the debate about whether Dickens is a realist - a utilitarian even - or a romantic; it is perhaps of less consequence in an interpretation of Ackroyd who, as a postmodern author, is not expected to be realistic. Having considered the relatively simple issue of whether the milieux described by Dickens and Ackroyd are realistic or not, and having established that whilst some locations are real, identifiable places, others are distortions of reality or wholly fictitious, the paper moves on to identify ten key spatial themes that the two authors share. Starting with the opposition between the country and the city, the paper goes on to explore how journeys from the edge of London to the centre are depicted, the idea of London as a labyrinth, the movement potential of the city, the significance of walking at night in the city, the contrast between the east end and the west end of London, what it means to live at the outskirts of London or to inhabit marginal, waterfront locations, the role of rookeries and slums, and finally the dichotomy between light and dark and mud and dust.

5.01 The country and the city

London is Dickens’ constant point of reference and principal environmental setting. but the impact of Dickens’ novels depends to a great extent upon his talent for describing memorable settings for the action, notably through his opposition of the country and the city. Several of his novels feature a child-hero whose country childhood is in marked contrast with their entrée into the sophisticated and cynical society of London. Often his descriptions of rural life border on the ideal, perhaps reflecting the romantic imagination of his urban readership, and the countryside serves to provide a clear contrast with urban life, as here, in Oliver Twist where every sense is called to evoke a rural idyll;
Presentiment, contrast and ambiguity

Hanson, J.

‘Who can describe the pleasure and delight, the peace of mind and soft tranquility, the sickly boy felt in the balmy air and among the green hills and rich woods of an inland village!...It was a lovely spot to which they repaired. Oliver, whose days had been spent among squalid crowds, and in the midst of noise and brawling, seemed to enter on a new existence there. The rose and honeysuckle clung to the cottage walls, the ivy crept round the trunks of the trees, and the garden flowers perfumed the air with delicious odours. Hard by was a little churchyard, not crowded with tall unsightly gravestones, but full of humble mounds, covered with fresh turf and moss, beneath which the old people of the village lay at rest.’ (p.207, OT)

Something of a moral geography emerges as characters steeped in wicked ways of the city try unsuccessfully to corrupt innocent country children. When the country youth Pip alights at Cheapside in the City of London for the first time, his feelings are largely negative; ‘while I was scared by the immensity of London, I think I might have had some faint doubts whether it was not rather ugly, crooked, narrow, and dirty.’ (p.138, GE) Coming out of Covent Garden Theatre on his first evening in town, David Copperfield observes in similar vein that; ‘I felt as if I had come out from the clouds, where I had been living a romantic life for ages, to a brawling, splashing, link-lighted, umbrella-struggling, hackney-coach jostling, patten-clinking, muddy, miserable, world.’ (p.247, DC)

Even the rain in London is depressing;

‘In the country the rain would have developed a thousand fresh scents, and every drop would have its bright association with some beautiful form of growth or life. In the City it developed only foul stale smells, and was a sickly, lukewarm, dirt-stained, wretched addition to the gutters.’ (p.33, LD)

However, Dickens leaves his reader in no doubt that he considers the poverty and institutionalised cruelty of the Victorian countryside to be as deplorable as the misery and squalor that he documents within the heart of London’s slums.

Dickens’ novels rely heavily on contrasts for their emotional effects: sentimentality is opposed by brutality, descriptive storytelling by satire, innocence by corruption, good by evil, the middle-classes by the labouring poor, and, of particular concern in this paper, the city provides a contrast with the country. Dickens even seems to suggest that London is a stronger force than the countryside, in that the evil forces of the city are able to infiltrate into the countryside but country ways are only able to cling on weakly at the outskirts of the city. This is reminiscent of Durkheim’s (1893) sociological proposition that dense, urban organic solidarities based on the division of labour and a market economy are more powerful than mechanically solid ones based on agriculture and the domestic mode of production.

In like manner, Ackroyd portrays London as a dystopia. In The Great Fire of London, for example, Spender believes that he is making a film about London, as well as an adaptation of Little Dorrit, ‘Now he had a theme – and it was London itself’ (p.12, GFL). Later, he determines that the film will, ‘make sure that the human figures were continually being diminished by the noise and spectacle of the city’ (p.84, GLF). The architect Dyer in Hawksmoor remarks, ‘thus London grows more Monstrous, Straggling, and out of all Shape: (in) this Hive of Noise and Ignorance’ (p.56, H).

Young Tim Harcombe in English Music actually seems to echo the fears of Dickens’ child heroes when he says,

‘I was filled with the same thin depression which seemed to issue from the very streets of London… I believe that my depression sprang from the fear that I, too, would become like them – another pale, baffled, defeated, tremulous human figure standing in the London lamplight.’ (p.59, EM)

He recalls how, at the time, he was frightened at the narrow line that separated ordinary life from destitution, a remark that is reminiscent of Dickens. In a dream sequence, Tim and Pip (the hero of Dickens’ Great Expectations) walk through the streets of
the City together and Tim is forcefully struck with the very same contrasts that Dickens so forcefully observes,

‘through close-packed streets and along empty avenues, in every direction, its inhabitants had become more passive and docile…vast London had by some alchemy drained away their spirit’ (p.47, Dee); put another way, it ‘had grown steadily larger by encroaching upon and subduing the energy of its inhabitants’ (p.48 Dee). Elsewhere, in another reference to London’s deadening and draining effect on its inhabitants, one of Ackroyd’s characters remarks that, ‘the night in London promises nothing; it is a bland darkness which gives as little as it promises. In other cities the night is full of movement and possibility; in London, it is like a cloth placed over the cage of a bird’ (p.73, GFL). Dickens also remarks on the apparent ability of the urban milieu to weaken or sap the strength of its occupants. Speaking here through the words of Clennam, he paints a debilitating picture of the City of London’s streets;

‘It was a Sunday evening in London, gloomy, close, and stale. …Melancholy streets, in a penitential garb of soot, steeped the souls of the people who were condemned to look at them out of windows in dire despondency…Nothing to see but streets, streets, streets. Nothing to breathe but streets, streets, streets. Nothing to change the brooding mind or raise it up.’ (p.31, LD)

Elsewhere in the same novel, Dickens uses the metaphor of a clock that is losing time to express the exhausting effect of living in London, ‘the house in the City preserved its heavy dullness’. ‘always the same reluctant return to the same sequences of machinery, like a dragging piece of clockwork’ (p. 322, LD).

5.02 Transects through London

Both authors freight journeys into the centre of the metropolis, or from the heart of the city to the outskirts of London, with symbolism as well as realism. As Nell and her grandfather quit London in The Old Curiosity Shop, the reader is shown a veritable transect through the urban geography of London, or indeed through any large Victorian industrial metropolis. First, ‘they came upon the haunts of commerce and great traffic, where many people were resorting, and business was already rife’. Then the pair reach ‘a straggling neighbourhood, where the mean houses parcelled off in rooms, and windows patched with rags and paper, told of the populous poverty that sheltered there…here were poor streets where faded gentility essayed with scanty space and shipwrecked means to make its last feeble stand’. On they go again, into yet more dingy and depressing streets where there are; ‘damp rotten houses – many to let, many yet building, many half-built and mouldering away’, before finally they escape to the country, where,

‘the freshness of the day, the singing of the birds, the beauty of the waving grass, the deep green leaves, the wild flowers, and the thousand exquisite scents and sounds that floated in the air – deep joys to most of us, but most of all to those whose life is in a crowd or who live solitary in great cities as in the bucket of a human well – sunk into their breasts and made them very glad’ (p.113-14, OCS).
As Nell and her grandfather move outwards, their burden of care is lightened in direct proportion to the way the day grows brighter.

Reversing the journey, Oliver’s initial entry into London is described in a lengthy passage of thick description that is only partially reproduced here and shows the descent from light and freshness into darkness and squalor;

‘It was nearly eleven o’clock when they reached the turnpike at Islington. They crossed from the Angel into St John’s Road, struck down the small street which terminates at Saddlers Wells Theatre; through Exmouth Street and Coppice Row; down the little court by the side of the workhouse; across the classic ground which once bore the name of Hockley-in-the-Hole; thence into Little Saffron Hill; and so into Saffron Hill the Great, along which the Dodger scudded at a rapid pace, directing Oliver to follow close at his heels…..a dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy and the air was impregnated with filthy odours…..Covered ways and yards, which here and there diverged from the main street, disclosed little knots of houses, where drunken men and women were positively wallowing in filth.’ (p.50-51, OT).

Victor makes a similar journey into London in Ackroyd’s Casebook of Victor Frankenstein;

‘When eventually I began to smell London, among the fields and market gardens of its periphery, my fear increased to an alarming degree….. We came by way of Highgate, and from the hill I could see the great immensity boiling and smoking ahead of me. If I went down once more into its streets, its entrails, would I ever be free again? The encroaching sound was like that of a vast herd of beasts.’ (p. 145, VF)

This novel is set at approximately the same time period when Dickens was writing. Yet whilst describing what was undoubtedly a very real phenomenon, environmental pollution seems for both authors to represent the much larger social theme of moral contamination and corruption.

5.03 Labyrinthine London
In everyday language, the word ‘labyrinthine’ is used to describe any intricate and complex network of interconnecting routes that is experienced as disorientating, winding or confusing. The adjective ‘labyrinthine’ is also liberally applied by writers of fiction and by social commentators to describe late nineteenth century urban environments, especially the ‘rookeries’ and ‘slums’ found in neighbourhoods like St Giles, Saffron Hill or Jacob’s Island, which were explored and portrayed by Dickens and more recently reimagined by Ackroyd.

The word ‘labyrinth’ is often used interchangeably with ‘maze’ but, technically, a maze may have more than one entrance and exit and its system of pathways should incorporate route choices that branch, often in a tree-like manner, so that most paths either lead to a dead end or come out again into a totally unexpected part of the system. By contrast, a classic labyrinth has just one way in and only one, albeit tortuous and winding, route to the centre and back again, so that it can be represented as a sequence of spaces that lead from the entrance at the periphery to the destination, which often, though not invariably, lies at its geometric centre. A labyrinth is therefore not difficult to navigate, even though it may be experienced as disorientating. Dickens and Ackroyd use both terms correctly; street systems are described as maze-like while courts and alleys, which are ultimately dead end spaces, justify the term labyrinthine.

Once their characters reach the centre of the city, both authors make much of London’s maze-like street systems, which seems to stand both for the chaos of metropolitan life and for the difficulty of choosing the right, that is the moral, way to live. In Oliver Twist, the East End in particular is described as ‘a most intricate maze of narrow streets and courts’ (p.76, OT), and elsewhere as ‘a low neighbourhood…a labyrinth of dark, narrow courts’ (p.96, OT). Bill Sykes’ lair in Bethnal Green is
located in a ‘maze of mean and dirty streets’ (p.121, OT) and Clerkenwell is portrayed as an ‘obscurity of the intricate and dirty ways which, lying between Grey’s Inn Lane and Smithfield, render that part of the town one of the lowest and worst that improvement has left in the midst of London’ (p.277, OT).

Similarly, one of the more shallow and duplicitous protagonists in English Music lives; ‘down one of those long, tree-lined streets which transform London into a kind of maze; depending on which particular corner you turn, you are confronted either by unprecedented squalor or by the vague dilapidation of large and perhaps once grand houses. The air is chillier here, the trees darker, the streets gloomier, covered by a further encrustation of grime and decay’ (p.78, EM).

The routes Tim Harcombe and his father take to get home to Hackney in English Music lives; ‘there were occasions when the apparently endless sequence of passageways and courtyards and squares gave me the impression that we were walking quickly in order to stay in the same place’ (p.13, EM). Their final destination, Hackney Square, is not recorded in the Victorian A-Z. Ackroyd describes it thus:

‘It was a quiet place, and set in such a maze of streets that it was almost undiscoverable except by those who actually inhabited it; it was part of a faded and dilapidated area, but on looking back I suspect that its very remoteness, its air of being withdrawn from the busy life of the Kingsland Road or Brick Lane, made it appear more derelict than it was. It seemed to be hiding from the world, and its loneliness had succumbed to internal decay.’ (p.13, EM)

Given the size of the area around the Kingsland Road and Brick Lane, (B, 43, J/K/L24/25) this description could apply to just about anywhere in the East End of London.

It has become customary both within the space syntax community (Vaughan, 2008) and beyond it (Tschumi, 1974) to describe London as a ‘labyrinth’. In the case of Vaughan, she is using the term self-referentially, in order to critique its use by late nineteenth-century writers and social commentators to portray the street network of Victorian London’s East End as a system that is amorphous, chaotic and out of control. Vaughan’s point is subtle. Not only does she suggest that it is possible to reveal a well-modulated pattern of spatial integration and segregation within the urban grid of London’s East End, there is also ‘a strong relationship between the spatial location of poverty and a relative lack of physical accessibility. Yet, the separation between poor and more prosperous streets was not as sharp as previously thought. Although there were pockets of severe deprivation, these were frequently located in close proximity to more affluent areas’.

Elsewhere in the same article, Vaughan reiterates the point that; ‘this is typical of the street layout of the time, with a juxtaposition of segregated back alleys a few turnings away from the local main street. Looking at the map, it is evident how the spatial structure of the area created the possibility for busy and quiet streets to be located within close proximity to each other’.

Put succinctly, Vaughan is suggesting that to describe the East End as a ‘labyrinth’ is to exaggerate or even misrepresent the physical situation as it existed on the ground.

Drawing on Evans’ (1978, 1997) earlier work on the East End, Vaughan suggests that, at that time, the image of ‘labyrinthine London’ may have had a social and a moral purpose, which was to bring about social reform. ‘The morphology – the physical form and layout of the city– was itself viewed by the general public as a source of the immorality of its inhabitants, and was considered to be a significant obstacle to policing.’ In this way, writers (including Dickens) are able to shape public opinion and create a cultural climate within which political debate takes place and public policies are framed and enacted.
Tschumi’s (1974) use of the term ‘labyrinth’ is somewhat different, in that he is using the term as one of a pair of contrasting descriptors, or even metaphors, for architecture itself. For Tschumi, the pyramid represents architecture as ‘a thing of the mind, as a dematerialized or conceptual discipline’, whilst the labyrinth expresses architecture as a spatial experience, including both ‘empirical research that concentrates on the senses’ and ‘the relationship between space and praxis’ (p.28).

Thus, the pyramid represents reason, architecture in its ontological form, and the labyrinth stands for feelings, architecture as a sensory experience; ‘The dark corners of experience are not unlike a labyrinth, where all sensations, all feelings are enhanced, but where no overview is present to provide a clue about how to get out.’ (ibid., p.42) Tschumi concludes that architecture encapsulates a paradox, in that it comprises two meanings that are both interdependent and mutually exclusive.

Drawing directly on Tschumi, Wolfreys (1998) suggests that in the case of London, what writers and their texts describe; ‘what they represent, what they imagine…is the sense of incompleteness, the unendingness, the ineffability and lack which is always at the heart of London and any faithful attempt to represent or imagine it…London refuses objectification due to its multiple personalities, amongst which is the labyrinthine.’ (p. 25-26).

According to Wolfreys, what fictional writing achieves is the shaping of urban consciousness, including the proposition that London is unknowable. This opinion seems to have a particular resonance with Ackroyd’s fiction.

Tschumi concludes that, in recent years, ‘the role of architecture and planning has been analysed in terms of a projection on the ground of the images of social institutions, as a faithful translation of the structures of society into buildings or cities. Such studies underline the difficulty architecture has in acting as a political instrument’ (ibid., p. 44).

He goes on to suggest that the architectural labyrinth reveals itself as a slow history of space, in which the observer is also socio-spatially situated, so that whilst it is possible to participate in the labyrinth by experiencing architecture, architectural understanding is doomed forever to be partial and incomplete. More positively, Tschumi’s labyrinth (real space) can be a place of dreams, including dreams of the pyramid (ideal space) (ibid., p.49).

In the past, he suggests, the labyrinth gave society a linguistic metaphor to explain space, but today it could provide a cultural model to transcend existing values and provide the conditions under which social attitudes can be renewed. (ibid., p.50-51).

As a method for spatial analysis, and even as a theory about the social production of space, the unreflexive, ahistorical and uncritical use of space syntax to analyse and re-engineer urban space could be charged with contributing to the ‘pyramid’ that stands for all that is ‘ideal’ in architecture, whilst neglecting the ‘labyrinth’ of architectural experience, even as it sets out to provide a rigorous way of reading, navigating, imagining and intervening in the design of the urban fabric. To the extent that this is a just accusation, it is important that, without losing rigour, designers and researchers also situate their investigations not only in terms of the cultural climate in which they operate (a Dickensian approach to the city) but also by extending their understanding to how urban consciousness is shaped by arts, the media and cultural production (an Ackroydian approach to the city).

5.04 London’s incessant motion

Both writers are fascinated by the apparent endless flow of life in the city; ‘that constant pacing to and fro, that never-ending restlessness, that incessant tread of feet wearing the rough stones smooth and glossy – is it not a wonder how the dweller in narrow ways can bear to hear it!... Think of the stream of life that will not stop, pouring on, on, on.’ (p.1, OCS)
Dickens’ novels portray a vivid sense of urban life and movement that is observed carefully and minutely, in a way that is almost syntactic.

In a similar passage, Ackroyd describes how Charles Lamb: ‘joined the throng of carriages and pedestrians, all moving eastward into the City. It was for him a motley parade, part funeral procession and part pantomime, evincing in him the fullness and variety of life in all its aspects – before the City swallowed it up. The sound of footsteps on the cobbles mingled with the rumble of the carriage wheels and the echo of horse hooves to make what Charles considered to be a uniquely city sound. It was the sound of movement itself.’ (p.28, LL).

Tim feels the press of crowds in motion almost as a physical pressure exerted on his body: ‘I could feel the tension rising within me. It was as if I were pushing my way, physically, through a crowd which might overwhelm me. I do not recall experiencing anything of this kind before – this sensation of millions of lives surrounding my own.’ (p.230, EM).

Elsewhere, the movement of the populace within London excites Frankenstein: ‘I wandered through the streets in a constant state of excitation. What power human lives have in aggregate! To me the city resembled some vast electrical machine, galvanising rich and poor alike, sending its current down every alley and lane and thoroughfare in the course of its pulsating life. London seemed ungovernable, obeying laws mysterious to itself, like some dim phantasm stalking through the world.’ (p.12.VF)

The metaphor of a current, here electrical but equally likely to be a fluid, is one that is familiar to urban morphologists, which helps to visualise statistical distributions of people within the urban street system.

5.05 Walking at night in the city

Ackroyd (2012) describes how, whilst engaged on the opening chapters of Barnaby Rudge, Dickens wandered through London’s streets in order to steep himself in the ‘historical essence of London, that deeply imbued spirit of dirt and misery with which he could bind his own past to that of the city itself…(and)… to find images which could move him’ (p.188). Consumed by restless energy, Dickens was capable of walking for fifteen to twenty miles at a stretch, often at night, to give his imagination free rein. Wanderlust is a theme that is much discussed by both authors in their fiction. However, Dickens’ exploration of London appears far more driven than that of his contemporary, laid-back Parisian flâneurs (stroller, saunterer, loafer) and it seems to fit better as an early manifestation of a practice that Baudelaire was later to describe in terms of an urban observer who is, ‘solitary, gifted with an active imagination, ceaselessly journeying across the great human desert (who) has an aim loftier than that of a mere flâneur, an aim more general, something other than the fugitive pleasure of circumstance. He is looking for that quality which you must allow me to call “modernity”; for I know of no better word to express the idea I have in mind’ (Le Figaro, 1863).

Dickens and Ackroyd are both great walkers, and they make their characters walk too, especially at night. In English Music, Audrey takes to walking at night: ‘she would wander over the site of the old Marshalsea prison looking for clues’ (p.97, GFL). As Letty’s mood becomes darker, she too takes to wandering the streets where, ‘she found herself attracted to tall, dark streets where the new season had for some reason been refused entry. And yet the streets seemed to spawn life: she had never before realised quite how many people surrounded her in the course of her own daily activities. It was only when she, as it were, dropped out and wandered without direction or purpose, that the fullness of the city presented itself to her’ (p.116, GFL).
Like many of Ackroyd’s characters, the architect Dyer is drawn to wandering aimlessly through London, ‘walking abroad into that great and monstrous Pile’ (p.11, H). In English Music, Tim abandons himself to the city where he wanders haphazardly; ‘although I always seemed to find myself in the most forlorn and dilapidated streets; there were occasions when the sight of a derelict building or a narrow terrace of houses would draw me irresistibly forward and I seemed to be searching for some aspect of my own self among the decay.’ (p.274, EM)

Matthew, in The House of Dr. Dee, prefers the city in darkness; ‘it reveals its true nature to me then, by which I suppose I mean its true history….there are times when I walk through the contemporary city and recognize it for what it is: another historical period, with all its mysterious constraints and docilities.’ (p.39, Dee).

Mary Lamb escapes the claustrophobia of the family home to walk the city streets where she meets William Ireland, who also has the habit of walking London’s streets at night and, in The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein, as he becomes more isolated and driven, Victor begins to walk about the city at night; ‘I wandered abroad, through streets of sinister aspect, without the slightest danger of being questioned; I sensed the power of the night too, when the wildness of the city was manifest.’ (p.120 VF) Walking the streets at night is one of Ackroyd’s most persistent and ubiquitous motifs.

5.06 East End versus West End

Dickens is among the very first novelists to write about everyday life from that of an urban, working-class perspective and his settings are predominantly located in the City of London and around its eastern fringe. Action in Dickens’ novels is usually played out in a relatively small geographical area but where London’s West End does feature in his novels, the smart addresses seem hardly more attractive than the hovels of the poor. Occasionally, the gloom of the City is contrasted with the bustle of the West End:

‘the day had brightened very much, and still brightened as we went westward. We went our way through the sunshine and the fresh air wondering more and more at the extent of the streets, the brilliancy of the shops, the greater traffic, and the crowds of people whom the pleasanter weather seemed to have brought out like many-coloured flowers.’ (p.54, BH)

More often, though, Dickens writes with vicious satire about the homes of the bourgeoisie. Considering the fact that Dickens is supposed to love London, he harbours few illusions about the worst manifestations of social inequality.

Bleak House is particularly strident in holding up human vices and follies to scorn. The aristocratic Dedocks’ town house is located in ‘a dull street under the best conditions; where the two long rows of houses stare at each other with that severity, that half a dozen of its greatest mansions seem to have been slowly stared into stone, rather than originally built in that material. It is a street of such diamal grandeur, so determined not to condescend to liveliness, that the doors and windows hold a gloomy state of their own in black paint and dust, and the echoing mews behind have a dry and massive appearance, as if they were reserved to stable the stone chargers of noble statues’ (p.554-5, BH).

Elsewhere, Mr. Tite Barnacle (the name is a pun as barnacles are crustaceans that glue themselves to rocks and ships), who runs the Circumlocution Office in Little Dorrit, is given a home in a fictitious street near Grosvenor Square, the centre of London’s high society (V, M, 17/18, 14). The area is mercilessly satirised;

‘Mews Street, Grosvenor Square, was not absolutely Grosvenor Square itself, but it was very near it. It was a hideous little street…but there were two or three small airless houses at the entrance end of Mews Street, which went at enormous rents on account of their being abject hangers-on to a fashionable situation; and whenever one
of these fearful little coops was to be let (which seldom happened, for they were in great request) the house agent advertised it as a gentlemanly residence in the most aristocratic part of town, inhabited solely by the élite of the beau monde. Arthur Clennam came to a squeezed little house, with a ramshackle bowed front, little dingy windows, and a little dark area like a damp waistcoat pocket, which he found to be Number twenty-four, Mews Street, Grosvenor Square. To the sense of smell the house was like a sort of bottle filled with a strong distillation of mews.’ (p.106, LD)

The Merdles’ house in a real location at Harley Street, Cavendish Square (V, L, 18, 14), fares no better; ‘Like unexceptionable Society, the opposing rows of houses in Harley Street were very grim with one another…The expressionless uniform twenty houses, all to be knocked at and rung in the same form, all approachable by the same dull steps, all fenced off by the same pattern of railing, all with the same impractical fire-escapes, the same inconvenient fixtures in their heads and everything without exception to be taken at a high valuation.’ (p.234, LD)

The area between Oxford Street and Park Lane; ‘among the great streets of melancholy stateliness, and the little streets that try to be as stately, and succeed in being more melancholy. …Rickety dwellings of undoubtable fashion, but of a capacity to hold nothing comfortably except a dismal smell’ (p.307, LD) and the Sparklers’ London house, described as; ‘quite a triumph of inconvenience, with a perpetual smell in it of the day before yesterday’s soup and coach horses, but extremely dear, as being in the centre of the habitable globe’ (p. 655, LD) are given the same condemnation.

Dickens’ characters inhabit different physical and social worlds that rarely interest or encounter one another. One exception is when Nancy crosses between Spitalfields in the East End and Hyde Park in the fashionable West End, to warn Rose Maylie about Moncks’ plan to harm Oliver. In so doing, she also crosses the social boundary between a gangster’s moll and the bourgeois model of respectable femininity represented by Rose Maylie. Ackroyd’s characters tend to cross in the opposite direction, from the West End to the East, and they also notice the contrast between the two settings, ‘I crossed the city from west to east – the wide streets and public gardens of Kensington giving way to the commercial streets of the West End and to the narrow thoroughfares of the City, before they in turn were displaced by the brooding terraces of Hoxton, Hackney and Spitalfields. The city itself slowly grew darker and heavier during that journey, as if the atmosphere of the past had rolled like a thick smoke into the east.’ (p.235, EM). In another of Ackroyd’s novels, as the hero approaches the old centre of the City of London, the behaviour of the citizens ‘becomes more subdued and, on occasion, more fearful’ (p.1, Dee).

Nevertheless, Ackroyd echoes the sentiment that is found in Dickens that West London is neither as grand nor as salubrious as it would like to be. At one point in English Music, Tim visits his father who is living in a fictitious address at Albion Lane, described as ‘a short thoroughfare running off the Portobello Road’ which is a real street in West London (p.230, EM).

‘Here the houses displayed white stucco rather than dark brick; they were larger too, and the streets were much wider. I might have been walking among palaces, so grand they seemed, and I never noticed the actual shabbiness and seediness to which much of this grandeur had been reduced – not until, that is, I found the decaying house in which my father lived…and felt to strong a sense of melancholy and dilapidation that it was as if the building itself were somehow approaching its own death.’ (p.230, EM)

5.07 Living on the edge

Several of Dickens’ characters live beyond London’s urban fringe, in places that were rural villages in the ethnographic present of the 1820s and 1830s, when most of his novels were temporally located. The
Garlands, with whom Kit goes to work as a stable lad, live in Finchley, where, ‘everything within and without the house seemed to be the perfection of neatness and order’ (p.165, OCS). The Meagles’ charming house at Twickenham is ‘bright and shining’ (p.178, BH) and its appearance is portrayed as a metaphor for its inhabitants, almost as if the house has a personality of its own,

‘It stood in a garden, no doubt as fresh and beautiful in the May of the year as Pet now was in the May of her life; and it was defended by a goodly show of handsome trees, as Pet was defended by Mr. and Mrs. Meagles. …there was a hale elderly portion to represent Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, and a young picturesque, very pretty portion, to represent Pet. There was even the later addition of a conservatory sheltering against itself, uncertain in hue in its deep stained glass, and in its more transparent portions flashing to the sun’s rays, now like fire, and now like harmless water drops; which might have stood for Tattycoram.’ (p.183, LD)

Good and wholesome characters, of which there are rather few in Dickens, almost invariably live on the outskirts of London, often in houses that are unusual, eccentric or downright weird, like the Castle, at Walworth, in Great Expectations, complete with a moat, drawbridge and cannon, where Pip’s colleague Wemmick lives with his ‘aged parent’;

‘It appeared to be a collection of back lanes, ditches, and little gardens, and to present the aspect of a rather dull retirement. Wemmick’s house was a little wooden cottage in the midst of plots of garden, and the top of it was cut out and painted like a battery mounted with guns.’ (p. 175, GE)

The house at Richmond where Estella stays near London is likened to a caricature of how aristocrats used to dress in previous centuries, a parody of Estella’s masquerade as an elegant lady,

‘our destination there was a house by the Green; a staid old house, where hoops and powder and patches, embroidered coats, rolled stockings, ruffles and swords, had had their court days many a time. Some ancient trees before the house were still cut into fashions as formal and unnatural as the hoops and wigs and stiff skirts; but their own allotted places in the great procession of the dead were not far off, and they would soon drop into them and go the silent way of the rest’(p.231, GE).

Ackroyd does not normally trespass outside London, but in English Music Tim and his father pay a visit to Hogarth’s House in Chiswick, even then a museum dedicated to the famous painter and satirist, whose engravings depict some of the best-known narratives of everyday life in Georgian London. Interestingly, Hogarth’s childhood, like that of Dickens, was adversely affected by his father’s imprisonment for debt. Built at about 1700, the house was Hogarth’s country home from 1749 until his death in 1764. Tim describes the house as ‘indefinably unsettled’, an effect that he attributes to the house having been surrounded by modern buildings so that, ‘the garden was filled with the noise of the encroaching city’, and yet, ‘as soon as we entered the house, everything became as still and as silent as if we had closed the door upon the world itself’ (p.245, EM). Whilst visiting the house, Tim faints and trans-locates in space and time to Bedlam, where he meets Hogarth, as if the house were a ‘thin place’ where it is possible to step from one world into another, another typical Ackroyd motif. Each author, in his own way, portrays houses on the outskirts of London as quirky, unusual and otherworldly.

5.08 Marginal waterfront locations

By contrast with the rural outskirts of London where good people live, several of Dickens’ villains inhabit or frequent ambiguous, marginal, waterfront locations where the boundary between land and water is constantly shifting as the tide ebbs and flows. The riverfront is a murky territory, a constantly shifting and untrustworthy landscape that is neither land nor water, where the ground literally shifts beneath one’s feet. The riverside is in several respects the antithesis of the city, characterised by mud, coarse
grass, rotten houses, slimy causeways coated with sickly substances, ooze and slush. One such place is the, probably fictional, location of Mill Pond Bank, Chink’s Basin, described in Great Expectations; ‘it matters not what stranded ships repairing in dry docks I lost myself among, what old hulks of ships in course of being knocked to pieces, what ooze and slime and other drags of tide, what yards of ship-builders and ship-breakers, what rusty anchors blindly biling into the ground though for years off duty, what mountainous country of accumulated casks and timber, how many rope-walks that were not the Old Green Copper. After several times falling short of my destination, and as often over-shooting it, I came unexpectedly round a corner, upon Mill Pond Bank.’ (p.317, GE)

Ackroyd draws on a similar repertoire of characteristics when he locates Victor Frankenstein’s workshop where he sets out to bring human corpses back to life, in a remote area of Limehouse close to the Thames; ‘I found a structure perfectly suited to my purposes. It was an old pottery manufactory in Limehouse, with its own yard or wharf upon the river. The buildings around it were warehouses of various descriptions and, as I imagined, quite deserted at night.’ (p.87, VF).

Frankenstein makes it even more inaccessible, in keeping with his inhuman and shameful practices, ‘There was a path that led from my workshop into the settlement at Limehouse itself, but over the months I had rendered it intractable and even dangerous....The only true means of access to my workshop, therefore, was by water.’ (p.125, VF).

However, perhaps the most awful of these marginal locations is Jacob’s Island, the place where Bill Sykes in Oliver Twist retreats to and meets his doom. Jacob’s Island was a real place in Bermondsey on the south bank of the Thames (V, N, 24, 25). It was the source of a notorious cholera epidemic in 1832-3. Its waterfront is portrayed by Dickens as a place where boundaries of all kinds break down: solid ground turns to oozing mud, order to chaos; ‘near to that part of the Thames on which the church at Rotherhithe abuts, where the buildings on the banks are dirtiest and the vessels on the river blackest with the dust of colliers and the smoke of close-built, low-roofed houses, there exists, at the present day, the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of its inhabitants.’ (p.329, OT)

Because Dickens is aware that his readership will not normally frequent such a desperate place, he feels it is necessary to paint a detailed portrait of the island, to show the depths of depravity to which Bill has sunk after having bludgeoned his girlfriend Nancy to death; ‘in such a neighbourhood, beyond Dockhead, in the Borough of Southwark, stands Jacob’s Island, surrounded by a muddy ditch six or eight feet deep and fifteen to twenty wide when the tide is in, once called Mill Pond, but known in these days as Folly Ditch.....Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half a dozen houses, with holes from which to look upon the slime beneath; windows broken and patched, with poles thrust out on which to dry the linen that is never there; rooms so small, so filthy, so confined, that the air would seem too tainted even for the dirt and squalor which they shelter; wooden chambers thrusting themselves out above the mud, and threatening to fall into it, as some have done; dirt besmeared walls, and decaying foundations; every repulsive lineament of poverty, every loathsome indication of filth, rot, and garbage; - all these ornament the banks of Folly Ditch.’ (p.329-30, OT)

5.09 Rookeries and slums

The slum called Tom-all-Alone’s in the novel Bleak House is not identified, but it is believed to be based on St Giles at Seven Dials (V, L/M, 19/20, 15), as Dickens often visited a lodging house in the area and the residents of that district had even written to the newspapers in 1849 to protest about their deplorable living conditions. However, by not being specific about the actual place he had in mind,
Dickens ensured that the setting was representative of any or all of the notorious London slums;

‘It is a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people; where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced, by some bold vagrants who, after establishing their own possession, took to letting them out in lodgings. Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As on the ruined wretch, vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever.’ (p.189, BH)

Visits to the slums are as frightening and challenging to the Victorian imagination as an anthropological expedition to the interior of continents that are just being opened up in the mid-nineteenth century, especially bearing in mind that Dr. Livingstone’s famous meeting with Henry Morton Stanley did not occur until a year after Dickens’ death, but young men in search of excitement close to home could obtain it by paying a visit to Seven Dials. Victor Frankenstein is one such ‘young buck’, who is introduced to the dark underbelly of London by a friend, Westbrook;

‘he led us through the neighbourhood of St Giles, as he called it, which was only a few streets from where we stood. It seemed to me to be the most wretched and depraved district imaginable on this earth. No low quarter of Geneva, however ruinous, had the least resemblance to this foul and degrading patch of London. The streets were no more than paths of mud, or filth, where the effluent ran in rivulets from the ragged courtyards and alleys. The stench was indescribable….How had this fetid body grown in the largest city on earth, without anyone so much as noticing its existence? We were only a few moments from the glare of the Oxford Road, as I judged it, but these alleys were like some black shadow forever following its steps.’ (p.14-15, VF).

In 1850, when Dickens accompanied Inspector Field of Scotland Yard on a tour of London rookeries, the pair were escorted by four other police officers to ensure their safety. Elsewhere Dickens describes the area as;

‘a villainous street – undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud and corrupt water – though the roads are dry elsewhere – and reeking with such smells and sights that he, who has lived in London all his life, can scarce believe his senses. Branching from this street and its heaps of ruins, are other streets and courts so infamous that Mr. Snagsby sickens in body and mind, and feels as if he were going down, every moment deeper down, into the infernal gulf.’ (P.268, BH)

Referring explicitly to the slums’ association with cholera and other diseases, he remarks that ‘there is not a drop of Tom’s corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere’ (p.533, BH).

Another notorious slum features in Oliver Twist. Dickens calls the place ‘the emporium of petty larceny’, perhaps recalling earlier descriptions of this part of London as ‘the great emporium’;

‘near to the spot on which Snow Hill and Holborn Hill meet there opens, upon the right as you come out of the City, a narrow and dismal alley (later named as Field Lane) leading to Saffron Hill. In its filthy shops are exposed for sale huge bunches of second-hand silk handkerchiefs of all sizes and patterns; for here reside the traders who purchase from pickpockets’ (p.161, OT).

A local medical officer describes Saffron Hill in 1842 as a labyrinthine area, occupied by thieves, pickpockets and prostitutes (V, L, 21, 15).

Looking at the street grid of St Giles, Jacob’s Island or Saffron Hill on a map, these areas appear (almost disappointingly) similar to the surrounding streets and their morphologies seem open, continuous and relatively well connected. However, during the late-nineteenth century, navigating the urban realm depended on local knowledge. The interface between the streets and the dwellings, which were mainly tenements and lodging houses,
was direct, so that a suspect who was being chased by a police officer could dart into a dwelling, go through the interior, emerge in the back yard and cut across the interior of the block, enter another house by the back door and go out at its front door, several turnings away, thus shaking off his pursuer. Control of the urban environment was invested in its working-class inhabitants. The housing estates that replaced the rookeries reversed this relationship, so that the streets and the new, inward-facing housing estates were easily policed and kept under surveillance, whereas the working-class homes were separated and segregated from one another and from the interface with the street, (Hanson, 2000).

This example illustrates how spatial information needs to be supplemented by social knowledge in order to interpret the relations of power and control that may be invested in space.

5.10 Light and darkness, mud and dust

Dickens’ London is frequently characterised by dark and gloom. It is his ‘default setting’ as this excerpt from Oliver Twist shows;

“The night was dark and foggy. The lights in the shops could scarcely struggle though the heavy mist, which thickened every moment and shrouded the streets and houses in gloom, rendering the strange place still stranger in Oliver’s eyes, and making his uncertainly more dismal and depressing.” (p.98, OT).

Ackroyd’s streetscapes and characters are illuminated by light, in the sense of being made understandable. In his first novel, the hero Spencer’s particular filmic preoccupation is with the ‘quality of light’ (p.15, GFL). One of Ackroyd’s characters explains the significance of light as a motif that suggests a sense of the sublime in English Music;

“It was a line of light, a line that moved among the phrases and melodies of music just as it did within the images and colours of painting. It was the light that brought all things into harmony… it was the roll of creation itself, the continuous disclosure of a pattern that never changed but always enlarged, human being with human being, past with present, the earth with its inhabitants: the line of light encompassed us all, and in this music resounded the harmony of the universe.” (p.198, EM).

Another of Ackroyd’s characters, Matthew, the hero of The House of Dr. Dee even experiences light as an epiphany;

“suddenly those clouds broke and a shaft of sunlight shone down upon the metal rail in front of me… I felt that some secret had been divulged to me – I had glimpsed some interior life and reality which glowed within all things… I found myself running through the streets as if I possessed them.” (p.42, Dee)

A final point of comparison and contrast between Dickens and Ackroyd is their use of phenomenal environmental properties to represent mood. Dickens is preoccupied with London mud, no doubt a very real phenomenon. Whenever a journey is necessitated, his characters wade along ‘little-frequented and dirty ways… a very filthy narrow street’ (p.99. OT). Whenever an unpleasant or criminal character is visited, the area where they live is deep in the mire; ‘The mud lay thick upon the stones, and a black mist hung over the streets; the rain fell sluggishly down; and everything felt cold and clammy to the touch.’ (p.121, OT) Ackroyd’s characters, on the other hand, are surrounded by dust and even discuss what it is made of; ‘Is Dust immortal then… so that we may see it blowing through the Centuries?” (Walter) “We are all Dust indeed are we not?” (p.17, H), and again, ‘They were patterns in the dust, caught suddenly in the changing light of that summer’s evening… and hadn’t he (his father) once told me that dust was simply the residue of dead skin?’ (p.9, Dee). Interestingly, dust is now the subject of serious academic research. Samples have been collected from historic buildings throughout Europe and beyond and analysed at the University of Augsburg using a scanning electron microscope, revealing that dust contains collections...
of tiny fossils, Saharan dust, pollutants and human debris that provide an unique fingerprint of each building, (Stoecker, 2011).

6.00 Dickens: a geography of presentiment and a meteorology of foreboding

One of the methods by which Dickens moves the plot forward is to describe the surroundings in which his characters find themselves in ways that relate to their characters and presage the events that will happen to them. His townscape and dwellings seem to parallel the lives of the characters that live there, so that the environment accentuates or intensifies their behaviour. It is not so much that the environment determines behaviour, for some of the foulest environments are inhabited by characters that are uncorrupted by evil, malice or wrongdoing. It is more that the environment either limits or affords opportunities to particular characters, sometimes in ways that prefigure the action. Where ‘thick description’ is adopted by Dickens, the reader can be sure that something of significance will happen, even if its meaning is not apparent at the instant of reading.

For example, just as Clennam is about to encounter for the first time the blackmailer who holds the secret of his family history, the environment suddenly fills him with dread and sadness,

‘his imagination was sufficiently impressive to see the whole neighbourhood under some dark tinge of its dark shadow. As he went along, upon a dreary night, the dim streets by which he went seemed all depositories of oppressive secrets’ (p.512, LD).

In a long passage of melancholy description of the environment of Clennam’s home, Dickens signals to the reader that something important is about to take place there.

In similar vein, Pip’s first visit to Mr. Jaggers’s office in Bartholomew Close off Little Britain, just outside Smithfield, is set in a real location close to where animals are butchered for the market, providing a hellish scene that presages the corruption of Pip’s innocence and country ways by the temptations and glamour of London society;

‘Of course I had no experience of a London summer day; and my spirits may have been oppressed by the hot exhausted air and by the dust and grit that lay thick on everything… I came into Smithfield, and the shameful place, being all asmear with filth and fat and blood and foam, seemed to stick to me. So I rubbed it off with all possible speed by turning into a street where I saw the great black dome of St Paul’s bulging at me from behind a grim stone building which a bystander said was Newgate Prison.’ (p.140, GE)

Pip is literally soiled by this experience.

The state of the weather in Dickens’ novels is often indicative of impending events. Rain, wind, snow and especially fog, give the reader an intuitive sense of foreboding that something particularly unpleasant is about to happen. In Dickens’ first novel, as Sykes and Oliver set out to rob the Maylies, the atmosphere that Dickens graphically describes reflects the darkness of the deed that is about to be perpetrated,

‘There was a faint glimmering of the coming day in the sky; but it rather aggravated than relieved the gloom of the scene, the sombre light only serving to pale that which the street lamps afforded, without shedding any warmer or brighter tints upon the wet house tops and dreary streets.’ (p.134, OT)

In a much later novel, Great Expectations, heavy rain presages the arrival of his mysterious benefactor, the convict Magwitch, in an encounter that dashes all his misguided dreams of happiness;

‘It was wretched weather; stormy and wet, stormy and wet; and mud, mud, mud, deep in all the streets. Day after day, a vast heavy veil had been driving over London from the East, and it drove still, as if in the East there were an Eternity of cloud and wind…..Alterations have been made in that part of the Temple since that time, and it has not now so lonely a character as it had then, nor is it so exposed to the river. We lived at the top of the last house, and the wind rushing up the river shook
Fog in particular is given a far larger meaning than the obvious functional one of clouding vision and rendering navigation through the streets of the city more difficult. In *Bleak House*, fog is a shape-shifting medium that stands for the obfuscations of the legal system, the opaqueness and obscurity of nineteenth-century urban society and the impossibility of reading people’s real thoughts and feelings;

‘London. Michaelmas term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln’s Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes – gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers…..Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city…..The raw afternoon is rawest and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest, near that leaden-hearted old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-hearted old corporation: Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln’s Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord high Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery. Never can there come a fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering conditions which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth.’ (p.3-4, BH)

Dickens is describing a real phenomenon, in that dense blankets of yellowish, blackish or greenish smog, laden with sulphur dioxide and other pollutants, were then a common occurrence in London, known as ‘pea-soupers’ or ‘London particulars’. Smog killed large numbers of the old, the ill and the very young throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, until the Clean Air Act of 1956 made the use of smokeless fuel compulsory in urban areas. In *Bleak House*, however, fog is given a larger purpose in that it shows the reader that everything in life is insecure; nothing is as it appears.

Rarely, but occasionally, the weather brightens as a sign of redemption. When Amy Dorrit forgives the evil Mrs. Clennam for the many wrongs that have been done to her;

‘the beauties of the sunset had not faded from the long light films of cloud that lay at peace in the horizon. From a radiant centre over the whole length and breadth of the tranquil firmament, great shoots of light streamed among the early stars, like signs of the blessed later covenant of peace and hope that changed the crown of thorns into a crown of glory’ (p.750, LD).

However, within the space of half a page, Mrs. Clennam’s house collapses, ‘it heaved, surged outward, opened asunder in fifty places, collapsed, and fell’ (p. 750, LD) in a symbolic parallel of Mrs. Clennam’s immediate physical collapse into complete paralysis and rigid silence, never to move or speak again.

7. 00 Ackroyd: ambiguity and the ‘spirit of place’

Ackroyd’s key spatial proposition is that, by concentrating meaning, places become nodes that make connections between people, events and things in ways that transcend time. In *The House of Dr. Dee*, Ackroyd explicitly refers to this as ‘the spirit of place’ (p.46, Dee), a concept that is often associated with Romanticism. In the context of contemporary architectural discourse, the concept of a ‘spirit of place’ or ‘genius loci’ can be attributed to the phenomenologist Christian Norberg-Schultz (1980), who developed the proposition in his influential book, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. 
Hawksmoor spells out to the reader the importance of ‘spirit of place’ in influencing people, actions and events. Standing in Fountain Court in the Temple, Hawksmoor experiences a strong sense of peace even in the heart of the bustling city; ‘Perhaps it was simply that people like myself had always chosen this place, and over the years it had accepted the stillness of its visitors.’ (p.43, H).

Ackroyd elaborates on these ideas about the capacity for busyness or quietude, a functional attribute of a place, in English Music as the painter William Hogarth converses with Tim Harcombe whilst walking through Bishopsgate, one of the busiest streets in the City of London;

‘All my delight is in motion. Movement is the key to all exercise of energy and the imagination… Look upon these crowds of people, passing before us and around us with such large, flowing, gliding outlines. It is the same spirit of motion….It is the line of our age. It is the line of our country.’ (p.252, EM).

This could almost be Hillier speaking about the significance of human movement, though Hillier’s explanation of how the relationship between particular spaces and their movement potential is explained as a system effect;

‘Spatial configuration influences patterns of movement in space, and movement is by far the dominant form of space use. Through its effects on movement, spatial configuration tends naturally to define certain patterns of co-presence and therefore co-awareness amongst the individuals living in and passing through an area….Patterns of co-presence and co-awareness are the distinctive product of spatial design, and constitute, it will be argued, the prime constituents of what will be called the "virtual community". The "virtual community" in a given area is no more nor less than the pattern of natural co-presence brought about through the influence of spatial design on movement and other related aspects of space use.’(Hillier, 1996, p. 141)

Later, Hawksmoor considers the association between criminality and place and concludes that; ‘most criminals tend to remain in the same districts, continuing with their activities until they were arrested, and he sometimes speculated that these same areas had been used with similar intent for centuries past…they were drawn to those places where murders had occurred before…. certain streets or patches of ground provoked a malevolence which generally seemed to be quite without motive.’ (p.141-2, H).

Ackroyd seems to be speaking directly to the reader here, using the voice of Hawksmoor to explain a philosophy of time and place. Hawksmoor hypothesises that the place is responsible for the deed; or perhaps for intensifying the occurrence of certain types of behaviour. This is, if anything, more symptomatic of environmental determinism than any proposition made by Dickens. Alternative explanations would look to what a particular place affords (Gibson, 1977) or how it influences opportunistic behaviour (Hillier, 1996). Space cannot determine the outcome of actions and events but it can give shape to their possibilities.

If movement is a functional attribute, the quality of light is a phenomenological one, since it is based on an observer’s experience of the sensory properties of a place. Elsewhere in his conversation with Tim Harcombe, Hogarth expounds on the unique association between a place and its light;

‘Do you sense that interposition of air which throws a general soft refining tint over the whole prospect? It is the light of London. For mark this well – each country, and indeed each city, has its own especial brightness.’(p.257, EM).

Elsewhere, Hogarth discourses on the built form and townscape of cities;

‘But do you see the way in which our buildings, our churchyards and our streets form such graceful lines and masses with one another?…Here is intricacy and unity close combined, the seeming crookedness and irregularity of our thoroughfares making an harmonious pattern which is to be seen only in this city. It has all the grace of a living object for, just as London has its own proper light, so does it possess its own fitting shape. Indeed it is
very much like an instinct, acting in the mind and determining the will of the people congregated here.’ (p.257, EM).

These views seem very close to Aldo Rossi’s (1966, 1984) proposition that a city remembers its past through its ‘collective memory’, though Ackroyd goes further. Rossi’s conception refers mainly to the permanence of a city’s culturally important buildings and monuments; Ackroyd’s to the memories locked up in all the phenomena that make up a great metropolis;

‘if the air indeed were one vast library, one great vessel in which all the noises of the city were preserved, then nothing need be lost….and perhaps there was such a place where perpetual, infinite London would one day be found.’ (p.246, Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem).

This proposition is voiced by the character of George Gissing, a Victorian realist writer.

Ackroyd’s sense that the city is a library that records and preserves a memory of everything that has ever happened results in a motif which proposes that phenomena are able to persist though time in a particular space. In The Great Fire of London, Spenser visits the Scrubs to discuss filming in an abandoned wing. He sees a childhood friend who has been incarcerated there. Prison is, it seems to Spenser, a place for society’s misfits, a place of hopelessness and futility;

‘once the Marshalsea, now here. Only a small time – an historical moment – separated the two; and they represented the same appalling waste of human life. Nothing had really changed in a society which had such places as its monuments.’ (p.57, GFL)

This could be Rossi speaking. Elsewhere in the same novel, as Rowan and Tim, two of the principal characters, walk together down the Marshalsea Road (there is such a street); ‘they talked about this area of the great city, how it was that so many old things lay here, and how many had remained unknown or neglected’ (p.31). This layering of history and its relationship to the present is to become a constant theme in Ackroyd’s later novels.

Layering can lead to characters in the same novel repeating the same actions in the same places at different historical times. For example, like many of Ackroyd’s characters, the young Dyer, a principal protagonist in Hawksmoor, is drawn to wandering aimlessly through London;

‘walking abroad into that great and monstrous Pile….. I used to sit against a piece of Ancient Stone and set my Mind thinking on past Ages and on Futurity….there was before me a stone pedestal on which was fix’d an old rusty horizontal Dial, with the Gnomon broke short off, and it was with an inexpressible Peacefulness that I gazed upon this Instrument of Time’ (p.11-12, H).

These actions and thoughts are recapitulated by Thomas, the first modern East End murder victim, who provides a modern translation of Dyer’s original words;

‘he had also taken to wandering…he had found an old square by the Thames in which a sundial had been erected….he would sit here, contemplating the change which had come over his life and, in his extremity, thinking of the past and of the future’ (p.43, H).

The reader infers that Dyer and Thomas have been drawn to the same point by its ‘spirit of place’ and are engaged in like-minded reverie.

Dee wanders at large in the city and upon returning home, he experiences a vision of his house as it will be in the future;

‘my ancient house was now in quite another guise with great tenements of stone and brick all around it. What was this place, which was my own and not my own? The door opened to me. And when I walked in I saw nothing that I knew. Here was my chamber of presence, but it was empty and swept clean. And what was it doing lowered upon the earth when it should have been two storeys high?’(p.217, Dee).

Set alongside the remark of Matthew, the modern owner of Dee’s house, that; ‘ “There is no such thing as history” I said. “History only exists in the
present.”’ (p.264, Dee). Perhaps Ackroyd is exploring a proposition about temporal resonance that is similar to Derrida’s idea of deferral;

‘Derrida strategically utilises a conception of time that emphasises deferral... the meaning of a particular object, or a particular word, is never stable, but always in the process of change.... Moreover, the significance of that past change can only be appreciated from the future and, of course, that ‘future’ is itself implicated in a similar process of transformation were it ever to be capable of becoming ‘present’. The future that Derrida is referring to is hence not just a future that will become present, but the future that makes all ‘presence’ possible and also impossible. For Derrida, there can be no presence-to-self, or self-contained identity, because the ‘nature’ of our temporal existence is for this type of experience to elude us.’ (Reynolds, 2002; 2010).

Derrida’s proposition seems to chime with that expressed by Charles Lamb in The Lambs of London;

‘Charles loved all the tokens of antiquity. He had stood on the site of the old Aldgate pump and imagined water being drawn from the wooden pipe five hundred years before; he had paced the line of the Roman wall, and noticed how the streets naturally conformed to it; he had lingered over the sundials in the Inner Temple, and traced their mottoes with his finger. “The future is as nothing, being everything”, he had once told Tom Coates (a fellow clerk) in a moment of drunken inspiration. “The past is everything, being nothing”’ (p.15).

This passage feels like it could be Ackroyd himself speaking directly to the reader through his character about his sensibility towards the ‘spirit of place’.

Another spatiotemporal motif that occurs in several of Ackroyd’s novels and hints at Derrida’s notion of presence through repeatability, is that the attentive reader experiences an echo from events that resound across the ages. For example, Hawksmoor recounts how he visits the old people’s home where his father is living and experiences a situation in which, ‘One old woman stood in a nightdress, her back against the wall, and repeated “Come John, come John, come John” into the air in front of her, until she was taken gently by the arm and led away still muttering’ (p.148, H). This recalls an earlier chapter in which Dyer and Wren visit Bedlam and, according to Dyer they see; ‘a Woman who stood with her Back against the Wall crying “Come John, Come John”. (I believe that to be her Son who is dead, Sir Chris. told me)’ (p.121, H).

In another situation from The House of Dr. Dee, Matthew and his friend discuss the idea that there may a ‘fatal attraction’ of place, in respect of Clerkenwell, a district that for centuries has been inhabited by watchmakers, watch-repairers and printers; ‘Had they chosen this place or had the place somehow chosen them?’ (p.17, Dee) The authorial message is reinforced when Matthew and his friend observe three prostitutes being arrested; having just remarked that prostitution had been recorded in the area during the middle ages. More prosaically, characters in Ackroyd’s novels report hearing ‘snatches of Song and confus’d conversation’ (p.2, H), which seem to persist in a place across the intervening centuries, so that history appears to repeat itself.

The motif of ‘something seen out of the corner of the eye’ adds to the sense of instability in Ackroyd’s novels. An early example from The Great Fire of London describes how, some time after Arthur Feather has murdered a child at the site of the Marshalsea, Rowan arranges to meet Tim there; ‘the park was barer and darker, now that late autumn had turned to winter, and there were some odd chalk marks on the path - it looked like the outline of a small bundle, but he couldn’t be sure’ (p.67, GFL). In Hawksmoor, a tour group led by a guide is observing the modern tower of Spitalfields Church when one member sees something out of the corner of his eye, ‘What was that falling there?, one of the group asked’ (p.28, H), the inference being that it is a persistent after-image of the boy Tom who had fallen from the tower hun-
dreds of years ago. In English Music, Tim reports; ‘I thought I saw a shape, or the shadow of a shape, passing quickly across the far end of the room. It was only in the corner of my eye, so to speak, and I may have been quite mistaken.’ (p.244, EM) Matthew’s mother on a visit to the house of Dr. Dee makes the clearest statement of the phenomenon that believers in the paranormal refer to as ‘shadow ghosts’; ‘There is something here...it’s just as if it were in the corner of my eye, but it’s not in my eye. It’s here.’ (p.87, Dee)

Ackroyd first explores the relationship between realism and artifice in The Great Fire of London where, in order to lend the film a degree of credibility, Spenser transforms his riverside location for Little Dorrit into a film set;

‘The black canvas was hoisted up even higher above the set, and several smaller canvas awnings were placed in position beside it, in order to create darkness where there was none before. Black felt was tacked into place along the narrow alley between the warehouses, and the sides of the vast and empty buildings had been coated in grey paint...They rose in front of him like houses of darkness, oppressive and yet unreal. They had been transformed into replicas of warehouses. Reality had been suspended.’ (p.108, GFL)

By this deception, ‘Here were the warehouses and alleys; Spencer had skillfully matched the old buildings with his own facades so that now the two were practically indistinguishable’ (p.157, GFL). Yet it is this very artifice that leads to the eventual destruction of the film set by local tramps, who have no qualms about burning it down because; ‘As soon as they saw the chosen place, they knew there was no harm in destroying it. It had been abandoned. It didn’t look right; it was false, flimsy.’ (p.162).

Later, in Hawksmoor, Ackroyd’s interests turn to the experiencing subject; ‘Could it be that the world sprang up around him only as he invented it second by second and that, like a dream, it faded into the darkness from which it had come as soon as he moved forward.’ (p.197, H). Hawksmoor feels that; ‘At such times the future became so clear that it was as if he were remembering it, remembering it in place of the past which he could no longer describe’ (p.248, H). Elsewhere, in The House of Dr. Dee, Matthew’s friend Daniel explains; ‘I think time may be a substance as real as fire or water. It can change shape. It can move to a different position.’ (p.82, Dee).

Early on in the novel, Matthew explains that, occasionally, he feels temporally dislocated; ‘the immediate world around me had become both more distant and more distinct’ and again, ‘I often viewed the past as the present, so in turn the present moment became part of the past’ (p.13).

At one point, in a passage that strikes a similar chord to Christopher Alexander’s (1966) influential article, A City is not a Tree, Hawksmoor puzzles about whether events are linked by linear causal chains or caught in overlapping networks that describe a nexus of possibilities;

‘The chain of causality might extend as far back as the boy’s birth, in a particular place and on a particular date, or even further into the darkness beyond that. And what of the murderer, for what sequence of events had drawn him to wander by this old church? All these events were random and yet connected, part of a pattern so large that it remained inexplicable.’ (p.196, H)

All these motifs serve to emphasise the ambiguous and unstable nature of things, as opposed to the belief that the senses record reality by presenting things as they actually exist.

8. 00 Discussion: two views of Romanticism

The novels of Dickens and Ackroyd require the reader to possess ‘a willing suspension of disbelief’, a term that can be attributed to the poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who used it in order to describe the acceptance within a narrative of characters, actions or events that would ordinarily seem to be unbelievable or unreal; ‘that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment,
which constitutes poetic faith’. This device, which will be revisited later, allows both authors to explore unusual or challenging propositions in their novels.

Likewise, the concept of a ‘thick spatial description’ that was introduced earlier in this paper initially requires a researcher to ‘suspend disbelief’ about the nature of evidence as it initially presents itself. Different spatial descriptions - factual accounts and fictional narratives, expert opinions and ordinary people’s viewpoints, quantitative and qualitative information, photographs and drawings, cartography and conceptual maps - depending on the question under investigation and always treated carefully and thoughtfully, may each be regarded as a valid representation that has something to contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomena under scrutiny. By analogy with ‘poetic faith’, the ‘creative leap’ in research and design may be stimulated by lateral thinking.

In Chapter XIV of his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge describes how the concept first took shape, whilst he and Wordsworth were collaborating on their ground-breaking volume of poetry, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), a work that is generally accepted as the first genuine expression of English Romanticism; ‘our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination’.

This dichotomy seemed to lead them naturally to adopt two distinct narrative styles, and Coleridge goes on to describe how he and Wordsworth decided to divide their poetic endeavours; he would produce works of the first sort and Wordsworth would aim at the second type of poetry;

‘In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real…. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such, as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves.’

Wordsworth’s poetry is characterised by his frequent use of everyday spatiotemporal settings, a preference for everyday language over high blown prose and the portrayal of the lives and experiences of working people in a way that elevates them above the ordinary. His aim is to communicate his sense of the ‘sublime’ in nature to his readers. Coleridge, by contrast, locates his narratives in extraordinary spatiotemporal settings, adopts a language influenced by educated and reflective thought, and tackles supernatural events and tragic subjects in order to reach the sublime by heightening the sensibilities of his readers. Both poets are celebrated as co-originators of the Romantic movement in poetry and literature, yet they have distinct authorial voices and approaches to space and time.

Dickens and Ackroyd share a large number of spatiotemporal themes and they both merge realistic with fictional depictions of space and time where these help to advance the narrative. At the same time, each has a distinctive authorial voice. Dickens’ preference is to use the environment not to determine, but to foreshadow or heighten the drama that his characters play out on the printed page. Ackroyd’s use of environment is subtle and ambiguous in the way he layers spatial experiences and manipulates atmosphere to convey feelings of menace or impending tragedy. In this respect, both Dickens and Ackroyd would seem to sit well within the English Romantic tradition, but perhaps Dickens is to Wordsworth as Ackroyd is to Coleridge.

Turning to the lessons that this comparison of texts has brought to light, general messages can be detected in the writing of Dickens and Ackroyd that might be of interest to architects and urban
morphologists. The first is a proposition familiar to practitioners of space syntax, that local space is invariably part of a bigger, global picture that depends on movement for its identity and coherence. Humans are spatial entities who exist, inhabit, move about and encounter one another in physical space. Solnit (2006) has observed that, ‘Walkers are “practitioners of the city”, for the city is made to be walked. A city is a language, a repository of possibilities, and walking is the act of speaking that language, of selecting from those possibilities. Just as language limits what can be said, architecture limits where one can walk, but the walker invents other ways to go.’ In this regard, both Dickens and Ackroyd are ‘practitioners of the city’. Their literary practice is grounded in walking the streets of London, observation and experience have led them to intuit the morphological and configurational patterns that ‘create life’ in urban street systems, and their novels are replete with descriptions of movement, routes and journeys through city space. The urban choreography of walkable cities is likely to assume ever-greater significance for architecture as information and communications technologies provide new ways to explore, experience and visualise the city, but literary modes of thought continue to remind us of the rich texture and inherent possibilities of urbanism.

A second common denominator is their understanding and exploitation of spatial contrasts: prison and city, sacred and profane space, East and West End, urban anonymity and providential encounter, ‘rookery’ and thoroughfare, to name just a few. One might even consider the contrast inherent in integration and segregation, as it is often forgotten that the one always implies the other. Architectural theory and practice that is focused on resolving particular questions or problems, may forget the value of approaches that tap into the possibilities released by contrast. Spatiotemporal ambiguity, on the other hand, permits alternative readings of social power that may function as a force for change, as in those circumstances where urban borderlines and boundaries become spaces of marginalisation, liminality or resistance.

The metaphor of the city as a library or a repository of collective memory is not in itself new, but in the narratives of Dickens and especially Ackroyd, the concept is grounded in real objects and spaces in a way that provides a springboard to design opportunities, whilst the idea that there could be such a phenomenon as a ‘fatal attraction of place’ is intriguing, as it suggests that configuration may give rise to conditions under which the properties of space are repeatedly exploited over time by individuals and groups: the successive waves of immigration into Spitalfields could be accounted for in this way.

The notion that either architecture in particular or the built environment in general, are capable of determining social behaviour has been largely discredited in recent years, and this is not how Dickens portrays the influence of environment either, for his most demoralising environments are redeemed by virtuous as well as vicious protagonists. His use of environment to portend or foreshadow events is more subtle and suggestive of an architecture that may possess a hidden latency on the one hand, or an overt power to heighten experience on the other. Such an inclusive, open-ended approach to information that assembles diverse objects, images and ideas and manipulates them in unexpected ways, may allow a more sophisticated architectural understanding to develop, which takes account of context as well as content. The realist agenda, describing the world as it is, is probably an unrealistic enterprise, whether in literature, ethnography, architecture or even science, but it is a feasible project to combine the theoretical insight of Hillier with the political awareness of Dickens and the cultural sensibility of Ackroyd. This can only enrich the ways in which architects envision their designs and make architectural research more relevant to wider society.
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