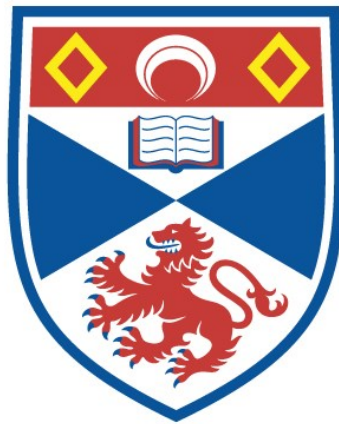


DICKENS AND THE UNREAL CITY : THE
METROPOLITAN SYMBOLISM OF THE MYSTERY
STORY

Karl Ashley Smith

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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Dickens and the Unreal City: the Metropolitan Symbolism
of the Mystery Story.

Karl Ashley Smith

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts of the University
of St Andrews in fulfilment of the requirements of the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

15 April 2002



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Thank you

Abstract

London is not only a backdrop in the novels of Charles Dickens. Its workings both conceal truth of various sorts from characters and push it into the open. This thesis claims that it is the primary symbolic means by which Dickens dramatizes the conflict between concealment and revelation which provides the driving force of his fiction.

The first chapter discusses how the city extrapolates the gothic motif of the haunted castle - a built environment which attempts to cut off connections with the rest of the world, leading to a state of atrophy and death. The second particularly explores urban squalor as evidence that human relationships have been obscured and that death is the result. Chapter three explores the kind of concealments and deaths effected by London and explains that the regenerative revelation required as an antidote to them is both social and religious in character. Dickens conceptualizes it as a participation in a familial system of love relationships originating in God's love for his children.

The fourth and fifth chapters deal with two parts of London's organisation that bring knowledge inexorably to light, the detective police force and the railway network. They are part of a city that hides truth and brings it to light according to a carefully laid plan. Chapters six and seven consider two sub-symbols, the Thames and the crowd, that reflect the city's dual role in bringing both death and regeneration, both concealment and discovery. Characters' immersion in these brings about a death to their old identity and often a re-emergence into a new identity, based on the scheme of interconnections, that is both a revelation and an induction into new life. The mysteries worked out by Dickens's symbolic London are therefore an imaginative engagement with Christianity as a mystery religion, promising revelatory regeneration through surrender to death in the modern world.

List of abbreviations

<i>BR</i>	<i>Barnaby Rudge</i>
<i>BH</i>	<i>Bleak House</i>
<i>COO</i>	<i>The Castle of Otranto</i>
<i>DC</i>	<i>David Copperfield</i>
<i>DS</i>	<i>Dombey and Son</i>
<i>GE</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>
<i>LD</i>	<i>Little Dorrit</i>
<i>MC</i>	<i>Martin Chuzzlewit</i>
<i>NN</i>	<i>Nicholas Nickleby</i>
<i>OCS</i>	<i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i>
<i>OT</i>	<i>Oliver Twist</i>
<i>OMF</i>	<i>Our Mutual Friend</i>
<i>MOU</i>	<i>The Mysteries of Udolpho</i>
<i>SBB</i>	<i>Sketches by Boz</i>
<i>TTC</i>	<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>
<i>TWL</i>	<i>The Waste Land</i>
<i>UT</i>	<i>Re-printed Pieces and the Uncommercial Traveller</i>

These abbreviations are used the first time I refer to a novel, or the first time I return to it after a period of discussing a different text. Thereafter, chapter and page numbers only are supplied.

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Introduction

It must be a strange state to be like Jo! To shuffle through the streets, unfamiliar with the shapes, and in utter darkness as to the meaning, of those mysterious symbols, so abundant over the shops, and at the corners of the streets, and on the doors, and in the windows! To see people read, and to see people write, and to see the postmen delivering letters, and not to have the least idea of all that language - to be, to every scrap of it, stone blind and dumb! It must be very puzzling to see the good company going to the churches on Sundays, with their books in their hands, and to think (for perhaps Jo *does* think, at odd times) what does it all mean, and if it means anything to anybody, how comes it that it means nothing to me?

(BH 16 p. 257)

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 ...

(19 p. 315)

To Jo, the illiterate crossing-sweeper, London is composed of millions of "mysterious symbols", each one a microcosm of an incomprehensible whole. Dickens is not so much horrified that the poor child cannot read, as disturbed by the way that this inability excludes him from comprehending his native environment. Words are everywhere in the city, explaining the function of buildings, indicating location and direction, advertising - truly or falsely - how needs are to be met there, and laying down the rules by which metropolitan society is governed. They convey information to the initiates by whom, and for whose use, the city has been designed. The point being made is that Jo, and hundreds of thousands like him, do not belong to this class. They are being exploited and shut out of participation in the city by its literal and metaphorical architects. For it is not only words that Jo is unable to read: he is also denied access to the meanings contained in the physical geography of London's built environment. The story of ultimate altruism potentially told by the cross atop St Paul's Cathedral is as locked to Jo, who does not know how to interpret the imposing architecture, as it is locked to him within the printed pages of the Bibles carried by those who go there. The closedness of these Bibles, however, suggests that even those who can read them do not - or at least they ignore the message of self-giving

love contained inside. If so, then there is a level of meaning contained in the city which even the apparently initiated have not grasped and it is not only Jo who is blind to the meaning of the cross of St Paul's. Since Jo's failure to grasp this meaning is said to epitomise the "great, confused city" as a whole, these passages raise the question of the exact relationship between the boy's situation and the wider ways in which London throughout the novel denies access to the knowledge it contains. Is Jo, staring at the cathedral cross through the metropolitan smoke, introduced as an extreme example of the exploited poor, kept from beneficial information by London's concealing élite, or is he rather a symbol for a need to apprehend present, but hidden truth that affects all areas of society? The answer to this question helps the reader to form an understanding not only of Jo's function in the novel, but also that of the everpresent city, with which he struggles to come to terms.

In *Bleak House*, as throughout his fiction, Dickens presents a metropolis which is felt to contain a meaning that few of its inhabitants can grasp - a metropolis that must be read, but that can be read only by a select minority. In his essay, 'G. M. Reynolds, Dickens and the Mysteries of London', Richard Maxwell sums up his perception of the relationship between Jo and the rest of the novel:

Swamped by writing, the city becomes a mystery This is not Jo's problem alone. Potentially, it is a problem for everyone caught in a London where lawyers preside.¹

The metropolis as a sealed text primarily refers the reader back to the obscuring overcomplication in the Court of Chancery which is responsible for the plight of Jo and most of the other characters. The problem is not illiteracy *per se*, but the fact that life in the metropolis now depends upon a totality of information to which only a few have access. Re-visiting these passages in his book *The Mysteries of Paris and London*,² Maxwell adds, borrowing a phrase from François Furet, "These sentences define a moment in modern urbanized culture when 'ignorance is turning into a kind of social handicap'" which "turns out to affect a wider variety of people, including many far more educated than Jo".³ In this analysis, the crossing-sweeper's situation merely figures a universal bafflement in the face of "mysterious symbols", which Maxwell defines as "self-propagating and rule-bound documents whose result is 'mystification'".⁴ Certainly in the London of *Bleak House*, no action can take place until these documents are comprehended in their entirety and the city's institutions, in the form of the Chancery Court, fraudulently claim exclusive ability to interpret them.

¹in *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, Vol. XXXII (1977), p. 205.

²(Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1992).

³ibid, p. 72.

⁴ibid.

A similar paralysis may be seen in *Little Dorrit*, where again, London is structured around documentation entirely within the power of its chief institution, the Circumlocution Office. And for Arthur Clennam, as for Jo, the "two frowning wildernesses of secrets" of the built environment of North and South London, embody the inscrutable illegibility of the system which regulates the capital's activities.

Nevertheless, Maxwell admits that "to see the Chancery plot as the novel's organizing centre involves us in a difficulty", namely that many of the secrets contained in and hidden by London in the novel have nothing to do with the information dealt with in the court case. Most obviously, London contains Esther's origins in the form of her father and she later traces her mother here. Although it is the capital's dense impenetrability that makes these acts of hiding possible, their motivation cannot be directly traced to the professional obscurantism of Chancery. If indeed the city becomes a "mystery" in Dickens's fiction, it is one that affects all of the inhabitants to a greater or lesser degree and over which no one individual or group can truly have overall control. Indeed, *Bleak House* insists that it is positively dangerous to restrict access to information in this way. Tulkinghorn, whose detached mastery of secrets seems to make him the most representative character of the Court's power, is murdered because the secrets he collects are ultimately beyond his control. Equally Krook, linked to Chancery by his nickname of "Lord Chancellor", explodes because of the atmosphere created by his collection of mouldering case-related documents. Such characters learn too late that the truths they keep locked up contain a warning for them too, which they ignore at their peril. Tulkinghorn can easily identify in the architecture of the streets "many" of the "mysteries" they hold, including, "difficulties, mortgages, delicate affairs of all kinds", but is not equipped to hear "a voice in a mile of them to whisper, 'Don't go home!'" (48 p. 746). In this, he and Krook resemble the carriers of the Bibles, who are as blind to the message of the text and city as those from whom they keep it.

Jo's barely-formed consciousness that London is to be perceived on a level which he is unequipped to see is, then, not such "a strange state" after all. It is the state in which most of the major characters exist in Dickens's world. And it is exactly the position in which Dickens places the reader of the novel, who, more than any of them, must learn to read what is contained in this environment as it is presented in the text. Jo's predicament has a symbolic role in vividly embodying a state of bewilderment and exclusion experienced by character and reader alike. The London which continually baffles him provides a symbolic microcosm of a universe that both holds and withholds the truth for which each character is searching. Throughout

Dickens's fiction, the city's structure and details actively block the solutions to the mysteries of the plot and yet, at the same time, it is constantly felt that what is seen there could actually provide the dénouement the plot is working towards, if only one knew how to interpret it. This thesis is about this concept of the city as a "mysterious symbol", simultaneously yielding vital information and rendering it inaccessible. It seeks to establish Dickens's metropolis as his ultimate symbolic expression of the tension between deadening concealment and regenerative revelation that forms the decisive principle of his fiction.

Firstly, however, it will be necessary to explain why the term "mystery" is used throughout the thesis to describe this tension between revelation and concealment. Along with "labyrinth", "mystery" is one of the most frequently recurring words in Dickens,⁵ and, fittingly, as a term used in the discussion of literary genre, it remains one of the most elusive of definition. Mediaeval miracle plays bear little resemblance to the largely secular world of the detective story, to gothic texts, such as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, or to the macabre world of Edgar Allan Poe, yet all of these are frequently described as mysteries. The word "mystery" originally applied to various unofficial forms of religion in the Graeco-Roman world which promised a knowledge of secret things upon initiation into a particular cult. *Myein*, the Greek word from which the name *mysterion* is derived, means "to close", implying that the eyes of outsiders are closed to the hidden knowledge. Already this is consonant with an organized system denying knowledge to some and allowing it to others, such as we have been considering with regard to the city.

What, then, are the characteristic features of these religions that have led me to consider them a helpful guide to the patterns governing the behaviour of Dickens's London? Firstly, there is their offer of revelation to the initiate. The cults insisted that truths were contained in the world and that once the candidate's eyes were opened, he or she would be able to perceive them. Equally, Dickens's London is a place full of truth for those with eyes to see it. The crucial question is how to pass from the condition of the uninitiated, such as Jo, to that of successful searchers like Esther, who come to understand something of what is hidden there.

⁵For example, Monks in *Oliver Twist* is described as a "mysterious Character" (heading, chapter 26). Dick Swiveller sees "Nothing but mysteries in connexion [sic] with Brass's house" (*OCS* 38 p. 300). In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, "a fearful mystery" surrounds the name of Mrs Harris (25 p. 403) and Nadgett has the rather unlikely job description of "man of mystery to the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company" (38 p. 586). The city itself takes on this characteristic for many characters as we shall see. Florence Dombey notes that "The weathercocks on spires and housetops were mysterious" (*DS* 23 p. 400). For Little Dorrit, Covent Garden is "a place of past and present mystery" (*LD* I 14 p. 159). Tulkinghorn's familiarity with the city makes him the "master of the mysteries of great houses" (*BH* 36 p. 381) and the title of Dickens's final, uncompleted, novel illustrates the extent of his dependence upon this word.

Secondly, there is the almost universal association in the mystery traditions between revelation and regeneration. Perhaps the first of these cults were the agricultural Mysteries of Eleusis, which celebrated Demeter's search for her daughter, Persephone, whom Hades captured and took to the underworld. Her seasonal release accounted for the springtime and renewed fertility that accompanied it. The discoveries promised with membership of the cults were sometimes said to be accompanied by a guarantee of physical fertility for the region or by a personal restoration of health and vitality for the initiate. Some even promised that the mystery could defeat death. Crucially, to be without the given knowledge was to decay and die with the outside world. To be entrusted with the knowledge was to receive life. As the early chapters of this thesis will show, Dickens presents the victims of the city's concealing functions as deathbound and in desperate need of a knowledge that will also revivify them. Later chapters will discuss the aspects of the city that work towards a regenerating discovery of what is hidden.

Bound up with this association is the means by which the mystery initiate participated in the renewing revelation. In the ancient cults, such knowledge was typically imparted through a humiliating ceremony in which the candidate's death was mimed or represented in anticipation of receiving the revivifying truth. In the Eleusian Mysteries, initiation involved an immersion in the sea, preceding a ceremonial celebration of rebirth. It was considered necessary to undergo some form of surrender to death before the new life could begin. Chapters four, six and seven of this thesis in particular trace ways in which the city forces its searchers to key moments of surrender and submergence of identity, so that they may re-emerge with new perceptions of themselves and their environment and with a wholesome new life.

Christian writers understood this opposition between deadening exclusion from knowledge and regenerating revelation through a symbolic act of death to be the central dynamic of the mystery religions. Indeed, they used it as a means of explaining their own faith, which made closely related claims. Jesus himself promised to reveal "the mysteries of the kingdom of God" (Mark 4:11) to his disciples. As in the mystery religions, this knowledge was not merely valuable for its own sake, but because it would provide the antidote to death, which the New Testament writers dealt with in three aspects. Firstly there was a present deadness of existence with no benefit to God or to the self, from which believers are "redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). In response to this condition, Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Secondly, there was physical death, presented as the

inevitable consequence of mankind's disobedience to God: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Finally, there was eternal separation from God for those who rejected His offer of mercy: "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (Revelation 20:14). As can clearly be seen from this selection of verses, Peter, Paul, John and John's Jesus are unanimous in declaring death of all three types to be referable to human sin. For this reason, they are equally unanimous in declaring Jesus Christ to be the remedy to this death. Because Christ endured all three types of death (temporal isolation from God, physical decease and the punishment of the second death) on the cross on behalf of each individual, the Apostles taught, according to the understanding of the Protestant tradition within which Dickens was working, that full life on earth, bodily resurrection and life in the heavenly realm were available to all. To grasp this in faith was a revelation that provided a threefold regeneration.

As well as this parallel between the nature of the revelation between Christianity and the mystery cults, there was also a distinct similarity in the means of participation in the mystery. Christian disciples had to be prepared to die to self - that is, to kill off their old way of life, inherited from previous generations. They were to consider these previous selves as "crucified with Christ". Because he had suffered death for these old selves, they no longer existed as far as God was concerned. Paul was able to claim with joy:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but
Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the
flesh I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and
gave himself for me. (Galatians 2: 20)

Having made this identification between Christ's death and his or her own, the believer could be "born again" (John 3:3). Just as the mystery initiates were required to undergo a form of death, Christian revelation by faith involved a definite death and burial of identity before new life can begin. To underline this, new Christians underwent the ceremony of baptism, which strongly resembled the immersions of the mystery religions, even if the truth it represents differs in content. In the submergence and re-emergence from the water, this act of self-burial and hoped for resurrection was vividly mimed (Romans 6:1-11). Over the centuries, Christians disagreed about whether revelation and saving regeneration came about at the moment of baptism or in the act of faith whose dynamic it represents. Nevertheless, the shared features of content and transmission between mystery cults and Christianity caused the apostle Paul to use the term *mysterion* frequently to describe the revelatory and regenerative aspects of his faith:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,
 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump:
 for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

(1 Corinthians 15: 51-2)

Later, the second-century father, Clement of Alexandria, explained his faith to Greek converts using parallels with the mystery religions with which they were familiar.⁶ As Christianity became increasingly Romanized in the centuries that followed, it started to resemble these cults, with whose concerns it had much in common, more closely. In Catholic theology in particular, sacraments such as communion took on a sense of ritual revelation of God to the participant. Over time, the word came to connote the ritual itself rather than what was revealed, in such phrases as "the mystery of the mass". Very specific concepts of sacredness, then, lie behind a word whose English meaning has come to include any puzzling thing.⁷

When T. S. Eliot, some fifty-two years after Dickens's death, wrote *The Waste Land*, it is unquestionable that he used the mystery cults to structure his experience of the city's concealment of truths from its inhabitants. The ongoing concern with the hanged God of Frazerian anthropology and in particular with Apollo and with the drowned Phoenician god, Thammuz, evokes numerous classical mystery cults. That he associates these gods with the "figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus" (note to line 46)⁸ emphasizes that it is the mystery-related, baptismal elements of Christianity that are being explored as an answer to the needs of those living in a London in which "death had undone so many" (l. 63).⁹ Indeed, Eliot's London is a place of decay and death-in-life because it systematically denies the decisive baptismal deaths that precede regeneration in Christianity and the mystery religions - or offers perverse corruptions of them that allow no genuine death or resurrection. In commentary on Eliot, these associations between the city and this sort of "mystery" are commonplace. It may seem more eccentric to trace a pattern of deathbound

⁶See for example *Stromateis*, Fenton J. A. Hort and Joseph B. Mayor (trans.), (London: Macmillan, 1902), Book Seven IV 27, p. 45: "Certainly it is our rule to begin by cleansing our souls from bad and wicked opinions ... and then, after that, to turn to the mention of the more excellent principles; for so too, in the case of those who are about to be initiated, it is thought right to apply certain purifications before the communication of the mysteries, on the ground that the godless opinion must be got rid of before they are ready to have the truth communicated to them."

⁷The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives an unspecified date in the Fourteenth Century as the earliest example of its non-theological use, meaning, apparently, the secret plan of a king. It also cites Thomas More's *Dyaloge* as an early sixteenth-century example of the word denoting a personal secret.

⁸*Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber, 1974) pp. 80-1.

⁹ibid, p. 65.

concealment and renewing revelation to the dynamic of the mystery religions when it occurs in Dickens's London. As this introduction will shortly consider, not all critics of Dickens, even those who employ "mystery" as a key term or centre their discussion around patterns of concealment and discovery or death and life, will allow a reading of Dickens in religious terms. Nevertheless, many of them will be seen to discuss the progression from ignorance to understanding of the city's mystery in terms of a journey from dissolution to reconstitution of identity. This thesis seeks to restore the religious dimension to this process in the workings of Dickens's London, which the repeated word mystery evokes, alongside its other, more secular dimensions.

When Dickens gives his crucial penultimate chapter of *Oliver Twist* the title "Affording an Explanation of More Mysteries Than One", he may simply be using the word in this wider, secular sense. Nevertheless, the associations carried over the centuries by the word he constantly chooses suggest a supernatural dimension to the truths hidden by the city and the processes by which they are made known. Dickens himself seems to have felt that his readership would not perceive the spiritual dimension to this favourite word. In a letter, he advised Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton to avoid relying upon it to convey this meaning:

I prefer "Wonder" to "Mystery", because I think it suggests something higher and more apart from ordinary complications of plot, or the like: which "Mystery" might seem to mean.¹⁰

This is not to say, however, that Dickens was unaware of the religious significance of the word, or that he did not deliberately evoke it in his fiction. He is not afraid to call his seekers after truth "The Augurs of the Detective Temple" (*BH* 53 p. 742) or to suggest that the discovered meanings of a novel may be learned by contemplating "the great origin and purpose of the ceremony" of baptism (*DS* 5 p. 60).¹¹ If the secrets of his novels are in any way connected with the secrets made known and symbolised by these religious means, clearly the word "mystery" which he repeatedly chose for his modern urban secrets, has at least residual associations with the sacred. Certainly he uses it to draw attention to the fact that for *Dombey* and numerous other characters like him, it is necessary in these novels to participate in a scheme of death and regeneration as definite as those laid down in the mystery religions if truth is to be given.

¹⁰20 May 1861. All references to Dickens's letters are to *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), vol. IX, p. 417.

¹¹I explore the significance of this incident and other references to baptism fully in chapter six of this thesis.

Did Dickens, then, borrow the vocabulary of Christian revelation to show something in the searchings he describes that gives direct expression to God's revelation to human beings of their place in the scheme of things? Perhaps, rather, this language and imagery is merely an opportunistic seizure of Christian vocabulary to illustrate a secular revelation in much the same way as Clement exploited the language of the mystery religions to illustrate a very different form of revelation. Raymond Williams certainly thinks so, arguing that:

Dickens ... uses the language of popular religion ... when he makes his related plea for change Yet it is clear that what he has in mind is always human and social intervention, in the spirit of innocence. He rejects or seems not to know the alienated religious versions of redemption or salvation.¹²

My study asserts that the struggle between the forces that would keep secrets hidden and the still more powerful forces that would drive truth into the open provides the central tension in almost all of Dickens's work. In making its central claim that the rhythms of concealment and discovery, death and resurrection definitively shape the role of London in Dickens's fiction, it asks how far the operation of these forces may be termed "mysterious" in the supernatural sense and how far Williams is right in asserting that the author is representing a purely social process of change when the dynamic of mystery operates in his metropolis. These two forms of regenerative revelation will be seen to be more closely intertwined in the mind and work of Dickens than Williams's diametric opposition allows.

The discussion that follows organizes the major critical views on the nature of this mystery into three schools - sociological, ontological and theological - and assesses their relative usefulness in accounting for the paradox of opposing tendencies in Dickens's London. Since these writers mainly discern or discount an element of religious content in the truths to be made known in the metropolis and the means by which they are made known, it will then be necessary to discuss briefly Dickens's opinions on Christianity as stated outside his fiction and as reflected overtly within it. Finally, the structure of the thesis and principles of selection for key texts will be explained. Firstly, however, attention focuses on what major critics of Dickens have made of London's patterns of concealment and revelation.

I - Critical opinions on Dickens's mystery metropolis

¹²'Dickens and Social Ideas' in Michael Slater (ed.), *Dickens 1970*, London: Chapman & Hall, 1970, pp. 96-7.

The sociological mystery

Richard Maxwell is quite clear about what the secret knowledge that is hidden and disclosed in Dickens's fiction actually is. Seeing both Dickens and Victor Hugo as part of a genre called "The novel of urban mysteries",¹³ he says that for both writers, "it is the city that hides, the city that must be revealed."¹⁴ His claim is that these writers have created a new type of allegory. Previous allegorists had used condensed and distorted figures to represent a particular truth too large for human comprehension, usually to do with God or Nature. Hugo and Dickens, and for that matter Eugene Sue and G. M. W. Reynolds, used urban figures such as the labyrinth, the crowd, the panorama and paperwork to represent a very different truth unconnected with either God or Nature, namely the existence and power of a systematic city too vast to be understood all at once:

Allegory was originally a technique for using enigmatic figures to reveal an invisible world. By the middle of the nineteenth century, London or Paris was that world.¹⁵

In this analysis, when characters such as Jo, Arthur Clennam, Esther Summerson or Oliver Twist enter the confusing mass of symbols, what they have ultimately lost is their perception of London as a whole. So vast has it become in the metropolitan age that its organising system can no longer be grasped by any one individual. Loss of such a perspective means loss of a workable sense of one's own identity, since each person is no longer able to perceive how his or her activities fit in to the working of the city in its entirety.

This way of thinking about Dickens's city - that each character's bewilderments and discoveries essentially represent nineteenth-century life in a metropolis too large for its fundamental interconnectedness to be seen - is well represented in Raymond Williams's book, *The Country and the City*.¹⁶ Williams credits Dickens with apprehending, for the first time in English fiction, "a paradox" about the modern city, namely, "the coexistence of variation and apparent randomness with what had in the end to be seen as a determining system: the visible individual facts but beyond them, often hidden, the common destiny".¹⁷ London's visible phenomena here include the buildings whose use shows no clear connection between their tenants and also the encounters with unknown people in the streets. What is

¹³*The Mysteries of Paris and London*, op cit, p. ix and throughout.

¹⁴op cit, p. 15.

¹⁵ibid, p. x.

¹⁶(London: Chatto & Windus, 1973).

¹⁷ibid, p. 154.

invisible is a sense of social interconnectedness, which the workings of Dickens's city ultimately insist upon, arising from membership of a total social and economic unit. The clouds of dirty air particles arising from the slums in the forty-seventh chapter of *Dombey and Son*¹⁸ to infect every area of London demonstrate that the metropolis has an indivisible unity. All London must be responsible for each of its parts, or all London will pay the consequences. To this example from *The Country and the City* one might add the disease spreading to the richer parts of town from the inadequate East End graveyard in *Bleak House* chapters eleven and forty-six. Such passages are seen as direct articulation of the political message of the novels as contained in the incidents of the plot. Each character's individual discovery of his or her relationship with parents, benefactors or wronged parties is microcosmic of an universal need to apprehend the city as a total system and to embrace the collective social responsibility that comes with it. And of course the wholeness of the city is part of realising one's place in a larger totality still - namely the state. To Williams, Dickens's strength is his affirmation of this essential wholeness of the city and his simultaneous recognition that the perspective of the individual within it often does not allow this wholeness to be perceived immediately:

It is true that this miscellaneity and randomness in the end embodied a system But the characteristic of London ... was that this was not, in any simple way, physically apparent ... Dickens's creation of a new kind of novel ... can be directly related to what we must see as this double condition: the random and the systematic, the visible and the obscured, which is the true significance of the city ...¹⁹

Here, the terms of mystery assert themselves, even if the truth they deal with is seen as entirely secular. The tension in the very nature of the metropolis, which Williams calls "the true significance of the city", between a tendency to provide a definitive and total body of knowledge and a tendency to reduce it to incomprehensible fragments is exactly what this thesis sets out to explore.

In viewing this conflict between revelation and obscurement of the total system as the fundamental condition of urban experience, Williams was applying to literature the theories of urban sociology developed much earlier by Georg Simmel. Written in 1902-3, Simmel's 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'²⁰ identifies the difficulty of balancing "the individual and the super-individual contents of life" as the key problem for the inhabitant of the modern city. This is attributed to the increased

¹⁸This thesis has a great deal to say about this crucial passage in chapters two and three.

¹⁹*The Country and the City*, op cit, p. 154.

²⁰H. H. Gerth, C. Wright Mills (trans.) in R. Sennett (ed.), *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities* (New York: Meredith, 1969), pp. 47-60.

division of labour in the industrial / commercial market. Such a socio-economic system has profound psychological effects upon the individuals within it. It "makes one individual incomparable to another", emphasizing every person's uniqueness, but at the same time, "makes each man the more directly dependent upon the supplementary activities of all others".²¹ Cities encourage people to develop those factors that make them unique both for the sake of retaining a sense of their own identity and of branding themselves for economic survival in a specialized marketplace. Moreover as contact in a crowded city is necessarily brief and hurried, they must make themselves unique in an immediately apprehensible way. On the other hand the metropolis militates *against* this development of subjectivity by promoting what Simmel calls "objective culture", which is to say a constant awareness that one's actions have no importance in themselves, but merely contribute to a collective totality.²² There are dangers involved in the overdevelopment of either tendency. If subjectivity predominates, people may lose their orientation to others in a quest for self-definition, leading to the "specifically metropolitan extravagances of mannerism, caprice, and preciousness".²³ On the other hand, if objective culture predominates, then the individual is robbed of his or her inner nature by being reduced to "a mere cog in an enormous organization of things and powers".²⁴ To Simmel, this latter was much the more threatening danger of the two. Nevertheless, he views the complementary movement towards individuality that accompanies it in cities with optimism. Speaking of the conflict between values based on a generalized conception of human nature and those values based on a strong personal differentiation, he says:

It is the function of the metropolis to provide the area for this struggle and its reconciliation.²⁵

To live in the city is to engage in the struggle between a self-centred definition of identity and a definition in relation to the whole. This view informs Williams and Maxwell to such an extent that they consider the focal point of Dickens's novels to be the characters' participation in just this choice: is my identity to be built with reference to self at the exclusion of other people or with reference to a knowledge of the total metropolitan system?

Although Williams sees the same struggle as "the function of the metropolis", however, his emphasis is significantly different. Firstly, whereas Simmel feels that the total objective culture is all too visible in the metropolis and that it is the

²¹ibid, p. 47.

²²ibid, p. 58.

²³ibid, p. 57.

²⁴ibid, p. 58.

²⁵ibid, p. 60.

subjective individual culture that must be sought, Williams feels that the unrelatedness of individuals is immediately apparent and that it is rather the system that has retreated from view. Secondly, with his very different political point of view, Williams assumes that a sense of London's interconnectedness is a revelation without which individual realisation is impossible. To him a sharp antithesis between subjective and objective culture, privileging the former, such as Simmel makes, can be harmful. A vision of the objective metropolitan culture must inform any sense of self because it is this that will encourage concerted action to deal with social problems and a necessary sense of mutual accountability. Thus, for example, Dombey isolates himself from the surrounding world by branding his own uniqueness very heavily, but he is forcefully made to realise his connections with the whole city when his firm crashes and the public at large discuss the failure of his marriage. This is directly compared to the need of the other rich people to look "upon the world of human life around them, to a knowledge of their own relation to it" - a lesson in the indivisibility of London that will, if ignored, be enforced when their children die of the epidemics spreading from the slums (*DS* 47 p. 620).

Maxwell builds upon this application of Simmel's theory to the nineteenth-century novel by asking how the fiction goes about resolving the conflict between subjective and objective identity. Hugo's *Les Misérables*, here considered as the most representative novel in the "urban mysteries" tradition, explores the "relationship, in the city, of individual consciousness and the deepest ... communal identity"²⁶ which has been under discussion. For Maxwell, as for Williams, it is clear that when Dickens writes of this relationship, he privileges knowledge of the whole: it is this which is hidden and which must be understood if one's sense of identity is to have any meaning at all. London is said to represent an "autonomy of knowledge"²⁷ in that it is composed of more information than any one person can comprehensively grasp. The metropolitan problem, then, is to build up as complete a picture of the whole as possible in order to have a workable sense of identity in relation to it. Since absolute knowledge is impossible, the only hope for the Londoner is to apprehend the limits of his or her sphere of knowledge, so as to live in relation to the body of autonomous knowledge that is the capital. This is what Jean Valjean achieves in *Les Misérables*. As he submerges his identity in the new role of the Parisian M. Leblanc, he reaches "a point of dissolution where mystery is ... an abyss in which to lose oneself".²⁸ This dissolution is further figured by his descent into the sewers, where waste from many sources throughout Paris is merged in a common and undifferentiated slurry. It is

²⁶*The Mysteries of Paris and London*, op cit, p. 208.

²⁷ibid, p. 20.

²⁸ibid, p. 208.

only once he has been through these experiences that Valjean progresses to realisation of the profound connection between all people in the city.

Of course, such a submergence of self and identity in the abyss as a means of revealing definitive truth sees the mechanism of mystery at work once more. Maxwell provides numerous examples of characters in Dickens who reach a similar point of dissolution in order to re-emerge with a new identity and frame of reference. Such a point comes here, however, with a realisation that the city's autonomous knowledge is too large for the individual's comprehension. What follows this acceptance of one's limitations is a new way of mentally ordering the city that does not depend upon knowing everything, in order to be able to live there. The very form of *Bleak House* embodies this idea. In this novel, paperwork holds the key to London.²⁹ Innumerable characters - including everyone involved in the Chancery suit - try to assemble from it a total body of knowledge that will enable them to assert absolute control over the capital. As Krook and even Tulkinghorn discover, such a scheme is impossible and only ends in further fragmentation - or even complete destruction. By contrast, Esther Summerson's narrative within the whole novel is read as an acknowledgement that she does not understand the whole city. Having conceded this, she can understand enough to form her own experience of it into a meaningful narrative: the very thing Krook and the actual Chancellor fail to do. Her manuscript is the truly valuable paperwork, but it contributes to the city's vast amount of documentation which exists independently of any individual's knowledge of it. In consciously writing a novel which is larger than her control of it, she displays what Maxwell sees as Dickens's strategy for living in the city, namely finding a working vision of the city whilst acknowledging its limitations.³⁰

Our Mutual Friend, according to Maxwell, goes even further and abandons the external narrator's traditional omniscience to underline the message.³¹ Instead a vast metropolis is presented to reader and character alike, but with no perspective available from which to comprehend all of its workings at once. In accepting the limits of even his own encyclopaedic knowledge of London, Dickens shows the way to his readers and characters. Whether or not this is so, Maxwell's account conceives Dickens's London as operating according to a fixed pattern of concealments and revelations of knowledge attained through a point of dissolution in the city. This thesis agrees, claiming that this pattern is compatible with the mechanism of religious

²⁹The mysteries of identity and moral relationships with others are frequently contained in paperwork in Dickens, from the document revealing the secret of Oliver Twist's parentage to the codicil in *Little Dorrit*.

³⁰For the ideas summarized here, see *The Mysteries of Paris and London*, pp. 178-9.

³¹ibid, pp. 281-8.

forms of mystery. Certainly the city's concealing tendencies are seen to demand a regenerating revelation, which cannot be gained without surrender to a disintegration of identity. For this school of critics, the subject matter of the restoring revelation is the metropolis itself. To Richard Maxwell, Dickens's ultimate triumph is that "he reaffirms the worth - in fact, the possibility of understanding cities".³² My thesis sees even this great enlightenment as symptomatic of a wider and more universal truth contained and obscured in Dickens's London. Nevertheless, it draws its perception of the city as an arena for conflict between its own inherent forces of concealment and revelation in large measure from the delineations of that struggle in the work of Williams and Maxwell.

A more recent study that has emphasized this dual nature in Dickens's city from a primarily socio-political point of view is *Dickens and the Spirit of the Age* by Andrew Sanders.³³ In comparing the urbanite's sense of alienation in Dickens with that observed by Friedrich Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Sanders comments upon a parallel tendency to find unexpected links between people in the metropolis. The description reads like a direct continuation of *The Country and the City*:

If, on the one hand, London seems to render human beings unconnected and enforces separation, on the other it forges and enforces new connections, proximities, and recognitions. It is both enclosed and open, both disparate and intimate, both anonymous and identified, both disturbingly plural and, perhaps most oddly, disturbingly particular.³⁴

Sanders uses this duality to present Dickens's fiction as working out the opposing strands of thinking about the metropolis in the nineteenth century: those which saw its conditions as oppressive and those which conceptualised it as liberating; the progressive and the reactionary; the admiring and the disapproving; the optimistic and the pessimistic. When, therefore, Dickens writes of the regeneration achieved by London in chapters six and fifteen of *Dombey and Son*, he is expressing the hopes of his time that new technology really could alter living conditions for the better. The construction of the railways has reduced London to fragments but it transforms the dilapidated Camden Town into a vibrant suburb. It is a practical example of the "systematic" underlying the apparently "random" that Williams identified as the defining principle of Dickens's fiction. It is, however, the railways themselves, in Sanders's analysis, that are the regenerating organisers of London. If they are

³²ibid, p. 239.

³³(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

³⁴ibid, p. 91.

symbolic of anything, it is only of the forces of positive, progressive social change in which Dickens believed.

Twenty years earlier, F. S. Schwarzbach's *Dickens and the City*³⁵ also identified this regenerative aspect of the city's self-revealing function with social change. Like Maxwell, he feels that Dickens's significance is his ability to shape the metropolis in our perception of it into the whole it really is:

this had been Dickens's work: he had brought the city forth from its obscurity and mystery, and made known the urban world to those who inhabited it, and to us, who inhabit it still.³⁶

Noting the frequency with which the word "mystery" occurs in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (published in the same year as *The Condition of the Working Class in England*), Schwarzbach relates the discovery of secrets in the plot to perception of London's underlying socio-economic unity. Like Sanders, he compares Engels's examination of London's disconnectedness with the fact that "in the city, beneath its teeming, anarchic surface, Dickens discovers a mysterious organising social principle".³⁷ Schwarzbach is quite clear that this principle is "what we would now call a social system". Acknowledging his debt to Williams, and quoting Donald Fanger, Schwarzbach sees the primary motivation of Dickens's fiction as a quest "to lay bare the subterranean network of social relationships"³⁸ that exists in the city.

Yet, although this "organising ... principle" is purely "social", it is also "mysterious" in the sense that characters suffer death and regenerative revelation to apprehend it. Without spelling out the link between "mystery" and re-birth, Schwarzbach delineates instances in each novel of characters who resign an identity in order to regain a new one. In *Our Mutual Friend*, Eugene Wrayburn and John Harmon are said to lose, through their experience of the city, a sense of identity and interrelationships based on "the cash nexus" and to replace it with one based on "the love ethic":

Thus, the near drownings ... save their lives by showing them that ... they had been immersed and drowning in the cash nexus, and then by teaching them they must die to it to escape it.³⁹

This explains with admirable clarity that not only is a grasp of the true social interdependency of human beings in the city a revelation in Dickens, but it is also a resurrection. Schwarzbach's vocabulary explicitly draws upon the Christian doctrine

³⁵(London: Athlone, 1979).

³⁶ibid, p. 223.

³⁷ibid, p. 80.

³⁸ibid, p. 98.

³⁹ibid, p. 206.

of dying to self in order to walk in newness of life, as symbolised in baptism, and applies it to the changes of direction experienced by such characters when this discovery of the city's wholeness is made. Of course he is merely pointing to a similarity of process. The deathbound identity to be rejected is not a self in sinful relationship to God, but a self based on a commercial, commodifying relationship to the total of other people. The regenerating truth is that love, usually taking the form of social reform, is the true basis of relationship to the other city inhabitants. Thus the famous de-familiarising and disorienting fog in the opening chapter of *Bleak House* exists not so much to cause the reader to share in Esther's search for identity as "to force [Dickens's] audience to see and understand the hidden, problematic nature of their familiar environment".⁴⁰ Thus even Esther's ontologically crucial quest for identity merely serves as a metaphor for this general goal of making each Londoner re-think how he or she is connected to the metropolis.

Schwarzbach considers the transformation of individuals through this social revelation as reflected in the changes that come upon London, starting with the re-shaping of Staggs's Gardens in *Dombey and Son*. Like Sanders after him, he sees the railways themselves as effecting the change, rather than any power they may be said to represent. They demonstrate Dickens's "mid-Victorian optimism ... that progress was possible" through the developing technology of the age.⁴¹ Schwarzbach comments on a letter Dickens wrote to W. F. de Cerjat in 1861 about the sudden change from "broken ground and ditch" to "splendid broad esplanade" effected by the building of the Victoria embankment, and says that this transformation "defines the thematic focus" of *Our Mutual Friend*.⁴² The individuals in the book who lose identity and experience a life-giving renewal merely reflect the enormous changes coming upon London in the 1860s with the construction of the sewers, the underground railway and the new waterfront. At first, these caused utter disruption, but from this destruction, visionary Victorians could see a prosperous, healthy capital arising. This leads Schwarzbach to say:

Our Mutual Friend has too often been seen as a novel about the myth of resurrection, but ... it is *more than* this: it is first and foremost a celebration of the real, of the future transformation and imminent resurrection of London.⁴³

This statement assumes that the concept of resurrection is somehow less than the regeneration of a specific city, which is, to Dickens, a particular application of it.

⁴⁰ibid, p. 123.

⁴¹*Dickens and the Spirit of the Age*, op cit, p. 112.

⁴²*Dickens and the City*, op cit, p. 194.

⁴³ibid, p. 212, my italics.

Schwarzbach here seems confident that the answers to the problems of the human race are socio-political and not personal. He acknowledges little fundamental connection between revelation of spiritual truth and the transformation of society, seeing Dickens as taken up with the latter at the expense of the former. By contrast, this thesis demonstrates that his desire for the physical reconstruction is deeply influenced by the inner and religious principles of transformation whose language he naturally and habitually borrows to describe the revivifying discoveries made in his novels. The "myth of resurrection", as part of the mechanism of mystery, will be shown as the basis of the symbolic scheme that governs the apparently contradictory movements embodied in Dickens's London toward concealing dissolution and clarifying regeneration.

Despite Schwarzbach's insistence upon the city itself as the agent and object of transformative revelation, he is not unaware of the personal and mythical dimension to Dickens's fiction. Indeed, the rather different focus of his book is primarily biographical. It suggests how events in Dickens's own life shaped his response to the city. For example, the death of Mary Hogarth, his young sister-in-law, in 1837, is said to have caused Dickens to depend upon a myth of innocent childhood for which he found support in pastoral norms emphasizing the wickedness of the city.⁴⁴ This, of course, was coupled with the experiences of his own childhood, which were now regarded in a new light. Returning to live in Kent is said to have revived traumatic rural memories, causing Dickens to overthrow this polarised view of city and country in his last novels.⁴⁵ Although such changes are discussed as affecting Dickens's attitude to the social reform, they are also seen as Dickens's attempt to re-construct his life into a meaningful narrative:

in the face of the incomprehensible experience of the city, a pattern, or structure, which could help order and explain what had happened.⁴⁶

This is, of course, a drawing upon established patterns of myth to explain one's own experiences (at one stage, Schwarzbach speaks of a "fall into city life"⁴⁷) but here the point is not the validity of these myths, but their convenience. The focus is not upon how Dickens's personal London mythology is informed by and expressive of the general human experience enshrined by traditional mythology. Instead, Schwarzbach concentrates on its representativeness of the specific social phenomenon of rural to urban migration in the nineteenth century. These novels find a way of transmuting

⁴⁴See *ibid*, chapter 2.

⁴⁵See *ibid*, pp. 178-93.

⁴⁶*ibid*, p. 23.

⁴⁷*ibid*, p. 23.

one person's experience of this nineteenth-century reality into something all can relate to:

a living myth, to which millions firmly held as an accurate version of their individual and collective past; one which offered some alleviation, at least on the level of fantasy, of the unendurable horrors of life in overcrowded towns and cities.⁴⁸

As far as Schwarzbach is concerned, the truth to be elicited from Dickens's urban mystery myth is primarily sociological.

The ontological mystery

At first glance, a much earlier classic text of Dickens criticism, J. Hillis Miller's *Charles Dickens - the World of His Novels* appears to supply the true point of origin for this sociological approach. The preface speaks of the metropolis itself as the object of the quest for hidden knowledge in the novels in a manner comparable to Williams:

Though each individual reaches out toward a comprehension of the city, the essential quality of the city is its transcendence of any one person's knowledge of it And yet it was the city as it really is, in all its unknown and perhaps unknowable complexity, which Dickens wanted to know and to encompass in his work.⁴⁹

London's duality, its equally characteristic tendencies to reveal and conceal, is similarly emphasized. Within its streets, "each limited event, each person ... contains as well as hides the truth". What is said to inhibit apprehension of this truth is a "distorted view of the city", to be dispersed by the author and replaced by an accurate view of it. Nevertheless, the actual focus of Miller's book is rather different. It devotes more attention to what these characters discover about themselves than to what they discover about their society and surroundings.

In his discussion of the term "mystery" in Dickens, Miller returns to this paradox of obscured and contained information. Now, however, the content of such revelation is not so much sociological as ontological:

The word "mystery" is Dickens's term for this sense that there is hidden in the world something alien and yet like oneself in that it would have a personal meaning if that meaning could be discovered.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ibid, p. 21.

⁴⁹(Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. xvi.

⁵⁰ibid, p. 114.

Concealed facts have "a personal meaning" rather than a social one. There is "something" that must be recognised by each individual as existing independently of him or herself. Recognition of one's relationship with this "something" will ultimately help to define the self. The problem facing Dickens's characters is not merely how to comprehend one's part in the socio-economic workings of a complicated city, but a more universal one, namely:

how to achieve an authentic self, a self which, while resting solidly on something outside of itself, does not simply submit to a definition imposed from without.⁵¹

What is to be gained from understanding external society is, to Miller, primarily an understanding of one's internal identity. His main theme is the relationship between the two. Tracing the process by which mystery works in Dickens, he describes a pattern of losing a sense of identity in the city and being forcibly made to embrace a new one, fashioned by an interaction with the subjective lives of others which has been previously avoided. Such characters "are initially 'found'" but become "lost" in order to emerge with a new sense of selfhood.⁵² This is a species of disorienting initiation into mystery of the type already considered.

Dickens's clearest example of this mystery in action to Miller is the plot of *Our Mutual Friend*. Here characters are said to endure a literal or metaphorical "annihilating plunge into the river" in order to achieve "a special form of engagement in the world" possible only to those who have "died to the world".⁵³ This Pauline terminology, encouraged by Dickens's phrase, "baptized unto Death" (I 14 p. 175), is given a very specific meaning here - and one very different from its biblical usage. To Paul, the world to which one must die is expressed by the Greek word *aion*, as opposed to *kosmos*.⁵⁴ The distinction is between the spirit of the fallen world with all its sinful desires, destined to pass away, and the sum total of human beings living in the world. It is this former that the believer must die to in the New Testament. What Miller means by "the world" here is, however, the sense in which the word is used in the title of his book, defined in the preface as "the totality of all things as they are lived in by all human beings collectively".⁵⁵ The world as it is understood by the individual, however, is a way of perceiving and mentally organising the external things with which one comes into contact in order to live among them. Each character tends to start with a rigidly defined "world", constructed around self. Death to this world occurs when contact with the selves of others, and the metropolitan

⁵¹ibid, p. 103.

⁵²ibid, p. 110.

⁵³ibid, p. 324.

⁵⁴see John 3:16 for an example of *kosmos*.

⁵⁵ibid, p. xv.

environment generally, fragments that view. The individual must then discover a newly ordered "world" - one much more like *the* world, as constructed by the novelist - which in turn re-defines the self, rather than *vice versa*. Instead of an entirely new self, however, it is a new and transformed resumption of one's old self that is in view, "the reaffirmation of one's given role after an interval of separation from it".⁵⁶ John Harmon, for example, has inherited a role as the wealthy husband of Bella, but loses it in becoming John Rokesmith. This gives him opportunity to re-examine that role from an external perspective in the light of an entirely changed world. However, it is only when he relinquishes this role and becomes again wealthy John Harmon, married to Bella, that the novel reaches its point of closure.

Miller seems convinced that there is no divine or supernatural agency in this process. In *Our Mutual Friend*, he claims that there is not even any objective reality to provide a definitive view of the world:

the city is, first of all, the co-presence of an unimaginable number of people in an entirely humanized world. And, as entirely humanized, the city can contain no transcendence, Christian or romantic.⁵⁷

Nevertheless it is such a transcendence that these characters look for. Miller later remarks:

Though they do not express orthodox Christian doctrine, Dickens's novels are religious in that they demand the regeneration of man and society through contact with something transcending the merely human.⁵⁸

These two statements are not as contradictory as they may appear. Miller is not claiming that Dickens depicts human beings yearning for and depending upon a supernatural force that is ultimately denied them because it does not exist. Instead, he sees these characters as searching for a "supra-reality",⁵⁹ larger than the merely human "world", which, he claims, can be found in contact with death. This is not a supernatural encounter because death is contained within the broader, natural "world" in which human beings already live. This natural "world" is seen as composed of matter, which is the raw materials from which human beings are assembled, but is also the impersonal "dust" into which human life is dissolved. Equally, the waters of this natural "world" are said to be the substance from which we emerge and which submerge us in death. It destroys the individuality of the individual and liquidates his

⁵⁶ibid, p. 325.

⁵⁷ibid, p. 293.

⁵⁸ibid, p. 315.

⁵⁹ibid, p. 329.

or her human spirit into a general chaos of amorphous molecules. Miller sees the river Thames drawing people from all classes to anonymous submergence in its depths as Dickens's primary example of the "power" of nonhuman matter "to destroy all recognizable forms and to transmute them into its own formlessness".⁶⁰ Death, then, is absorption into this "impersonality of matter".⁶¹ For Miller, the only hope the characters of *Our Mutual Friend* have of reaching beyond the human "world" is to be confronted with a premature experience of this dissolution of distinct human identity in the world of death. This may take the form of drowning in the Thames and wandering in oblivion, as it does for Eugene Wrayburn, or it might take the very different form of "being dead" with Jenny Wren on the roof of Pubsey & Co.'s buildings, but it is an experience of "liberation of self from situation" that is "absolutely necessary".⁶² It is to be enveloped in a "negative transcendence",⁶³ larger than the human being, but lacking the personality or Providential benignity of God. The "something transcending the merely human" which Dickens's characters seek is rather an all-encompassing "nothing". In the face of such nothingness, the characters who undergo such experiences are challenged to realign their lives and engage in them with an informed conception of their finiteness. Miller sees Dickens as working towards this vision throughout his career.

If these novels offer any means of participation in a positive Providential scheme of revelation in this analysis, it is gained by doing one's duty. In *Bleak House*, for example, the ontological fragmentation that characterises London life is attributed to "the absence of moral relationship between people".⁶⁴ Esther gains a sense of a divinely underwritten plan from restoring this interpersonal relationship. Her identity is a reminder to Lady Dedlock of her responsibility for the existence of another human being. Her own willingness to accept responsibility for the needs of others restores an interconnectedness with the world that the fog threatens to take away. Even this regenerating clarity, however, is presented as merely subjective. The third person narrator of the novel is said to see no such overarching mysterious system. Miller goes as far as to say that "God has withdrawn himself from the world of *Bleak House*".⁶⁵ By the time Dickens writes *Our Mutual Friend*, the void has become the only means of transcendence capable of reaffirming engagement in the life of human relationships. What is significant however, is the very different focus from the Williams school of urban mystery criticism. Perception

⁶⁰ibid, p. 312.

⁶¹ibid, p. 317.

⁶²ibid, p. 325.

⁶³ibid, p. 333.

⁶⁴ibid, p. 206.

⁶⁵ibid, p. 218.

of the city as a socio-economic system is here unimportant compared to the spiritual identity given to the individual by renewed perception of the whole external world: what forces larger than the human being is the city hiding from view, and how will contact with them negate and redefine each person's traditional notion of his or her self? My thesis builds upon this wider approach, paying closer attention to how it is specifically Dickens's London that obstructs and brings to light this revivifying transcendence. It also re-examines how ideas of a Christian, Providential God, revealing Himself in the world in redemptive ways, may have deeply influenced the ontological discoveries brought about in these novels. Indeed, it questions how far God really has "withdrawn himself" from the mysterious workings of this symbolic London.

The theological mystery

In testing the assertion that Dickens's novels are "religious"⁶⁶ in dramatising the search for a revelation of superhuman realities in London, one cannot omit Alexander Welsh's *The City of Dickens*.⁶⁷ In this account, Dickens developed from seeing the city as a moral problem to be satirised, to perceiving it as a social and physical problem that should be dealt with in more practical ways. The idea of a London in need of physical, spiritual and moral transformation is aided, Welsh notes, by the biblical idea of an earthly and an heavenly city. The Psalms and Old Testament prophets abound in images of hope of a new, perfect version of Jerusalem, taken up with enthusiasm in the New Testament, especially in the final chapter of Revelation. The writer to the Hebrews sums the idea up concisely in chapter eleven, explaining that while most people are fixed upon building a life upon earth, there have been many who hope finally to settle elsewhere. Abraham, nomadic founder of the Israelite nation, is said to have "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (v. 10). This is contrasted with Ur of the Chaldees from which he came out at God's command (v. 15). The writer goes on to say of those who follow this example of visionary faith, "God ... hath prepared for them a city" (v. 16). Augustine developed this idea in the early fifth century in *The City of God Against the Pagans* (completed 426), in which temporal power and ambition generally and Rome in particular are characterised within the symbolic bounds of the earthly city. The enduring popularity of the idea in England was reinforced by its allegorical presence in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1664). Welsh claims that Dickens's perception of London is primarily as this earthly city, earmarked for destruction and visibly decaying before his eyes. Disease-ridden, overcrowded and violent, London

⁶⁶ibid, p. 315.

⁶⁷(Oxford: Clarendon, 1971).

tends inevitably towards death. Time and again in Dickens, the cause of this universal death in the city is shown to be the immoral selfishness of those who control it and subscribe to its ethic.

Where then must the pilgrim go who seeks to escape this environment? The inadequacy of flight to the country in the earlier novels such as *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* may be easily seen since all Little Nell and her ilk may do is to die there rather than in the city.⁶⁸ If there is to be genuine new life in a New Jerusalem, Welsh claims, Dickens finds it almost impossible to depict it convincingly:

The earthly city is unmistakably present, reinforced by a satiric tradition and the daily experience of the surrounding metropolis; but the promise of the heavenly city is muted or even denied.⁶⁹

In Dickens, hope for an eternal dwelling place as "the antithesis of the city" is replaced by something altogether more tangible, namely "the fireside at home":

if the problem that besets [Dickens] can be called the city, his answer can be named the hearth.⁷⁰

Welsh emphasises that this family environment has a religious as well as a secular meaning. Most homes are focused around the embodiment of the regenerating spirit, the heroine.⁷¹ She it is who has made the revelation of love necessary for admittance into this small and temporal New Jerusalem. Such a character expresses superhuman, rather than merely human, love:

novelists are hinting at ... much more than a person in a heroine like Little Dorrit. They are invoking something more nearly divine.⁷²

Welsh considers some of the factors in nineteenth-century religious life that led up to this apotheosis of the heroine, including the Protestant rejection of the perfection and mediatory role of Mary. Here was a local manifestation of divine regenerative principles that was widely credible in a more sceptical age. Although, however, such heroines offer escape from the death of the city, Welsh notes that death has a crucial part in their function. Agnes, Florence and even Little Dorrit point to a homely transcendence of death, but to say so implies that characters must still come through death, rather than avoid it, to experience this transcendence fully. This terrifying dual role is acknowledged in the chapter heading "Two Angels of Death".⁷³ In order to be

⁶⁸See *ibid*, pp. 119-21, 135-7.

⁶⁹*ibid*, p. 141.

⁷⁰*ibid*, p. 142.

⁷¹but by no means all. The Gills/Gay/Cuttle home is the most striking exception, although this is, admittedly, completed on the arrival of Florence.

⁷²*ibid*, p. 176.

⁷³*ibid*, pp. 180-95.

a revealing angel, pointing the way to the blessed state, the heroine must also be the bringer of death. Although Welsh does not explicitly tie this to the operation of mystery, it is harmonious with what has been said about the dual nature of that process. Regenerating clarity is thus a force to be feared because in Dickens it cannot be obtained without the prior experience of dissolution and death.

Comparison between the other schools of criticism considered here and Welsh's approach, which is clearly very different, will be the most efficient way of setting out the remaining territory to be covered in the thesis. Three distinct ways of thinking about the truth contained and obscured by Dickens's London have been identified, but all concur that the city is made to serve both concealing and revelatory functions. The Williams, Schwarzbach and Maxwell grouping regard all revelations made to characters as representative of an emerging *socio-economic* truth. This might be summarised as the interdependency of each individual in the system and awareness that every action somehow affects the whole. Such a realisation is vital because it leads to a sense of mutual social responsibility which is the only way to real regeneration. For Miller, it is essentially the same revelation about the relationship between part and whole that is under discussion. Where he diverges from these writers who have followed him is that for him, the significance of the discovery is primarily *ontological*. To understand one's place in the wider scheme is to understand one's self and to engage in a more universal quest for true identity. In contrast to both of these, Welsh sees Dickens's city as a concealer of the truth of domestic love, which is mainly a secular truth, developing out of a *religious* one. *The City of Dickens* discusses the way in which the home environment, presided over by the heroine, oscillated in Victorian art and culture between being an illustrative emblem of religious love for God and a self-sufficient replacement for it. Dickens's depictions of this theme, felt to be all-important in his work, are said to be representative of this state of fluctuation between attributing religious and secular meanings to the domestic atmosphere. For a character or reader to understand the whole city in this analysis would presumably be to understand that it is deathbound and that the individual within it is equally heading for destruction. Heroines point away from the city to a blessed sphere where their divinely endorsed virtues are permitted to govern human behaviour. In returning the focus to the city itself in Dickens's fiction, this thesis acknowledges that all three forms of truth are considered vital. It seeks to explore the relationship between them. In particular, it suggests that, for Dickens, the sense of urban community and ontological knowledge gained both have an inextricable religious dimension comparable to that discerned by Welsh. The mystery religions' characteristic plan of deathly concealment and revivifying discovery, so coherent, yet terrifyingly ambiguous, will be established as

characteristic of London's workings in these novels. In the process, the factors relating to what is made known there that make this borrowing so natural to Dickens will be explored.

Welsh differs from the other two schools of thought on the regenerative as well as the revelatory aspect of mystery. All the writers considered agree that to remain in the city is to subject oneself to death, whether this be a literal fact, because of unhealthy conditions, or a metaphorical term for the dissolution of identity experienced there. The solutions the critics see Dickens recommending for this, however, vary widely. Schwarzbach, meditating on the shifting ways in which Dickens viewed his own personal history, sees the author as advocating an escape to the country, and gradually re-evaluating this strategy until the socially reformed city becomes as vibrant as it has been deathbound. The New Jerusalem is, as it were, confidently expected with the completion of the sewage systems and underground railway, when "the future transformation and imminent resurrection of London" will be seen.⁷⁴ Williams with his emphasis on the "new order"⁷⁵ that emerges after the revolutionary smashing of Camden Town in *Dombey and Son*, would surely agree. This re-building of a neglected metropolis is, after all, the logical real life result of the "creation of consciousness - of recognitions and relationships" that can "be seen as the purpose of Dickens's developed fiction".⁷⁶ Perhaps Richard Maxwell applies the thinking of Simmel more rigorously in seeing the assembling of a working knowledge of London in its entirety as the source of a newer and fuller life. There is much less emphasis on physical reconstruction and in this regard he is much closer to Miller than to Williams. Miller's book, however, sees Dickens as recommending something other than a fresh and practical understanding of London's structure. It sees contact with death itself as the means by which new life is to be attained. This new life is to be lived here in the physical world. Again, it can be found in London and does not necessitate flight into the country. In opposing the city and the hearth as antithetical, one deathbound, the other transcendent of death, Welsh has returned to a paradigm more traditional in Dickens criticism than that of his predecessor, Miller and of those that followed. Although the hearth is often within the city, it is as much outside it to Welsh as the country is in older accounts. Nevertheless, the city in Dickens's mature novels is the place where the characters resolve their difficulties and they reshape their perception of the city as its workings throw up the information they need. Indeed, the transformations undergone by particular characters are often reflected in striking changes in the landscape of the capital - and this becomes a recurrent motif.

⁷⁴*Dickens and the City*, op cit, p. 212.

⁷⁵*The Country and the City*, op cit, p. 162.

⁷⁶ibid, p. 155.

As well as that effected by the railways in *Dombey and Son*, discussed by Williams, Sanders and others, the thesis will consider more subjective, but nevertheless important metropolitan conversions elsewhere in Dickens's fiction. It aims, however, to restore Welsh's sense of the residual religious function of the quest for regeneration to this vision of the city itself as both provider and object of transformation. It is London that keeps transforming knowledge from view in Dickens and yet its own structure also pushes regenerating truth to light. As well as physically taking the individual through the process of mystery, London reflects this narrative by destroying and re-building itself. In this great symbol that dominates Dickens's fiction, the thesis points to Dickens's imaginative retention of the Providential scheme of mystery-based religion.

II - Dickens's religious views

If the embodiment of such a scheme is to be accepted or rejected as the defining function of Dickens's London, some knowledge of the writer's personal religious views will be required. It is not my purpose here to write a comprehensive account of Dickens's relationship to the various Christian orthodoxies, Catholic, Evangelical, Liberal-Anglican or otherwise. This would require a thesis in itself, with a rather broader focus than my own, and in any case, many of the critics briefly discussed below have made useful attempts to label Dickens's position on a scale of contemporary beliefs. My intention is rather to outline briefly Dickens's stated opinions about the matters specifically connected to mystery as considered in this thesis, the nature of mankind's death and decay and how it is to be remedied, the need for and nature of new life, the presence or absence of divine revelation and God's Providential plans. Having abstracted Dickens's beliefs from primarily extra-fictional sources, the main question will be how these are to be measured against the message given by the experience of reading the novels regarding these issues - after all, the tale and the teller frequently send out different signals about a piece of work. What Dickens consciously believed is not always the impression conveyed to the reader about what he felt to be true. This is not to say that Dickens did not know his own mind. Discrepancies between tale and teller may arise for a number of reasons including a need to conform to the conventions of the genre, the liberation in fiction from binding plot to the perceived laws of the universe, and most importantly, because problems are resolved differently when they are engaged in imaginatively, rather than at the level of linear thought.

Those critics who discuss Dickens's religion take widely different approaches to how the task of relating his stated views to the religious vision of his fiction should be attempted. Although Dennis Walder in *Dickens and Religion* warns that "Dickens articulates his beliefs by the methods of a novelist" and that "significant moments, images, themes" are a more fruitful source of information than "the easily abstractable, surface reflections of his views which have generally been accepted as a complete version of them",⁷⁷ in practice, he generally views the fiction as a more profound expression of the beliefs articulated in the private and public declarations of faith. *Little Dorrit*, for example, is said to be:

a sustained attempt by Dickens to show that one can free oneself from the imprisoning forces associated with a narrow Old Testament belief ... by means of the broadly redemptive, loving spirit of the New ... But it is expressed in terms which transcend the immediately personal or social.⁷⁸

By contrast Janet L. Larson in *Dickens and the Broken Scripture*, sees the author's use of biblical texts as both supporting and undermining his stated views. Sometimes this undermining is done consciously, she implies, sometimes unconsciously, but the effect is the same. Dickens explores at a creative level the texts upon which consolatory belief is based and suggests that often they are found wanting. Although his allusions give stable meanings within the Christian scheme of things to some events, at other times, the contrast between the words and the modern situations they are enlisted to describe can give an uncomfortable sense of their inapplicability - even meaninglessness - in the nineteenth century. According to Larson, Dickens establishes a complex dialogic between these uses of scripture.⁷⁹

Larson's account, then, sees the religious faith in Providential justice and life beyond death proclaimed in the novels, as the teller asserting his meaning through plot and commentary, but finding himself resisted by the tale's constant tendency towards an agnostic pessimism, wherein "the rituals of the church and the Bible ... no longer had the power to order feeling and inspire hope".⁸⁰ Alexander Welsh, by contrast, had seen Dickens's apparent Broad Church rationalism as the voice of the teller, undermined by tales that came closer to endorsing the ideas of the more orthodox Christianity rejected by the tale in Larson's reading. Quoting Humphry House's remark that "Dickens's deep and bitter hatred of evangelicalism was not

⁷⁷(London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 3.

⁷⁸ibid, p. 179.

⁷⁹*Dickens and the Broken Scripture*, Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1985, p. 44.

⁸⁰ibid, p. 90.

usually directed against any of its typical Christian doctrines",⁸¹ Welsh points to examples of grace and faith in something outside of the self rather than good works actually being responsible for the decisive transformations in Dickens's stories.⁸² Similarly, Andrew Sanders, in *Charles Dickens Resurrectionist*, encourages the reader to take seriously the author's defensive claims that he aimed "to inculcate some Christian lessons in books".⁸³ Sanders does not see these lessons as fundamentally in conflict with those the books themselves teach, in the manner of Larson and Welsh. Nevertheless, he does see the fiction as a whole as offering a more orthodox supernatural Christianity in the mystery tradition than the largely social, almost humanistic vision of Walder's account:

It is a mistake to assume that Dickens is simply condemning the mercenary and social values of mid-Victorian England ... he is, more trenchantly, opposing a picture of a society with false values, values symptomatic of spiritual death to those redeemed characters who offer hope of a continuing process of re-birth and regeneration the reality of the hope that the resurrected few may show the way to the many.⁸⁴

My study perhaps comes closest to the approach suggested by Welsh's remarks in acknowledging that the imaginative realisation of Dickens's vision in the novels may frequently yield different results to his attempts to express his beliefs non-imaginatively elsewhere. It takes notice of such divergences, whilst retaining Sanders's claim that a directly supernatural and saving dimension to regeneration is essential to both orthodox Christianity and to Dickens's works. Its main focus is on how the symbol of the metropolis participates in the novel's discussion of these themes. In the London of his novels, Dickens constructs a symbolic microcosm of the universe which allows him to explore imaginatively the process by which things come about, sometimes in ways harmonious with his declared convictions, sometimes in ways that diverge from them. The body of the thesis will produce evidence about the nature of the religious vision expressed in the operation of the city. This initial discussion, however, provides a useful starting point in suggesting which areas of religious debate and doctrine occupied the writer's mind.

Dennis Walder begins his study, by speaking of his subject's "fundamental outlook as a liberal Protestant with radical, Romantic leanings".⁸⁵ At first glance, this seems rather a specific identification for a man who famously insisted upon his

⁸¹*The City of Dickens*, op cit, p. 74.

⁸²See, for example, *ibid*, pp. 83-4.

⁸³*Charles Dickens Resurrectionist* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), p. 62.

⁸⁴*ibid*, p. 197.

⁸⁵*Dickens and Religion*, op cit, p. xiii.

freedom from sectarianism and doctrinal partisanship. When, for example, his youngest son, Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens, left home for Australia in 1868, the author made a point of giving him a New Testament and urged him to consider "the truth and beauty of the Christian religion, as it came from Christ himself". Each of his sons had received the same gift with instruction to "guide themselves by this Book, putting aside the interpretations and inventions of man".⁸⁶ In the same spirit, Dickens ends his will with the desire that all his "dear children" should live according to "the teaching of the New Testament in its broad spirit, and ... put no faith in any man's narrow construction of its letter here or there".⁸⁷ His respect for the personality and teachings of Jesus as recorded in the gospels was incontestable. Equally clearly, he felt he was holding that faith in its pure form in a way that could not be reduced to denominational or sectarian labels. Nevertheless, in the face of twenty centuries of theology, it is almost impossible to make any meaningful statement about Jesus Christ without revealing views that can be identified as siding with one existing opinion and against another. To consider the form of particular sacraments as unimportant, to take one obvious example, places one automatically in opposition to those who believe such sacraments within a particular communion necessary for salvation.

Moreover, although Dickens avoided telling his children which Christian groupings they should align themselves with, he was equally adamant about which branches they should not join. He famously told Douglas Jerrold that "I don't know what I should do, if [his son, Charley] were to get hold of any conservative or High church notions".⁸⁸ He may have defended the rights of Catholics in *Barnaby Rudge*, but he also wrote to Angela Burdett-Coutts of "the Roman Catholic Religion - that curse upon the world". What he principally objected to was its restrictions upon "Freedom" and curtailment of individual civil liberties in countries where it was practised.⁸⁹ If, however, his objection to these forms of religion is more largely attributable to horror at the notion that observance of ritual makes a person right with God, he had no more sympathy with the more direct forms of Christianity. The extempore prayers and sermons of the evangelical chapels are dismissed in the 1836 pamphlet *Sunday Under Three Heads* as exhibiting a "disgusting and impious familiarity" with the Almighty.⁹⁰ As will be seen later on, Dickens also objected to some of the characteristic doctrinal as well as stylistic features of evangelicalism. Although the philanthropist, George Moore, who belonged to that persuasion, saw Dickens's beliefs as sufficiently like his own to say "I found him a true Christian

⁸⁶quoted in J. Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Dent, 1966), vol. II, p. 380.

⁸⁷quoted in *ibid*, p. 422.

⁸⁸to Jerrold, 3 May 1843, *Letters*, vol. III, p. 482.

⁸⁹quoted in *Dickens and Religion*, *op cit*, p. 93.

⁹⁰quoted in *ibid*, p. 35.

without great profession",⁹¹ it is not to be wondered at that other Evangelical readers felt Dickens's ideas of salvation to be too divergent from their own to be sufficiently Christian.⁹² Perhaps the most important reason for this is that Dickens did not see the Bible as the infallible word of God, but merely as a book in which imperfect human apprehensions of God were recorded for posterity. His American hostess, Annie Fields, recalls him speaking in March 1868 of even his beloved gospels having been assembled from "some anterior written Scriptures - made up, perhaps, with additions and interpolations from the *Talmud*".⁹³ In this conversation, Dickens also spoke intelligently of the possibility that some of the figures of speech attributed to Jesus in the gospels were anachronistic.

If Dickens could not regard the received text of the Bible as authoritative, he also saw some parts of it as more important than others. He felt that the Old Testament presented a different, more vindictive code than the New. In *Little Dorrit* this becomes one of the crucial points of the novel's message. The heroine works for a change in Mrs Clennam by telling her to abandon Old Testament precedents of human vengeance on the sinful in favour of New Testament mercy:

let me implore you to remember later and better days. Be guided only by the Healer of the sick, the raiser of the dead, the friend of all who were afflicted and forlorn, the patient Master who shed tears of compassion for our infirmities. We cannot but be right if we put all the rest away, and do everything in remembrance of Him. (II 31 p. 770)

In this Dickens follows Dean Stanley's idea of "progressive revelation",⁹⁴ by which a partial insight had been recorded by the patriarchs and a fuller one by those who had the benefit of contact with Christ. As science uncovered more knowledge about the world, revelation was continuing into Dickens's own time. He wrote to Walter de Cerjat:⁹⁵

what these bishops and such-like say about revelation, in assuming it to be finished and done with, I can't in the least understand. Nothing is discovered without God's intention and assistance, and I suppose every new knowledge of his works that is conceded to

⁹¹quoted in Philip Collins, *Dickens Interviews and Recollections*, 2 vols. (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), vol. II, p. 340.

⁹²In December 1842, *The Christian Remembrancer* observed that "His religion, whenever any is introduced, is for the most part such mere pagan sentimentalism, that we should have been better pleased by its absence" (quoted in H. House, *The Dickens World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 113).

⁹³quoted in *Dickens Interviews and Recollections*, op cit, Vol. II, p. 320.

⁹⁴This is discussed in *Dickens and the Broken Scripture*, op cit pp. 202, 209-14.

⁹⁵28 May 1861, *Letters*, vol. X, pp. 252-3.

man to be distinctly a revelation by which men are to guide themselves.

Dickens did not look exclusively to the Bible for definitive answers to the questions of death and regeneration as the Evangelicals did. His conception of the means of revelation may thus be expected to be more inclusive than that of contemporary fundamentalists of whatever persuasion. This optimistic view of a Providential scheme releasing more and more wisdom upon mankind as the centuries went by and the race matured to receive it, is therefore an influence upon the ordered system of revelations made to the characters and readers in his novels.

Since he did not see the words on the page of the Bible as the permanent and enduring word of God, he was not particular about insisting on its doctrines about the nature of God and of Christ. His brief spell as an attender at the Little Portland Street Unitarian chapel between 1842 and 1847 is well known and his vagueness of phrase concerning the deity of Christ at the beginning of *The Life of Our Lord*⁹⁶ is often taken as evidence of anti-Trinitarian belief:

There is a child born today in the city of Bethlehem ... who will grow up to be so good that God will love him as his own son; and he will teach men to love one another ... and his name will be Jesus Christ; and people will put that name in their prayers, because they will know God loves it, and will know that they should love it too.⁹⁷

This, however, is probably merely a simplification and avoidance of controversy for the benefit of his children. Elsewhere, for example, he calls Sunday the Jewish Sabbath,⁹⁸ although his fiction (e.g. *DS* 13 p. 162) shows him to be well aware that Saturday was their day of rest. What is really significant is that Dickens considered it more important for his children to grasp the moral relationship between Jesus and God the Father, evidenced in their behavioural resemblance, than that they should understand the exact theological relationship between them. The same values probably lie behind his Unitarian sympathies *per se*. His 'conversion' to Unitarianism came at a time when he was dissatisfied with the lack of social action being taken within the Church of England to care for the poor in imitation of Christ, whereas his new co-religionists, as he wrote to Cornelius Felton, "*would* do something for human improvement if they could; and ... practise charity and toleration".⁹⁹ His rejection of High Church Tractarianism and Evangelicalism is probably referable to the fact that

⁹⁶a brief work written for the private religious instruction of his children in 1846 and not intended for publication

⁹⁷*The Life of Our Lord* (London and Edinburgh: Morrison & Gibb, 1934), p. 14.

⁹⁸*ibid.*, p. 35.

⁹⁹to Felton, 2 March 1843, *Letters*, vol. III pp. 455-6.

salvation in the former depends upon ritual and in the latter upon belief in the achievement of Christ. Neither places a saving value upon works. Dickens is bound to have feared that both could encourage complacency and provide insufficient obligation to perform the real Christian business of doing good. This is where the whole emphasis of *The Life of Our Lord* lies. The book concludes with the words:

Remember! - It is christianity¹⁰⁰ TO DO GOOD always - even to those who do evil to us It is christianity to be gentle, merciful, and forgiving, and ... to shew that we love Him by humbly trying to do right in everything. If we do this ... we may confidently hope that God will forgive us our sins and mistakes, and enable us to live and die in peace.¹⁰¹

Dickens then can be said to belong to the Broad Church tradition within the Church of England, to which he returned in 1847. Humphry House,¹⁰² Dennis Walder¹⁰³ and Janet Larson¹⁰⁴ all use this phrase to describe the writer's position. The term was said to have been coined by A. H. Clough in conversation in the late 1840s as an alternative to High and Low Church and it soon gained national currency. It described a movement firmly within the established Church towards greater inclusivity of opinion, whilst retaining an emphasis on Jesus as the supreme example to mankind and pointer towards God. Characteristically liberal themselves, Anglicans of this school stressed, as we have seen Dickens did, the importance of the New Testament at the expense of the Old, and a special value was placed on the gospel narratives and the Sermon on the Mount in particular. Working to remedy social ills and caring for the needy were seen as the most important parts of Christ's teaching and these were exactly the aspects emphasized in person and in the fiction by Dickens. In a letter to de Cerjat, the author ringingly endorsed one of the movement's major manifestoes, Benjamin Jowett and John Colenso's *Essays and Reviews* (1860):

the importance of timely suggestions such as these ... is that the Church should not gradually shock and lose the more thoughtful and logical of human minds; but should be so gently and considerately yielding as to retain them, and through them, hundreds of thousands.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰The capitalization of 'Christ' and 'Christianity' in *The Life of Our Lord* are inconsistent throughout. This is because it was set up in type in 1934 from the original manuscripts which are printed alongside them. Had Dickens himself meant to publish it, he would undoubtedly have corrected these peculiarities.

¹⁰¹ibid, pp. 124-7.

¹⁰²*The Dickens World*, op cit, p. 109.

¹⁰³*Dickens and Religion*, op cit, p. 174.

¹⁰⁴*Dickens and the Broken Scripture*, op cit, p. 319.

¹⁰⁵to de Cerjat, 28 May 1863, *Letters*, op cit, vol. X, p. 253..

Other leading figures in the Broad Church movement were admired by - and themselves admired - Dickens. Dean Stanley (who may be said to have popularised the term "Broad Church", if Clough coined it, and whose Pauline commentaries with Jowett in the 1850s provided some scriptural grounding for the party's ideas) preached a sermon devoted to the writer in Westminster Abbey the Sunday after his death. When Stanley published *The Life and Correspondences of Thomas Arnold*, his still more influential mentor, Dickens wrote to Forster that "Every sentence that you quote from it [rather than the Bible itself] is the text-book of my faith".¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Arnold was personally much more insistent than Dickens on doctrinal specificity, speaking in one sermon of the "many" who

habitually lose sight of [Jesus's] office of Saviour and Mediator, and regard him only as a teacher their opinions ... are more those of the disciples of John the Baptist, who preached repentance, than of the Apostles of Christ, who taught together with repentance towards God, faith towards Jesus Christ our Lord.

As Larson points out,¹⁰⁷ the opinions of the "many" here closely resemble those recommended to Dickens's children in *The Life of Our Lord*. By this measure, Dickens's views seem rather broader than even those of this most representative of Broad Churchmen. In any case, a term defined by a desire to eschew precise theological distinctions can be of only limited use in describing Dickens's religious thought. It will be of more practical benefit to this study to ask what Dickens thought about the theological issues that have to do with the mystery of regeneration.

Clearly most of Dickens's fiction is taken up with the question of how dead lives are to be made truly alive. The tendency for people to be reduced to mere inanimate things in his work has been frequently remarked.¹⁰⁸ This is symptomatic of novels such as *Dombey and Son* where Paul, looking at the lifestyles around him, can ask, "Floy, are we *all* dead, except you?" (16 p. 223), and *Our Mutual Friend* where the sterility of modern life is terrifyingly universal. Moreover, it hardly requires demonstration that physical death is a dominant issue in his writings. People of all ages, from Little Johnny to Betty Higden must learn to confront it. The novels often narrate a search for a means of transcending it, both for those who die themselves, and also for the survivors. Dickens, like almost all other human beings, had had to deal with the death of loved ones throughout his career. The loss of his sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth in 1837 affected him profoundly and is frequently cited

¹⁰⁶to Forster, 13-14 October, 1844, *Letters*, vol. IV, p. 207.

¹⁰⁷*Dickens and the Broken Scripture*, op cit, p. 320.

¹⁰⁸most famously by Dorothy Van Ghent in 'The Dickens World: A View From Todgers's' (1950), George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane (eds.), *The Dickens Critics*, Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1961.

as the stimulus behind his explorations of the deaths of the pure and innocent. To this might be added the passing of his sister, Fanny, in 1848, his baby daughter, Dora, in 1851 and his son, Walter Landor Dickens in 1863. In 1852, his friends Richard Watson, Catherine Macready, wife of the actor, William, and Count D'Orsay all died within a few months of one another. No wonder he spoke of the "tremendous sickle" that was cutting down his circle of friends.¹⁰⁹ There is little evidence that the second death formed any real part for him of the problem of death that had so urgently to be overcome. Humphry House notes that:

The Devil and Hell are frequently referred to in passing, but ambiguously; they might be either literal or metaphorical ...¹¹⁰

Certainly Hell is invoked in the fiction for its concept of a Providential justice operating in a larger arena than that of this world only. When, for example, Fagin, with his "gasping mouth and burning skin" writhes "in a paroxysm of fear" on his last night alive and "his unwashed flesh crackled" as if with exposure to fire, it seems an anticipation of the state into which he shall shortly pass. This is re-inforced when Oliver and Brownlow arrive, hoping to "recall him to a sense of his position" (*OT* 52 pp. 361, 364). At other times it is used metaphorically to describe godless values and fearful conditions that characterise this present world in a way that leaves it unclear whether this, or the supernatural place alluded to, is itself the actuality of Hell. When Dickens speaks of slum dwellers as having been "born, and bred, in Hell!" (*DS* 47 p. 737) he may be saying that their current atmosphere erodes their morals and has a bearing on their eternal destiny, or he may simply be saying that the actual environment in which they live is as terrible and hopeless as the hell which presents itself to religious imaginations.

Yet if Dickens shared the typical views of his Broad Church allies, he is likely to have had a liberal reluctance to believe in a literal Lake of Fire. Frederick Denison Maurice, for example, a leading preacher of the social gospel ideas, was famously deprived of his chair in Theology at King's College, London, for expressing these views in his *Theological Essays* in 1853. Tennyson, too, was a universalist who could not believe that any would be excluded from salvation. Such views, however, were increasing in popularity in these middle years of the nineteenth century.¹¹¹

If, however, Hell is an uncertain place in his writings, death does seem to have its origins in a world that has sinned against God. Although House quotes Acton as

¹⁰⁹to Forster, 19-21 September, *Letters*, vol. VI, p. 764.

¹¹⁰*The Dickens World*, op cit, p. 112.

¹¹¹See M. Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 219.

saying that "Dickens knew nothing of sin when it was not crime",¹¹² his novels are full of behaviour that is legally respectable, but morally horrifying. The sense that human beings have transgressed a divine standard is overwhelming. One of the two situations in which religion enters the plot of Dickens's novels most directly¹¹³ is when the offer of repentance is being held out to sinners, usually fallen women. Nancy speaks of her "life of sin and sorrow" and speculates that her self destructive love for Sikes might be due to "God's wrath for the wrong I have done" (*OT* 40 p. 274). Equally, Martha in *David Copperfield* correctly sees the hero's search for her as an earnest quest "to save a wretched creature for repentance" (47 p. 585) and Harriet Carker has assumed this role for Alice Marwood with the narrator's full backing in *Dombey and Son*. Even the murderous father in *Barnaby Rudge* is urged by his wife, speaking of "the retribution which must come, and which is stealing on you now", to "repent". Whereas Rudge refuses to do so, however, Alice, Martha and Nancy recognise their position as sinners. Nancy breathes "one prayer for mercy to her maker" (*DC* 47 pp. 322-3), explaining to her murderer that "It is never too late to repent".

Such widespread sin does not, of course, mean that Dickens accepted the doctrine of original sin. Indeed he violently repudiated it. This can most clearly be seen in that its most vigorous adherents are deeply unsympathetic characters like Mrs Clennam, who notes that "every one of us, all the children of Adam" have "offences to expiate and peace to make" (*II* 30 p. 350). Mrs Barbary's insistence too that Esther has been "born with" a fault inherited from her parents (*BH* 3 p. 31) is also taken to task by the novelist. Dickens's major objection to this doctrine seems to be the perceived long term effects upon children such as Arthur and Esther, who believe that they are fundamentally wicked before they are able to make moral choices. By contrast, many of the children of his novels, although by no means all,¹¹⁴ seem fundamentally good. It is impossible to imagine Oliver Twist or Little Nell as inheritors of Adam's blighted nature. In the face of this, Paul's teaching seems blasphemous to Dickens's religion. Nevertheless, in adulthood such unspoiled characters are striking exceptions rather than representative human beings in Dickens's world, and their value to the novelist lies in showing a spoiled world how to escape the effects of sin and death.

¹¹²*The Dickens World*, op cit, p. 112.

¹¹³The other is at the deaths of children, which will be dealt with shortly.

¹¹⁴Noah Claypole, Quilp's boy and the young Smallweeds seem hardly to belong to this category and represent a conflicting view of children.

What, then, is the means of transcending death that Dickens and his novels recommend? Participation in overtly religious mystery requires some form of identification with death before new life can be aquired. How is the death of a former identity for the obtaining of a deathless one, as represented in Paul's words, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20), to be realised in Dickens? In *Little Dorrit*, he makes it clear that he considers the ascetic form of self-crucifixion utterly inadequate. Mrs Clennam feels that by restricting her enjoyment of life and by suffering the effects of her disability, she is "balancing her bargains with the Majesty of heaven" (*LD* I 3 p. 48). This is a curious doctrine that suffering embraced in this life cancels out sins and reduces punishment in the hereafter. Her harsh treatment of Arthur's real mother, "through ... present misery ... to purchase her redemption from endless misery" (II 30 p. 755) is justified by this same teaching in a way that exposes its falsehood. Nevertheless, she relies upon such an act of purchase herself. It is a point worth making because it is often overlooked that Mrs Clennam is not an Evangelical. For such Christians, the idea that the sacrifice of Christ itself was insufficient to redeem or buy back the human being from a lost eternity and that it needed to be supplemented by additional suffering would have been as deeply blasphemous as it was to Dickens. Suffering that did not directly benefit others is shown in this book to be not an identification with Christ's death, but a perversion of its fundamental purpose. Arthur Clennam understands this and insists upon "Duty on earth, restitution on earth, action on earth" in contrast with Mrs Clennam's system of reparation. Such a path is:

far straiter and narrower than the broad high road paved
with vain professions and vain repetitions ... all cheap
materials costing absolutely nothing.

(I 27 p. 311)

As Larson perceptively notices, the reference here to a text in the Sermon on the Mount conventionally used by Calvinists to demonstrate the smallness of number of the elect is here subverted to show that the truly difficult path is that of doing practical good.¹¹⁵ Larson, however, goes on to claim that even this attitude is infected with his mother's insistence upon repayment and "contains telltale remnants of his childhood's legalistic themes".¹¹⁶ A life of renunciation alone, Larson claims, cannot bring happiness to these characters. It is only when Arthur and Amy recognise and requite their need of one another that they find a means of transcending their world. Whether or not this is so, *Little Dorrit* herself at least teaches a lesson of grace, mercy and forgiveness that refuses any monetary repayment. Even if this represents an advance on Arthur's attitude, however, it is difficult to imagine the act of burning the codicil

¹¹⁵*Dickens and the Broken Scripture*, op cit, p. 233.

¹¹⁶*ibid*, p. 234.

having the same meaning had Mrs Clennam not embraced something of the desire to make restitution on earth in authorising the heroine to look at its contents. For Dickens, repentance in action and reception of grace are rather more intertwined as a means of salvation than Larson's analysis allows. This is very much in the spirit of characters in the gospels such as Zacchaeus, who responds to the grace of Jesus and instantly restores fourfold the money of which his deceit has deprived others (Luke 19:8). Little Dorrit's conversation with Mrs Clennam here is one of the key points of the novel and is explicitly a triumph of the heroine's New Testament theology over Mrs Clennam's Old Testament one (II 31 p. 770). Jesus's compassion and practical care for the downtrodden is held up as the correct Christian model and it is Mrs Clennam's partial apprehension of this that brings about the subjective transformation of the cityscape so that churches are prominent and people live in a spirit of love (II 31 p. 771).¹¹⁷

The idea of rebirth is important in Dickens and is often effected through repentance and a change of heart. Mr Dombey, Ebenezer Scrooge and Eugene Wrayburn may all be said to undergo conversions when confronted with death in one form or another, and to be reborn into an entirely new style of life.¹¹⁸ It is important to remember that Dickens's novels are not tracts and that in dramatising a dimension of religious experience, the author is not obliged to exemplify a theological truth naturalistically, but may rather provide images that make the reader feel the reality of it in other ways. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that many of the characters who have to confront death are made to do so explicitly with reliance upon the work of Christ. Stephen Blackpool's death in *Hard Times* evokes the traditional Victorian deathbed confession of faith:

The star had shown him where to find the God of the poor; and through humility, and sorrow, and forgiveness, he had gone to his Redeemer's rest. (III 6 pp. 291-2)

This orthodox statement is still somewhat ambiguous. Is the saving "forgiveness" Stephen's forgiveness of his oppressors, for example, or God's forgiveness of Stephen? How and when has Christ redeemed Stephen and from what? Nevertheless, the knowledge that somehow He has done so seems to vitalize Stephen here in the face of death. *Our Mutual Friend* provides a more explicitly Christian death in the end of Betty Higden's flight from so-called charity. The reader is told that the countryside in the rural reaches of the Thames "brought to her mind the foot of the

¹¹⁷Chapter three of this thesis returns to this transformation of the cityscape (see pp. 117 ff below) and it is developed in the context of the transformation of London brought about by railway construction in chapter five (see pp. 169 ff below).

¹¹⁸See also Barbara Hardy, 'The Change of Heart in Dickens's Novels' in *Victorian Studies*, vol. V (1961), pp. 49-67.

Cross,¹¹⁹ and she committed herself to Him who died upon it" (*OMF* III 8 p. 505). Here, Dickens comes close to portraying Christ's death as being on behalf of the dying person. In the following chapter, of course, he shows unease in the notion that Betty really is a sinner in need of salvation. When Milvey tries to console Sloppy with the thought that "we were all a halting, failing, feeble, and inconstant crew", he responds, "*She* warn't, sir" (III 9 p. 508). Despite these misgivings about the hated doctrine of original sin, however, Dickens clearly feels that Christ's death has enabled Betty Higden to accept and transcend her own.

As the very beginning of this introduction noted, the cross is part of the city's hidden meaning. Jo may be prevented from apprehending its significance by men like Chadband and by all that is represented by the London fog, but it must surely have a profound meaning or else it would not strike the reader as scandalous or pathetic that it should be denied to him. Directly within his line of vision is something that might potentially give him the ability to transcend death that it provides for Betty Higden. So what *should* the cross mean in *Bleak House*? Here, it seems to be a symbol of altruistic self-giving. What Chadband is said to obliterate is the story of Christ's "deeds done on this earth for common men" (*BH* 25 p. 415). In so far as anyone enlightens Jo, it is Woodcourt, who shows him what Christlike altruism is, instead of imparting theological information. His recognition that the fragmented phrases of the Lord's Prayer are "wery good" recalls their spiritual kinship with the generosity of Nemo: "He wos wery good to me, he wos!" (11 p. 181).¹²⁰ This works on the same principle as Alice Marwood's equation of the gospel narrative with Harriet Carker's care for her in *Dombey and Son*:

Lay my head so dear, that as you read, I may see the words in your
kind face. (48 p. 785)

The Bible and Harriet Carker's face are, then, two means of telling an identical story. Such people have earned their right to speak the message of Christianity, just as Esther's words of comfort about "Our Saviour" are acceptable to the brickmaker's wife, whereas those of Mrs Pardiggle are not (*BH* 8 p. 134). The Bible, then, is not merely a convenient text for abuse by hypocrites such as Chadband. *Oliver Twist* reads its pages with delight (*OT* 32 p. 211). Alice Marwood finds her place in its story (*DS* 48 p. 765) and Pip reads its pages to Magwitch as he faces death (*GE* III 17 p. 456). Acts of human kindness, including the systematic social reform the novels call for, are then, religious acts. They are the divine operation of divine love in the

¹¹⁹a phrase so important, it is included prominently in the manuscript number plan for this chapter.

¹²⁰Chapters three and four discuss the specifically Christian content of Woodcourt's mission and the manner in which he is able to make the cross visible through the fog. See pp. 113 ff and pp. 144 ff below.

world, which, to Dickens finds its clearest expression - one might even say incarnation - in the charity of human beings.

The cross, then, seems to Dickens to be fundamentally an exemplary act of altruism, where Jesus was able to forgive His executioners, rather than the altar of a sacrifice for sin. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine how its apparently random suffering could have had any altruistic purpose without its redemptive element. In *The Life of Our Lord*, Dickens told his children that the disciples "carried crosses as their sign, because upon a cross He had suffered Death" without further explanation of the significance of that death.¹²¹ The crucifixion is also narrated without reference to Christ's suffering for mankind's sin, although Jesus's promise to the dying thief is faithfully and lovingly recorded. It would seem, then, that if Dickens's method of participating in Christ's cross is primarily sharing in His life of self-giving practical action, then the author's religion is one of salvation by works, rather than by faith. This is the overwhelming impression created by *The Life of Our Lord*, which promises his children that "if they did their duty, they would go to Heaven".¹²² There is, of course, forgiveness for the last minute penitent, as was reflected in the fiction:

people who have done good all their lives long, will go to Heaven after they are dead. But ... people who have been wicked, because of their being miserable, or not having parents and friends to take care of them when young and who are truly sorry for it, however late in their lives, and pray to God to forgive them, will be forgiven and go to Heaven too.

Two distinct categories emerge here: those who are good and need no salvation and those who are wicked and do. Dickens almost certainly saw himself most of the time in the former category. If this comes dangerously close to the complacent Pharisee and the tax collector of Luke 18:9-14, *both* of whom required justification before God, it is worth remembering that his own will concluded by committing his "soul to the mercy of God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ".¹²³

Even when Dickens seems most firmly to insist that innate goodness rather than imputed righteousness is the means of salvation, however, the nature of salvation is always essentially based on the idea of conversion from one state into another:

the most ugly, deformed, wretched creatures that live will be bright Angels in Heaven if they are good here on earth.¹²⁴

¹²¹op cit, p. 103.

¹²²ibid, p. 123.

¹²³*The Life of Charles Dickens*, op cit, vol. II, p. 422.

¹²⁴*The Life of Our Lord*, op cit, p. 28.

This is very much in the spirit of the mystery religion that prompted Paul to write, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51). The Apostle likens the buried body to a seed or "bare grain" (v. 37) that emerges from the earth as something beneficial, saying:

So also is the resurrection from the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. (v. 42).

The same hope and consolation that Dickens gave his own children is repeated to Florence after the death of her mother in the contemporaneous *Dombey and Son*. Her mother has been:

buried in the ground where the trees grow where the ugly little seeds turn into beautiful flowers, and into grass, and corn, and I don't know what all besides. Where good people turn into bright angels, and fly away to Heaven!

(DS 3p. 26)

This emphasis on transformation *via* death uses almost identical vocabulary to that of *The Life of Our Lord*, where the "ugly" are made into bright angels" after death through having been "good", and the Apostle Paul's agricultural metaphor is added to re-inforce the same faith in bodily resurrection to an heavenly state. Dickens guards against the assumption that this is an exact statement of his theology by semi-fictionalising the account ("Once upon a time", said Richards ...) and putting it in the mouth of "a strange nurse that couldn't tell it right" (I 3 pp. 26-7). Nevertheless, the rest of the book reinforces this tale of resurrections - whether it be through Walter's reappearance from the shipwreck, the transformation of Dombey himself, or Little Paul's dying vision of his mother and Jesus waiting for him beyond the sea of death (16 p. 225) - in a way that lends a definite truth to Richards's story at least within the context of the novel's world.

In a less explicit way, Paul's resurrection metaphor is present behind the more Romanticized death of Little Nell. She prepares to encounter death by thinking of "the growth of buds and blossoms out of doors" (OCS 53 p. 413) and, having looked down the deep well which "looks like a grave", her last living thoughts are of the time of new growth:

"The birds sing again in spring," thought the child, as she leant at her casement window, and gazed at the declining sun. "Spring! a beautiful and happy time!" (55 p. 430)

Here the idea is rather that Nature continues, even if Nell does not. Her death contributes to a natural cycle that causes other things to grow. Perhaps this is because the focus here, unlike that of *Dombey and Son*, is primarily upon how to survive the death of a loved one, rather than upon how to transcend death and deadness. If

anything metaphorically grows from the burying of the body-seed in the earlier novel, it is virtue arising in the hearts of the bereaved from memory of the dead. The schoolmaster insists that:

There is nothing ... no, nothing innocent or good, that dies, and is forgotten oh, if the good deeds of human creatures could be traced to their source, how beautifully would even death appear; for how much charity, mercy, and purified affection, would be seen to have their growth in dusty graves. (54 pp. 421-2)

Nevertheless, having tested this secularized version of what grows from graves, he ultimately finds it wanting. In a letter to John Forster of 8 January 1841, he confessed that the writing of Little Nell's death reminded him painfully of his bereavement of Mary Hogarth and that "I can't preach to myself the schoolmaster's consolation, though I try". His intense doubts of this comfort can be seen in *The Old Curiosity Shop* when he attempts to re-iterate its precepts when Nell's passing is discovered:

Oh! it is hard to take to heart the lesson such deaths will teach, but let no man reject it, for it is one that all must learn, and is a mighty universal Truth. When death strikes down the innocent and young, for every fragile form from which he lets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world, and bless it. Of every tear that sorrowng mortals shed on such green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes. In the Destroyer's steps there spring up bright creations that defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of light to heaven
(72 p. 659).

It clearly remained no easy matter for Dickens to learn this lesson instead of rejecting it. It seems that the Pauline application of the seed-into-plant analogy of the later novels, which promises bodily resurrection and reunion, had more enduring comfort for Dickens than the schoolmaster's consolation after all. This was the comfort that Dickens's wife, Kate, had at Mary's death. In a letter to his friend Richard Johns, dated 31 May 1837, Dickens said that she "looks forward to being mercifully permitted one day to rejoin her sister in that happy World for which God adapted her better than for this". The same consolation seems to have become increasingly effective for Dickens himself and when Forster's brother died, his condolences mix the schoolmaster's doctrine of memory with a confident assertion of the Christian hope that:

That end [is] but the bright beginning of a happier union, I believe; and have never more strongly and religiously believed (and oh!

Forster, with what a sore heart I have thanked God for it) than
when that shadow has fallen on my own hearth ...¹²⁵

With every apparent sincerity, the writer testifies to a faith that death can be turned into the means of entering a new and transformed life available for each individual eventually to share.

Enough, then, has been said to piece together a working idea of Dickens's stated beliefs and the beliefs expressed directly in his fiction with regard to the component parts of Christian mystery. The thesis proper turns its attention to how the symbol of the city contributes to working out the signals these novels send to the reader about the Providential scheme of revelation and concealment, burials of identity, transcendence of death, new life and resurrection.

III - Structure and Principles of selection

In general, this thesis treats Dickens's London as essentially consistent throughout his career. This is not, of course, to say that it is precisely the same city, but rather that its symbolic function remains largely the same. Indeed, between 1835 when *Sketches by Boz* was published and Dickens's death in 1870, the population of London had almost doubled, the expansion into the suburbs was altering the shape of the metropolis on the map and such changes as the construction of the railways, the sewage system, the underground and the Thames embankment had transformed the visual effect and total experience of living in the capital. Nevertheless, Dickens's conception and presentation of the city is surprisingly stable from novel to novel. Part of this is because of his tendency to set his stories in the London of his childhood in the 1820s. It is also referable to the fact that the same landmarks recur again and again to provide continuity of points of reference. Newgate prison is as much a source of fascination for the Artful Dodger (*OT* 25 p. 158) as it is for the man who shows Pip "where the gallows was kept" for the price of a shilling (*GE* II 1 p. 164) and for the narrator of *Nicholas Nickleby* who calls it "the very core of London" (4 p. 89). The attack upon it provides the focal point for the riots of *Barnaby Rudge*. In the same novel, John Willet recommends the cheap "diversion" of "going to the top of the Monument, and sitting there" (13 p. 153) that is still current for the sightseers in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Tom Pinch looks to this conspicuous and commanding vantage point as a potential means of organizing and transcending a bewildering London, only

¹²⁵to Forster, 8 Jan 1845.

to be disillusioned when the guardian of its heights uses the "low expression", "A Tanner" (37 p. 578). Godfrey Nickleby considers throwing himself off it (*NV* 1 p. 60) and, perhaps at the same time, the young David Copperfield is also finding inexpensive entertainment by watching the sun "lighting up the golden flame" on its top (*DC* 11 p. 143). Although eighty-five years separate the London of *Barnaby Rudge* from that of *Our Mutual Friend*, the same places are recognised and responded to by diverse characters in all of the novels. It makes sense therefore to organize the material thematically rather than chronologically and to explore the different treatment of each metropolitan aspect as it recurs in modified form from novel to novel.

Furthermore, London's rapid expansion and alteration was an assumed and fixed condition of metropolitan life for Dickens. It had been growing and changing at an astonishing pace since his childhood in the 1820s. Thus in *Dombey and Son*, Euston station is said to be at "the heart of this great change" (*DS* 15 p. 218), which phrase is used to describe the whole city. This perception is crucial to his symbolic use of London. It is what makes the metropolis such a fitting vehicle for expressing the transformations he uses it to explore. The city, then, is the same in that its dynamic of change, of collapse and renewal, of concealment and discovery, is constantly in force from the beginning to the end of Dickens's career.

It will be understood that not all of Dickens's texts use the city as a means for exploring the connection between death and concealment, and renewal and regeneration, to the same extent. Some are more taken up with recording the experience of living in London in more direct ways. Others primarily use it as simply a familiar backdrop where things happen to happen. This thesis has therefore tended to concentrate on the central novels which emphatically do explore this interrelationship through the medium of a fictionalised London. *Dombey and Son*, *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* are the main books in which this technique is worked out and these novels consequently receive most attention. As will be seen, the method of perceiving the city developed in these works becomes an established principle that is used powerfully in *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*. This explains why *A Tale of Two Cities*, despite its title, does not feature heavily. Although the theme of resurrection is all important in that novel, it is rather dramatised through delineation of Sidney Carton's inner state than in the dynamics and mechanisms of London or Paris. Earlier novels are drawn upon to show how component parts of the city symbol present themselves to Dickens's imagination and what elements of mystery he sees in these aspects of city life to allow him to fashion them into his total scheme of London.

The journalism, private correspondence and speeches will also be visited for the same purpose.

As far as structure is concerned, I have begun by concentrating on the problem before considering its solution. That is, the first three chapters deal with those aspects of London which bury truth and create a deathbound atmosphere. The first chapter begins with the crooked streets and labyrinthine structure of the capital and discusses how Dickens turns them into a vast extrapolation of the gothic novelists' haunted house motif. This earlier genre brings together themes of hidden truth and physical collapse. Understanding the symbolic purpose and method of the haunted house therefore provides an illuminating starting point in discussing Dickens's purpose and method in dealing with these concepts. Chapter two focuses on the urban dirt, which both acts as an obscuring agent in the form of mud and fog and unequivocally brings death to those who live in it. Dickens's language here will be closely compared to that of sanitary reformers, some of whom also saw moral and spiritual dimensions to the death wrought by metropolitan squalor. This leads to a third chapter which suggests that the city's deadening concealment is presented as ranged against God and His values, lending a supernatural aspect to the obvious need for regeneration.

The fourth chapter begins a new section of the thesis which shows that there are parts of London's structure that push truth into the open as surely as those previously considered keep it hidden. The first of these is the Metropolitan Police force and in particular the detective figure in *Bleak House*. The second, discussed in chapter five, is the railway network in *Dombey and Son*. Both of these distinctively metropolitan phenomena provide a focus for discussion of the aspects of London that organise and reveal hidden information.

In these two sections, it will be seen that London behaves in a more complex way than division of its forces into concealing/deathbound versus revealing/resurrecting can comfortably accommodate. Sometimes the obscuring elements emphasize the sense that something is being hidden, for example, and precipitate its discovery. On the other hand, the lifebound forces often take the individual towards a frightening point of death before regeneration can occur. Therefore the third section explores the most typical subsymbols of Dickens's city, the river Thames in chapter six and the crowd in chapter seven. Because of their ambiguous role in bringing both death *and* regeneration, both concealment *and* revelation, they are the most representative components of a city that works by maintaining a tension between all four forces at once. The conclusion makes some remarks upon Dickens's London as a whole, taking into account what has been

discovered in each part. It briefly relates his vision to the views suggested by other nineteenth-century writers who saw the city as connected in one way or another to schemes of revelation and concealment of divine life.¹²⁶ Finally, it argues that Dickens fashioned a new way of perceiving the city that has strongly influenced twentieth-century writers, such as T. S. Eliot. More even than the sum of its parts, Dickens's London is a symbol of extraordinary power, versatility and subtlety. My thesis aims to locate that power in the struggle between forces of concealment and revelation, death and resurrection dramatized in this huge arena.

¹²⁶Where it has helpfully illustrated a point, however, I have occasionally allowed myself to compare Dickens's treatment of particular aspects of city life with their treatment in a mystery-related context in the work of Ruskin, Baudelaire, Conrad and others.

"The debilitated old house in the city": the London of *Little Dorrit* as haunted house.

Each individual building in the London of *Little Dorrit* including the Circumlocution Office, the Marshalsea and Mrs Clennam's house, seems designed to restrict access to information, especially about those within their walls. The cumulative effect is a metropolis whose structure and atmosphere deny the individual's attempts to fathom its secrets. If, as this thesis aims to establish, the main motivating force informing Dickens's plots is the tension between an impulse to conceal and a drive towards revelation, the city has been erected by people in the grip of the former. Later chapters will consider the forces inherent in the city which push truth into the open. Here discussion focuses on how the city keeps its secrets, what those secrets are and what underlies the desire to conceal embodied by the imposing conglomeration of London. Themes of this sort had been previously explored in literature by means of an earlier symbol, that of the haunted castle. In Dickens's fiction generally, but especially in *Little Dorrit*, numerous houses inherit and develop this tradition. Since the entire metropolis comes to be perceived by character and reader alike as an enormous extrapolation of their enclosed and obscuring environments, it will be helpful to look at the kinds of secrets kept in haunted houses and the means by which these buildings participate in the concealments of the stories in which they belong.

I. Castles of the ego

Dickens explicitly associates Mrs Clennam's house with this particular gothic convention. It is called "the haunted house" (I 29 p. 337) and compared to "a castle of Romance" (I 3 p. 40) - but which particular castles might Dickens have had in mind? In a letter to John Forster, he refers to "the owner of the gigantic helmet",¹ displaying some familiarity with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which provides an obvious antecedent for the tale of Mrs Clennam's house. In both stories, an imposing building contains the secret of a family wronged. It is in the interests of the individuals who preside over these houses to keep the secrets hidden and both Manfred, the wicked count in Walpole's book, and Mrs Clennam in *Little Dorrit* use the complexities of their respective buildings to prevent hidden information from leaving their control. Once the truth gets out into the open and the "villains" are exposed, the edifice that has aided the concealment crumbles to dust.

¹to John Forster, 18 March, 1841, *Letters*, vol. II, pp. 238-9.

Another key gothic text with which Dickens was familiar is Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1792) - indeed he had several novels by Radcliffe and her contemporary Victor Maturin in his library.² In this novel, the use of a castle by a scheming concealer was developed, with much more description of the building and the experience of wandering inside it. Crucially, both Otranto and Udolpho are fortresses which prevent outsiders from gaining access to their owners. Both Manfred and his counterpart in Radcliffe's book, Montoni, wish to be seen as powerful and rightful rulers, but under the surface is the truth that the former is an illegal usurper and the latter is the captain of a vicious gang of bandits. Whereas Manfred is thwarted by supernatural intervention, Montoni remains in almost complete control of everything that is seen in Udolpho and Emily's impressions of the castle could well be a description of its master, whose image it projects:

Silent, lonely and sublime, it seemed to stand sovereign
of the scene, and to frown defiance on all, who dared to
invade its solitary reign. (*MOU* II 5 p. 227)

The house, then, is an expression of power over others and a very concrete reinforcement of an image of self.

This motif is clearly visible in Dickens's fiction in *Dombey and Son*, which evokes the haunted house to convey the barriers one man wishes to erect between himself and the eyes of humanity at large. Throughout the novel, Dombey hides behind an impenetrable public persona as the mighty man of business and refuses to let his wife and children - in fact, even himself - see behind this image. His house in North-West London is made to participate in this exclusion of others from access to the self in much the same way as the Castle of Udolpho. Dickens explicitly compares it to the "magic dwelling-place in magic story, shut up in the heart of a thick wood" of this tradition, by emphasising its darkness and enclosure behind railings. Like its owner, it constantly has "a frown upon its never-smiling face" (*DS* 23 p. 311). This is an outward manifestation of his desire to "shut out all the world as with a double door of gold" (20 p. 275). Beneath Dombey's successful exterior, there is a moral emptiness which no-one must be allowed to see.

It is in *Little Dorrit*, however, that the motif becomes the dominant one in the novel. Mrs Clennam's house embodies the identity she has built for herself - that of the stoical religious sufferer. Its "wrathful, mysterious, and sad" exterior (*II* 10 p. 525) resembles its owner's appearance:

Her severe face had no thread of relaxation in it, by

²see *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, op cit, vol. VII, p. 547.

which any explorer could have been guided to the gloomy labyrinth of her thoughts. (I 5 p. 44)

On the exterior, everything about Mrs Clennam's house suggests barriers, from its "rusty" "iron railings" to the "jumble of roots" (I 3 p. 32) they enclose. This latter phrase is especially resonant of unfathomable ontological mysteries. When William Dorrit seeks admission, he enters something very like a mediaeval castle with a portcullis:

The door gave back a dreary, vacant sound and a chain grated ... (II 17 p. 603)

Elsewhere in the novel, Dickens teaches the reader to compare houses with public personae. Merdle's dinner guests, set in two rows, are famously said to resemble

The expressionless uniform twenty houses ... all fended off by the same pattern of railing ... (I 21 p. 240)

Even the most respectable houses are designed to exclude in their featureless monotony. A characteristic feature of urban experience in Dickens is that each person refuses his neighbour access to his or her inner life, making the impenetrable house into a protection of rigidly defined ego boundaries. Intrusion into the house is an intrusion into the person - who knows what dark corners may be discovered? - and is therefore not to be tolerated. There are moreover other houses in the novel. Mr Merdle's house and its near relation, the Circumlocution Office, have an image of irreplaceable benefit to Society to convey. Dickens represents the latter's effectiveness at keeping out the uninitiated by conflating its frightening bureaucracy with the complex internal design of the building:

Numbers of people were lost in the Circumlocution Office ... and never re-appeared in the light of day.

(II 10 pp. 101-2)

Even the high walls of the Marshalsea are more for the protection of the inmates from intruders than for incarcerating them. William Dorrit has constructed an egotistical castle for himself out of these crude materials long before the structures he plans in Italy prior to his death (II 18-19).

All of these metaphorical houses, however, have a secret, a weakness that could cause them to come crashing down. For Merdle, it is his fraud. The secret behind the facade of his house is that he *has* nothing. The wealth that guarantees his power is illusory, just as Dombey's revered fortune has been secretly embezzled away by Carker and proves in any case to be of no value in purchasing the things that count in the novel. Both men find their business houses crashing down when the truth is discovered. The secret concealed in the corridors of the Circumlocution Office is also a vacuum: it is the fact that it *does* nothing. For William Dorrit, who builds palaces of air on the continent, it is his time in the Marshalsea that must be

concealed. For Mrs Clennam, the secret is made tangible by the codicil, which, disclosed, would enable the heroine to inherit money left to her. The whereabouts of this document provide real reason for anxiety. The question "Where is Blandois?" really means, "Where is the information about Little Dorrit's inheritance?" If Blandois is murdered and/or hidden in the house, then this information is within the control of its owner; if he is outside, then it is not. This uncertainty supplies the suspense of much of the novel.

As in the gothic novels, Dickens's bewildering houses conceal the deprivation of a family of their rights. Just as Montoni's image of himself as Prince of Otranto depends upon concealing Theodore's right of descent, so the self-image as fulfilled businessman upon which Dombey depends relies upon concealing his obligation to his daughter. The size of his house protects him from the necessity of having to pay attention to Florence. He has hidden from himself and others that she has a claim on his love as rightful as any denied claim of property or money in the eighteenth-century texts. *Little Dorrit* returns to this theme as her father uses the walls of the Marshalsea milieu to conceal the debt of love he owes her. This is ultimately compounded in a way more palpable to the reader when Mrs Clennam exploits the forbidding exterior and complicated interior of her house to hide the document guaranteeing her rightful inheritance. Tied in with this, however, is the question of Arthur's own origins and identity. Should he come to understand the criminal secret of the deception, he will have to discover the ontological secret of his parentage. Like Walpole's Isabella and Radcliffe's Emily, he is finding out the truth about a figure who has dominated him in a semi-parental role. Arthur's exclusion from such knowledge, however, has a much stronger personal significance, because he has believed Mrs Clennam to be his actual mother. He himself grew up in the building that contains the secret. "His mother's dismal old house" (II 10 p. 596) is also "that grim home of his youth". Thus the mystery contained here is one related to his own identity.

Most writers on the gothic novel and its descendants in Victorian fiction read the secrets of the house in Freudian terms of repressed sexuality eroding a respectable exterior. This is why, it is claimed, tales of a shameful family secret were often discovered by a hero and heroine who behave as if their love for each other were spiritual and asexual. Coral Ann Howells provides an example of this school of commentary:

All the time we have the uncomfortable sense of being in a fantasy world which is about to reveal secrets of the human personality - indeed straining towards these revelations - and yet constantly kept in check by the

negative forces of guilt and repression.³

As well as the ostensible truths about the villain, the searching characters learn - or sometimes fail to learn - to come to terms with their own sexual natures. It may even be valid to interpret *Little Dorrit* in this way. It is certainly "negative forces of guilt and repression" that pile up fortifications in this novel and one of the most significant truths Clennam learns is that there is a sexual element to his love for Amy. But this can only ever be part of the story. Manuel Aguirre usefully points out the limitations of this approach to gothic texts:

a psychoanalytic perspective might, at the extreme, merely reduce to mental states a genre which endlessly emphasises objective causes of mental states: in defining the horror tale in terms of paranoia we eliminate from our analysis precisely that which explains and justifies the existence of the tale: the Other.⁴

If the horror of hidden things can be explained entirely in terms from the rational world of nature, such as sexual paranoia, it has ceased to be a supernatural tale. Aguirre sees the development of gothic horror as a result of the culture of Enlightenment seeking to shut out what he calls "the Numinous" (i.e. God and the spiritual world) and to build an ordered world that makes sense without deity, obeying its own inherent laws.⁵ Comprehension of the workings of the universe was sought in order to give humanity as a whole control over the cosmos. Nevertheless, there remained things that could not be understood or accounted for and these took over in the popular consciousness as objects of awe and replacements for the terror of divine retribution. Montoni and Manfred are presented as a commentary on this sort of thinking, erecting a world in their castle where they have complete control over what is known about them. The awesome barriers and battlements they shelter behind act as a fortification against the numinous Providence that would bring their deeds to light. Ultimately, the supernatural Other finds a way to assert its reality from within the castle itself, in the form of ghosts that insist upon declaring the truth.

Of course, Aguirre's "Other" is a highly problematic term that means vastly different things within different schools of criticism. His primary use of the term is to denote precisely that which cannot be explained or understood by any of the conventional rational ways of labelling the world. One of the ways in which Western

³*Love, Mystery and Misery. Feeling in Gothic Fiction* (London and Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Athlone, 1995), p. 5.

⁴*The Closed Space* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 84.

⁵For the ideas summarized here, see *ibid.*, pp. 75-87.

thought has attempted to take this Other captive for the enlightened world is to call it the "id", but in practise this does not make it any more explicable. In fact, the terminology of "ego" and "id" makes it clear that the latter is something "other" than "I", something that cannot be governed by rational laws. The two explanations of gothic, Freudian and Aguirrean, are, then, not entirely incompatible. Aguirre's contribution is rather to remind modern readers that gothic novels actually take as their theme the very resistance of inexplicable forces (whether these are called God, the devil or the id) to rational categorisation and to schemes which would try to comprehend, and therefore limit, their power.

Both Freudian and Aguirrean explanations of gothic novels, however, grasp the most salient point, namely that consciousness of guilt and fear of punishment is behind the symbol of the haunted house, whether that guilt is perceived as warranted or unwarranted. Similarly, the house-builders in *Little Dorrit* are devising systems to prevent the laws of Dickens's world from bringing about the consequences of their actions. Mrs Clennam's house and her self-imposed confinement in it are really an attempt to exclude Providence itself by replacing its ministry with a series of self-punishments that benefit no-one. As the truth emerges, this system, which is as artificially shored up as the house itself, is eroded and exposed as false. Although the crumbling of the house has a more rational explanation than the collapse of Otranto, therefore, the cause of this event is rather to be traced in the inexplicable laws of the book's symbolism and narrative justice than in the laws of the physical world.

This is a poignant development of the use of the haunted house motif in *Dombey and Son*. Dombey cannot accept the emotional and spiritual vacuum that exists at the heart of his philosophy and builds the house of Dombey and Son to disguise the fact. It seems designed to exclude the love offered by Florence (which, as we shall see in later chapters, is a positive numinous force in Dickens, a system of rightful relationships asserting itself at crucial moments according to a Providential scheme) that constantly threatens to expose his inner emptiness and poverty. Just as in Aguirre's analysis the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rejected God and found the numinous reasserting itself in the inexplicable phenomena of their own minds, so in dismissing Florence, Dombey "rejected the angel, and took up with the tormenting spirit crouching in his bosom" (*DS* 20 p. 278). As he does so, the inexorable laws of the narrative bring about the collapse of his business, marriage and reputation in one fell swoop. As if to underline the fact, his actual house is gutted and stripped literally bare by rapacious creditors. In all of these cases, an emptiness or a nakedness has been sheltered from a revealing Providence behind forbidding walls and labyrinthine houses. It is worth remembering that the first act of concealment in

human history according to the biblical account was with the same motive of hiding wrong done from the eyes of a punishing numinous Other:

I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.

(Genesis 3:10)

Hiding from the forces that bring about the consequences of one's actions is as futile in *Little Dorrit* as it is in the Garden of Eden. Nevertheless, the concealers in this novel prefer to hide within their houses whose walls protect rigid ego boundaries against the numinous as surely as do those of Manfred and Montoni.

The final point of comparison to be noted between the gothic haunted house and Mrs Clennam's updated version of it is its tendency to become a prison, initially for the seeker for truth within it and ultimately for the concealer who has constructed it. Recognising that the heroes and heroines are questers after knowledge, and thus in league with the Providence their castles are designed to exclude, the gothic villain typically tries to lock them into the parts of the castle where the truth is rendered inaccessible. At the same time, they must not be allowed to leave the building - representative as it is of the concealers' realm of control over what others know about their identity - with the knowledge they do have. Thus they are both shut out and shut into the world of the villain's ego boundaries. Emily in the *Mysteries of Udolpho* has a keen sense of this carceral use of the castle:

As the carriage-wheels rolled heavily under the portcullis,
Emily's heart sunk, and she seemed, as if she was going
into her prison. (II 5 pp. 226-7)

Equally, Manfred's desire to marry Isabella is a desire to confine her to a role in the secret of the usurped house, by making her complicit with it. When these attempts are so strongly resisted, the villains must resort to literal imprisonment. A century later, another novel in the gothic tradition, *Dracula* provides a clear use of the fortress-as-prison symbol from both perspectives. Not only do locked doors prevent Jonathon Harker from seeing anything within the old castle, but they prevent him from escaping as well:

doors, doors, doors everywhere, and all locked and
bolted. In no place save from the windows in the castle
walls is there an available exit.

The castle is a veritable prison and I am a prisoner.

(*Dracula* 2 p. 26)

In this case, the secret, vampirism, by its nature attempts to lock Harker into the conspiracy by making him a vampire himself. Likewise, inside Mrs Clennam's house, there are many locked places and dark corners. Arthur is very familiar with some of them, including an

old dark closet, also with nothing in it, of which he had been many a time the sole contents, in days of punishment, when he had regarded it as the veritable entrance to that bourne to which the tract had found him galloping. (I 3 p. 72)

These punitive confinements in a microcosmic Hell also represent an attempt to lock Arthur into the same secret as his mother - to subject him to the control of the house-world. He ultimately escapes from these snares, as his refusal of a share in the business underlines. Fagin's constant imprisonments of Oliver Twist in rooms in his den are also designed to restrain curiosity and prevent knowledge from bursting forth upon the world at large.

Yet if the hidden places in which the concealers try to lock the heroes and heroines are associated with imprisonment and divine punishment, this is much more true for those who lock themselves into them. In forcing themselves to constantly retreat into their impregnable castles, the villains become trapped in them themselves and are cut off from the outside world in an unwholesome state of atrophy. Montoni ends besieged in his castle and Manfred's life is crushed as his castle crumbles. Keeping a secret for egotistical reasons restricts the keeper and this truth underlies the many and much commented upon real and metaphorical prisons in *Little Dorrit*. Mrs Clennam chooses her self-confinement in her house and it leads to a paralysis that is her downfall. William Dorrit is safe from creditors and moral judgement in the Marshalsea, but he is a prisoner nevertheless and his sanity is eroded by the lie his life has become. In excluding the Providential forces that bring revelation of secrets, they have excluded the source of life and freedom. All of these characters - and Dombey too - have the opportunity to accept a liberating love but to do so, would be to acknowledge their guilt and the vacuum at the heart of their self-justifying identities.

II. The house and the city

David Jarrett has comprehensively traced Mrs Clennam's house to its antecedents in the gothic castle in terms of shared physical features and similarity of plot.⁶ Dickens's extrapolation of this motif into the vaster symbol of the metropolis as a whole has not been discussed so fully, however. Arthur's first approach to his

⁶The Fall of the House of Clennam' in *The Dickensian* vol. LXXIII (1977), pp. 155-61.

mother's residence in the novel - and consequently the reader's - is "through some of the crooked and descending streets which lie (and lay more crookedly and closely then) between the river and Cheapside" (I 3 p. 31). Everything about his journey suggests hiding places. Structuring the city so that progressing in a straight line is difficult creates a fitting symbol of the hero's quest after truth and the obstacles set in front of him. This is an extended prevision of Mrs Clennam's dwelling, where "There was not one straight floor, from the foundation to the roof" (I 5 p. 54). Seeing with any kind of perspective here has been made almost impossible. Once Clennam leaves the house, he is in a structure still more labyrinthine, fragmented and bewildering. Bleeding Heart Yard is just one part of the city which it is virtually impossible to navigate one's way around:

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. (I 12 p. 129)

This constitutes a large expansion of Isabella's gropings through the "long labyrinth of darkness" inside the Castle of Otranto (*COO* p. 25). In Dickens's London, the dark network of passages that make up the "proud irregularity" of Montoni's castle, in which Emily fears to "lose herself" in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and in which she is perplexed by the "numerous turnings" and "the many doors that offered" (II 6 245, 258), is re-born as an incomprehensible tangle of streets.

One of Dickens's favourite ways of describing London throughout his novels is as a labyrinth. In *Oliver Twist*, for example, the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates run through "a most intricate maze of narrow streets" (OT 13 p.74). Mrs Brown, in a later novel, takes Florence Dombey through "a labyrinth of narrow streets" (*DS* 6 p. 75) and, of course:

Todgers's was in a labyrinth, whereof the mystery was
known but to a chosen few. (*MC* 9 p. 129)

Dickens delights in bringing naive characters such as Tom Pinch and Oliver from the country and abandoning them momentarily in the bewildering city. Florence is also lost there on two occasions. There are so many zones in London that it is almost impossible to conceive of it as a whole. This is clearly how the owners of the secret houses would have their homes and their affairs. Just as the gothic villains exploit the complexity of their houses, so there are those in Dickens who use knowledge of the city as a means of asserting control over others who are ignorant of its layout. Even the normally idle Eugene Wrayburn in *Our Mutual Friend* uses his familiarity with London in this way, carefully studying its illogical structure to make Bradley Headstone undergo "grinding torments" in following him down unknown alleys and

dead end streets (III 10 p. 533).

Who, then, is in control of the labyrinth of London? Certainly Arthur Clennam feels that the city as a whole is a continuation of the house his (step)mother uses to such effect to restrict access to knowledge. This is because the Puritanical religion she hides behind is presented as the dominant religion of the capital. From the first, therefore, London, with its entertainments shut to the population, is described in terms that will later be applied to the house:

It was a Sunday evening in London, gloomy, close
and stale (I 3 p. 26).

The narrator says of Arthur's father's room,

Its close air was secret. The gloom, and must, and
dust of the whole tenement, were secret. (II 10 p. 526)

Sunday is chosen for the introduction to London because it evokes the atmosphere of legalistic religious inactivity, or paralysis, that prevails in the house. Already, moreover, the capital is established as a locked place:

Everything was bolted and barred that could by
possibility furnish relief to an overworked
people. (I 3 p. 29)

Dickens protests against the use of religion to deny benefits to others, comparing it to Mrs Clennam's debarring of Little Dorrit from her inheritance through pseudo-religious intolerance. A supposedly liberating faith has been twisted by this same spirit to turn the whole city into a prison. The Puritanical religion that shelters Mrs Clennam from facing her guilt is highly effective because it forms an essential characteristic of the whole city.

Although the continuity between her house and London generally gives an impression that she has a sinister power over the entire capital, it may be more accurate to say that Mrs Clennam's dwelling is symptomatic of the city's tendency to conceal a moral vacuum behind a form of religion. It is implied that the locking of London's doors on a Sunday may be motivated by millions of other secrets as well as hers. Arthur sees his mother's house as the locus of an atmosphere of concealment that permeates the entire capital. Two characteristics of London generally, its lockedness and its darkness, are shown to extend outward from these features as they appear in the house:

the whole neighbourhood [was] under some 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. The
deserted counting-houses, with their secrets of books and papers
locked up in chests and safes; the banking-houses, with their secrets

of strong rooms and wells, the keys of which were in a very few secret pockets and a very few secret breasts; the secrets of all the dispersed grinders in the vast mill, among whom there were doubtless plunderers, forgers, and trust-betrayers of many sorts, whom the light of any day that dawned might reveal; The shadow thickening and thickening as it approached its source, he thought ... of the secrets of the river, as it rolled its turbid tide between two frowning wildernesses of secrets, extending, thick and dense, for many miles, and warding off the free air and the free country swept by winds and wings of birds.

(II 10 pp. 526)

This personification of the city as itself "warding off the free air" re-inforces the fact that the "close air" of Mrs Clennam's described immediately afterwards is the atmosphere of the whole city. Indeed, London infinitely reproduces the most frustrating aspect of the rambling building: each street is a locked room or a dark corner within this enormous stronghold of darkness. Each of the millions of doors he passes may contain the information he is looking for, or it may not. And there is no way of telling which doors will yield results. As in the gothic castle, Arthur, the seeker after truth, is both shut out by and also shut within the city. There is no escape from a city whose boundaries are beyond the visible horizon on every side and which gives the illusion of being entirely within the concealer's control.

Of course there are other human beings than Mrs Clennam, such as Merdle, keeping it this way, and this is the significance of the "counting-houses" and banks. His is one of the "very few secret pockets" mentioned here. Indeed, the city proves to be constructed by various concealers, striving with varying degrees of success to build the city as their own vast house, asserting the power of their self image over all who live in its shadow. This chapter will shortly turn to the social message that Dickens sees in this: that the city is built to conceal the fact that individuals and groups have structured it to deny the poor as a class their rights and opportunities, just as Little Dorrit's personal rights are hidden in the labyrinthine house and city. Firstly, however, it is necessary to explain Dickens's underlying theme of the guilty secret, inherited from the gothic novel, of which all of these locked doors in the city - both individual and social - are examples.

In this passage, what is being kept out, as well as the freedom of access to the truth, is the light of the open countryside - "the light of any day that dawned" - which is presented here as an external threat to the darkness connected with secrecy throughout this long paragraph. Thirteen years earlier, *Martin Chuzzlewit* had noted the absence of daylight and breathable atmosphere in the metropolis:

London ... hemmed Todgers's round, and hustled it, and crushed it, and stuck its brick and mortar elbows into it, and kept the air from it, and stood perpetually between it and the light ... (9 pp. 128-9)

The city is here personified as an oppressive bully, giving a vague sense of menace, as if the capital were deliberately constructed by people with these characteristics in order to exclude its inhabitants from light and clean air. In the later novel, this observed aspect of London becomes central to the novel's symbolic purpose. Darkness and shadow emanating from the house take on a superhuman scale. It is not only "Dull and dark" (I 5 p. 94) and exclusive of light, but it appears to contaminate what does reach it:

The debilitated old house in the city ... never knew a healthy or a cheerful interval, let what would betide. If the sun ever touched it, it was but with a ray, and that was gone in half an hour; if the moonlight ever fell upon it, it was only to put a few patches on its doleful cloak, and make it look more wretched. (I 15 p. 172)

Such darkness is actively repellent and the language suggests a fundamental unwholesomeness too strong to apply solely to the shadows falling on a building:

the haunted house with a premature and preternatural darkness in it ... (I 29 p. 337)

The next chapter will discuss the connection between decay and concealment and the reasons why it adds up to a state which must be remedied by a revelation with a specific regenerative element to it. Here, the significant point is that a considerable part of the city has been structured to exclude a healthful light, because such light would bring buried guilt to the surface. In the words of Christ:

For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved (John 3:20)

The light that house and city exclude with such determination is identified with a force of regenerative revelation as "the light" is in the New Testament. Its entry into house and city would destroy the ego boundaries those domains represent. Nevertheless, this guarded-against eventuality holds the potential for granting new life to those trapped inside, including those who build such houses in the first place. It is equally clear that the penetrating light is an agent of the inexorable movement towards uncovering secret things contained within the narrative. Thus, just as the constructors of haunted houses were ultimately guarding against an inexorable Providential scheme, so Dickens's city represents the modern world's attempt to protect itself from an apocalyptic light that must ultimately reveal the moral vacuum at the heart of its identity.

III. The Adelphi

Showing the darkness of a whole society requires not just a single house, but an enormous metropolis. There is a powerful atmosphere of terror as to what might come out of London's own darkest corners. On her night away from home, Little Dorrit visits some of these. She is startled when she sees "a moving shadow among the street lamps" and the dangers she faces include "homeless people, lying coiled up in nooks ... drunkards ... slinking men, whistling and signing to one another at bye corners, or running away at full speed" and a prostitute, all lurking in "the dark vapour on the river" (I 14 pp. 166-9). Henry Mayhew catalogues very many of these corner dwellers, claiming that in 1857, the year of *Little Dorrit's* publication, 8, 600 prostitutes were known to the police, with up to ten times that number possibly working.⁷ One has only to think back to Fagin slinking about "like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved" (OT 19 pp. 120-1), to grasp the fundamental connection between the city's obscurity and criminality. Concealment is a moral issue for Dickens and the habitual tendency to hide in *Little Dorrit* reflects a fear of more than the police, who are absent from the novel, set, as it is, before the Metropolitan Police Act (1829). There is a sense, however, in which the real concealers in Dickens are those who cause the deprivation that drives people to such local manifestations of criminality. Often it seems that there is an affiliation of gothic-style villains organising London so that the guilty secret behind its poverty should remain unapprehended. One particular dark corner of Dickens's London is worth examining in detail because it returns attention to the social aspect of what is deliberately concealed in the metropolis.

The Adelphi was a part of London that Dickens often re-visited in fact and fiction. The young David Copperfield is fascinated by it, recalling,

I was fond of wandering about the Adelphi, because it
was a mysterious place, with those dark arches.

(DC 11 p. 138)

It was an area near the Strand, itself so-called because of its original adjacency to the Thames, where wharves of the poorest character were built upon in 1768, without, one imagines, any permission sought from the users of the area. These muddy areas were enclosed in even greater darkness than before by streets of housing for the wealthy erected above them by two brothers named Adams, after whom the imposing

⁷*London Labour and the London Poor*, 4 vols. (New York: Dover, 1968), vol. 1V, p. 213.

edifice was named. This expression of their personality was supported upon a series of subterranean arches which became a haunt for homeless people. It is almost certainly the setting for the third panel of Augustus Egg's series *Past and Present*,⁹ a scene of destitution typical of how the area was perceived. By the 1860s one Victorian reminisced of the arches that:

no sane person would have ventured to explore them
without an armed escort.¹⁰

Darkness has been created by one group of citizens building their house on the exploitation of another displaced group: a guilty secret, like Mrs Clennam's, in the cellar.

This, then, is a fitting place for Arthur to be when he hears a secret that turns out to be part of the property owner Casby's network of mystery (*LD II 9*). This man owns large areas of London, but his outward benevolence is later exposed when it emerges that his greed has forced up rents to a level which reduces his tenants to poverty. Plornish is entirely deceived, accepting Casby's public image of generosity at face value. This results in his absolute bafflement about the reasons for his plight. As he tries to unravel "the tangled skein of his affairs", he finds himself involved in a mystery as profound as the main plot:

They was all hard up there Well, he couldn't say
how it was; he didn't know as anybody *could* say how
it was; He could tell you who suffered, but he
couldn't tell you whose fault it was. (*I 12 p. 136*)

To the reader, however, it is quite clear whose fault it is. Casby is denying the poor their rights, whilst feigning virtue as surely as Mrs Clennam is denying Little Dorrit what she owes to her under a cloak of righteousness. Bleeding Heart Yard is the squalid underside to the splendid edifice of his public persona, just as the respectable mansions of the Adelphi conceal the darkness and poverty they have exacerbated.

Little Dorrit presents a London built by various overlapping individuals and groups aiming to establish control over the city at the expense of the confused population in this way. Where Casby's bid for domination of the metropolis comes through property ownership, the Barnacles exert their grip over the city by their administration of it. Again, it becomes clear that the money and power they gain for this task is misplaced as the energies of the Circumlocution Office are channelled entirely into draining London's resources for personal gain and covering the fact in a labyrinth of red tape. They are protecting their own dynasty's image of

⁹see J. Maas, *Victorian Painters* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1978), p. 134 for this painting.

¹⁰quoted in R. Samuel, 'Comers and Goers' in H. Dyos, J. Wolf (eds.) *The Victorian City*, 2 vols., (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), vol. I, pp. 128-9.

indispensability to society by making it impossible for the people they exploit to investigate their affairs. Arthur soon learns how difficult they can make it for those who "want to know, you know" (II 10, p. 108). Here again, the city is the Adelphi in macrocosm. London's structure is built to project the ego boundaries of people like Casby, the Barnacles and Merdle, but that structure must hide the social suffering lurking at its foundation.

On this level, then, what is being concealed by the metropolis of *Little Dorrit* is the social interconnectedness of that metropolis itself. It is the fact that the poverty lower down the system is actually caused by the negligence, greed and inactivity of those further up. This system of connections within urban society is, of course, exactly what Raymond Williams claimed the Londoner had to discover.¹¹ Certainly the novel insists that, despite the best efforts of these concealers, this knowledge cannot remain hidden forever. Just as Mrs Clennam's secret must emerge and the house that embodies her public persona must crumble, so Dickens warns that the secret of social exploitation must emerge and the exploiters' power must collapse. This is described in terms that evoke the fall of the respectable upper housing of London because of the rottenness of the squalid caverns upon which it is built:

look to the rats young and old, all ye Barnacles, for before God they are eating away our foundations, and will bring the roofs on our heads! (I 14 p. 208)

Because of its history and nature, then, the Adelphi is an especially suitable place in which to overhear secrets in *Little Dorrit*. Within a small area, it summarises the kind of London depicted in that book, with its sense of a respectable London built over an exploited hidden zone. Before its brief appearance in this book, however, Dickens had dwelt at greater length upon the Adelphi in *David Copperfield*, where his sense of the spot as emblematic of the two Londons neatly juxtaposed is clearly visible. David visits the world beneath in the days of his unhappy childhood. Later, in his prosperity, he comes to live in the houses above ground, just as Dickens did in the 1830s, and shows a keen awareness of the difference between the two adjacent worlds:

I turned my face to the Adelphi, pondering on the old days when I used to roam about its subterranean arches, and on the happy changes which had brought me to the surface. (DC 23 p. 303)

Copperfield has moved from the labyrinth below in which he had been exploited and kept in ignorance, to inclusion in the world of the establishment above. On the whole, this is presented as a positive move, brought about by a combination of

¹¹ See pp. 10 ff. above.

Providential favour and David's own hard work. *David Copperfield* does not place the same emphasis on the corrupt social structure of London as *Little Dorrit*. Nevertheless, the reader does register in the hero's brooding reflections here a slight, conflicting sense of unease that in belonging to this upper London, the hero is participating in and perpetuating the system that kept those like his younger self in the dark.

It is interesting that there is part of David Copperfield's own past to be found in the underside of the city. Although there is no strong sense that he himself wishes to hide his former poverty, the real novelist, upon whom his experiences are based, Charles Dickens, seems to have desired to keep hidden his formative years in this part of London. At any rate, he concealed them from public knowledge until after his death and did not even tell his children about them. It is not easy to say why he did so. Dickens, the genuinely active reformer, can hardly be accused of having exploited the poor to get to his position. Nevertheless, perhaps he retained an understandable, if irrational, sense of guilt regarding those who remained poor when he returned to his middle class world. It is even possible that part of him felt that he had exploited those with whom he had come into contact during these years in representing them in the fiction that had made his name. He had even borrowed - or stolen - some of their names, such as that of Bob Fagin, who worked beside him in Warren's Blacking Warehouse.¹² His position as the dominant novelist of London certainly depended upon the experiential resources gained from this dark underworld. Perhaps Dickens's reluctance to talk about this period may also be due to a constant temptation to criminality enforced by his poverty. Certainly in his private memorandum to Forster, he said:

I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond.¹³

Whilst this may not have led him to illegal actions, it is possible that guilt for this unrealised criminal potential may have remained with him. Again, London's underworld housed knowledge about his identity that was incompatible with his projected public image. Of course, all of this is merely speculation, but it suggests how Dickens could depict so convincingly characters like William Dorrit who wish to keep their past hidden and the other concealers who use London to obscure the secrets about their past contained within it. It also suggests how the metropolis may have developed in Dickens's mind into a symbolic environment which protects the ego boundaries of the powerful by making the actions of the past invisible. If the *Adelphi* draws attention to the sociological motivation for the city's network of

¹²Dickens records another borrowing of this person's name in a private record quoted in J. Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 2 vols. (London: Dent, 1966), vol. I, p. 22.

¹³quoted in *ibid*, vol. I, p. 25.

concealments, for Dickens it also resonates with ontological reasons for hiding. It seems to remind him that for some, a sense of self-defined identity may depend upon keeping the secrets of one's origins and background out of sight.

Why, then, is the Adelphi so effective at keeping secrets, whether the reasons for doing so are sociological, ontological or theological (in terms of hiding past guilt from a punishing Providential justice)? The answer is that its structure, like that of the city as a whole, restricts access to information for the same reasons as the haunted castle. It is a place of barriers. As well as the thick vertical barrier between rich and poor, there is a horizontal barrier between the subterranean part of the Adelphi and the outside world. What is said within cannot be heard in the surrounding streets. Entering it effects:

a sudden pause in that place to the roar of the great thoroughfare. The many sounds become so deadened that the change is like putting cotton in the ears, or having the head thickly muffled. (II 9 p. 514)

This is of course a characteristic feature of Mrs Clennam's house too:

As to street noises, the rumbling of wheels in the lane merely rushed in at the gateway in going past, and rushed out again So with whistling, singing, talking, laughing, and all pleasant human sounds. (I 15 p. 172)

Flintwinch takes full advantage of this by having his secret conference with his brother about the codicil in its most sound-proof recesses (I 4 p. 14). The layout of the house is used to draw a veil over his transactions. When his wife does overhear him, he enforces this exclusion from perceiving what is happening by force. Flintwinch constantly threatens Affery with physical suffering, much as Montoni threatens Emily and Annette in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. So scared is she that she starts to impose a veil upon herself, throwing her apron over her face "lest she should see something" (I 15 p. 182). Thus later on, when the experience of being in the Adelphi is compared to having violent things done to the pedestrian to prevent him or her from hearing, such as the thrusting of cotton into the ears and the muffling of the head, it suggests that those who control the city use such places to bully people into giving up their search for knowledge.

Light as well as sound is excluded by the atmosphere of the Adelphi and the other excluding areas of the city. The obscurity of the spot, like Mrs Clennam's house, seems to defeat any attempts to illuminate it. The "street-lamps, blurred by the foggy air" (*LD* II 9 p. 513) reproduce on a larger scale the obstacles to clear vision used to aid the concealment in Mrs Clennam's residence:

the ceilings were so fantastically clouded by smoke and

dust, that old women might have told fortunes in them, better than in grouts of tea; ... heaps of soot ... eddied about in little dusky whirlwinds when the doors were opened [i.e. whenever there is a danger of access being given] ... cobwebs ... fur and fungus ... (I 5 p. 54).

Mr Flintwinch adds personally to these unwholesome, impenetrable clouds by his tobacco smoke and in one place, Dickens merges this with the smoke of the whole city, extending one environment into the other yet again:

The smoke came crookedly out of Mr Flintwinch's mouth, as if it circulated through the whole of his wry figure and came back by his wry throat, before coming forth to mingle with the smoke from the crooked chimneys and the mists from the crooked river. (II 23 p. 660)

Inclement climatic conditions in general collude with those who have an impulse to lock away in the world of this novel. Dickens says the house is "wrapped in its mantle of soot" and that

all bad weather stood by it with a rare fidelity ... and as to snow [a further covering], you should see it there for weeks, long after it had changed from yellow to black, slowly weeping away its grimy life. (I 15 p. 173)

The recesses of the Adelphi are also full of polluted air that smothers light, which is why Wade meets Blandois here to discuss their secret before proceeding to Casby's house.

In *Bleak House*, Dickens had made the fog that fills the Adelphi characteristic of the whole city, accompanied by mud, dust and smoke. Here there is an even greater sense that the smog is somehow caused by, or at the very least, encouraged by, the city's dominant groups who need to prevent exploited individuals from reaching an understanding of who is to blame for their plight. After all, "the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest, near ... Temple Bar", where, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor" (*BH* 1 p. 14). *Bleak House* also makes it clear through the contaminated fog that to be the victim of concealment is to be trapped in an unwholesome atmosphere that takes away life. This is an important aspect of living in the underworld of London in *Little Dorrit*:

nothing moving on the stream but waterman's wherries and coal-lighters. Long and broad tiers of the latter, moored fast in the mud as if they were never to move again, made the shore funereal and silent after dark; and kept what little water movement there was, far out towards mid-stream. (II 9 p. 514)

To live beneath the Adelphi arches is not only to be forced into darkness, but also in a

state of deathly paralysis. The gothic exclusion of light, which Dickens extends into the typical features of the city, proves ultimately to be an exclusion of healthy life.

IV. Ghosts and the city

The relationship between concealment, death and the dirty air will be explored fully in the next chapter. Firstly, however, there is a final Gothic convention carried over into the symbol of the modern city to be dealt with, namely that of ghosts and evil spirits. Because dirt in Dickens comes to take on the function assigned to ghosts in gothic literature, it will be worthwhile to take a few pages to outline how such supernatural phenomena are perceived by the characters in *Little Dorrit* and why Dickens evokes them.

This chapter has considered how distortion of street lighting by the fog in *Little Dorrit* becomes emblematic of the obscuring of truths by concealing groups and individuals. Those who are searching for the sociological reasons for their poverty or for ontological information about their origins and identity find their way thwarted at every turn by the city's refusal to let them see anything clearly. Nevertheless, the blurred light of London produces strange phantasmagoria that actually stimulate the exploited characters to wonder what is to be seen there. The fog transmutes the physical into the numinous. Little Dorrit, for example,

through the dark vapour on the river; had seen little spots of lighted water where the bridge lamps were reflected, shining like demon eyes, with a terrible fascination in them for guilt and misery. (I 14 p. 169)

The difficulties of vision have turned lamps into demon eyes, causing the observer to speculate that the secret hidden in the mist may actually be motivated by external evil powers.

The spell of the Thames upon the suicide is certainly not heavenly in origin. Misery, like fear, is a feeling which distorts facts out of recognition in Dickens and presents them in another light. Fanny's bitter anger and selfish tears create another fog with similar results:

Waters of vexation filled her eyes; and they had the effect of making the famous Mr Merdle, in going down the street, appear to leap, and waltz, and gyrate, as if he were possessed of several Devils. (II 24 p. 683)

Although the devils have no existence outside the mind of the person caught up in the concealing atmosphere, the distortions of clear vision can paradoxically reveal a strange truth to him or her. Merdle, in his destructive deception, *is* a devil, although it takes Fanny's emotion to show her that. His web of deception in the city, by which he protects his public persona from those who would see behind it, is presented as motivated, if not directly empowered by, Satan. Those who uphold Merdle's secret are described as evil and "would have done better to worship the Devil point-blank" (II 26 p. 691). His followers, "the high priests of this worship" (II 12 p. 539), behave like a mystery cult informed by a diabolical deity. Forty years later, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* more literally demonized this force of self-preservation through egotism. Dracula is actually a devil, who expands his ability to shut people into and out of his secret by turning the whole city into an extension of his castle. Perhaps drawing upon a potential in the city for magnifying the atmosphere of the gothic house seen in *Little Dorrit*, Stoker makes the dark and deathly atmosphere of the vampire's haunted castle terrifyingly inescapable by extending its characteristics into the expanse of London. Arthur Seward describes his confusion in a metaphor connected with fog:

At present I am going in my mind from point to point,
as a madman and not a sane one follows an idea. I feel
like a novice blundering through a bog in a mist, jumping
from one tussock to another in the mere blind effort to
move on without knowing where I am going.

(*Dracula* 14 p. 193)

When the London outside his door proves to be full of impenetrable fog, the confusion caused by the urban environment materially adds to the confusion he feels with regard to the whereabouts and intentions of the Count. Dracula is hiding in the fog and may even be creating it by his satanic powers, just as the the reader half suspects the Court of Chancery of creating the fog that embodies its effects in *Bleak House*. Dickens's exploration of the themes of the haunted house in a new metropolitan context had been reclaimed for the gothic novel.

Tricks of the light, in Mrs Clennam's house as in the city, play a crucial role in establishing the supernatural element in *Little Dorrit*. Dickens concludes his account of the sparing candle light creating bizarre shadows of various people actually present in a room with:

Mistress Affery's magnified shadow always flitting about,
last, until it finally glided away into the air, as though she
were off upon a witch-excursion. (I 15 p. 173)

Since all is unknown to Affery, through whose eyes these shadows are seen, the origins of that unknown may conceivably be superhuman rather than human.

Similarly, Mrs Snagsby's servants in *Bleak House* believe they are seeing and hearing otherworldly phenomena because of the atmosphere of secrecy and suspicion. This leads to the creation in their minds of yet another haunted house:

Mrs Snagsby is so perpetually on the alert, that the house becomes ghostly with creaking boards and rustling garments. The 'prentices think somebody may have been murdered there, in bygone times. Guster holds ... that there is buried money underneath the cellar, guarded by an old man with a white beard, who cannot get out for seven thousand years, because he said the Lord's Prayer backwards. (*BH* 25 p. 408)

When one is responsible for the secrecy oneself, these imagined hauntings become more acute because mixed with a guilty fear of discovery. In Mr Krook's very urban haunted house, Mr Guppy notes that:

One disagreeable result of whispering is, that it seems to evoke an atmosphere of silence, haunted by the ghosts of sound - strange cracks and tickings, the rustling of garments that have no substance in them the air is full of these phantoms ...

In his terror, he exclaims, "This is a horrible house" (32 pp. 514-16).

Affery, for her part, originally speculates that Arthur's father's mistress is buried in the house and then that:

she haunts the house, then. Who else rustles about it, making signals by dropping dust so softly? Who else comes and goes, and marks the walls with long crooked touches when we are all a-bed? (*II* 30 p. 765)

And in a sense she is correct, or, as Dickens puts it,

The mystery of the noises was out now; Affery, like greater people, had always been right in her facts, and always wrong in the theories she deduced from them.

(*II* 31 p . 772)

Certainly there are no actual ghosts, but the past does keep turning up in the form of the appearance of evidence of wrong done. Furthermore, Little Dorrit herself in her "dark corner" (*I* 3 p. 35) is a species of ghost. Her presence is a constant reminder to Mrs Clennam that she is concealing from her what is owed to her and of the past which she has otherwise succeeded in burying. It is the girl's mysterious appearance in the house that provokes Clennam to get to the bottom of the secret. As with Dickens's most traditional haunted house, Chesney Wold in *Bleak House*, with its mysterious Ghost's Walk, the supernatural is the imperfectly understood evidence of

an equally distressing human secret. Esther Summerson displays a profound understanding of how gothic works when she says,

there was a dreadful truth in the legend of the Ghost's
Walk; that it was I, who was to bring calamity upon the
stately house; and that my warning feet were haunting it
even then. (BH 36 p. 586)

Shame does not come upon the family because a real ghost walks there, but because a flesh and blood illegitimate daughter walks the earth as a result of past misdeeds. Ghosts are re-emergences from the dead; from the world that ought to remain buried. The modern city is a place where figures from the past can re-emerge unsettlingly at any moment, whether it be Esther, Alice Marwood or Magwitch. It is, in Baudelaire's phrase, a

Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,
Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant!

O swarming city, city full of dreams,
where ghosts accost the passers-by in broad daylight!
(*Les Sept Vieillards*' ll. 1-2).¹⁶

When such ghosts are proven to be human rather than supernatural phenomena in early gothic, such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe and her followers attributed their re-appearances to an equally supernatural Providence. The concealments in the city of Dickens's fiction are organised, like those in the haunted house before it, to prevent the Providential force inherent in the narrative from bringing their guilt to light and from bringing about the consequences of their actions.

Nevertheless, this Providential force uses the very veils that the house and city impose to draw the searcher's attention to what is hidden behind. Commenting on a house in *Doctor Grimshawe's Secret* (1861), Nathaniel Hawthorne's biographer, H. H. Hoeltje, makes a passing remark which shows how fully he understands the relationship between the two symbols of haunted house and city:

This old mansion had that delightful intricacy that can never be contrived, never be attained by any design, but is the happy result of many builders, many designs, many ages - *a house to go astray in, as in a city*, and come to unexpected places, a house of dark passages and antique stairways where one might meet someone who might have a word of destiny to say to the wanderer. It was a dim, twilight place ...

¹⁶*The Complete Verse*, Francis Scarfe (trans.), (London: Anvil, 1986), p. 179.

as if some strange vast mysterious truth long searched
for was about to be revealed; a sense of something to
come: an opening of doors, a drawing away of veils.¹⁴

When Hoeltje uses the key phrase I have italicized here, he clearly has in mind the sort of city Dickens has constructed in his novels. To evoke the sense of searching for the mystery, Hawthorne's house must be too large to comprehend at a single effort. The "delightful intricacy" necessary is the result of the work of many architects with conflicting aims. This is more powerfully achieved in a whole city where buildings of many centuries abut each other apparently at random and this is why London is preferable to a city with a more recent grid-iron plan such as Manchester. Dickens keeps whisking the reader from Bleeding Heart Yard to Covent Garden to the Marshalsea to Harley Street, which recreates the miscellaneous nature of the city as perceived by the person who is lost in it. Certainly there is room for readers to "go astray in" - and the point is that they should.

Ironically, this built-in mechanism of concealment does nothing so effectively as to alert the reader and the characters to the fact that there is something to be solved: the presence of a veil implies the existence of something hidden behind. Such mysterious environments provoke the imagination into speculation. Real life gothic architecture takes the shadow created by its projection into account as part of its design. The imagination is forced into action because so much is left to it. The vast scale of the gothic building also stimulates wonderment and fresh thought because the whole cannot be comprehended at a single glance. In *European Magazine* in 1795, a piece entitled 'On the Pleasure Arising from the Sight of Ruins or Ancient Structures' declared:

No one of the least sentiment or imagination can look
upon an old or ruined edifice without feeling sublime
emotions; a thousand ideas crowd upon his mind, and
fill him with awful astonishment.¹⁵

This is certainly true of the architecture of Mrs Clennam's house. Two people as different in temperament as Arthur Clennam and William Dorrit are both impressed at this level by the appearance of the house. For Clennam:

It always affected his imagination as wrathful, mysterious,
and sad; and his imagination was sufficiently impressible
to see the whole neighbourhood under some tinge of
its dark shadow. (II 10 p. 526)

Here is Dorrit's reaction:

¹⁴*Inward Sky: The Mind and Heart of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1962), pp. 549-50.

¹⁵quoted in Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 40.

So powerfully was his imagination impressed by it, that when his driver stopped, after having asked the way more than once, and said to the best of his belief this was the gateway they wanted, Mr Dorrit stood hesitating, with the coach-door in his hand, half afraid of the dark look of the place. (II 17 p. 602)

Ironically it is the very fortifications against investigation that stimulate the curiosity that leads to investigation. How much truer of the city! In the case of the Adelphi, it is the very "stoppage" that the place causes to Clennam's progress that draws attention to contemplation of its secret:

a train of coal-waggon's toiling up from the wharves at the river-side, brought him to a stand-still. He had been walking quickly, and going with some current of thought, and the sudden check given to both operations caused him to look freshly about him. ... (II 9 p. 513-14)

Attempts to obstruct the searcher's movement towards truth only serve to arouse his or her curiosity and stimulate observant thought. If this leads them to outlandish misconceptions like the "ghosts", it also helps them to arrive at the truth that underlies these apparently foolish ideas. Thus in the metropolitan fog, the muffled, sound-distorting air and the constant threat of violence that characterize London, the "heavy magnificent curtains" of Hoeltje's analysis are at their very heaviest, concealing the truth, but drawing attention to that very act of hiding. London's symbolic structure facilitates both concealment and revelation according to a fixed narrative scheme. The next chapter traces a similar pattern in Dickens's use of the city's dirt.

A great (and dirty) city: London's dirt as concealing agent.

Seven years after the publication of *Bleak House*, Dickens revisited the theme of the haunted passage in an article in *All the Year Round* entitled 'Sanitary Science'. The reality behind the phantom is conceived here, however, not as the living evidence of past misdeeds, but as disease-carrying effluvia, improperly disposed of:

there are many houses in Great Britain which have inherited evil reputations; there is a "ghost's room," or a "ghost's corridor," ... The true ghost's walk is, however, in the basement ... Your only exorcist is the sanitary engineer.¹

Whether or not Dickens was himself the author of the piece, the writer has grasped the imaginative link between contaminating dirt, ghosts and guilty secrets that creates the thematic unity of the novel from which the phrase 'ghost's walk' is drawn. The supposed apparitions in *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* are created by the re-emergence of suppressed truth and, as in the gothic texts, only disappear once that truth has been brought out into the open. Nevertheless, within the world of these Victorian novels, such spectres are merely imagined by the characters. Dirt, on the other hand, fulfils a similar symbolic purpose, but is given a much more literal existence.

Dickens's interest in sanitary reform is well documented.² His brother-in-law, Henry Austin, was chief inspector to the General Board of Health and had been influential in keeping the novelist informed on such issues. In September 1842, for example, he passed on a copy of Chadwick's crucial *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring People* to Dickens, who, in his *American Notes*, praised "Mr Chadwick's excellent Report" (18 p. 292). Both men were active members of the Metropolitan Sanitary Association, founded in 1850, and so the housing and health of the British population was firmly on the author's mind in 1848. Nevertheless, when Dickens prefaces his crucial forty-seventh chapter of *Dombey and Son*, to which the whole novel has been building up, with three pages on the slums, it is not, as Humphry House claims:

a curiously sudden, inept and passionate piece of propaganda for Public Health, ... ludicrously detached from the theme and mood of the novel.³

¹*All The Year Round*, vol. IV (1860), p. 31.

²For a fuller summary of Dickens's involvement in this field than I give here, see Norris Pope's extensive entry on 'Public health, sanitation, and housing' in Paul Schlicke (ed.), *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 469-74.

³*The Dickens World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), pp. 192-3.

Outbursts like these often occur at the pivotal points of Dickens's stories but, they are by no means journalistic digressions. Instead, urban dirt and the need for its removal symbolically provide the moral framework for the concealments and revelations that take place in his London. Indeed, this very passage prefigures the central symbolic method of *Bleak House*. To live in urban squalor in Dickens is to live both in a state of approach to death and in an atmosphere which conceals truths vital to existence. This chapter therefore, suggests that exclusion from knowledge is closely connected with death in Dickens's imaginative vision, just as it is in mystery religion. It begins by discussing the various types of death and concealment created by dirt in Victorian London in the perception of Dickens and his contemporaries so that the kind of regeneration and revelation required as an antidote to them may be explored. Thus it asks whether, in the words of the *All the Year Round* article, the "sanitary engineer" is the *only* exorcist in Dickens's fiction, or whether the task of cleaning up London involves the meeting of a spiritual as well as a physical need. The significance of the struggle between dirt and the anxious compulsion for clearing it away that characterizes life in the London of *Bleak House* will here be traced to its fundamental connection with the scheme of regenerative re-orderings that happen alongside it.

I. The physical and moral effects of dirt

Undeniably dirt was a major problem in the real Victorian metropolis and generated ills that were difficult to escape. In the 1840s, 30 000 inhabitants of London were without water.⁴ Proper sanitation was a luxury enjoyed by the few and, in addition to the human excrement in the streets, overpowering quantities of dung were generated by cattle being driven to Smithfield and other markets. As late as 1900, two hundred people were employed to remove manure from the streets of the single parish of St Pancras.⁵ Since the sewers were not constructed until 1858 and completed only in 1865, much of this seeped through into the water table, putting all London at risk. Outbreaks of cholera were a constant feature of life in the capital, and between 1845 and 1856, more than seven hundred works were published on the subject, many of them tracing the origins of the disease to the polluted atmosphere in which the poor of London lived.⁶ The discussion of London's sanitary problems in the forty-seventh chapter of *Dombey and Son*, then, contribute to a large body of

⁴A. S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives* (London: Dent, 1983), p. 62.

⁵*ibid.*, p. 84.

⁶*ibid.*, p. 118.

contemporary published work and to a widespread public debate. Overcrowding increased the risk of contagion. Between 1847 and 1848 50 000 people died from influenza in London alone and nationally typhoid caused twice as many fatalities in the large towns as in the country.⁷ London and the other enormous cities were correctly perceived as unhealthy environments conducive to the spread of deadly disease.

As well as these physical evils, however, dirt created social harm in London. Its attendant smell created a frontier of disgust between the classes. The rich could not tolerate the smell of the poor or of those areas in which they lived and so tended to remain in ignorance of their humanity and of their living conditions. Dickens discusses this in the passage in question by presenting the good doctor or clergyman walking through these areas, "his life imperilled at every breath he draws" (47 p. 737). There is a danger involved in crossing from the clean to the dirty zones of London. Middle-class readers are made to see the horror of life here by seeing someone from "our" world entering this territory. Then they are made to realise that some people are confronted with this danger throughout their existence. They must

Breathe the polluted air, foul with every impurity that is
poisonous to health and life; and have every sense ...
sickened and disgusted, and made a channel by which
misery and death alone can enter. (47 p. 619)

Here is a third result of squalor. By sensory means, polluted air poisons minds as well as bodies. Dickens argues that seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting nothing that is beautiful gives people nothing in their surroundings to indicate that there are values to aspire towards. When every impression registered by the brain is a signal of threatening physical destruction, moral degradation will inevitably develop. If society will leave its members in such a state, they are unlikely to develop the belief in love that motivates the highest virtues.

Ruskin diagnosed the same condition in *Fiction, Fair and Foul*, which begins with a description of the delapidation brought to Croxted Lane with the recent urbanization of the area. As evidence for the fundamental ugliness brought about by this transformation, Ruskin launches into an extensive and rather Dickensian list of "every unclean thing that can ... rot or rust in damp".⁸ The area that was once open, green and uncultivated - and therefore natural - is now full of the evidence of decay and decomposition. This is, however, chiefly reprehensible because of the adverse

⁷ibid, p.128.

⁸*The Works of Ruskin* (ed. E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn), 39 vols. (London: Geo Allen, 1908-1912), vol. XXXIV, p. 266.

moral effects such sights have upon the viewer. Constant contemplation of the "forms of filth, and modes of ruin" of their physical surroundings, Ruskin argues, induces a comparable state of "mental ruin"⁹ in the slum dwellers. Like those in *Dombey and Son*, who breathe "polluted air" and cease to believe in anything other than "misery and death", the inhabitants of Croxted Lane find that:

The power of all surroundings over them for evil; the incapacity of their own minds to refuse the *pollution* ... brings every law of *healthy existence* into question with them ... degrade the conscience, into sullen incredulity of all sunshine outside the *dunghill*, or breeze beyond the wafting of its impurity ...¹⁰

My italics suggest that the city's dirt held similar connotations for Ruskin as for Dickens. It was opposed to a whole concept whose twin parts were morality and good health. His chapter on "Purity" in *Modern Painters* proposes that the idea of "impurity" attaches fundamentally "to conditions of matter in which its various elements are placed in a relation incapable of healthy or proper operation; and most distinctly to conditions in which the negation of vital or energetic action is most evident". Appreciation of purity, he argues, is actually an apprehension of the unrestricted flow of life itself in an object. Dirt is therefore matter of lesser energy that seems to retard the energy of a more vital substance with which it has become mixed. Thus:

dust or earth, which in a mass excites no painful sensation, excites a most disagreeable one when strewing or staining an animal's skin.¹¹

Purity in an object is associated with the "vital and energetic connection amongst its particles, whilst "foulness is essentially associated with dissolution and death".¹² Ultimately, this life that defines cleanness, is, to Ruskin, part of God's character because it is "expressive of that constant presence and energizing of the Deity by which all things live and move, and have their being".¹³ Metropolitan filth is therefore to be abhorred because it excludes these healthy principles of life from view. The truths of God's love and vitality that Ruskin saw at work in Nature would not be apprehended by those living in squalor.

Not only, then, did the city's grime exclude a profound truth, but it imposed both physical and moral collapse. To Ruskin, dirt bred sin, the wages of which, in

⁹ *ibid*, pp. 266, 268.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.269.

¹¹ *ibid*, vol. IV, p. 129.

¹² *ibid*, p. 132.

¹³ *ibid*, p. 133.

Biblical phraseology, is death (Romans 6:23). For Dickens also, conditions that lead to living in dirt, beyond the control of the individual poor, ultimately obscure the truth of these laws of healthy existence. Dirt not only leads to death, but it denies the principle of life itself. London is thus presented as the breeding ground of twisted, unhealthy vegetable life, whose filthy situation no longer allows it to draw upon the divine source of life:

Vainly attempt to think of any simple plant, or flower, or wholesome weed, that, set in this foetid bed, could have its natural growth, or put its little leaves forth to the sun as GOD designed it. (47 p. 619)

That plant is, of course, used as a metaphor for the human beings bred in London. For an example of what is naturally produced in these circumstances, Dickens chooses this "ghastly child, with stunted form and wicked face" (47 p. 619) - that is, displaying both physical and moral deformity. *Bleak House* allows the reader the opportunity to consider this example as a fully realised character in the person of Jo. Admittedly, Jo is rather amoral than wicked - despite Chadband's attempts to make him fit the stereotype. Nevertheless, Dickens's narrator accounts for him as a typical organic result of his environment by employing the cultivation metaphor:

native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sink his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish. (BH 47 p. 724)

This figure of speech recurs again in a speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association on 10 May 1851:

no one can estimate the amount of mischief which is grown in dirt ... either in its physical or in its moral results ... ¹⁴

Metropolitan squalor is a self-perpetuating source of harm that must be dealt with if society is to return to a sound state. Thus the "polluted air" is "poisonous to health and life" as a whole and breeds an environment where "Vice and Fever propagate together" (*DS* 47 p. 619). It prevents the inculcation of the moral sense that cleanliness, with its revelations of the principles of life, was considered more likely to impart. For this reason, the slum dwellers are described as having been "born, and bred, in Hell!" (47 p. 619). Such assertions had serious implications for Victorian Christians. If souls were really prevented from living righteously because of their environment, and the middle classes failed to do what was in their power to help, then they must also be held responsible for their damnation. Their Saviour had strong words to say against those who denied knowledge of the way of salvation to

¹⁴K. J. Fielding, *The Speeches of Charles Dickens* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 128.

the poor (as, for example, in Matthew 23:13). If men and women were perishing because the lack of love shown precluded belief in a loving, self-sacrificing God, then the task of cleaning the city would be a revelation with the regenerative power needed to defeat the second death as well as the death of the body..

The reasons given in *Dombey and Son* itself for expanding upon this theme are not to do with airing a point of view or educating a politically aware readership, but rather with answering the question of how environment produces moral character specifically in order to account for the behaviour of his central characters. These paragraphs announce themselves as an inquiry into:

what Nature is, and how men work to change her, and
whether, in the enforced distinctions so produced, it is
not natural to be unnatural. (47 p. 619)

The passage on how slum conditions breed immorality is, then, offered as an illustration, already understood by the public, of how an apparently unnatural development of character may be entirely expected in a particular atmosphere. It consciously brings the world of London and the world of Dombey's house together in a cohesive symbolic unity. If the selfish pride of Mr and Mrs Dombey is to be made credible, the factors which have made unnatural behaviour natural for these people must be considered:

Coop any son or daughter of our mighty mother within
narrow range, and bind the prisoner to one idea, and foster it by
servile worship of it on the part of the few timid or
designing people standing round, and what is Nature to
the willing captive who has never risen up upon the wings
of a free mind ... (47 p. 619)

In metaphorically presenting Dombey as a prisoner, Dickens for the first time invites the reader to identify with this man and to ask himself, would I have been any different placed in identical circumstances of family obsession and flattery? Thus London's dirt is a symbol of all in the city that obstructs the revelation of love relationships and the morally deadening effects caused by this perversion.

Far from being a digression, Dickens's portrait of the slums also enhances the reader's perception of Florence, whose name immediately suggests a connection with the "simple plant, or flower ... set in this foetid bed" (47 p. 619). Dickens wishes to present her as the ultimate symbol of loveliness, blossoming and blooming in an unlikely environment of evil. Having already linked the flower metaphor with children growing up in dark circumstances, his subsequent application of it to

Florence makes her determined love and goodness seem especially remarkable. She is described as simultaneously an adult and a child:

as if the Spring ... sought to blend the earlier beauties of
the flowers with their bloom. (47 p. 624)

Florence's patient confidence in a father's love in spite of everything is her essential beautifying aspect and it is specifically this to which Dickens applies similar floral language. That he has already associated flowers with the pre-doomed slum children helps to account for the collapse of this most precious of all blooms, who suffers from "hopes that were withered and tendernesses [Dombey] had frozen". Ultimately, "even the patient trust that was in her, could not survive the daily blight of such experience" (47 p. 621). Florence eventually comes to realize that her father cannot be won round to loving her and, after he brutally strikes her, this apprehension causes her to leave the house altogether. This whole chapter depends upon making that process convincing. It must not be too sudden or sharp, for fear that Florence's early hope will seem superficial. Thus Dickens speaks of "The change, if it may be called one" (47 p. 621).¹⁵ Yet it must be definite and understood by the reader if the plot and symbolism are to progress. This is achieved by linking her and her environment to that of London's poor and their filthy surroundings by the image of the flower.

¹⁵Dickens's concern about whether it is possible for even his purest heroines to be corrupted by their environment, whether the cleanness of their nature is inherent and guaranteed or at stake and to be fought for, lies at the bottom of the famous debate on Little Dorrit's "speck". Briefly, she feels that it is unjust that her father should be expected to pay in money for his debts in addition to the spiritual price he has paid in the Marshalsea:

The prison, which could spoil so many things, had tainted Little Dorrit's mind no more than this. Engendered as the confusion was, in compassion for the poor prisoner, her father, it was the first speck Clennam had ever seen, it was the last speck Clennam ever saw, of the prison atmosphere upon her. (I 35 p. 409)

In *The Imagination of Charles Dickens* (London: Collins, 1961), pp. 40-1, A. O. J. Cockshut sees this as a speck indeed, an evasion of accountability which Little Dorrit heroically strives to overcome. F. R. Leavis, in his discussion of the passage in *Dickens the Novelist* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, p. 295), responded that "The speck, of course, is upon Clennam". Leavis is anxious that the girl should not only be virtuous but incapable of any flaw and argues that her perspective is correct. The problem is that this is not the point of view the story itself endorses. Little Dorrit herself seems to learn this and persuades Mrs Clennam that her confinement in the prison of her house and paralyzed body is not sufficient payment for the wrong she has done, but she must instead make restoration to those she has wronged. John Carey is correct in perceiving that "The scene redounds to her credit, because it shows that, though superior by nature, and 'inspired', she was not automatically safeguarded from corruption. She had to fight against it and did so triumphantly" (*The Violent Effigy* (London: Faber, 1979), p. 196). The reason this debate is significant is that Dickens takes pains to show that although his heroine is essentially pure, her purity is not maintained without a commendable struggle against her environment. The same is true of Florence in the chapter under discussion. The writer has made Florence's loyalty to her father in the face of emotional abuse the hallmark of her spotless virtue. When she is finally forced to leave him, Dickens must, rather uneasily, emphasize the difficulties created by her environment to account for this change of attitude without seeming to suggest that her environment has actually robbed her of any of her virtuous nature.

II. Dirt as an avenging spirit

Having shown how the living conditions of the poor make righteousness almost impossible for them, Dickens returns to the plot by showing that even the selfishness that perpetuates this state of things, characterised by Dombey's attitude to Florence, is equally a product of a sick money-centred environment. Failure to care for the needs of others is:

a perversion of nature in their own contracted sympathies
[i.e. those of uncaring legislators and property owners]...
as great, and yet as natural in its development when once
begun, as the lowest degradation known. (47 p. 620)

Boldly equating passive callousness on the part of the respectable with the more obvious moral outrages committed by the slum dwellers, Dickens shows that both are part of the same soiled order of nature. Those who produce the dirty areas and allow them to remain are no cleaner than those with no choice but to live in them.

Not only, then, does the neglect that leads to filthy slums teach something about the Dombey's, but the Dombey's teach something about the slums. This is especially so when it comes to the question of culpability. Earlier it was shown that the reader is invited to identify with Dombey as a victim of his environment, like the urchin child. He is also, however, associated with those who cause such conditions. Unhealthy regions of London are "the scenes of our too long neglect" (47 p. 620). Dickens envisages the spread of fever from these areas into the middle class parts of town with the movement of polluted air across the capital as the just wages of greed and apathy. Not only is it dangerous to cross from the clean to the dirty zones of London, but the fatal air from the dirty zones threatens to invade the purer districts.

Miasmatic theory of disease contagion was widespread in Dickens' s lifetime. Bacteriology did not develop until the 1870s, after his death, and water-borne contagion, the largest cause of disease transmission in London, was not established as a fact until 1848, the year when *Dombey and Son* appeared. In the novel, the movement of disease-carrying air through London is used as an analogy for the immorality generated here spreading across class boundaries in its effects:

if the noxious particles that rise from vitiated air, were palpable to the sight, we should see them lowering in a dense black cloud above such haunts, and rolling slowly on to corrupt the better portions of a town. But if the moral

pestilence that rises with them, and, in the eternal laws of outraged Nature, is inseparable from them, could be made discernible too, how terrible the revelation!

(47 p. 620)

As people born here lose the ability to respond to distinct ideas of good and evil, their crimes affect the more wealthy beyond the boundaries of the slums. In this way, "depravity" is seen to "blight the innocent and spread contagion among the pure". Now it is not only the children of the poor who are flowers of evil, but those of the rich as well. The gardener responsible for the condition of these plants is then shown to be none other than the middle-class reader:

where we generate disease to strike our children down ...
 there also we breed, by the same certain process, infancy
 that knows no innocence, youth without modesty or
 shame ...

(47 p. 620)

Wrong returning upon the head of the sinner - in this case, those who keep the poor down - is a very biblical concept. Here the image of the rich destroying their own children in misguided selfishness enforces the link with the main plot. Can Dombey be said to have struck down his own child? Certainly he will strike Florence in this chapter, but surely he cannot be thought of in these terms with regard to his darling boy? And yet he has created an environment in which his son could not live. Paul is a natural lad, suspicious of money and abounding in those qualities of love, affection and imagination which his father so singularly lacked. Dombey seems determined to create an atmosphere in his house which will stifle these virtues in Florence. In doing so, he renders the world equally uninhabitable to Paul, who cannot fit the mould Dombey would press him into. The claustrophobic atmosphere of this one house is now reflected in the polluted air of all London and the message is driven home that the circumstances which create poverty of environment are ultimately a curse upon those who cause them.

Dirt, then, is not only the result of a social crime, but it is the evidence of that crime asserting itself in a form that refuses to go away. It has replaced the ghost of gothic fiction as that which insists on the culpability of the concealer and brings him or her to judgement. *Bleak House* makes this connection explicit. Here again, Dickens devotes space to the miasma spreading from the slums, represented by Tom-all-Alone's, to infect the areas inhabited by the negligent legislators responsible for their squalor. He underlines this chain of cause and effect by personifying the slum and depicting "Tom" consciously exacting retribution:

But he has his revenge. Even the winds are his messengers,
 and they serve him in these hours of darkness.

(BH 46 p. 710)

Borrowing this language from Psalm 104,¹⁶ Dickens even suggests a divine causality for this means of vengeance. Earlier, Nemo's burial in the ridiculously full city churchyard prompts a similar scriptural allusion, this time from 1 Corinthians 15:42:

here, they lower our dear brother down a foot or two:
here, sow him in corruption, to be raised in corruption: an
avenging ghost at many a sick-bedside ... (11 p. 180)

The spread of fever is a parody of God's resurrection from the dead, in which the human body "is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption", and the language of sowing and reaping is conflated with that other biblical axiom, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7 and elsewhere). Once again the cultivation metaphor returns and immorality is considered as one with disease in the account of what is grown in London.

There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates
infection and contagion somewhere There is not an
atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas
in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about
him, ... but shall work its retribution ... (46 p. 710)

Gothic ghosts are victims who refuse to stay buried; Dickens invests urban dirt with their numinous accusing properties.

III. Fog and mud : dirty air and concealment

Whether the impulse is journalistic or poetic, Dickens wished in *Dombey and Son* to make the physical and moral infection in the air "palpable to the sight" by somehow rendering the 'noxious particles' discernible (DS 47 p. 619). Again dirt will bear the double burden of physical danger and moral signifier. If anything is to be done about the situation, a "revelation", to use Dickens's terminology, is necessary. Visible dirt has become the outward manifestation - one might even say the symbol - that there is something to be cleared up. As well as such an imaginary 'colouring in' of harmful air particles, a second fantastic suggestion is offered of how a revelation might be achieved, that of the:

¹⁶This Psalm speaks of God "...who walketh upon the wings of the wind: Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire" (v. 4).

good spirit who would take the house-tops off ... and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes ... (47 p. 620)¹⁷

Dombey too must be made to see the results of his selfish neglect and this is included in the general apocalypse heralded by the spirit. It is at this point that Dickens brings his London panorama back to the plot with the words, "But no such day had ever dawned on Mr Dombey, or his wife" (47 p. 739). The main story interacts with Dickens's social comment by making the results of egocentrism visible as dirt makes the sources of disease and socio-moral dysfunction visible. Dombey's apocalyptic realisation that he has created an environment in which his children could not live transfers the emotions involved in awakening to the need for social reform to a family context in which the reader can readily identify with them. This 'digression' on the slums of London demonstrates that the story has a wider significance than the tale of a single house.

In *Bleak House*, dirt - and in particular, dirty air - is not used simply as an illustration, but as a fully realized part of the novel's ethos and theme. An entire city in the advanced stages of decay, made filthy by the miasma proliferating from Tom-all-Alone's, provides the bewildering opening of this novel. In 1853, when *Bleak House* was published, the dirt of London's air was high on the public agenda, with the passing of a Smoke Nuisance Abatement (Metropolis) Act. Since it only regulated industrial atmospheric pollution, however, it was of only limited effect. London had fewer large factories than Britain's other large towns and its smog resulted from fuels burnt in smaller workshops and homes. Dickens was able to turn this problem of contaminated air into a symbol that would immediately strike a chord with many of his readers.

Chapter One has the High Court of Chancery rather than Tom-all-Alone's as the centre to which the dirt of London gravitates. The two are linked. Upon the reader's first visit to the slum, he or she is told "This desirable property is in Chancery, of course" (16 p. 257). Here is an objective example of greed preventing improvement. Had the parties not been squabbling so stubbornly, the area might have been clean and habitable. As the previous chapter of this thesis suggested, the most obvious function of the polluted fog is to reflect the obstructions to clarity cherished by the court. Those involved in Chancery suits, after all, must be prevented from seeing why the case is taking so long to conclude. The miasma that obscures vision and endangers health in the slum is a by-product of the same

¹⁷ The most immediate allusion here is to Alain Henri's evil spirit, Asmodeus, in *The Devil Upon Two Sticks*.

concealing cloud which prevents any movement to rescue Tom-all-Alone's. The shift from literal to metaphorical use of dirt here is almost seamless. The narrator makes it difficult to tell when he has stopped using the words "fog" and "mud" to describe the external conditions around the court and when he has started to use them to describe the complexity of the procedures, so that the uncomfortable confusion generated by the former remains intensely present when the latter are discussed. Similarly, Tulkinghorn encourages an obfuscatory layer of dust to surround his home. It is immediately compared to that metaphorical dust which "the law... may scatter, on occasion, in the eyes of the laity" (22 p.352). Dirt reflects deliberate mystification for corrupt ends.

Krook, with his ironic title of Lord Chancellor, is made to represent the whole system because of his desire to amass information for personal gain and then to conceal it from others. Constantly wishing to be the only one in the know, he has "a liking for rust and must and cobwebs" (5 p. 70). In his death, deliberate mystification is shown not merely to destroy the concealer, but to spread outwards and pollute others. He dies:

the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts inborn,
inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and
that only - Spontaneous Combustion ... (32 p. 519)

Krook's legacy, the "stagnant, sickening oil, with some natural repulsion in it that makes them [Tony and Guppy] both shudder", so "offensive to the touch and sight, and more offensive to the smell" (32 p. 516), has equal horror for the reader. Despite the author's insistence in the preface upon the factual possibility of spontaneous combustion, the manner of Krook's departure has been chosen because of its symbolic aptness. Concealment has brought its own nemesis. The dust that he has used to hide the documents he possesses has formed an environment unwholesome for himself, just as other exclusions of truth, light and air in Dickens lead ultimately to destruction for the concealer. Yet, disturbingly, the harm does not stop there. The explosion of Krook sends his internal substances outward to merge with the fog that clouds the view from Jobling and Guppy's window, making it still darker, dirtier and more impenetrable. In the fog of *Bleak House*, dripping with such matter as this, Dickens has found a way to make the "vitiating air" of *Dombey and Son* really "palpable to the sight" and the effect is terrifying.¹⁸

¹⁸Baudelaire's response to the task of making the 'vitiating air ... palpable to the sight' was to personify vice in grotesque figures and to dress them in clothes that emphasize their common characteristics with the urban smog:

Un brouillard sale et jaune inondait tout l'espace ...
un vieillard dont les guenilles jaunes
Imitaient la couleur de ce ciel pluvieux ...

Who, then, in real terms, does Dickens hold responsible for creating such terrible effects? The forty-sixth chapter of *Bleak House* describes a generator of fog and dirt still more potent than Krook and the Chancery court: the "mighty speech-making there has been, both in and out of Parliament" (46 pp. 708-10). Delays were caused to sanitary reform by various political, religious and social factions arguing with each other whenever the subject was raised. These are presented as a cloak for an apathetic indifference and lack of will to provide a real solution, as deceitful and unproductive as the endless talk in Chancery. Mrs Jellyby's dirtiness is culpable for similar reasons. Her devotion to the African mission literally produces filth at home because it occupies her attention exclusively. It is an evasion of responsibility and a failure to engage with a problem in which she could offer some practical help. London's general lack of cleanliness is referable to the same selfish reluctance to act. Dirt is the evidence that some in the city are deliberately covering from view the fact that they have a natural duty to their neighbours. As it spreads its disease towards the homes of negligent legislators, it is also the means by which this mutual responsibility re-asserts itself. Nor is this merely a symbolic way of representing obstructions to an underlying social inter-connectedness. As F. S. Schwarzbach points out in his article, '*Bleak House: The Social Pathology of Urban Life*':

The much celebrated opening description - of a city mired in mud and clouded in fog - seems to present disconnected phenomena, but in fact nothing could be further from the truth. For most of the mud, made up of dirt, rubbish ... and raw sewage, ends in the Thames and then oozes downstream to the Essex marshes. There it rots and festers, soon producing infectious effluvia that are blown by the raw East wind back over the city. *This is the stuff of the novel's dense fog, a fog that spreads disease wherever it is inhaled - which is to say, as the novel insists, everywhere* To say, then, as often has been said, that the mud and fog are *symbols* of social malaise is to miss the point entirely: Dickens is pointing to a literal economy of filth and disease that functions not as symbol but as fact

to poison the very air his readers breathe, according to scientific laws as inexorable as those of gravity.¹⁹

Dickens is using a physical reality recognized by the medical authorities of the time to exemplify, rather than to provide a metaphor for, the concealment of an unavoidable system of social relationships.

Polluted air, the damage done by the greedy and selfish, is not confined then to areas like Tom-all-Along's. All life in London is affected. For exactly this reason, many Victorian attempts to deal with the problem failed. There was a widespread conservative fear of centralized action. Unfortunately this was precisely what was needed. Fever, after all, did not respect borough boundaries, as Dickens pointed out in a speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association on 6 February 1850:

With regard to the objectors on the principle of self-government, and that what was done in the next Parish was no business of theirs, he should begin to think there was something in it when he found any court or street keeping its disease within its own bounds, or any parish keeping to itself its own fever or its own smallpox, just as it maintained its own beadles and its own fire engine.

Dickens made the same point more concisely in a later speech to the Association on 10 May, 1851, remarking that "The air from Gin Lane will be carried, when the wind is Easterly, into May Fair."²⁰ Piecemeal legislation was inadequate. Everyone who lived in London was responsible collectively for dealing with this problem, as the fiction states so forcefully.

Thus the mystery in which this metropolitan squalor participates is that identified by Raymond Williams, the "real and inevitable relationships and

A dirty yellow fog flooded the whole of space ...
 an old man whose yellow rags
 Were the same colour as the rainy sky ...

(*Les Sept Vieillards*' lines 9, 13-14, *The Complete Verse*, Francis Scarfe (ed. and trans.), (London: Anvil), pp. 178-70) Each soiled inhabitant is made part of the atmosphere of the whole and their moral squalor becomes inescapable and omnipresent. Dickens's wicked old man and is more directly merged with the fog by the explosion of his body into fragments that form part of it.

¹⁹in *Literature and Medicine*, vol. IX (1990), p. 95.

²⁰Fielding, *op cit*, p. 128.

connections"²¹ that necessarily exist between people in any society. The insistence upon London's squalor as a problem with causes and effects tracable to the metropolis as a whole and necessitating action on the part of the entire metropolitan community also reinforces Richard Maxwell's later sociological interpretation of the mystery, "it is the city that hides, the city that must be revealed".²² What the fog hides in *Bleak House*, and yet what it makes known, is the utter indivisibility of London as a social ecosystem. This is also the mystery which the good spirit of *Dombey and Son* is called upon to reveal. Yet there are aspects of the horror experienced by both Esther and the narrator of *Bleak House* when confronted with London's dirt that demand a very different sort of clarity from this sense of interconnected social structure. Apart from their place in the society represented by the city, there are other entirely different senses in which they feel that the mud and fog are eroding their identity.

IV - Dirt and distinctions: fog and the framework of the universe

At Mrs Jellyby's house, Esther's sense of propriety is offended by the lack of proper distinctions made in her cupboard. Her list of things found in this mess is truly haphazard including: "bits of mouldy pie, sour bottles, Mrs Jellyby's caps, letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes of children, firewood, wafers", and numerous other objects which do not ordinarily belong together (30 p. 480). Esther's description of this woman's house is clearly a microcosm of the other narrator's description of the merging of objects in dirt in London at the beginning of the novel. One notes that "no domestic object which was capable of collecting dirt, from a dear child's knee to the door-plate, was without as much dirt as could well accumulate upon it" (30 p. 479) and the other describes "mud, sticking ... tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest" (1 p. 11). Pedestrians blend with "tens of thousands of other foot passengers" and dogs are "undistinguishable in mire" (1 p. 13). One simply cannot tell what anything is. Esther's own reaction to this same scene shows that it disturbs her perceptions of the universe. London, she says, has 'the dirtiest and darkest streets that ever were seen in the world (I thought), and in such a distracting state of confusion that I wondered how the people kept their senses" (*BH* 3 p. 42). Not only are contemporary species blurred, but all ages are confounded together in the regressive slime that pollutes the city:

²¹*The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 155.

²²*The Mysteries of Paris and London* (Charlottesville and London: University of Georgia Press, 1992), p. 15.

it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. (1 p. 13)

Each day the crowds add "new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud", suggesting a surreal juxtaposition of various geological eras, all visible at once.

This is disconcerting for the same reasons as those that terrify Henry Knight, in Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, as he hangs from the cliff, imagining all the layers of life fossilized within it.²³ He is in danger of having his particular identity as a human being eroded and of merging into an indiscriminate mass of animal life. This is what death means to him. For Dickens too, the loss of individual identity - particularly as a human being - is death, and this is why a clear revelation of origins and personal identity fulfils a regenerative function. To him, however, the place which threatens the distinction human beings apprehend between themselves and other living organisms is not located in the strata of the coastal rock, but in the dehumanizing environment of the metropolitan slum. Anxieties of this kind are a characteristic feature of Victorian thinking about the city. As notions of inheritable evolution developed in the nineteenth century, the parallel concept of degeneration emerged. The thought that a significant proportion of the British population might not be progressing in the direction of the fittest who would survive, but might instead be systematically losing the 'higher' traits of humanity, was horrifying. Contemporaries were not slow to identify this section of the community as "the 'waste' products of the struggle for survival" and there was no doubt about the habitat which encouraged this threat to the healthy development of mankind. William Greenslade sums up contemporary concern about the apparent proliferation of the unfit:

The post-Darwinian city was imagined not merely as a city of moral darkness and of outcasts. Here were tracts of new degenerate energies, menageries of sub-races of men and women So far from entailing extinction, these creatures of the biologically degenerate underground were the tenacious, perverse, and ambiguous fit/unfit, with an appropriately dark future ahead of them.²⁴

Clearing away of dirt, which so comprehensively blurs perception of the distinctions between species, is, then, in the Victorian world, a revelation of man's place in the developmental scheme of things.

²³(London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1975), p. 222.

²⁴*Degeneration, Culture and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 36, 38-9, see also chapter 3.

So irrelevant are distinctions in the spot where Knight experiences his moment of terror, that it is even known as "the Cliff without a Name".²⁵ Names are the means by which human beings assert their grasp of their own identity and of the identities of objects in the surrounding world. Equally, Dickens informs the reader that "few people are known in Tom-all-Alone's by any Christian sign" (*BH* 22 p. 358). Edwin Chadwick comments on this phenomenon in the dirtiest tenements of Glasgow, quoting a police inspector who tells him,

The fact is ... they really have no names. Within this range of buildings I have no doubt I should be able to find a thousand children who have no names whatever, or only nicknames, like dogs.²⁶

Perhaps this was to some degree due to an understandable reluctance on the part of Glaswegian children to give their names to 'the polis', but the remark recalls Snagsby's difficulty in finding Jo because of the meaninglessness of names in Tom-all-Alone's. Not only does this lack of nomenclature make such human beings indistinguishable from each other, but it also means that they can not be differentiated from the animals around them. They are unflatteringly described as:

a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers ... (16 p. 256-7)

Jo too knows what it is:

To see the horses, dogs, and cattle, go by me, and to know that in ignorance I belong to them ... (16 pp. 258)

Even this impression is too optimistic, however. Dickens goes on to state that there can be no sense of belonging in the nameless mire - not even to the canine world:

He is not of the same order of things [as George], not of the same place in creation. He is of no order and no place; neither of the beasts, nor of humanity. (47 p. 724)

London's dirt dehumanises and threatens the whole structure of the universe and this is why it must be cleared away. In the meantime, "Jo, and the other lower animals, get on in the unintelligible mess as they can" (16 p. 258).

This is the most fundamental reason why, in the world Dickens describes, dirty dwellings promote immorality. If it becomes impossible for individuals to understand how they are defined in relation to the rest of the things that combine to form the universe, then their sense of proper behaviour towards them will be

²⁵*A Pair of Blue Eyes*, op cit, p. 218.

²⁶*Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring People* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965), pp. 198-9.

threatened. One of the 'unnatural' traits of the downtrodden classes mentioned in *Dombey and Son* is that of "losing and confounding all distinctions between good and evil" (47 p. 619). For dirt is about distinctions. The whole concept involves making judgements about the value of matter, what is and is not presentable and where it may or may not be touched. For example, a live fish is quite clean in a river, but dirty on a wedding dress. In her book, *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas says:

Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity.²⁷

Douglas points out that notions of dirt have to do with ideas about how the universe, and its microcosm, society, are held together. This principle governs the rules of tribes and religions regarding which foods, animals, people or forms of sexual activity are considered clean or unclean.

The motives of the Victorian sanitary reformers reflect this conception of hygiene. For them, the keeping apart of elements that did not belong together, for the preservation of the body, was closely associated with the keeping apart of people that did not belong together, for the preservation of a sound society. Many recognised that overcrowding led not only to an inability to keep contaminating matter away from areas of food preparation, but also to the impossibility of maintaining separate male and female sleeping accommodation. Behaviour which outraged the reformers and was labelled 'dirty', was widespread as people became inured to sleeping with many partners. Social as well as sanitary distinctions were eroded. Dr Gilly, the Canon of Durham, pronounced to Chadwick that:

It shocks every feeling of propriety to think that in a room, and within such a space as I have been describing, civilised beings should be herding together without a decent separation of age and sex.²⁸

Writing in 1855, R. Bickersteth put the same argument in terms that conceive physical and moral squalor as different aspects of the same problem:

There are tens of thousands in this metropolis whose physical condition is a positive bar to the practice of morality. Talk of morality amongst people who herd ... together with no regard to age or sex, in one narrow

²⁷*Purity and Danger* (London and New York: Routledge, 1984), p. 36.

²⁸*Report*, op cit, pp. 198-9.

confined apartment! You might as well talk of cleanliness
in a sty, or of limpid purity in a cess pool.²⁹

Perhaps this dimension to the sanitary question explains Dickens's religious choice of language as he describes the fog in *Bleak House*:

where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the
waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. (1 p. 13)

London can take something originally pure and make it unclean. Mary Douglas talks of pollution and defilement in terms of socio-religious classification of matter. Victorian reformers were able to use dirt as a moral metaphor so naturally - without even necessarily being conscious that they were doing so - because the separations between objects for the preservation of healthy life enforced by sanitary principles reflected their ideas of which relationships between people were and were not acceptable if the moral principles of healthy life were to be maintained. But the classification of clean and dirty matter in Douglas's view reflects not only a structure of relationships between human beings, but also of relationships between mankind and the rest of the universe and sometimes ultimately with its creator. If for any reason mankind's sense of his place in the hierarchy is upset, it is felt that chaos will result - not merely the moral chaos which has already been considered, but ontological chaos for the individual and society. To prevent this from happening at the most fundamental level, peoples come to regard those things that endanger their world view as unclean. Contact with them defiles and must be avoided.

In her second chapter, Douglas illustrates this with the familiar example of the abominations of Leviticus. Those animals that do not fit into their categories - a scheme which she works hard to impose upon Leviticus, and not without success - are pronounced untouchable. Her reasons for this are as follows:

holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the
class to which they belong. And holiness requires that
different classes of things shall not be confused ... the
dietary laws would have been like signs which at every
turn inspired meditation on the oneness, purity and
completeness of God.³⁰

The Levitical laws were interpreted differently in an article which Dickens published on 20 October 1860 in *All the Year Round* entitled 'Sanitary Science', which stated quite bluntly, "Many of the Levitical laws are sanitary laws".³¹ In other words, those things which were unclean were simply those that would have an adverse effect

²⁹quoted in *Endangered Lives*, op cit, p. 7.

³⁰*Purity and Danger*, op cit, pp. 54, 58.

³¹*All The Year Round*, vol. IV (1860), p. 29

upon the digestion, that were difficult to store and which were likely to go off in a hot climate, contaminating the other foods with which they came into contact. Nevertheless the discrepancy between the two views is not as great as it may at first appear. For the Levites, the world existed and was held in shape simply because of the holiness and pure goodness of God and his utter abhorrence of evil. What defined them as human beings was their ability to have a relationship with this God, which required a similar intolerance of all that was not holy or clean. The principle behind their rules was God's much repeated commandment: "Be holy; for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44 and elsewhere). Their law shaped a society that constantly reinforced this fact, by dividing almost every activity and every object into categories of clean and unclean, as Douglas's theory insists. For nineteenth-century readers, other laws came into play. Their post-Enlightenment world view depended on their ability to discern and act upon rational demonstrable fact, which elevated them above the beasts of the field. Dirt and consequent death in the real and the imaginative London threatened that distinction between thinking mankind and irrational animal. Slums and their inhabitants uncomfortably disproved by their very existence the Utilitarian faith that market forces would automatically raise economic conditions for all. Further, urban squalor showed that deep within human nature, where reason ought to have been the distinguishing motivator, was something that fundamentally prevented people from putting rational ideas into practice. Selfishness made a mockery of reason's demands that each must live in a state of hygiene and enable his or her neighbour to do the same. These slum areas were unclean for the reason that their existence undermined the whole world view of Victorian humanists. Their need to deal with them comes from a moral obligation to support the framework of the universe. This, of course, is directly comparable to those duties felt by earlier societies to exclude certain anomalous things from the sanctified zones that represented how the world ought to be organized - or even to exterminate them altogether.

It was in this light, for example, that the matter of eugenics appealed to Francis Galton, the founding father of that science. For him, the need to stem the tide of degeneration and to clear away the conditions that led to it was more than a mere question of commendable social improvement. In his *Inquiries into the Human Faculty*, he wrote, "Man has already furthered his evolution very considerably ... but he has not yet risen to the conviction that it is his religious duty to do so deliberately and systematically".³² In the new religion of secular progressivism a sacred duty to protect the pure remains. In the view of men like Galton, a general concealment of

³²quoted and discussed in *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel*, op cit, p. 26.

the principles of healthy life was still in operation in modern London, even if revelation of these principles was to be arrived at through reason, rather than ideological belief. This concealment was dragging human beings back to the animal nature from which they had evolved, dissolving their identity and leading to the death of the species. This must be resisted by creating living conditions that facilitated the upward development of humanity. Unwholesome urban society was felt, by the humanists of the late nineteenth century, to be in severe need of regeneration, and the principles of rationality would have to be revealed and acted upon if mankind was to survive. Nothing less than the salvation of humanity, not from hell, but from regression and extinction was being called for in the campaign for cleaning up London and Galton correctly identifies this aim as a religious one. Dickens was more keenly aware than most of this dimension to the contemporary cry for sanitary reform, whether from secular or Christian voices. Even on those occasions when he presents the solutions to metropolitan dirt as purely physical, he recognises that the compulsion to implement them cannot be described without specifically religious vocabulary, since the aim of all these attempts to restore cleanness is specifically religious: the salvation of humanity from ontological dissolution and death.

V. Jo and Esther: compulsive cleaners

One option available to the rationalist confronted with the problem of the filthy metropolis was, with Podsnappian arrogance, to sweep the dirt out of sight. A disturbing example of this is the way in which the long term poor and unemployed were conceptualised as the residuum, or waste matter, in the process of mankind's evolution. The only solution was totally to eliminate such contaminating matter from London. The words of Samuel Smith, a writer in the *Contemporary Review* in 1885, sound chilling in the light of twentieth-century history, but arose quite naturally from this way of thinking about people and dirt:

While the flower of the population emigrate, the residuum stays, corrupting and being corrupted, like the sewage of the metropolis which remained floating at the mouth of the Thames last summer, because there was not scour sufficient to propel it into the sea.³³

³³quoted in G. S. Jones, *Outcast London* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 309.

Engels's description of Manchester reveals a city built by the middle classes with radial roads lined with beautiful houses so that the wealthier inhabitants could cross the whole city without even seeing the slums that lay behind:

The town itself is peculiarly built, so that someone can live in it for years and travel into it and out of it daily without ever coming into contact with a working class quarter or even with workers I have never elsewhere seen a concealment of such fine sensibility of everything that might offend the eyes and nerves of the middle classes.

Stephen Marcus quotes this passage as convincing proof that "the invisible poor of the mid-twentieth century was a reinvention of the invisible working classes of the mid-nineteenth".³⁴ Although the city has not grown according to a preconceived plan, one class has declared another untouchable and has forbidden itself close contact with its members. Here is the classic example from real life of the city structured, like the haunted house, to aid the concealer.

Jo is a victim of this approach. He is himself part of the dirt that must be swept away. Continually told to move on, he recognises his place among the defiled. Most of us have an uncomfortable recognition from time to time that we do not conform even to our own ideal of what a human being ought to be, let alone anyone else's, and Jo's unease is an emblem of our own. It is especially poignant then that the sole aim of this filthy creature's existence should be to keep an area clean. The one thing he knows is "that it's hard to keep the mud off the crossing in dirty weather, and harder still to live by doing it" (16 p. 256). He is powerless to sweep away the dirt that puts him in daily risk of disease. He is powerless to shift the dust that covers London, generated by Chancery and Parliament, which blinds men and women to the good that might be done. He is powerless above all to clear away the metaphorical dirt that prevents him and the other Londoners from re-asserting their identity as human beings.

Jo provides a neat parallel with the concerns of Esther Summerson. She too begins her life like dirt that must be swept away. Because she has not been born in the proper sphere of wedlock, her very identity runs contrary to what ought to be in her aunt's outlook and thus she must be hidden from the sight of decent folk. Miss Barbary tells Jarndyce that she had "blotted out all trace of her existence" and that, like Jo, "she would be left entirely friendless, nameless, and unknown" (17 p. 276). In this, she resembles her father, whose actions lead to an equal need to hide. Nemo,

³⁴'Reading the Illegible' in H. J. Dyos, M. Wolff (eds.), 2 vols. *The Victorian City, Images and Realities* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), vol. I. pp. 258-60.

in a "foul and filthy" room (10 p. 165), "established his pretensions to his name by becoming indeed No one" (11 p. 167). Opium fumes blend with the other poisons in the air of this venue for loss of identity. He is also personally dirty. His beard is "ragged ... and grown, like the scum and mist around him, in neglect" (10 p. 165). The defilement of a human nature in the eyes of the world is here physically objectivized.

Esther grows up with the feeling that she too is to decay in hiding until her life has been forgotten, resembling Florence, who is similarly shut away and placed by the language of the novel in metaphorically dirty surroundings because she does not fit her father's rigid conception of how the world ought to be. Esther is the shameful secret that undermines the Dedlock dynasty and, in gothic fiction, she might have appeared as a ghost rather than an illegitimate child.³⁵ As has been discussed, dirt replaces the ghost of the gothic novel as concealed information about past transgressions that refuses to stay buried.³⁶ Just as the dirt that threatens to become "an avenging ghost", bringing disease to those responsible for it (11 p. 180), so those responsible for making Esther metaphorically dirty and hiding her in the metaphorical obscuring dirt find that Esther becomes "the dreadful truth in the legend of the Ghost's Walk .. who was to bring calamity upon the stately house" (36 p. 586). Her resemblance to her mother in her obscure London surroundings constantly threatens to reveal the fornication that has brought her into being.

Since dirt, then, serves as a metaphor for the attempt to conceal the personal or social connections that ought to obtain between people, it is appropriate that Esther's search for her origins, in the form of her mother, is through the "slimy" places of London such as Limehouse Hole, "which the wind from the river ... did not purify" (57 p. 868). As the chase nears its conclusion, this atmosphere becomes more and more phantasmagorical:

the wet housetops, the clogged and bursting gutters and water-spouts the stained house fronts put on human shapes and looked at me [so that] the unreal things were more substantial than the real.

It ends in a graveyard which is "hemmed in by filthy houses ... on whose walls a thick humidity broke out like a disease" (59 p. 913). Much of Dickens's fiction is about confronting unsettling truths about one's origins. Pip's despair upon discovering that his identity as a gentleman is built upon Magwitch's money and not

³⁵See pp. 67-8 above.

³⁶See pp. 78-80 above.

Miss Havisham's is the most famous example of this. Shortly after *Great Expectations*, Dickens published an article that said:

Sewage ... is very much like our convicts; everybody wants to get rid of it, and no one consents to have it.

The article continues with the writer contemplating the sewage and reflecting:

I felt as if the power had been granted me of opening a trap-door in my chest, to look upon the long-hidden machinery of my mysterious body.³⁷

The city's dirt and hidden workings serve in the article, as in the fiction, to symbolize the forces that prevent the searcher from looking into his or her own self, but sometimes contemplation of the dirt is the key to learning about origins and identity.

Just as Jo feels a compulsion to sweep the crossing, Esther is obsessively tidy. Her chief joy is to keep Bleak House in order. She frequently remarks upon dirt elsewhere and considers Caddy virtuous because she learns to tidy up. Her response to being told she is 'dirty' is exactly the opposite to her father's. She is creating a universe where she has the moral and ontological place denied her by Miss Barbary. Her persistent tidying involves the same quest for dispelling concealing agents which motivates her search for Lady Dedlock, exemplifying Mary Douglas's definition of "dirt avoidance" as a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience".³⁸

Not only can Esther make her own universe like this, but she also has the power to transform the lives around her. Jarndyce and Ada feel "that wherever Dame Durden went, there was sunshine and summer air" (30 p. 486). She is able to transmit the sense of truth and purity - and of everything making sense - that is the antidote to the poisonous air of London and all that it represents. Whereas the smog embodies obstruction and concealment and can blind even the good characters such as Carstone, Esther represents clarity.

If the order of Esther's world is based on principles of tidiness that bear no relation to anything else, it is an efficacious delusion. On the other hand, if it is based on an accurate perception of the way the universe is, which the atmosphere of the city blocks out, then it is a revelation. But just as the Levitical laws of ceremonial cleanness primarily revealed the purity of God's character and the manner in which human beings were able to relate to Him, Dickens felt clean air would allow a natural revelation of a Christ who was invisible through the man-made dirt of London.

³⁷'Underground London' in *All The Year Round*, vol. V (1860), p. 454

³⁸*Purity and Danger*, op cit. p. 2.

Assuming the voice of a slum dweller responding to an outraged moralist, he exclaimed in a speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association:

give me my first glimpse of Heaven through a little of its
light and air ... help me to be clean ... and, Teacher, then I'll
hear, you know how willingly, of Him whose thoughts
were so much with the Poor.³⁹

Heaven is also equated with clean air in *Little Dorrit*. Edwin B. Barnett in his article, '*Little Dorrit* and the Disease of Modern Life',⁴⁰ usefully traces the similarity between the claustrophobic atmosphere of London, with too many inhabitants sharing too little air, and the unwholesome environment of Mrs Clennam's house. Arthur's re-introduction, in Book One, Chapter Three to a London dominated by the same Puritan attitudes as Mrs Clennam's house shows clearly the unwholesomeness of the distorted religion. Locked up and stale on a Sunday afternoon, it sets the tone for the whole novel, much as the opening paragraphs do in *Bleak House*. Since the reader has already encountered the bewildering suffocation of London on the journey there, the concentrated claustrophobia of Mrs Clennam's house makes the power of her distorted religion seem terrifyingly universal. If the clouds of dust within Mrs Clennam's house represent an attempt to restrict the visibility of truth in the manner of the gothic haunted house, and the fog of the city expands their symbolic meaning, then the fall of her house leads above all to the clearing of the air. Once the dust from the collapse settles down, the stars can clearly be seen. As will be seen in more detail in the chapter on railways and the transformed cityscape, the panorama of London that follows this event shows a London based on different principles from that of the Puritan London which the reader is taken through at the beginning of the book.⁴¹ The new prominence of the city churches emphasizes that with cleaner air, heavenly values have been restored. Along with Esther and Florence, Amy Dorrit reveals the goodness that the soiled environment of London renders invisible. They show that moral distinctions and perception of one's place in an interdependent universe do indeed have value, contradicting the message written in the surrounding dirt.⁴²

³⁹*Speeches*, op cit, p. 129.

⁴⁰*Nineteenth Century Fiction*, vol. XXV, pp. 199-215.

⁴¹See pp. 107-9, 146-9, 169 ff below.

⁴²Barnett also draws attention to the ways in which London's dirt amplifies the concealment of Merdle's house. In particular the meanderings of the dirty river that dominate Book One of Chapter Three are reflected in the behaviour of the man himself:

Merdle, as usual, oozed sluggishly and muddily about his
drawing-room, saying never a word. (II 12 p. 553)
His obsession with making money is metaphorically linked to disease:
Bred at first, as many physical diseases are, in the
wickedness of men, and then disseminated in their
ignorance ... communicated to many sufferers who are
neither ignorant nor wicked. (II 13 p. 566)

Ultimately the framework of the universe that dirt threatens for Dickens is not only that of reason. Instead it has as its root an idea of collective responsibility and love. This is why the novelist still found a value in the person of Jesus, despite disbelieving in the inspiration of the Bible.⁴³ *The Life of Our Lord* and passages such as Alice's death in *Dombey and Son* demonstrate that what was most significant to Dickens was not Christ's sacrifice of himself for sin but his socially inclusive caring life. The gospels are:

the blessed history, in which the blind lame palsied
beggar, the criminal, the woman *stained* with shame, the
shunned of all our dainty clay, has each a portion, that no
human pride, indifference, or sophistry ... can take away ...

(DS 58 p. 785, my italics)

In other words, the dirty must be acknowledged as human beings and not swept away by the genuine follower of Christ. Allowing slum conditions to remain, or shutting out the misery of their inhabitants, jeopardized belief in the care that each man should have for his fellow.

The stories and symbolic environments created by Dickens show concepts of dirtiness formed by people like Dombey or Mrs Clennam who exclude as dirty those who do not fit into their self-centred conceptions of how the world ought to be and because they have power, they cause the institutions of the city to reflect these exclusions. The clarifiers, Florence, Esther and Little Dorrit, expose the narrowness of such conceptions of the world and demonstrate the need to see where one stands in relation to the wider universe. Dirt must still be cleared away but the judgement must be made on proper criteria. And only those aware of redeeming love can evaluate this properly.

Underpinning this emphasis on transcending a spoiled origin through redeeming love is the Christianity which partially shaped the general cultural climate of the Britain in which Dickens grew up. Recognition of one's helpless place among the defiled and confronting the mysteries of one's origins in the dirt closely resemble the initial stages of Christian salvation. Although Dickens's characters must ultimately find a comprehensive order for themselves in the chaos of London's dirt,

This chapter on the widespread popularity of dangerous speculation is entitled 'The Progress of an Epidemic'. Contagion is explicitly used as a metaphor for a contamination of the mind caused by greed. Merdle's scatological name cannot be an accident: concealers like this man are the offensive matter from which harm spreads. Dickens returns to this theme in the filthy river and lucrative dungheaps of *Our Mutual Friend* and I return to it in chapter six of this thesis.

⁴³See p. 34 above.

Christ-like figures such as Walter Gay and Alan Woodcourt point the searcher towards a new ontological place in the universal structure. Once this has been achieved, they can even help those responsible for their degradation to confront their own equally dirty origins in redeeming love. The search for a way of escape from humanity's deathbound uncleanness that drives the mystery religions and Christianity in particular, also informs and lends power to Dickens's vivid stories of hope that the contaminating dirt of London can somehow be transcended and cleansed.

"The crowning confusion of the great, confused city": what is hidden in Dickens's city and why?

The last two chapters explored aspects of the metropolitan experience that effect concealment. They discussed the use made of London's labyrinthine layout by various concealers to keep their misdeeds and moral emptiness from public scrutiny as an expansion of the gothic haunted castle. The gothic villains aim to obscure a system of relationships, including how they and others fit into a rightful line of descent. The complicated structure of their houses amplifies the confusion of other characters, trapped within them, who seek to re-establish a knowledge of these relationships. Comparably, Dickens's city depicts the ontological confusion that arises when concealers deliberately obscure the system of relationships, including relationships of social accountability, that ought to obtain among human beings. In particular, London's dirt and filthy air were seen to hide the connections that form the system of the city. The neglect and inaction of the Chancery Court and the Parliament create a bewildering miasma that allows the wealthier classes to evade their responsibility, but the dirt merely breeds disease that spreads to the richer parts of town. Thus the masked social interconnection re-asserts itself more insistently. Finally, dirt conceals a still larger sense of relationships between the people and things that constitute the universe as a whole.

The previous chapter suggested that Dickens may have conceptualized the need for this wider revelation of connections as a search for mankind's place in the world in relation to God, much as the writer of Leviticus promulgated laws of cleanliness to restore a sense of self-definition and national re-orientation towards the pure character of God. At any rate, it is identity as an individual, as a human being distinct from the animal world, with moral obligations and rights, that the London fog of *Bleak House* threatens to erode. To lose this identity is the ultimate death that concealment brings about, necessitating an urgent revelation of one's place in the system. Such a revelation is clearly regenerative to Dickens, restoring life to the individual, to society and to the human race as a whole.

This chapter draws together the conclusions of the previous two to arrive at a consistent definition of the truths hidden in Dickens's London and the motivation for their concealment. Do Dickens's discoveries of truth dramatize characters' personal compulsions to know things, or the operation of a Providential force, which must give mankind the regenerating vision of divinely appointed order? Do the concealing phenomena of the city represent and assist a psychological urge to hide from view, or

an active resistance to a Providential revelation? Obviously the answers to these questions must be complicated and inclusive. Here I work towards an understanding of what typically informs the drive to conceal and the nature of the resisted truth, which can then be tested in the next chapters, which discuss those features of the city that effect discovery.

I. Personal urges to conceal

In *Dombey and Son*, *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, concealment leads inevitably to dissolution and death. This can be recognised in the personal stagnation suffered by Mr Dombey and Mrs Clennam as they hide behind their respective barriers. The process is vividly figured in the decaying houses which they inhabit and more vividly still in the rotting city whose complexity often aids the keeping of secrets. London's dirt and fog, the metropolitan phenomena most extensively used by Dickens to emphasize the obstacles to clear vision in this environment, bring death not only to those bewildered by them, but also to those whose negligence has created them. Their refusal to acknowledge social connections leads to physical decay and disease and also to a dissolution of ontological identity that is ultimately the death of humanity. But where do these concealing forces have their origin, as Dickens depicts them, that death should so automatically attend them?

The resemblance borne by certain houses and by the surrounding city to the individuals who live within them, both in terms of appearance and behaviour was noted earlier.¹ These environments serve, within the symbolism of the novels, to externalize the concealers' power to prevent access to the truth about their lives. It is therefore not unreasonable to look for an explanation of why concealment leads to death in the psychology of these characters.

Mrs Clennam's self-confinement in her house is a slow, lingering death-in-life. Dickens emphasizes that her change from "old active habits" (*LD* I 3 p. 34) to virtual paralysis comes from a wilful desire to have as little as possible to do with the external world. It is with "a grim kind of luxuriousness" that she relishes declaring her ignorance of what passes outside her door:

All seasons are alike to me I know nothing of summer and winter, shut up here. (*I* 3 p. 34)

¹See pp. 47 ff above.

This delight in her separateness from the outer world seems to be as much a factor in her limitation to a single room as her physical condition. The lack of fresh air caused by this locking of doors against the rest of the world erodes her health:

There was a smell of black dye in the airless room, which the fire had been drawing out of the crape and stuff of the widow's dress for fifteen months, and out of the bier-like sofa for fifteen years.

(I 3 p. 34)

This is an environment that feeds continually upon itself, without allowing any influx of life from outside. Mrs Clennam's motivation for creating it is her safety within it from eyes prying into her past. She deliberately rejects her real connections with the rest of humanity: that she is not Arthur's mother, but that she *is* the person responsible for paying Amy Dorrit her inheritance. Concealment, to Dickens, is a separation of self from relationship to the external world - a denial of a life-giving sense of connection with mankind at large. It is maintained at the cost of interaction with others and can only end in a state of atrophy.

When viewed from outside, the house emphasizes the fact that its impenetrability is responsible for its decay:

The debilitated old house in the city, wrapped in its mantle of soot, and leaning heavily on the crutches that had partaken of its decay and worn out with it, never knew a healthy or a cheerful interval, let what would betide. If the sun ever touched it, it was but with a ray, and that was gone in half an hour as to street noises, the rumbling of wheels in the lane merely rushed in at the gateway in going past, and rushed out again So with whistling, singing, talking, laughing and all pleasant human sounds. (I 15 p. 172)

The rusty "iron railings" and buttresses "overgrown with weeds" (I 3 p. 32) have excluded natural light altogether in order to preserve Mrs Clennam's isolation. Its life-giving effects are completely prevented. In its place is the light of the fire, which "shone sullenly all day, and sullenly all night" and "was suppressed, like her, and preyed upon itself evenly and slowly" (I 15 p. 172). The lesson that a perverse denial of relationship with the outer world leads to atrophy and death is not taught by this one house alone, however. As Arthur walks out into the metropolis at large, the streets are all "depositories of oppressive secrets", locking their inhabitants up from the outside world (II 10 p. 526). London itself, shut up on Sunday, has severed all connection with anything outside itself, including even the "unfamiliar animals", "rare plants or flowers" and "natural or artificial wonders of the ancient world" shown in the British Museum (I 3 p. 29). The result of this is mental and physical stultification, exemplified in the common lack of running water. People "live so unwholesomely,

that fair water put into their crowded rooms on Saturday night, would be corrupt on Sunday morning" (I 3 p. 29). Dickens constantly suggests that the reason for this is that the metropolis is populated - and indeed governed - by numerous Mrs Clennams, neurotically creating a total environment where human connections may be lost, so as to wallow in introspective self-righteousness. Others, such as the Barnacles and Merdle, equally shut the door of their houses to connections with the outside world in their creation of an utterly self-defined world. The accumulated unhealthy results of this in the totality of London may be seen as Arthur loses himself among the "Parasite little tenements" around Park Lane:

Rickety dwellings of undoubted fashion, but of a capacity to hold nothing comfortably except a dismal smell, looked like the last result of the great mansions' breeding in-and-in; and, where their little supplementary bows and balconies were supported on thin iron columns, seemed to be scrofulously resting upon crutches On the door-steps there were ... butlers, solitary men of recluse demeanour, each of whom appeared distrustful of all other butlers wicked little grooms in the tightest fitting garments, with twists in their legs answering to the twists in their minds, hung about in pairs, chewing straw and exchanging fraudulent secrets.

(I 27 pp. 316-17)

Of course this recalls the "half-dozen gigantic crutches" upon which Mrs Clennam's rotten house is "Propped up" (I 3 p. 71). Such artificial systems of support for house and city show that the egocentric worlds of those responsible for them are also vulnerable to decay. The crutches remind the reader of Mrs Clennam's physical degeneration and suggest the wasting self-destructiveness of the attitudes that have formed the ethos of London. Like Mrs Clennam, the builders, inhabitants and masters of these Park Lane houses, and of the sunlight-excluding city as a whole, have created for themselves an entirely self-referential world, out of sheer self-love and refusal to acknowledge necessary connections with the human race. This refusal is what concealment is to Dickens and his terrifying cityscapes graphically show that its logical result is inbred destruction.

Here, Dickens seems to have imaginatively anticipated twentieth-century thinking exemplified by Georges Bataille, whose book *Literature and Evil* (*La Littérature et la Mal*)² discusses self-absorption as a perverse instinct, common to human beings, to embrace death rather than life. Expanding on the thinking of de Sade and Sartre, Bataille writes of the instincts of mankind as informed by two

²Alistair Hamilton (trans.), (London: Calder & Boyars, 1973)

mutually incompatible desires. One is a wish to sustain life at a healthy level. He writes:

The mainspring of human activity is generally the desire to reach the point farthest from the funereal domain, which is rotten, dirty and impure.³

The other instinct is a wish to pursue an intensity of present experience, which ultimately exhausts the self and destroys the individual. The intensity sought may be sexual or sensual in some other way, it may be religious and mystical, but in so far as it is allowed to exclude the instinct for personal survival, it conflicts with the desire to preserve life. In fact, gratification of such desires must necessarily be at the expense of life. It is a perverse embracing of death and autodestruction and it is this that defines it as evil to Bataille. In a Christian culture, in this analysis, an act is based upon evil because it chooses instant satisfaction, even knowing that damnation will be the result, over everlasting benefit to the soul; in a materialist culture, it is evil because it privileges instantaneous use of energy and material over rational preservation of them for on-going needs. Bataille resembles the type of economist who believes that the function of production is not consumption, but investment in further production. When pleasure is allowed to outweigh work, immediate consumption the need for saving, and, in the Christian scheme, temporal delights to outweigh eternal bliss, this second instinct is deathbound. Bataille's starting point in the task of defining evil is thus that "it expresses an attraction towards death".⁴

The characteristic of this state of mind that chooses death instead of life is an exclusion of all considerations outside of self. Pursuit of intense pleasure is deathbound not merely because it spends the self, but because in its preoccupation with self it cuts the individual off from the contact with the rest of the world that supplies life. In Mrs Clennam's egocentric religion, Dickens provides an example of just such a state of mind that feeds only upon self, severing ties of relationship and responsibility to the outside world in order to enjoy a consuming sense of self-definition. Her rejection of "The world" and "its hollow vanities" is based upon a deadening absorption in herself (I 3 p. 34). Indeed, her ascetic doctrine that she is making reparation for her sins and even redemptively sharing the "consequences of the original offence" (II 30 p. 756) elevates her pleasure in her confinement to a great intensity. In actual fact, it is maintained by refusing to acknowledge her relationship of debt to Little Dorrit and no real reparation is made. The concealment which

³ibid, p. 48

⁴ibid, p. 16.

maintains her religious fantasy is a withdrawal from the connections of social life which Bataille would have labelled as deathbound and evil.

Victor Sage in his *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition*⁵ points out the biblical habit of referring to the body as the decaying house of the spirit, to be rebuilt at the resurrection, as for example in the final chapter of Ecclesiastes. It is the Fall that has caused this effect to the human body and the end result is death. In the Christian conception, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) and the collapse of the body/house is the natural result of evil. Bataille might have preferred to say "the goal of sin is death" and the body and other external projections of the self, such as the house/city, will also tend inevitably towards collapse, if this path is chosen. In the gothic tradition, those who bury secrets in their wickedness are keeping the houses they build for themselves in an unwholesome state of approach to death. Mrs Clennam certainly attributes the decay of her own body to the results of sin, seeing herself as "justly infirm and righteously afflicted" (I 5 p. 45). Her theology is flawed because she chooses this form of self-sacrifice that benefits nobody rather than the self-sacrifice of genuine repentance which would involve relinquishing her cherished hate and making amends to those she has wronged. In other words, repentance would bring to light the system of moral obligations long hidden by Mrs Clennam's religion. Such a state of stubborn self-imposed death, hiding one's own real accountability, precludes any hope of real regeneration. The fall of her decaying house is the only way the book could end. It is the inevitable result of her evil - not because it is her punishment, but because it is what she has chosen. Little Dorrit shows her that in cutting herself off from life to enjoy her own self-righteousness, Mrs Clennam has embraced an evil of a very Bataillian kind. Representing the concealment upon which it depends in every locked and dilapidated street, the decaying London of *Little Dorrit* shows in amplified form the self-absorbed, death-driven psychology of individuals like this.

In a neat parallel, the reader is made aware that the building of Mr Dorrit's dream castle, the new home with which *he* wishes to consolidate his egotistical world is motivated by similar self-absorption. It is equally obvious that his shelter within it will lead ultimately to the collapse of his own body and spirit. In the first half of the book, the limited world of the Marshalsea, to which he is confined, acts as a reinforcement of his rigid ego boundaries. Its walls are accompanied by a world of characters who screen out the truth of his accountability and deferentially support his view of himself as a great man. Once both of these are removed, he has to re-create

⁵(Basingstoke and London: Meredith, 1988)

an environment that acts in the same way as this towering prison-house. Thus no-one from this point onward is allowed to mention the Marshalsea and the disgrace attached to it. His desire to build a vast new home is an expression of this.

Immediately before his death, it becomes an obsession:

Mr Dorrit, in his snug corner, fell to castle-building
 It was evident that he had a very large castle in hand.
 All day long he was running towers up, taking towers
 down, ... looking to the walls, strengthening the defences,
 giving ornamental touches to the interior, making in
 all respects a superb castle of it. (II 18 p. 615)

He employs the rest of his time doing similar work on his image among his circle of wealthy acquaintances. Unfortunately, the Marshalsea remains in the vaults and ghosts such as John Chivery (II 18) constantly threaten to re-appear in the state rooms. Such constant mental building and re-building shows an uncomfortable awareness of the weakness of mind and body that will lead to the disclosure of his past and the fall of his structured world. Projecting this anxiety onto his brother, his metaphors are closely tied to the book's symbolic pattern of egotistical dwelling places resembling dying flesh:

Fast declining, madam. A wreck. A ruin. Mouldering
 away before our eyes. (II 19 p. 623)

William Dorrit's selfishness in building his ego-house is responsible for much of the suffering in his youngest daughter's world and is symptomatic of the oppressive evil in the atmosphere of the whole novel. Passages like this vividly display the life-denying character of the concealment by which such self-centredness is maintained. But the most striking reminder of imminent collapse is in the scene where all of this takes place - the city once more:

And now, fragments of ruinous enclosure, yawning
 window-gap and crazy wall, deserted houses, leaking
 wells, broken water-tanks, spectral cypress-trees ... and
 the changing of the track to a long, irregular, disordered
 lane, where everything was crumbling away, from the
 unsightly buildings to the jolting road - now, these
 objects showed that they were nearing Rome. (II 19 p.617)

Admittedly this is not London, but Rome is chosen as a city where a great civilisation has broken down in decadence, showing what must happen to the proud of today. London too has in its structure many remnants from previous civilisations serving as grim reminders that structures of the ego in the past have been brought to nothing. Dickens's reference to "a Congregationless Church that seemed to be waiting for some adventurous Belzoni to dig it out and discover its history" (I 3 p. 31) links

archaeology with recent civilisation. Such a sight on the road to the old house points out not only that London has secrets to be unearthed, but also that religious structures not unlike that of Mrs Clennam's *Weltanschauung* may eventually pass away.

Dickens's depiction of such psychologies as motives of deathbound concealment is not confined to *Little Dorrit*, but is a recurrent theme in his work. Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*, for example, is a still more extreme re-working of Mrs Clennam. She too is carefully unconscious of what passes outside her house, saying, "I know nothing of days of the week; I know nothing of weeks of the year" (I 8 p. 63), and goes as far as stopping all the clocks at twenty to nine. Like Mrs Clennam's, her twisted psychology demands that she wallow in a sense of wrong done to her. Her withdrawal from society, which makes her declare, "I have done with men and women" (p. 60), is perversely deathbound. Cut off from interaction with humanity, she sits in decayed clothing in a dirty room, surrounded by decomposing foodstuffs, upon which rats scurry as upon a dead body. No wonder Pip describes her as "corpse-like" (p. 61). This version of the state of mind is a bitterly personal response to pain which has developed into emotional sadism. Her isolation becomes the means of her particular concealment, by which she exacts her revenge upon the male sex. Since it is impossible for Pip to approach her, she can pretend to be his benefactress, claiming, in this case, a spurious relationship with him, when she is utterly cut off from the inclination to love or to do good to anybody. Again, the city contributes to the reader's experience of this psychology. Although she has little connection with London, Pip believes that it is she who has sent him there and he finds the city, dominated by Newgate, the public hangings and the carcasses of Smithfield as locked and deathbound as her house.

Perhaps Dickens's earliest developed exploration of such a state of mind, however, is to be found in *Dombey and Son*. Mr Dombey cuts himself off from the outside world in a still more neurotic attempt to keep his inner life self-contained. He cannot bear the thought of anyone else being allowed access to his feelings and emotions. His intense enjoyment of his own importance depends upon being able to "shut out all the world as with a double door of gold" (20 p. 275). Only Paul, who is part of his identity as Dombey and Son, is invited inside this door. All other connections are covered over by means of money and this is the concealment by which his ego boundaries are maintained. He covers his dependence upon the wet-nurse to care for Paul by changing her name and insisting upon the monetary nature of the transaction. His relationship to Florence and need of her love is carefully excluded from his attention. Again, this feeding upon a fixed notion of self has a deathly effect. Like Mrs Clennam, he ends up "a lone prisoner in a cell, or a strange

apparition that was not to be accosted or understood" (I 3 p. 25). His house shows the atrophy that comes from cutting off circulation with the rest of the world. Just as in her house, "The summer sun never shone on the street, but in the morning about breakfast time It was soon gone again to return no more that day" (*LD* I 3 p. 26), daylight has also been excluded from Dombey's dwelling by "a monstrous fantasy of rusty iron curling and twisting like a petrification of an arbour over the threshold" (23 p. 311) and the house fills with mildew and mould (p. 312). The whole area seems to echo this stagnation in its oppressive monotony and closedness. The dirty decaying panorama of chapter forty-seven⁶ suggests that the city is in the hands of people as neurotically anxious to conceal their obligations to the poorer classes as Dombey is to conceal his obligation to the Toodleses or to Florence.

II. Anti-social urges to conceal

More clearly than anywhere else in the novel, chapter forty-seven of *Dombey and Son* explains the atmosphere of the metropolis as a whole in terms of Mr Dombey's character. In this London, wealthy people are desperate to hide the connections by which they are linked to other people in the social system of the city. Despite their physical proximity to the poor and dependence upon their labour to maintain their prosperity, they refuse to acknowledge their duty of care to them, or the suffering they undergo:

dainty delicacy living in the next street, stops her ears, and lisps "I don't believe it! (p. 619)

This personified figure, in stopping her ears, enacts both a withdrawal from society into a self-contained fantasy and a concealment of her responsibility for her neighbour. What the middle class people addressed here are hiding from themselves and others - indeed that which requires "revelation", to use Dickens's term - is the fundamental interconnectedness between human beings in this system. The good spirit who removes the house-tops is charged with "rousing some who never have looked out upon the world of human life around them, to a knowledge of their own relation to it" (p. 620). This relationship is specifically that of a parent to a child, which is the theme of the novel's main plot. Implicating the prosperous, but socially negligent among his readers, Dickens says, "*we generate disease ... we breed ... infancy that knows no innocence*" (p. 620, my italics). By creating the economic conditions that obtain in the city, such people have brought the diseased and immoral

⁶considered at length throughout the previous chapter of this thesis.

poor into being and thus have a responsibility to them. Dainty delicacy's wish to cover this relationship is directly linked to Dombey's refusal to act as a loving parent to Florence. The reader can readily grasp how the latter is the result of a warped psychology that leads to atrophy and death. In this chapter it becomes clear that the upward-spreading dirt and physical decay of London are also referable to a collective warped psychology that conceals vital relationships in preference for a self-absorbed, deathbound intensity of life. Dickens calls this "a perversion of nature in their own contracted sympathies and estimates" (p. 620). Here, it is clear that the corrupt values that bring death to Dombey's world through denial of vitalizing relationships are the same values upon which the decaying city has been built. The "double door of gold" by which Dombey reduces all of his dependencies upon others and responsibilities to them to impersonal monetary transactions, is also the system by which relationships are concealed in a London dominated by the cash nexus. All of this corroborates Raymond Williams's claim that for Dickens what is really concealed in the city is the social truth of mutual interdependence within a total system, that "the fog ... keeps us from seeing each other clearly and from seeing the relation between ourselves and our actions, ourselves and others".⁷ Yet crucial as this obscured system is in these novels, this passage makes it equally clear that Dickens is interested in the morbid state of mind that deliberately creates the obscurity. In depicting the darker side of Dombey's consciousness, he is explaining the breakdown of a society where relationships are based solely on monetary values, but he is also exploring the deathbound and self-absorbed desires in the human condition that are causes, as well as effects, of a particular economic system.

In identifying the anti-social behaviour that causes society to disintegrate with perverse, deathbound psychological urges, Dickens's thinking seems to anticipate ideas later formulated more theoretically by Jean Paul Sartre and Georges Bataille. The latter, in *La Littérature et la Mal*, develops a societal as well as a personal definition to the choice of the deathbound urge. He begins by assuming that human beings' healthy instincts to survive will lead them to mutually beneficial interaction, with the community to which they belong. To Bataille, by its very essence, "Society is governed by its will to survive" which is "based on calculations of interest".⁸ On sheer utilitarian grounds, what promotes the life of society at large promotes the life of the individual. Refusing to put anything into the system that ought to sustain the individual is a deadly withdrawal from life. Bataille cites Heathcliff's "rejection of [society's] rationality" in *Wuthering Heights*, which makes him "committed in his

⁷*The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 156.

⁸*Literature and Evil*, op cit, p. 6

revolt to the side of evil", as the "ultimate death".⁹ Therefore abstracting oneself from one's proper relationships of responsibility which should sustain society is based upon the same psychological urge - or "perversion of nature" as Dickens calls it - that was labelled "evil" in its personal dimension. In the locked and decomposing London of *Little Dorrit*, Dickens creates a symbol large enough to depict these urges corrupting a whole society. Merdle and the Barnacles feed upon its inhabitants without giving anything back. They have withdrawn into a closely exclusive world by erecting barriers of concealment against those who try to scrutinize exactly how they contribute to the social system. Dickens also labels such concealment as evil, saying that the followers of Merdle "would have done better to worship the Devil point-blank" (II 25 p. 691). Thus Dickens emphasizes that a social truth is being hidden, but his concern is also with the psychotic desires that lead to this and other acts of concealment.

Dombey's values turn out to be the values of the whole metropolis in the novel that bears his name and in *Little Dorrit* too, the masking of social relationships with monetary ones is explored. But London here is not only an embodiment of the values of the cash nexus, but of Mrs Clennam's Puritan values, which, as has been seen, are based on the same self-absorbed and deathbound psychology. When Arthur re-enters it in Chapter Three of Book One, the whole capital seems overshadowed by the restrictive religious mentality that prevails in his mother's house. Because of the Sabbatarian laws, "Everything was bolted and barred that could by possibility furnish relief to an overworked people" (I 3 p. 29). Mrs Clennam's desire to luxuriate in a rulebound religion rather than to acknowledge her obligations to the dispossessed is the climate of the entire city, just as the use of money to mask what Dombey and Merdle owe to society is reflected in London as a whole. Dickens is careful to show that the closing of doors to places of recreation and refreshment on Sunday is really a way of withholding what is due to the working classes. He ironically asks:

what secular want could the million or so of human beings whose daily labour, six days in the week, lay among the [airless buildings and streets] from the sweet sameness of which they had no escape between the cradle and the grave - what secular want could they possibly have upon their seventh day? Clearly they could want nothing but a stringent policeman. (*LD* I 3 p. 29)

The implication is that the Sabbatarian legislators owe the workers the ability to enjoy rest on this of all days, but by adopting a solipsistic, ascetic Puritanism, they too are concealing their obligations in order to revel in self-righteousness. If the house gives

⁹ibid, pp. 7-8.

symbolic expression to Mrs Clennam's deathbound, concealing urges, then London expresses the effects upon society of being governed by such urges. The same stagnation, atrophy and death that resulted from concealing links of responsibility with the world in the former is still more visible in the latter. Everything there has ceased to circulate freely. The atmosphere has become such that "the inhabitants gasped for air" and even the Thames no longer seems to move from the country to the sea, maintaining a healthy, life-giving contact with the outside world:

Through the heart of the town a deadly sewer ebbed and flowed, in the place of a fine fresh river (I 3 p. 29)

As London continually feeds upon itself, it becomes dirty, decayed and dead:

In every thoroughfare, up almost every alley, and down almost every turning, some doleful bell was throbbing, jerking, tolling, as if the plague were in the city and the dead-carts were going round. (I 3 p. 29)

The deadness-bringing concealment, to which Little Dorrit's regenerating revelation is the answer, is truly a social problem, but it is symptomatic of a general self-absorbed and self-destructive aspect of human psychology.

Throughout Dickens's oeuvre, then, the discoveries that bring conclusion to the novels and fulfillment to the characters are revelations of connections between individuals and the rest of humanity. Whether they are initially aware of it or not, protagonists yearn to find their origins. To lose their sense of where they came from is to lose contact with the network of human relationships that holds society together and to dissolve their identity, which, to Dickens, cannot be truly defined without reference to that network. Some, such as Oliver Twist or Esther Summerson, need to learn the most direct form of origins, the identity of their parents. This is the most immediate way of determining how they are related to the rest of the world. Others, such as Tom Pinch or Pip, seek their benefactor, but the quest is the same: who is it that has made me who I am? Still others need to know who *ought* to be acting as parent or benefactor to them. Jo's ignorance of his parentage is symptomatic of his ignorance that society has a debt to care for him. There are also those who wonder whether there are any to whom *I* should be a parent or benefactor. Arthur Clennam is the most obvious of these but Mrs Clennam and Dombey are among those forced to discover their relationship of obligation to and dependency upon others. It is these connections, then, that the aspects of the city which have been considered so far primarily conceal. And, of course, these connections are ontological connections, determining for each person who he or she is and why. The key question that Raymond Williams identifies as posed by Dickens's London, what is my relationship to and function within the social system as a whole, is, then, a representative and

integral part of the wider question identified there by J. Hillis Miller: what is my relationship to and function within the phenomena that make up "the world" as a whole? Miller describes the "adventures" of each Dickensian protagonist as "essentially attempts to understand the world, to integrate himself in it, and by that integration to find a real self".¹⁰ It is only once this question has been answered in Dickens that a fully informed sense of familial and social duty can emerge. Revelation restores the network of ontological links between people as "creatures of one common origin, owning one duty to the Father of one family, and tending to one common end" (*DS* 47 p. 620), and, Dickens argues, restoration of social ties will be the inevitable result.

III. Discovering guilty origins

For some of Dickens's characters, the quest for origins leads to the discovery that in generating them, their parents or benefactors have committed an act of transgression against the ordering principles of society. Esther Summerson learns that her mother, Lady Dedlock, conceived her out of marriage. This act not only transgresses the system of relationships between people that binds society together, but, as Lady Dedlock herself freely admits, the code of permitted human relationships laid down in God's commandments. In Pip's case, too, the issue is one of confronting guilty origins. If Miss Havisham stands in the relationship of benefactor to him, his identity as a gentleman is based upon a permissible foundation: if Magwitch, then it is not. Magwitch has not transgressed sexual boundaries, leading to illicit conception, but he has acquired money in ways that contravene the law of the land to beget a "son" by means of this wealth. His dilemma is the question of whether he can accept that identity without accepting the criminality that has created it. Arthur Clennam too grapples with just this question of whether his relationships with the rest of humanity require him to set right the wrongs of his predecessors. Indeed, the discovery of parentage in Dickens is frequently a revelation that the protagonist has rightfully inherited not the parents' wealth, but their debts. Thus, although Dickens repudiated the doctrine of original sin, much of his later fiction is concerned with the question of what to do about inherited guilt. These novels continually explore the sensation of discovering that one's identity is based upon transgressions committed by parent figures and of seeking a way to deal with this knowledge. It is frequently this ancestral transgression that the city in its concealing aspect is hiding. The parents

¹⁰*Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 329.

have severed their relationship of obligation to God, "the Father of one family", and to the rest of humanity, in their pursuit of selfish ends. The city's complexity has been highly successful in obscuring the existence of this evaded responsibility. Thus the descendants frequently remain unaware that the atrophy and deadness of their own lives are the result of the transgressive circumstances in which their identities were shaped by the ancestors. Awareness of this fact is part of the necessary revelation of the individual's connections with the world.

Chadband reads Jo's confusion and decaying physical state as a result of his having been born into original sin and feels that revelation of this fact, delivered in a lengthy sermon, may set that proper relationship straight. He announces his remarks as an explanation for Jo's deathbound failure to participate in Divine life:

O running stream of sparkling joy

To be a soaring human boy!

and do you cool yourself in that stream now, my young friend? No.
Why do you not cool yourself in that stream now? Because you
are in a state of darkness, because you are in a state of obscurity,
because you are in a state of sinfulness, because you are in a state
of bondage.

(19 pp. 313-14)

Although Dickens uses this language ironically, Chadband's statements are true - otherwise there would be no point to the revelations sought in *Bleak House*. Jo is indeed in darkness and bondage, unable to enjoy the stream of healthy life and this is vividly shown when he is ejected back into the city streets. Here, the darkness takes the form of the "red and violet-tinted smoke" that comes between him and "the great Cross on the summit of St Paul's Cathedral", which he feels to be "the crowning confusion of the great, confused city" (p. 315). The implication is that the cross, "that sacred emblem", holds the answer to the darkness and bondage which Jo's life in the mud and smog impose upon him, but that these metropolitan conditions prevent him from apprehending it. In its own architecture, the city contains the regenerating information he needs, but other aspects of the city conceal it from his view. In the same way, the bibles carried here by the church-goers contain the same message, but Jo does not know how to read it.

The message of the cross is restoration of the broken relationship between mankind and God. In the Christian scheme, the place of Calvary is to reverse the effects of Adam and Eve's choice to reject their relationship of love with God and afterwards with each other. There, Christ embraced the death and the terrible isolation from the life of God that human beings suffer as a result of their separation

from God, which resulted in the cry from the darkness, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27: 46) The unpaid debt incurred by the parents and shared by the descendants was at last paid on their behalf, returning the proper system of relationships. Where mankind sought a self-absorbed happiness that excluded God and eternal life, God did the opposite, reaching out and renewing the vital connection. The cross is an act of complete altruism, the offended party suffering punishment for the offender, displaying God's complete love for a fallen world. Whilst Dickens does not read the cross as compensation for original, as well as individual sin,¹¹ he does see the self-giving love displayed there as the way of renewing relationships between people that were broken by the concealments of the 'parents' who have shaped their identities. It is the way of counter-acting the death and atrophy that has resulted from these past obscurings of interhuman ties, perpetuated by individuals whose identities have been framed in transgressive circumstances.

Chadband, unlike Jo, is intellectually equipped to read this story of ultimate altruism in the bible and in the architecture of the city. It is in his power to declare God's relationship of selfless love to the world by showing His grace and kindness in action. Instead, in his self-important and incomprehensible sermon, he merely condemns him as a sinner. The sterile Christianity he offers can only label people as wicked, having lost its power to enlighten and transform because its practitioners fail to reflect the selfless giving of Calvary. In blocking the message of the cross, he has contributed to the confusing smog. Such people have obscured the primary symbol of their faith, making the restored relationship between people and God that it offers "so far out of ... reach" (p. 315).

Not only, then, is Jo in a state of darkness, but people like Chadband are keeping him there. In labelling Jo's state as primarily one of "sinfulness", he is like those mentioned in *Dombey and Son* chapter forty-seven, who behold another slum child and "hold forth on its natural sinfulness, and lament its being, so early, far away from Heaven" (47 p. 619). The narrator invites them to think about how the squalid urban environment has made the development of healthy morality almost impossible for such boys and girls, who have "been conceived, and born, and bred, in Hell!" (p. 619) For physical, rather than theological, reasons, they have been "shapen in iniquity" (Psalm 51:5). The atmosphere in which they live predisposes them to wickedness. London's dirt obscures the relationship of love and care that ought to obtain among human beings. No wonder, then, that those who live in it should not see the system of human interconnectedness that underlies morality.¹² Their origins

¹¹See pp. 36 ff above.

¹²See pp. 73 ff above.

in poverty are the result of a collective transgression of society which leads to each individual born into its results committing further transgressions with grim inevitability. In effect, they have been born into an artificially generated original sin. In wording their predisposition to wickedness caused by the slum environment in such a way that it is almost a predetermination, Dickens aimed to shock his religious middle class readers into feeling that their negligence might be a form of manmade foreordination to a lost eternity. The Chadbands of the world are thus complicit in a villainous concealment in condemning the Jos for living in a situation their own inactivity has created. For Dickens, there is no original sin *per se*, but there are originators, who cover their relationships of responsibility to enjoy selfish pleasure and leave the morally blinded people, brought into being in the process, to deal with the results as they may.

IV. Concealment versus the cross

Jo has been denied the possibility of participation in the renewed system of connections promised in the cross. Constantly told to "move on", he is not allowed to assume any fixed place in relation to others. His inability to orient himself towards the city's crosses restates the futility at the inquest of his swearing on a bible of whose contents he is entirely ignorant. In the event, it is Woodcourt, not Chadband, who goes furthest towards explaining the cross in terms he can understand, by demonstrating the relationship of love in practical kindness.¹³ Even he, however, can only go so far. Jo finds the words of the Lord's Prayer "wery good" (47 p. 734) and thus akin to the "wery good" generosity of Mr Nemo (11 p. 178), who turns out to be the father of another lost child. Woodcourt, in repeating the first line of that prayer, seeks to reveal Jo's relationship as a child to one common father, but whether he succeeds or not is left chillingly ambiguous. To Jo, the words seem to be merely disconnected phrases. The pessimism of his question, "Is there any light a comin?" (47 pp. 733-4) contrasts pathetically with Paul Dombey's confident vision of "The light about the head" of Christ (*DS* 16 p. 225). Here, the effect of having been born into an atmosphere where relationships between individuals and the framework of the universe has been obscured is bleak indeed.

¹³The next chapter of the thesis explains the specifically Christian dimension of the revelation he offers, see pp. 146-9.

In his inability to read the city churches, Jo is in a different category to characters such as Ralph Nickleby, who can and do read their message - and deliberately reject it. The latter commands church bells to:

ring chimes for the coming in of every year that brings this cursed world nearer to its end. No bell or book for me; throw me on a dunghill, and let me rot there to infect the air! (*NN* 62 p. 906)

His pursuit of riches has been maintained by refusing to acknowledge his relationships of responsibility, even to the extent of disowning links with his own son, Smike. In his dying curses, he equates this concealment with a rejection of Christianity and its metropolitan manifestations. Having deliberately aligned himself to the dunghill, instead of the cross, he identifies with the dirt which obscures social interconnections and relationship to the framework of the universe upon which moral choices are based. His wish to "infect the air" highlights his perverse deathbound psychology and he adds to the fog that comes between the individual and the cross, keeping others in deadening confusion. The corruption spreading from people like this fills the atmosphere of London throughout Dickens's fiction. *Our Mutual Friend*, provides the most concrete example of a society that values the dustheaps more highly than the cross. Nickleby's rant suggests an answer to Gaffer Hexham's anxious questions about the decay and confusion surrounding him:

Have we got a pest in the house? Is there summ'at deadly sticking to my clothes? What's let loose upon us? Who loosed it? (*OMF* I 6 p. 82)

Here is a London built, metaphorically at least, on dunghills such as the one on which Nickleby wishes to be thrown. These have been formed by the accumulated villainy of the living and the dead in their obsession with money in place of Christian values. Gaffer is registering the rottenness emanating from these dead and dying men as it pervades the atmosphere and poisons life for others.

Jo, then, is a victim of the deadly disease that spreads from the concealment of relationships wrought by such people. Previous generations have evaded their responsibilities as have other contemporaries who ought to stand *in loco parentis* to Jo including the king, lords, "Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends" and "men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts" appealed to at Jo's death (47 p. 734). Consequently, Jo perpetuates the infection spreading from their mistakes, passing on the smallpox that deforms Esther. This makes him guilty in his own mind and leads him for the first time to seek some form of redemption - or rather a way to gain a just relationship with the world. His proposed method of achieving this is very telling. He believes that if Mr Snagsby, the law stationer, could somehow "write out, wery large so that anyone could see it anywheres, as that I was wery truly hearty sorry

that I done it", then Woodcourt, along with the rest of the world, would "be able to forgive me in his mind. If the writin could be made to say it wery large, he might" (47 p. 731). Public writing of this sort is the language of the city. It has been the means by which he, in his illiteracy is denied access to vital information. It is also where the Christian message is contained, in harmony with the message contained in the city's architecture.¹⁴ Woodcourt and Snagsby's attempt to re-integrate him into loving relationships has allowed him some limited understanding of that message. Now, by putting his own repentance in writing, he will be able to participate for the first time in the revelation of truth encoded in the city.

To Dickens, then, there is something more involved in the system of connections concealed by some and discovered by others, than simple co-operation for mutual benefit on utilitarian grounds. Relationships, as far as his novels are concerned, include a dimension of love. The truth of the cross and the Lord's Prayer, so determinedly shrouded by the metropolitan smog, is mainly presented as a truth of fatherhood and fraternity. Equally, the truth the urban squalor of *Dombey and Son* is said to conceal is that mankind is "one family" with "one Father" (47 p. 620). Here, Dickens suggests something quite different from the conventional Victorian idea that the primary function of human family relationships was to illustrate mankind's relationship with God. Charles Kingsley concisely summarized this concept in a letter, which said that family relationships were "given to us to teach us their divine anti-types":

Fully to understand the meaning of "a Father in Heaven", we must be fathers ourselves; to know how Christ loved the Church, we must have wives to love, and love them.¹⁵

Instead, Dickens shows the properly loving human family as an organic expression of *the* Father's love for His children. People who accept and receive their Father's love pass it on to those in their care as a natural consequence of being connected to an open and flowing network of love. Thus the family is not sacred because it represents divine love, or teaches something about it, but because it is in itself a manifestation of that love. At a societal level, those in the family tree who have failed to care for succeeding generations have not only transgressed a social principle, but have transgressed the same principle of divine familial love that makes Dombey's refusal to care for Florence so horrifying.

¹⁴See pp. 1 ff. above.

¹⁵Fanny Kingsley (ed.), *Charles Kingsley. His Letters and Memories of his Life*, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co, 1879, vol. I), pp. 166, 222, quoted in P. V. Mallett, 'Women and Marriage in Victorian Society' in ed. Elizabeth Craik, *Marriage and Property* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984).

Florence constantly seeks to break through Dombey's self-absorbed attitude with a revelation of this familial interrelationship of unconditional love. Her very presence recalls the picture of her in her dying mother's arms, expressing that love, whilst he, by his own withdrawal into his self-defined world, has "had no part in it". The narrator expresses his thoughts as a vision of his daughter and his dead wife clasped in:

clear depths of tenderness and truth ... while he
stood on the bank above them, looking down a
mere spectator - not a sharer with them - quite
shut out. (3 p. 31)

This scene is "a revelation" to Dombey of "something secret in his breast, of the nature of which he was hardly informed himself". What she knows is that Dombey's self-referential world is inadequate; he ultimately needs to be part of the network of love relationships. This truth is insupportable to him and in his perverse urge to conceal it, and to embrace self-absorbed atrophy, he frantically asks, "what was there he could interpose between himself and it?" (20 p. 278) In the following novels, and in chapter forty-seven of this particular novel, characters like Dombey find something large enough to interpose between themselves and revelation of the love relationships they ought to be participating in - namely, London, in its complexity, lockedness and miasmic dirtiness.

Florence's message, then is the message of the cross in *Bleak House*. The "strange ethereal light that seemed to rest upon her head" (47 p. 620) is the same that rested upon Christ's head in little Paul's vision. What the boy saw was the embrace of his mother - a human parental love relationship, integrated with the love relationship with the Everlasting Father in which it originates. The vision of a mother's embrace that was so unbearable to Dombey brings life, health and peace of mind to Paul. In *Bleak House*, the Chancery Court, Parliament and Chadband, with their parental position in society, can no more tolerate this revelation than Dombey can and, literally and metaphorically, generate the fog to hide it.

For the same reason, most of Dickens's heroines have the same ethereal quality about them as Florence. Agnes Wickfield, Esther Summerson, Little Dorrit and Lizzie Hexham exist, like Florence, to reveal relationships of love that are part of a network of such relationships stemming from God's love for his children. This is what leads Alexander Welsh to say:

novelists are hinting at ... much more than a person in a heroine like Little Dorrit. They are invoking something more nearly divine.¹⁶

For Welsh, they are invoking what his chapter heading calls "The Spirit of Love and Truth". He argues that truth is, to Dickens, a function of love, noting that "The English definition of truth ... stands for both loyalty, in a whole range of personal relations, and truth-telling", so that "The faithful correspondence of words to reality and of persons to each other"¹⁷ are two examples of a single concept in operation. Truth, which is central to the idea of revelation, is therefore primarily concerned with acknowledging right relationships between people. This virtue, Welsh argues, became an increasingly abstract quality over the course of the Victorian era, rather than an expression of the divine character seen in the connections between men and women. Welsh sees the relationships of familial love, localized in the hearth, as fortified places to flee to from London's deathly climate. *The City of Dickens* argues that these novels are representative of an increasingly secular age in offering salvation from the city's destruction not in the visions of the afterlife they occasionally invoke, but in "the firesides and family circles that are defended against the surrounding city".¹⁸ This thesis has argued that for Dickens, the discovered truth insisted upon by Florence *et al* is that there is an essential life-giving connection between all people, which is an expression of humanity's connection with a common Father God who loves us. The hearth and its relationships are no defensive zone to retreat into, shutting out the outer world. This, after all, is Dombey's fantasy with his "double door of gold" (20 p. 275). Rather they are the bases from which such relationships can spread positively outwards into the city, converting it to the way men and women ought to relate to each other in it. The local family circles show what is possible for the whole human society if they will restore their connections of family love with one another, culminating in a complete restoration of collective filial relationship with God.

To abstract oneself from that network is death. The personal compulsions to do so that fascinated Dickens are not merely resistant to social principles or to the demands of ontological well-being, but to the love of God itself. Thus the interrelationships hidden by London's much manipulated dirt and bewildering layout are not merely those of a social system, as in Williams's outlook, or the reference points for building a sense of identity, as in Hillis Miller. Their revelation, to Dickens, is primarily religious in character. Dennis Walder writes:

¹⁶*The City of Dickens* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 176

¹⁷*ibid*, p. 167.

¹⁸*The City of Dickens*, *op cit*, p. 143.

he believed in a conception of conversion which did not primarily involve an acceptance of Christ or the sinfulness of man, but which did involve spiritual transformation affirming a new consciousness of oneself and one's place in the universe.¹⁹

This new consciousness of place is specifically, however, an awareness and embracing of divinely appointed love relationships. In so far as these are represented in the cross in *Bleak House*, Dickens saw this new consciousness as itself an acceptance of Christ. If sin may be defined as the breaking of these relationships, Dickens does portray a conception of "the sinfulness of man". Certainly the "spiritual transformation" brought about in Mrs Clennam when Little Dorrit tries to awaken her to "consciousness" of her "place in the universe" which she has denied for so long presents itself to the heroine primarily as a religious realisation. The older woman is invited to "remember later and better days" of the New Covenant between God and human beings and to emulate Christ, "following Him" in the task of forgiveness and of restoring relationships of love (II 31 p. 770). As she considers this, the cityscape outside changes before her, so that "the clear steeples of the many churches looked as if they had advanced out of the murk that usually enshrouded them and come much nearer" (p. 771). The city, then, has the message of Little Dorrit's theology built into it, even if its operation creates the "murk" that conceals it. The narrator makes it clear that it is the recently seen triumph of the New Testament outlook that enables London to be seen like this. The rays of sunlight that illuminate the renewed cityscape are "signs of the blessed later covenant of peace and hope that changed the crown of thorns into a glory" (p. 771). Even though Dickens is not specific about why or how the new covenant supercedes the old, the thorns, symbolic of Adam's curse (Genesis 3:18), have been transformed in this moment of revelation into a symbol of eternal life in a way that is embodied in the entire metropolis. Here at last is the direct remedy to Jo's situation, unable, as he is, to see the city's Christian revelation through the obscuring smog. A partial transformation like this happens when Woodcourt performs an act of love in securing lodgings and medical help for Jo and "the high church spires ... are so near and clear in the morning light that the city itself seems renewed by rest" (47 p. 719). This is exactly opposite to the effect of the encounter with Chadband: the crosses are now visible, resolving themselves into a more meaningful vista for Jo.

To Dickens, New Testament Christianity is revelation of the ultimate interconnectedness that comes from a common duty to love one another with God's

¹⁹*Dickens and Religion*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981, p. 114.

unconditional love. This network of interconnections is summed up in the commandments:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind

And ... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

(Matthew 22: 37-39).

Mystery in Dickens's city is ultimately about the discovery of this system of relationships, which are part of the scheme of divine love. J. Hillis Miller is, then, correct to attribute the "process of dissolution" symbolically effected by Dickens's "ubiquitous fog" to "the absence of moral relationships between people in the novel".²⁰ Yet the required interpersonal connection is not only conspicuous by its absence in these novels. There are those characters who are able to point to it and even to bring it about as a positive, defined presence. The mystery of moral relationship, masked by the fog, but disclosed by Florence, Little Dorrit and Alan Woodcourt, is one of mutual duty, based upon community as creatures of one Father, as enshrined in the teachings of Christ. Concealment of it may be motivated by the deathbound psychological urges that so fascinated Dickens, but such urges are the part of human nature that rejects Christ. Little Dorrit teaches Mrs Clennam that her personal obsessive withdrawal from the world has actually been a transgression of the connections insisted upon in Christ's commandments. Since the values of the city in the book are based upon the same perverse desire to obscure interhuman links, the novel insists that the social problems of the city are also caused by this rejection of Christian love. Dickens's novels express horror at the social systemic chaos that ensues when these relationships are concealed, but this is merely the most advanced symptom of a fundamental breakdown in the essential relationships voiced in these two greatest commandments.

So far, the thesis has considered how the concealing elements of the city have obscured this religious duty to love. The following chapters explore the elements of the metropolis that bring this interconnectedness to light. As the features of London's workings that aid concealment have been compared to the kinds of confusion and dissolution they express, so now those features which mysteriously aid the quest for truth will be examined in terms of the inexorable forces of discovery they objectivize. For Dickens's London as a whole both conceals and reveals the organizing principle of the universe, which this chapter has called divine love; it brings death, but also brings the potential for new life. It will also become clear that the very elements of the city where truth is buried bring it decisively to light; that it is often the

²⁰Charles Dickens. *The World of His Novels*, op cit, pp. 205-6.

experiences of death that work regeneration. Thus the thesis proposes that Dickens optimistically conceptualizes the forces revealing these love relationships as stronger than the forces that conceal them. Indeed, the city's ambiguity of operation even suggests that both forces are indispensable parts of a whole process. In this way, there would appear to be a Providential scheme in operation, triumphantly bringing about new life through death, revelation through concealment. It is against this scheme that concealing individuals will be seen to set themselves. It is the main contention of the rest of this thesis that it is primarily through his created London that Dickens gives this mysterious scheme its full symbolic expression.

"Angel and devil by turns": the detective figure in *Bleak House*.

Of all the features which Dickens's metropolis develops from the haunted house, the most important is its inevitable collapse. Both city and house, as symbolic environments, unmistakably signal the deathbound nature of their builders' desires to obscure their obligations to society. It has been seen that the dirt and crookedness used by these concealers to hide the secrets upon which their worlds are built lead ultimately to the rot and instability that cause their downfall. Revelation, then, if it is to be an effective antidote to this deathly condition, must contain an element of regeneration. This chapter begins to discuss the elements of the city that are revelatory and regenerative in contrast to the deathbound, concealing elements already considered.

I. Revelation and resurrection

The link between the revelatory and the regenerative can be understood by noticing how important the concept of burial is in Dickens's London. At the centre of it, Mrs Clennam's house has a cellar "like a sort of coffin in compartments" and a "bier-like sofa" (I 3 p. 33). Its owner talks of her son's "duty to bury half an hour wearily here" (II 10 p. 533). William Dorrit dreams about the house functioning literally as a tomb and about having "found the body of the missing Blandois, now buried in a cellar and now bricked up in a wall" (II 17 p. 608). No doubt this is suggested by Blandois himself, who links the environments of house and city in these terms:

I had a friend once, who had heard so much of the dark side of this city and its ways, that he wouldn't have confided himself alone by night with two people who had an interest in getting him under the ground - my faith! not even in a respectable house like this ...

(II 10 p. 533)

This is just what the householder would like to do to Blandois and his codicil. The house is tomblike because it embodies the deathbound effects of concealment and also because the burial it provides keeps secret information out of sight.

Arthur Clennam, making his way to this place, reflects on London in its entirety as a vast conglomeration of such secrets, thinking of the dead as the most mysterious aspect of it all:

As he went along, upon a dreary night, the dim streets ...
seemed all depositories of oppressive secrets. The
deserted counting-houses, with their secrets of books and
papers locked up in chests and safes; the banking-houses,
with their secrets of strong rooms and wells the secrets
of the lonely church-vaults, where the people who had
hoarded and secreted in iron coffers were in their turn
similarly hoarded, not yet at rest from doing harm ...

(II 10 p. 526)

London's bulging graveyards are full of unfathomable secrets, spreading their corruption from unseen sources. *Little Dorrit*, however, is permeated by an unease that, even here, nothing can stay buried:

The clouds were flying fast, the wind was ... rushing
round and round a confined adjacent churchyard as if it
had a mind to blow the dead citizens out of their graves.
The low thunder, muttering in all quarters of the sky at
once, seemed to threaten vengeance for this attempted
desecration, and to mutter, "Let them rest! Let them rest!"

(I 29 p. 337)

The involvement of the elements suggests an arena of conflict larger than mankind - indeed, wind as a revivifier is a very biblical concept. This scene recalls the rejuvenating spirit of God blowing through the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37, later alluded to by T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*. The difference between the biblical text and the literary ones, however, is startling. Whilst the former presents the experience as awesome, it is to be welcomed whole-heartedly. In the latter, it is to be feared above all things:

But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

(ll. 185-6)¹

David Copperfield recounts the effect upon him of the story of "how Lazarus was raised up from the dead", explaining:

And I am so frightened that they are afterwards obliged to
take me out of bed, and show me the quiet churchyard out

¹*Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 1974), p. 70.

of the bedroom-window, with the dead all lying in their graves at rest.

(2 p. 12)

In his biography of Dickens, Peter Ackroyd deduces from the evidence of the novelist's own childhood fears a recurrence of "the idea of the dead coming alive, the horror of being pursued".² Resurrection and pursuit are indeed closely bound with one another in Dickens, from Bill Sikes, haunted by the eyes of the murdered Nancy as he flees from the crowd, to "our dear brother" in *Bleak House*, "raised in corruption" (11 p. 180) from the city churchyard as an avenging personification of cholera. This chapter focuses on the pursuing agent and the power he is able to exert. The following one returns to consider the hunted persons' fear of inexorable death and also their deeper terror that the same force that brings death will unearth the identity they have kept underground. April is the cruellest month for Dickens's characters because the regeneration threatened by the resurrecting wind will reveal to the world what has been carefully buried.

In fact, this wind is not unlike another ideal force in *Dombey and Son*, whose narrator cries:

Oh for a good spirit who would take the house-tops off ...
and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from
amidst their homes, to swell the retinue of the Destroying
Angel as he moves forth among them! (47 p. 620)

The effects of this unlocking of the city's doors would include:

one night's view of the pale phantoms rising from the
scenes of our too-long neglect.

What is startling about this is Dickens's identification of the reader with the concealer. These rising spirits are the poor, who suffer because of "our" neglect - because we prefer to keep them hidden. "We" are on the wrong side in this imagined supernatural confrontation. It is not only an indefinite "a good spirit" that is invoked, but "one duty to the Father of one family, and tending to one common end, to make the world a better place!" (*DS* 47 p. 620). For Dickens, the forces that conceal this social mystery are ranged against a Divine power that adds sacred status to human brotherhood. To be complicit in hushing the matter over is to take sides against Him. *Little Dorrit* hints throughout at the connection between the mysteries of the plot and the secret shame of social misconduct in London, blending Christian terminology with this vision. In this book, the good spirit, not content with merely removing the roof, exposes the secrets of Mrs Clennam's house by overturning it altogether. It is

²*Dickens* (London: Minerva, 1991), p. 55.

paradoxical that the revitalizing discovery of the secret should be the very thing that leads to the falling of the house and the death of the concealer, yet this has always been a hallmark of gothic fiction. Once the metaphorical foundations of Montoni's rule in *The Castle of Otranto* have been proven false, the whole edifice that externalizes his power and conceals his crime crumbles. It happens suddenly, however, with no preparation in the early chapters. When Dickens takes up the image, the whole work builds up to it.

The next chapter will deal extensively with the possibilities of bringing a transformed new city out of the ruin of the old one, at the moment at which revelation takes place. This one introduces the tension between the mighty forces of hiding and of exposure inherent in the city. It asks what exactly is the apocalyptic power in Dickens's London that can destroy while it restores to life, which is to be feared as much as it is to be sought after, by examining one of its most fascinating incarnations. *Bleak House* is another book set in a chaotic capital with over-stuffed graveyards and millions of secrets. Yet in the very midst of this is a detective police force providing an irresistible organisational scheme and which represents more clearly than anything else in the city the quest to bring truth to light.

II. London and the Detective

Mr Bucket provides one of the earliest examples in English fiction of the metropolitan detective as a representative of clarifying forces. His inquiries provide the focus of a novel in which many other types of searches are embarked upon by various characters, including Esther's attempt to discover her place in the world. According to Gordon D. Hirsch, the whole novel is about applying the skills of detection to human experience:

Bleak House ... may be said to be concerned primarily with mystery, curiosity, and investigation - with making connections and finding links.³

Hirsch's own investigation considers the curiosity involved here as a quest for sexual knowledge. My discussion of Bucket's role and of his relationship with the city aims to find other "connections" and "links" based on the mysteries of interrelationships dealt with by Christian faith.

³The Mysteries in *Bleak House* in *DSA*, vol. IV, (1975), p. 132.

Firstly, then, it will be useful to delineate the mysteries the reader of *Bleak House* needs to see resolved and the level of Bucket's involvement in each. In the first chapter, there is the case in Chancery, later referred to as "that mystery" (23 p. 369). Bucket is not involved in this directly, but the novel begins by establishing an atmosphere of unresolved questions hanging over London - questions which consume and destroy those who come into contact with them.

The second chapter opens a new area of curiosity: what is the connection between Lady Dedlock and the writer of an obscure legal document? As Tulkinghorn searches for someone who can recognise the handwriting of Captain Hawdon in chapter twenty-one, the reader suspects it is the same handwriting that was seen in chapter two and the relevance of this man to the story is finally revealed by the secretive lawyer in chapter forty for purposes of blackmail. Bucket's mind is definitely needed in this mystery and he is initially brought in by Tulkinghorn to find Jo, the witness who is able to identify Lady Dedlock as the visitor to Hawdon's grave.

The parallel mystery of Esther's parentage is introduced in chapter three. Strangely, Guppy in chapter seven seems to be the first person to suspect the truth, although Tulkinghorn, Krook, Weevle and the Smallweeds also engage in this question. Esther herself seems to have little active curiosity and waits for revelation to come, but she knows instinctively that Lady Dedlock is her mother after a form of vision, tellingly received in a church service where the sermon insists upon the impossibility of excluding relationships. Finally, the revelation is made formally by Lady Dedlock herself in chapter thirty-six. This question of Esther's identity mirrors a deeper ontological question about who Esther is: how she is connected to the rest of the human world, how she is to perceive herself and what position she is to assume in relation to her past and present. Although the Inspector is not officially interested in this aspect of the mystery, Dickens makes sure the reader associates his inexorable powers of discovery with it by bringing the crucial documents into his hands.

When Tulkinghorn, who has been largely responsible for drawing the strands of the plot together, is killed, a new sort of mystery begins. The reader at this point thinks he or she knows who the murderer is and that he or she is watching a process of inevitable capture, as in the case of Nadgett and Jonas in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Something more complicated is happening here, however. The question is not merely "Who killed Tulkinghorn?", but "Is Esther's mother guilty?" For six chapters, Bucket dominates the action, unexpectedly proving that she is not. This is

even more a relief to Esther than it would be to most people under the circumstances. For most of her life she has been told that her mother has made a transgression and that she has inherited her shame. Bucket's discovery of Lady Dedlock's innocence of murder exonerates her from a crime that would have consolidated her role as a guilty figure. Esther may be the daughter of a fornicator, but she is not the daughter of a murderer. Her identity and existence as illegitimate child has not been the cause, accidental or otherwise, of the killing of Tulkynghorn. Previously, Esther had feared that her presence near Chesney Wold, with her clear resemblance to Lady Dedlock, would lead her mother to act desperately to preserve her secret:

there was a dreadful truth in the legend of the Ghost's Walk; that it was I, who was to bring calamity upon the stately house Seized with an augmented terror of myself which turned me cold, I ran from myself...

(36 p. 586)

It is this fear that she will do harm simply by being who she is that threatens her ability to say, "I was as innocent of my birth, as a queen of hers; and that before my Heavenly Father I should not be punished for birth, nor a queen rewarded for it" (p. 587). Bucket's search through London, with Esther, to find her mother is a way of dramatizing the quest to find and validate Esther's origins that has already been enacted by the solving of the mystery.

Thus the significance of what Bucket shows to Esther is that she is in a state of darkness because of the concealments of a previous generation. In this, she finds herself like Jo and the slum-dwellers, in that she is seen as sinful because of the sins of her parents.⁴ Unlike Chadband, however, Bucket is able to prove to Esther that her origins have not led to her existence compounding this "original sin" by turning sexual transgression into murder. Instead, her unconditional love and forgiveness of her mother have helped to restore correct relationships between people. Lady Dedlock's disclosure of identity to Esther in chapter thirty-six is an acknowledgement of her motherhood and true connection with humanity. Esther tells her that her "heart overflowed with love for her, that it was natural love" (p. 579). In return, she hears that Lady Dedlock "loved me ... with a mother's love" (p. 580). Having apprehended the truth about her origins and reversed the effect of the original concealment through restored love, Esther can at length move towards shaping a rightly informed sense of her own identity. Ultimately she must do this for herself, but Bucket has valuably demonstrated, both to her and to the reader, that discovery of truth is possible.

⁴See pp. 110 ff. above.

In the metropolitan detective, Dickens chose as a symbol of the forces of revelation a figure that had long been established within the popular consciousness. In 1749, the Bow Street Runners were founded. Dickens satirized them for their self-importance and inefficiency in Blathers and Duff in *Oliver Twist*, but here were the beginnings of an organised detective force. Later, in 1798, the Thames Police came into being, also undertaking investigative work. As the names of these early forces suggest, crime and its discovery were associated with the capital: a popular impression consolidated by Peel's Metropolitan Police Act of 1829. Other areas were not given legislation for a further ten years.⁵ The name of Scotland Yard, its headquarters, became broadly synonymous with the Police Force, further fixing the link with London in the public mind. Originally, the area of London covered by the force was similar to the county of London but was extended to out-lying towns and villages in 1840 to make flight more difficult.⁶ Small wonder, then, that Bucket and his task seem an integral part of the London of *Bleak House*.

One 'detective' who had already achieved international celebrity was the French informer Eugène François Vidocq. A former criminal, he began a spectacular career as first chief of the *sûreté* under Napoleon in 1811. His innovations included making plaster of Paris casts and the study of ballistics. Disguise was an important part of his work, although he was often suspected of setting up crimes himself. He published his own memoirs⁷ and a book entitled *Les Vraies Mystères de Paris*.⁸ and Dickens's friend, Douglas Jerrold, wrote a play based upon his life, *Vidocq the French Police Spy: a melodrama in two acts*.⁹ Dickens is likely to have shared the widespread public interest in this character prevalent in the early nineteenth century. Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin in the short stories 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' and 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' is another example of interest in the detective - albeit one hostile to, rather than part of, the forces of policing, ten years before the publication of *Bleak House*.

The detective force itself was not officially founded until 1842, although there had been some plain-clothes policemen since 1829. Dickens's imagination was captured immediately by this new force, apparently far more organised than anything that had preceded it. On 13 July 1850, *Household Words* published a piece by

⁵ For a fuller discussion see D. G. Browne, *The Rise of Scotland Yard* (London: Harrap, 1956).

⁶ F. Moylan, *Scotland Yard and the Metropolitan Police* (London and New York: Putnam, 1929), pp. 78-9.

⁷ *Mémoires de Vidocq, Chef de la Police de Sûreté* (Paris: Tenon, 1828).

⁸ (Brussels: A. Lebègue et Sacré Fils, 1844).

⁹ (London: J. Duncombe, 1825).

Dickens's sub-editor, W. H. Wills, called 'The Modern Science of Thief-taking',¹⁰ which claims that by this stage, there were forty-two investigative officers working for Scotland Yard. So impressed was his employer with this that he invited many of the plain clothes men to a party held in the magazine's offices. An account of this appeared in the article, 'A "Detective" Police Party' (27 July 1850).¹¹ Sergeant Thornton became 'Sgt. Dornton', Sergeant Shaw became 'Sgt. Straw', Sergeant Whicher, 'Sgt. Witchem' and so on. 'Inspector Wield', or Inspector Field, had much to do with Dickens. He was employed by the author to prevent trouble at the opening night of one of his friend Edward Bulwer-Lytton's plays. 'Three "Detective" Anecdotes' followed (14 September 1850)¹² and finally, Field took Dickens on a hunt around the slums of St Giles, leading to the third article, 'On Duty With Inspector Field' (14 June 1851).¹³ He spoke of them in glowing terms:

the Detective Force ... is so well chosen and trained, proceeds so systematically and quietly, does its business in such a workman-like manner, and is always so calmly and steadily engaged in the service of the public, that the public really do not know enough of it, to know a tithe of its usefulness.¹⁴

Dickens's admiration was rather progressive. As late as 1869, many English people still regarded the force as dubiously continental. In the Commissioner's report of that year, Sir Edmund Henderson wrote:

There are many great difficulties ... in the way of a detective system; it is viewed with the greatest suspicion and jealousy by the majority of Englishmen and is, in fact, entirely foreign to the habits and feelings of the nation.¹⁵

As this chapter moves on to consider Bucket himself, it will constantly refer to the *Household Words* articles, as they show what it was that appealed to Dickens's imagination about these often unpopular figures.

¹⁰ *Household Words*, vol. I (1850), pp. 368-72.

¹¹ *ibid*, pp. 409-14, 457-460.

¹² *ibid*, pp. 577-80.

¹³ *ibid*, vol. III (1851), pp. 265-70.

¹⁴ 'A "Detective" Police Party' in *ibid*, vol. II (1850), p. 409.

¹⁵ quoted in *Scotland Yard and the Metropolitan Police*, *op cit*, pp. 156-7.

III. Bucket as seen by Snagsby and Esther.

Snagsby's tour of Tom-all-Alone's in chapter twenty-two of *Bleak House* closely resembles Dickens's wanderings around the slum-infested area of St. Giles's in 'On Duty With Inspector Field'. Dickens was evidently proud of a friend who had access to and understanding of such areas and took great satisfaction in telling Bulwer-Lytton that Field "is quite devoted to me".¹⁶ This delight in friendship with the detective bursts out in the fiction when Bucket rather oddly tells Smallweed that he loves Snagsby "like a brother" (54 p. 823). Dickens places into the mouth of Bucket the statement of personal affection born by the investigator to the man whom he has initiated into the secrets of London that he boasted of with regard to Field. Since Dickens seems to identify Snagsby's relationship with the detective with his own, the reasons for the law stationer's fascination with him provide some clues for Dickens's personal interest in the figure of the detective.

The law stationer is introduced as "rather a meditative and poetical man" with a yearning to find some hidden meaning in the city - perhaps the kind of person Dickens imagined enjoying his own novels of urban secrets. Before he even meets Bucket, he speculates that his own mundane environment houses buried artefacts with a story to tell, commenting that:

there were old times once, and that you'd find a stone
coffin or two, now, under that chapel, he'll be bound,
if you was to dig for it. (10 p. 158)

By means of this taste for romantic secrets, Bucket establishes a firm grip upon Snagsby's life. He is associated with what is hidden in London in the mind of the fanciful man. Dickens remarks:

Tom-all-Alone's and Lincoln's Inn Fields persist in
harnessing themselves, a pair of ungovernable coursers,
to the chariot of Mr Snagsby's imagination; and Mr Bucket
drives ... (25 p. 406)

Similarly, in the article, Field comes immediately from the "elder world" of the British Museum,¹⁷ whetting the reader's appetite for an introduction to the unknown. This of course was a role that Dickens himself delighted in. At the beginning of his career, he takes obvious pleasure in whisking *Oliver Twist* and the reader through a list of bewildering names of obscure London streets and areas (*OT* 8 p. 102), and this becomes a hallmark of his style. Furthermore, he is able to show the mysterious

¹⁶ to Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 9 May 1851, *Letters*, op cit, vol. IV, p. 380.

¹⁷ *Household Words*, op cit, vol. III (1851), p. 265.

meanings whose presence not far beneath the surface of metropolitan life is suspected by the urbanite. Like Shakespeare's Prospero, Bucket conjures up visions and makes them vanish. The Police are his familiar spirits and they evaporate at the touch of his magical stick or wand (22 pp.357-8). Perhaps the novelist saw in this figure a modern emblem of his own art. Snagsby not only reflects Dickens in his relationship to Field, but he also represents the wondering reader in relation to Dickens. Bucket, therefore, plays a crucial role in the novel as the author's representative. In making the revelations upon which its plot depends with near omniscience and calculated timing, he seems to personify the narrative scheme. The types of truth he makes known are ultimately those made known by the novel itself.

Throughout the Victorian era, the reading public sought authors who could guide them into uncharted territory in this way. London's slums certainly presented themselves to the middle-class imagination as *terra incognita*. With some of Snagsby's romantic appetite for what was buried beneath the familiar side of the city, they devoured the work of writers who could take them into this world which was closed to them. It was not only authors of fiction, however, that supplied this demand. Henry Mayhew's *Life and Labour of the London Poor* (1851-2)¹⁸ had given a gripping and detailed account of the lives of the very poorest in society. In 1890, William Booth published *In Darkest England and the Way Out*¹⁹ and Peter Keating's anthology about Victorian urban poverty sums up the titles of the works contained within it: *Into Unknown England*.²⁰ Poorer areas of London were seen as a foreign continent full of savages and much of the delight evident in Dickens's articles is at being admitted by the detective into this environment. 'The Detective Police' shows Dickens' fascination with the detective's ability to infiltrate cabals and alien environments, such as the butcher's shop gang penetrated by Mith. The responses of Dickens and Snagsby suggest that desire to be initiated into mystery in general stems primarily from a craving for excitement and 'exotic' new experience.

Yet there is more to it than this. Booth and his contemporaries fed popular curiosity, but they aimed at provoking a deeper response. They wanted the revelation of the hidden London they provided to awaken their readers to their obligation to do something about the situation of the poor. This is also true of Dickens's detective-led journeys into the slums. Characteristically, in 'On Duty with Inspector Field' the real revelation allowed by this access to the city's dark underside is the suffering caused by insanitary conditions:

¹⁸(New York: Dover, 1968).

¹⁹(Montclair, N. J.: Patterson Smith, 1975).

²⁰(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976).

How many people may there be in London, who, if we had brought them deviously and blindfold to this street, fifty paces from the Station House, and within call of St. Giles's church, would know it for a not remote part of the city in which their lives are passed? How many, who amidst this compound of sickening smells, these heaps of filth, these tumbling houses, with all their vile contents, animate and inanimate, slimily overflowing into the black road, would believe that they breathe *this* air?²¹

The crucial discovery that middle class Londoners "breathe *this* air" essentially means that they are part of the same environmental system as the inhabitants of St Giles's and the impurities there are finding their way into the atmosphere in which they live themselves. Thus the police inspector is a way of realising the longing of *Dombey and Son* for "a good spirit who would take the house-tops off" to expose the disease spreading from within (*DS* 47 p. 620) and he uncovers a social truth. This may not be the information Field is detecting, but it is the truth his findings make known to Dickens. Bucket, too, can hardly be credited with a social conscience, but the effect of what he shows to Snagsby is to awaken the law stationer's sense of his relationship of obligation to the poor. Dickens emphasizes the absolutely foreign nature of this area amid the familiar city in almost identical terms to those of the *Household Words* article. Snagsby walks down a:

villainous street, undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud and corrupt water ... reeking with such smells and sights that he, who has lived in London all his life, can scarce believe his senses heaps of ruins ... streets and courts so infamous that Mr Snagsby sickens in body and mind, and feels as if he were going, every moment deeper down, into the infernal gulf. (22 p. 358)

In his capacity as a guide, Bucket is a mysterious conductor through an urban hell, comparable to Virgil in Dante's *Inferno*. Indeed, Dickens treats Bucket as if he were taking Snagsby on a spiritual quest through the underworld, where his perceptions of the framework of reality are totally dissolved, so that he may emerge from this experience with a newly formed perception of the world and its interconnections. There is an unreal visionary character to this expedition. What is seen is barely tangible:

the crowd ... hovers round the three visitors, like a dream of horrible faces, and fades away up alleys and into

²¹*Household Words*, vol. III (1851), p. 265.

ruins, and behind walls; and with occasional cries and shrill whistles of warning, thenceforth flits about them until they leave the place. (22 p. 358)

Again:

the crowd, like a concourse of imprisoned demons, turns back, yelling, and is seen no more.

As the vision of Hades draws to a close, the narrator remarks:

By the noisome ways through which they descended into that pit, they gradually emerge from it ...

The experience has left Snagsby initially "confused by the events of the evening" and "doubtful of the reality of the streets through which he goes" (p. 365). Despite the fact that he has been overwhelmed by the realm of death in this way, however, he has been helped towards a new identity and a new way of understanding his relationship with the whole city, as seen in his direct involvement with Jo's problem. Afterwards, London's everyday regions feel more real and substantial as a result of the journey:

Through the clearer and fresher streets, never so clear and fresh to Mr Snagsby's mind as now, they walk and ride ... (22 p. 362)

Bucket has taken Snagsby through the realm of death and evil to a clearer understanding of his place in the cosmos. Such a semi-mystical journey, early in the novel, with the aid of Bucket, suggests something of the way the city offers revelation through an experience of confusing disorientation and restored life through descent into death.

Snagsby's attitude to Bucket paves the way for Esther's. The two characters are closely linked in the novel's thematic structure. Mrs Snagsby's efforts to discover the "fact" that Esther and her husband are having an affair and that Jo is the result parody Esther's search for her own origins and clearance from inherited guilt. When she announces "It is as clear as crystal that Mr Snagsby is that boy's father" (25 p. 409), the reader is reminded of Mr Snagsby's interest in Old Holborn Brook flowing *underneath* the city "as clear as crystal [sic]" (10 p. 158). Both are thirsty for an insight into this subterranean river that will show them the truth about their environment. Like Snagsby and Dickens, Esther is proud of the detective's compliments and respect (59 p. 902) and Snagsby's journey prepares the reader for her vision in the city, which is the real focus of the book.

Whereas the stationer is driven by Bucket in a metaphorical chariot of imagination, Esther's carriage is more tangible. The speed imposed by the detective

blurs an already confused city, reflecting the confusion in Esther's mind and adding to the phantasmal character of the experience:

We rattled with great rapidity through such a labyrinth
of streets, that I soon lost all idea where we were.

All is surreal and Esther underlines this by repeating:

I was far from sure that I was not in a dream And still
it was like the horror of a dream. (57 pp. 868-9)

Like Snagsby earlier in the novel, Esther is taken into an area of the city where her perceptions of the framework of reality have become utterly dissolved. Completely disorientated, she feels that she has entered the world of death. Once more, London's slums are the layered circles of Hell and Bucket is the guide:

we appeared to seek out the narrowest and worst streets
in London. Whenever I saw him directing the driver, I
was prepared for our descending into a deeper complication
of such streets, and we never failed to do so. (59 p. 903)

Meanwhile, the Thames at night, so often associated with death, resembles the underground rivers of mythology. Esther remarks that "we had crossed and re-crossed the river" (57 p. 868), so that she does not know which side she is on, and adds "The river had a fearful look, so overcast and secret ... so deathlike and mysterious" (57 p. 870). Limehouse Hole, with its "FOUND DROWNED" notices and "slimy" corpses, serves as a reminder of the universal presence of death. This is as much a token that a trip to Hades is being made as the visit to Parnell's grave in the cemetery passage in *Ulysses*.²² Real things are distorted in the surface of the Thames, so that, for example, carriage lamps become what Esther fears to see, "a face, rising out of the dreaded water", like the lost souls coming up to meet Dante's narrator. Ultimately, she arrives at the very lowest circle, the city burial ground and its:

heaps of dishonored [sic] graves and stones, hemmed in by
filthy houses, with a few dull lights in their windows, and
on whose walls a thick humidity broke out like a disease.
(59 p. 903)

Here she finally confronts her dead mother, as Aeneas and Ulysses confront their dead fathers. Like these mythic archetypes she re-emerges from her vision of death with a fuller understanding of the significance of her life. The pursuit has been not only a search for Lady Dedlock's physical body, but a descent into the realm of death. As Esther finds her mother dead, her perception of her own identity dissolves. The identity she had discovered as the daughter of a transgressor is here

²²D. Kiberd (ed.), (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), pp. 126-147.

laid to rest at last. This is a confusing experience for her as her loss of all reference points in the city shows. Nevertheless, she ultimately emerges from it with a new relationship to the living world, which, as shall be discussed shortly, is most directly expressed in her newly acknowledged love for Woodcourt.

It is Bucket and his men who have, in effect, guided Esther through this experience, carefully controlling the pace at which she discovers the truth with her well-being in mind. Although their business is not to solve ontological and spiritual mysteries, this is what their factual discoveries do in real terms for Esther. Dickens encourages the reader to associate them in the scheme of the novel with the ancient mystery religions who offered revelation by supernatural means in referring to them as "The Augurs of the Detective Temple" (53 p. 803). Like the priests of the Orphic mystery, which promised a vision of the underworld, they guide their initiates through a bewildering mimesis of death towards a revelation that brings new life. Their highly organised code of secret signals and hidden paths through the city make them a clarifying element in London's framework that works both with and against the capital's disorienting dirt and complexity.

Disconcertingly, however, the revealers of truth are inextricably part of this surreal bewildering urban underworld and they belong there. Esther transmogrifies the Police into fittingly hideous forms:

Sometimes he would get down by an archway, or at a street corner, and mysteriously shew the light of his little lantern. This would attract similar lights from various dark quarters, like so many insects ... (59 p. 835)

Esther clearly perceives that involvement with such forces is hazardous. This is especially the case for those motivated by idle curiosity, rather than purposeful investigation. Mr Snagsby becomes so absorbed in trying to fathom a secret that does not belong to him, but to which he belongs, that he exclaims:

I find myself wrapped round with secrecy and mystery,
till my life is a burden to me. (47 p. 729)

The reader is warned of dabbling in the mystery without a guide. Snagsby becomes:

a party to some mysterious secret, without knowing what it is. And it is the fearful peculiarity of this condition that, at any hour of his daily life, at any opening of the shop-door, at any pull of the bell, at any entrance of a messenger, or any delivery of a letter, the secret may take air and fire, explode, and blow up ... (25 p. 407)

Krook, Carstone and Gridley are examples of destruction of various sorts arising from unwise involvement in secrets and Snagsby fears that he will be next.

Snagsby recognises that it is the everyday activities of London life that house the mystery. Because it contains so many lives and stories, he never knows who or what is going to burst into his story as he goes about his business. To the initiates, it is through precisely these means of anonymous city routine that truth is revealed. Bucket says:

I've communicated with Mrs Bucket, in the baker's loaves
and in the milk ... (54 p. 834)

The revealer communicates secretly with his initiates in commonplace items. This is characteristic of Christianity in so far as it is a mystery religion. What is known as "the mystery of the mass", the means by which human beings would receive a weekly reminder of their restored relationship to God under the New Covenant, is given in two equally mundane emblems. Christ promised communion with His church in a loaf and a cup, objects that would have seemed as ordinary to the uninitiated as the loaves and milk through which Bucket makes things known to his wife. It is for this reason that London is perpetually exciting to Dickens. The complexity of the city's routine obscures, but also excites anticipation of, revealed truth and participation in the system of relationships that are part of the divine life.

IV. Bucket and Christ

It would seem fanciful to draw a parallel between Bucket and Christ in this way, were it not for the fact that Dickens constantly encourages the reader to see him in these terms. The policeman's initial introduction as "a person ... who was not there when [Snagsby] came in, and has not since entered by the door or by either of the windows" (22 p. 35) recalls Christ's entry into the upper room:

when the doors were shut where the disciples were
assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in
the midst ... (John 20:19)

Like the disciples who "supposed that they had seen a spirit" (Luke 24: 37), Snagsby considers this a "ghostly manner of appearing" (22 p. 355). Furthermore, Bucket is credited with God-like qualities such as omnipresence and freedom from the general laws of physics, even experiencing resurrections of a kind:

Time and place cannot bind Mr Bucket. Like man in

the abstract, he is here to-day and gone to-morrow - but,
 very unlike man indeed, he is here again the next
 day. (53 p. 803)

Jo certainly believes him to be "in all manner of places, all at wunst" (46 p. 717). The narrator refers to him as "a homely Jupiter" (54 p. 837) and his name even replaces God's in a phrase like "Mr Bucket only knows whom" (25 p. 407). Furthermore, Bucket demands a declaration of faith and trust from his followers, such as that required by Christ, before he can open the initiate's eyes to what is hidden in the city. His repeated question, "you know me, my dear; now, don't you?", receives the response, "he was far more capable than I of deciding what we ought to do" (57 p. 885). Although Esther cannot understand why they are pursuing Jenny, she allows herself to be guided by him. On her journey, she says, "I felt a confidence in his sagacity which re-assured me" (57 p. 868). Bucket is at the very least a revealing angel. Placing her own necessary vigilance and alertness under a confidence in this supernatural figure is the key to Esther's discovery of her particular mystery.

Bucket's metaphorical associations with Christ come mainly from the idea of Jesus as the ultimate revealer of mysteries to his disciples.²³ Of course the specific mysteries unveiled by these two figures differ enormously. Bucket has no power to display the eternal purposes of God in redeeming the human race. Nevertheless, to those who trust him in a comparable way, he allows another set of ontological insights about the divinely originated system of interrelationships that obtain between human beings, despite the best efforts of men and women to conceal them. As well as doing this for Snagsby in a social capacity, he is able to confirm Esther's true identity and to guide her through dissolution of that identity to a newly reconstituted role in the world. Most of all, however, he unearths buried transgressions of the system of relationships. This is another point of resemblance to Christ, who, like Bucket, ultimately promises to make men "know the truth" (John 8: 32), as the latter does for Esther, and to bring deeds of darkness to light. Because of Christ:

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day
 shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire ...

(1 Corinthians 3: 13)

Of course this power is fully realised at the second coming, when the dead are raised:

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord
 come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of

²³See, for example, Mark 4: 11, where he tells them, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables".

darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts ...

(1 Corinthians 4: 5)

As the Bible presents it, the resurrection is to be feared by those who have cut off their love relationships with the world, because buried guilt will be exhumed with physical bodies. We are not always comfortable with what will be disclosed. Bucket, then, is Godlike primarily because his power brings the criminal to judgement and allows no hiding place.

Furthermore, Bucket's power is not to be understood by ordinary mortals. Dickens never allows the reader to enter into the intellectual process of deduction by which the detective solves the mystery. Here, his centre of interest is very different from that which created Dupin or later detectives such as Sherlock Holmes. Nevertheless, Bucket represents another of Edgar Allan Poe's fundamental concerns - the inevitability of capture. Poe himself saw a strong imaginative link between his concerns and those of his English contemporary. As early as June 1836, at a time when Dickens was unknown in America, he glowingly reviewed *Sketches by Boz*²⁴ and later, in his 'Prospective Notice' of *Barnaby Rudge*, said that Dickens's novels "formed an era in the reading of every man of genius".²⁵ It was not, however, Dickens's ability to keep a secret until the last possible minute that appealed to Poe as a mystery writer,²⁶ but his perceptive delineation of the compulsion to keep things hidden and of the force with which things burst into the open. Early fiction by Boz that he praised included 'The Black Veil', a story about a mother whose son turns out to have been hanged, 'A Madman's Manuscript' in chapter eleven of *The Pickwick Papers*, and 'The Clock Case' in the third number of *Master Humphrey's Clock*. Here, a man buries the "dreadful secret" of a murdered boy underneath a chair from which he presides over a banquet, but bloodhounds leap over the wall and uncover the body, causing his guests to exclaim, "There is some foul mystery here!" Once more, detection involves the reversal of a burial. In these stories, there is no remorse - only a dread of discovery. The last is reminiscent of Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart', in which the killer entertains the police where the corpse is concealed until the

²⁴ *Southern Literary Messenger*, June 1836, reprinted by Gerald.G. Grubb as part of 'The Personal and Literary Relationships between Dickens and Poe' in *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, vol. V (1950), pp. 1-22.

²⁵ *Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post*, 1 May, 1841, reprinted in *Dickensian* vol. IX (1913), pp. 274-8.

²⁶ Indeed, in the same review, Poe claimed to have fathomed the murder by page seven. Although Grubb appears to prove that he must at least have read to the end of chapter five and there are certain mistakes in his predictions even then (see footnote 23), he is correct in identifying Rudge as the killer.

uncanny beating of the dead man's heart forces him to give himself away.

Similarly, when Jonas fears capture, he:

heard his own heart beating Murder, Murder, Murder,
in the bed. (MC 47 p. 725)

In the works of both writers, the plot is consistently motivated by the tension between a neurotic impulse to conceal and a force inexorably pushing truth into the open.

Had Poe lived until 1853, he would have found in Bucket the ultimate embodiment of this force which irresistibly brings the truth into the open. It is this same power that appears to interest Dickens about Field. Whereas in Wills's article, Witchem's ability to deduce facts from details as tiny as a lost button is emphasized, alongside his curious personal authority over individual criminals, the detective in Dickens's piece makes no brilliant mental connections. He merely strolls around St. Giles's, perfectly at ease in the maze, until he ultimately finds the criminal. Dickens is fascinated by the respect and subservience that this man commands. He notes:

Every thief here, cowers before him, like a schoolboy
before his schoolmaster. All watch him, all answer
when addressed, all laugh at his jokes, all seek to
propitiate him.²⁷

Equally, in the slum, "everybody seemed to know and defer to" Bucket (57p. 869). In middle-class London, however, he is not so universally recognised (although equally authoritative) and Snagsby "is quite in the dark as to who Mr Bucket may be" (22 p. 355). Nevertheless, both Field and Bucket can interfere in any circle once the moment is right without fear of resistance:

let Inspector Field have a mind to pick out one thief here,
and take him ... and all Rat's Castle shall be stricken
with paralysis, and not a finger move against him, as he
fits the handcuffs on!

Bucket has the same confidence in himself that Dickens invests in Field:

'Do you see this hand, and do you think that *I* don't know
the right time to stretch it out, and put it on the arm that
fired that shot?'

Such is the dread power of the man, and so
terribly evident it is that he makes no idle boast, that
Mr Smallweed begins to apologise. (54 p. 825)

²⁷ *Household Words*, op cit, vol. III (1851), p. 266, as for the two following quotations from the same article.

The characters fully believe in this omnipotence. Sir Leicester Dedlock feels that he can hide nothing from him - not even his gout, thinking that "Mr Bucket palpably knows all about it" (54 p. 817). Dedlock perceives him as an embodiment of Providence, whom nothing can take by surprise and whose attitude to any mystery is that of one having made skillful calculations as to correct timing:

From the expression of his face, he might be a famous whist-player ... with the game in his hand, but with a high reputation involved in playing his hand out to the last card, in a masterly way 'I don't suppose there's a move on the board that would surprise *me*' ... (54 pp. 816-18)

Solving the crime becomes almost a foregone conclusion. Characteristically in *Household Words*, Dickens pauses to empathize with the criminal:

And to know that I *must* be stopped, come what will.
To know that I am no match for this individual energy and keenness, or this organised and steady system.

Bucket's significance is that he represents a system that can classify things in their correct relationship to each other, even in a vast metropolis. He has the power of God, whose discoveries cannot be resisted, over man, making revelations at just the right moment. Most importantly, these are powers which the novelist also holds. Bucket personifies the narrative drive towards discovery inherent in the story.

To the ordinary person, the city itself is actually designed to be impenetrable and to conceal its secrets. 'On Duty with Inspector Field' evokes this magical environment:

Come across the street, here, and entering by a little shop, and yard, examine these intricate passages and doors, contrived for escape, flapping and counter-flapping like the lids of conjurer's boxes.

Dickens builds his description of the city as the ultimate means by which secrecy may be preserved and then demolishes it with "But what avail they?" Field's power is emphasized because even the obscurest zones of London are transparent to him. Neither Dickens, on his tour with Field, nor his fictitious counterpart, Snagsby, is initiated to the point at which he sees with this level of clarity. Field's attitude to the Stygian Thames, which is the essence of the city's mystery in the article, is very different from the narrator's own:

He does not trouble his head as I do, about the river at night. *He* does not care for its creeping, black and silent, on our right there, ... hiding strange things in its mud, running away with suicides and accidentally drowned

bodies faster than midnight funeral should, and acquiring such various experience between its cradle and its grave. It has no mystery for *him*.²⁸

Equally, the British Museum, where the article begins, has a sense of wonder for the author, which is completely absent from Field, who wanders around, "recognising the Ichthyosaurus as a familiar acquaintance".²⁹ For all Dickens's admiration of Field and assumption of his role, it is obvious that he considers life much less fascinating for this man. Ironically, the value of mystery comes from *not* knowing certain things. If Snagsby could see the brook running beneath Holborn Hill, it would not be nearly so interesting to him. Awe is an important dimension to mystery. The knowledge that is to be found is revered by Dickens's characters as partaking of a transcendental character, outside of the usual sphere of information. Esther's discoveries of parentage and love, for example, have a value that exists on a higher plane for her than the mere facts she learns elsewhere - otherwise she would not be writing her narrative. Revealers like Field, who can contemplate hidden things without any particular respect are a different order of being, to be marvelled at, but not envied. Too much illumination at one go risks the destruction of mystery and its replacement with something more like "geographical science". Dickens requires the forces that bring about revelation in his novels to be awe-inspiring and above the level of the everyday human being if they are to be fit messengers to embody the revelation of divinely appointed interrelationships.

In *Martin Chuzzlewit*'s Mr Nadgett, the author had managed a figure like the similarly named Bucket:

Jonas sometimes saw him in the street, hovering in the outer office, waiting at the door for the man who never came ... but he would as soon have thought of the cross upon the top of St Paul's Cathedral taking note of what he did, or slowly winding a great net about his feet, as of Nadgett's being engaged in such an occupation.

(38 p. 587)

J. Hillis Miller has already commented extensively on the link between this man and his urban environment, with its separation of "public role and private self".³⁰ Strikingly, both Nadgett and Bucket are in league with as well as opposed to the city in their task of unearthing truth. Like Field, they represent the other, non-

²⁸ *Household Words*, vol. III (1851), p. 269.

²⁹ *ibid*, p. 265.

³⁰ *Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 104 ff.

labyrinthine, side of the city - its revelatory aspect which is charted in police records and controlled by an efficient system with knowledge catalogued and at its fingertips. In fact, with their system of signs and signals, the police behave like a highly organised mystery cult, in charge of admission to the city's hidden knowledge.

Nadgett is certainly perceived by Jonas as a man elevated by his unaccountable knowledge to supernatural status. His adversary is described as his "pursuing Fate" (*MC* 38 p. 597) and as "Another of the phantom forms of this terrific Truth!" (51 p. 783) Both Nadgett and Bucket are semi-allegorical figures who embody the forces of the city which drive truth into the open. Nevertheless, their roles are not identical. In the earlier novel, the focus is upon the fugitive and his fear, with Nadgett remaining in the shadows. *Bleak House* focuses upon the pursuer, leaving his quarry out of sight until caught, as in the modern detective story, allowing for suspense and surprise regarding the murderer's identity. Furthermore, Bucket has a duty to make his revelation and does so gladly. When Nadgett tells Tigg, "It almost takes away any pleasure I may have had in this inquiry even to make it known to you" (38 p. 590), he sounds more like Tulkinghorn, who enjoys his secrets as "old wine" (22 p. 352). Bucket may be seen on the one hand as the antithesis of Tulkinghorn, one man's *raison d'être* being to acquire power over others by keeping secrets and the other's being to unravel them and to proclaim them for the good of society. Tulkinghorn shows what happens when secret knowledge is gained and then concealed for self-advancement. Although he discovers hidden connections between people, he merely accumulates them and restricts the flow of information about them, instead of proclaiming them. His keenly enjoyed sense of identity comes from exclusively "being master of the mysteries of great houses" (36 p. 581) and denying his social duty to use his knowledge to benefit others. That such an attitude is a deathbound withdrawal from the principles of life is shown - first, as a warning, in Krook's explosion - and then in the murder that comes to him because he has become involved in one secret too many. The motives of Tulkinghorn and Bucket for involvement - anti-social and social respectively - must, Dickens claims, be carefully separated. Both men are present in the chariot of Snagsby's imagination, Bucket as driver, Tulkinghorn as passenger (25 p. 406). When Mrs Snagsby attempts to make selfish capital out of Esther's secret, Bucket returns to this image, showing the dangers created when the Tulkinghorn attitude is allowed to assume the driving seat:

Mr Tulkinghorn, deceased, he held all these horses in his hand, and could have drove 'em his own way, I haven't a doubt; but he was fetched off the box head-foremost, and now they have got their legs over the traces, and are

all dragging and pulling their own ways. So it is, and such
is life. (54 p. 829)

Mrs Snagsby, he warns, will also get herself into difficulties if she tries to emulate Tulkinghorn in using what she knows - or thinks she knows - about Esther to exert a power over the Dedlock family.

On the other hand, however, the two characters are closely linked. Tulkinghorn himself calls Bucket to help him to trace Jo and the two talk with surprising confidentiality. Bucket solves Tulkinghorn's murder and the connection between the two is underlined at the funeral. Dickens writes of the "Contrast ... between Mr Tulkinghorn shut up in his dark carriage, and Mr Bucket shut up in *his*" (53 p. 805). Although Bucket and Tulkinghorn represent apparently opposed attitudes to secrets, there is a disturbing sense that they are co-operating as parts of a whole system. Their ambiguous relationship is microcosmic of the ambiguous relationship between the detective force and the Chancery Court in *Bleak House* upon which D. A. Miller comments in *The Novel and the Police*. Miller contends that although the police investigator stands for pushing conclusions into the open as quickly as possible, the detective "serves a particular ideological function within this system and not against it".³¹ Chancery depends upon preserving the spurious hope that a revelation can be arrived at and the tidy resolution at the end of the detective story is one way of achieving this. In this way, the police exist to provide an authoritative gratification of the desire for clarity that can be safely contained within a system that depends upon withholding vital information from the powerless, whilst leading them to believe that it can ultimately be obtained.

Certainly, Dickens conveys an uneasy sense that Bucket is rather upholding the Chancery Court than resisting its tendency to obscure justice. His arrest of Gridley renders his role more ambivalent, despite his affable tone and anxiousness for the older man's welfare. George is afterwards disposed to think of Bucket as a "rum customer" (47 p. 722) and links him with the oppression imposed upon him by Tulkinghorn, of whom he says:

I know the man; and know him to have been in
communication with Bucket ... He has got a power
over me ... (47 pp. 726-7)

Lady Dedlock too views Tulkinghorn as having the power and omnipresence attributed by others to Bucket, describing him as "Always at hand. Haunting every place. No relief or security from him for a moment" (48 p. 737). The use the

³¹(Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 1988, p. 75.

manipulative lawyer makes of these powers casts doubt upon the detective's right to hold them. Indeed, there is a chill feeling that Bucket is only a hair's breadth from being Tulkynghorn. These two characters pave the way for the still more ambiguous figure of Jaggers in *Great Expectations*, who loves to establish power over others with enormous potential for good and evil, but who is the working manifestation of Providence in the novel, keeping secrets until the crucial moments of revelation.

This is harmonious with Miller's claims that the structure of the novel as a form is itself like Chancery, expecting its readers to wait for a final judgement that may or may not come. The role of the detective plot is, in this analysis, to generate a feeling that the closure implicitly promised in the Victorian novel has been granted.³² Thus the narrative form, as personified in Bucket, leads the reader to expect that closure and revelation of social relationships must inevitably come, and trains the reader "in the sensibility for inhabiting the new bureaucratic, administrative structures" of the time.³³ F. S. Schwarzbach extends Miller's Foucauldian analysis to another aspect of the city, which this thesis has considered in some depth. In '*Bleak House - The Social Pathology of Urban Life*', he opposes the clarity brought by Bucket to the confusion of London's dirt and disease rather than to the Chancery Court. The desire to clear away the dirt and to show the connections upon which the city as a system is based is linked to Bucket's own revelations of interrelationships between Londoners. Schwarzbach raises the idea, however, that the whole concept of revelation, encoded within the discourse of sanitary reform and police work, is repressive. The task of clearing the fog - whether literally or metaphorically, as in the case of the police force, who eliminate obscurity to organise London into a comprehensive system of reliable information - means exposing the poor to "the gaze of the powerful at the powerless".³⁴ No doubt the yearning in *Dombey and Son* for "a good spirit who would take the house-tops off" (*DS* 47 p. 620), of which Bucket is a partial fulfillment, is an example of this potentially repressive aspect of social revelation. Dickens is credited, in Schwarzbach's article, with registering his uneasiness about this aspect in the poor characters who resist examination and in Bucket's own ambivalence:

Dickens does not fail to point toward the ways in which Bucket, well-intentioned though he may be, acts as agent for the very political and social institutions the novel so forcefully attacks.

Like Miller, he suggests hidden concerns on Dickens's part that the detective police - and indeed the very desire for revealed social interconnections beneath a confusing

³²For the argument summarised here, see *The Novel and the Police*, pp. 83 ff.

³³*ibid*, p. 89.

³⁴*Literature and Medicine*, vol. IX (1990), p. 99, as for next quotation.

environment that creates their function in the novel - keep institutions like the Chancery Court in business.

Certainly Dickens points intelligently to the limitations of the revelation Bucket can provide, including his complicity with the confusing system he symbolically opposes. The clarity with which he sees London may assist the poor by revealing social connections to the latently generous, such as Mr Snagsby; it may aid Esther in her journey towards ontological and spiritual revelation. Nevertheless, it may also be used to keep people, such as Gridley, imprisoned within the confusing city institutions. The end result is not, however, as the work of Miller and Schwarzbach might suggest, to discredit the notion of revelation *per se*. Instead, the partial success of Bucket's work and of the detective plot in general show Esther and the reader that an affirming revelation is possible, but the limitations of that success show with equal certainty that full revelation is to be sought outside the flawed systems these represent. As the final section of this chapter will show, the wider scheme in which the detective plot encourages trust is not political or administrative, but spiritual and Providential.

V. The other Christ in *Bleak House*.

Bucket's awe-inspiring power to bring to light buried connections and his numerous comparisons to Christ suggest that the force he represents - the police force - will at last make the obscured message of the cross visible to Jo. Whilst Dickens builds up this image of the Christlike Bucket, however, he skilfully highlights the factors that implicate him with the anti-Christian, cross-concealing fog. Woven into the supernatural aspect of his personality there is the other facet of the ghostly guide, quite at home in the underworld, in charge of occult powers,³⁵ equally associated with supernatural evil as with supernatural good. His forefinger is said to be a "familiar demon" (53 p. 803) with the power to whisper information, increase sensory powers and charm the guilty towards destruction. Sir Leicester Dedlock perceives it as "the cruel finger that is probing the life-blood of his heart" (54 p. 821). At the revelation of the murder mystery, Hortense curiously calls Bucket "my angel" (54 p. 830) and his role as apocalyptic angel has already been discussed. When he unexpectedly discovers her guilt, she also exclaims, "you are a devil!" . Bucket replies with some amusement, "Angel and devil by turns, eh?" (54

³⁵See pp. 129-30 above.

p. 837) - and this is just what this elusive character is. He represents all that penetrates the novel's concealing fog, but his power comes at least in part from the deadly forces that keep it in place.

For Bucket is only presented as godlike from the implied viewpoint of other characters. The narrator is aware of limitations to his power beyond any moral or social deficiencies. Hortense alone of all the people he meets recognises this and draws it to the reader's attention, saying to Bucket upon his solving the case, "You are very spiritual". This strange choice of word recalls her previous "Angel" and reinforces Bucket as supernatural revealer. She then punctures this by asking:

But can you res-tore him back to life? ... Can you make
a honorable lady of Her?

Even Bucket seems lost for words and his "Not exactly" and "Don't be so malicious" sound rather feeble. He can discover transgressions of love relationships, but is powerless to reverse their effects. In the face of death, Bucket is impotent. Although he catches Gridley, he cannot apprehend him because he dies, and even his stock-in-trade cajolery achieves nothing:

You want excitement, you know, to keep *you* up; that's
what *you* want (24 p. 405),

Equally, Lady Dedlock is found dead and Bucket arrives at the limit of his powers. It almost seems that he really represents that other force that inevitably catches up with everyone: not merely justice, but death itself. He may be a revealer, but Dickens pointedly shows his inability to provide the full resurrection which accompanies revelation in his works. Although Bucket is the most tangible personification of emergent truth in the story, he only points to the need for a more complete figure if exhumation is to be converted into genuine resurrection.³⁶

³⁶Inspector Heat in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* is a later and more pessimistic exploration of the failure of the detective figure who promises, but ultimately cannot deliver, a revelation of Providential order. He claims the same omniscience as Bucket, relishing his role as an embodiment of Providence and his part in an organized and infallible system:

There isn't one of them, sir, that we couldn't lay our hands on at any
time of night and day. We know what each of them is doing hour by
hour ... (5 p. 84)

he meant to have him some day. But not yet: he meant to get hold of him in
his own time, properly and effectively, according to the rules of the game
(6 pp. 122-3)

Stevie trusts the police as fully as Esther and Dickens, but Heat proves ultimately far more impotent than Bucket. The Professor, with the bomb in his pocket, can be monitored, but not stopped from using his power. Unfortunately, even the system is divided against itself in this book and depends upon as many contradictory motives as the world of the urban anarchists. The boy's attitude comes from the simple yearning for order that causes him constantly to draw complete circles - a desire that Conrad's bleaker book shows to be in vain. Finally, Stevie is exploded into absolute confusion much as Krook is in *Bleak House*.

A version of this other figure is also present with Esther on her journey through London. Indeed, the sudden appearance of Alan Woodcourt at this stage of the search for Lady Dedlock is hard to explain, except as a signal to the reader that he is going to assume and complete the role played earlier by Bucket. Ultimately it is the doctor who shows Esther her true identity and guides her to the place prepared for her in the world. The second time the detective appears in the novel, he is in disguise as a physician (24 p. 401), immediately establishing a link between the two characters. They share between them the role of guide through Hell and both are equally conversant with Tom-all-Alone's. Woodcourt is observant and vigilant, like the Inspector:

Attracted by curiosity, he often pauses and looks about him, up and down the miserable byways. Nor is he merely curious, for in his bright dark eye there is compassionate interest; and as he looks here and there, he seems to understand such wretchedness, and to have studied it before. (46 pp. 710-11)

Woodcourt has penetrated the slum in a way that even Bucket has not. He achieves this through genuine care and love, coming to that environment to help people and not to seek information or to capture them. It is the same key that helps him to understand Esther's mystery - to feel for Esther's real self despite the fragmented personality imposed upon her by her shame before society (represented by her mother), by the countless names and roles given her by others, and by her own self-deprecating attitude. He is the genuinely Christ-like figure who shows the way, whose existence is suggested but never fully realised by Bucket's messianic qualities. For Woodcourt, power is not something to be had for its own sake, yet he has it nevertheless:

Allan restrains the woman, merely by a quiet gesture, but effectually. (46 p. 715)

Like Christ, he in one sense harrows Hell, bringing aid to a wounded woman and Jo to an environment where he is equipped to transcend death. Jo's appreciation that the Lord's Prayer is "wery good" (47 p. 734) seems very little and there are severe limitations faced by Woodcourt also, yet he still seems more powerful in the face of death than Bucket. In the lives of the individuals with whom he has come into contact, he has succeeded in clearing the fog that surrounds the cross. He has potently revealed by example the interlocking system of love relationships expressing God's love to His children.

Esther is more effectively rescued from her confusion than Jo and trusts Woodcourt as a guide even more than she does Bucket. Her language echoes that of

religious devotion: "I owe it all to him everything I do in life for his sake" (67 p. 989). Together they resemble Christ and his bride, the Church, called "A great mystery" in Ephesians 5: 31-2. One is completed in the other. Despite her early denials for the sake of her fiancé, Mr Jarndyce, the reader is allowed to see this throughout the text. Just as Esther puts aside the veil of hair covering her mother's face (59 p. 915), Woodcourt, having led her there, closes the book by allowing Esther to see her own face:

do you ever look in the glass ... don't you know that
you are prettier than you ever were? (67 p. 989).

Esther seems close to accepting this revelation at the end.

Her husband, unlike everyone else in the book, helps her to find her own identity, by truthful means, without imposing his own version of it upon her. Here, he stands in contrast even to Mr Jarndyce, who tries to shape her identity by giving her names. Woodcourt tends to avoid these, although admittedly Esther is known as "the doctor's wife" and presumably becomes "Mrs Woodcourt" (67 p. 988). Jarndyce has his own ideas that marriage to him is what is best for Esther and, in his goodness, retracts these when he perceives that she really loves Woodcourt. Even then his deceptive means of leading her to the doctor's new home - also called Bleak House - in the belief that she is going to oversee domestic arrangements seems somewhat manipulative. Such behaviour may have its origins in the conventions of Romantic comedy, but the reader cannot but compare it unfavourably with Woodcourt's direct and truthful manner of speaking to her. Whereas Esther learns Jarndyce's plans through his circumlocutory phrases and elaborate schemes of denouement, she says:

When Mr Woodcourt spoke to me I learned in a moment that he
loved me. (61 p. 937)

This truthfulness and respect for the integrity of Esther's own identity is what makes the revelation he provides so superior to that offered by Bucket. For a revealer of truth, the latter tells a lot of lies. His identity is certainly very fluid. Like Nadgett, who "carried contradictory cards, in some of which he called himself a coal-merchant, in others a wine-merchant, in others a commission-agent, in others a collector, in others an accountant: as if he really didn't know the secret himself" (*MC* 27 p. 408), Bucket has an uncle in law stationery (22 p. 356), a whole family in service, including a father who progressed from page to steward before retiring to become an innkeeper and an aunt in Chelsea (53 pp. 813-14). He is also the friend of a sculptor (p. 812) and of a musician who requires a second hand 'cello (49). The

Bagnets do not think this chameleon adaptability an admirable quality (52 p. 798). He is a master of disguise. The narrator records how:

the physician stopped, and, taking off his hat, appeared
to vanish by magic, and to leave another and quite a
different man in his place. (24 p. 401)

'Three Detective Anecdotes' suggests that this theatrical element to detective work appealed strongly to Dickens, himself a keen actor. Witchem boasts that he has pretended to know the identity of criminals he meets so that they will think they are passing on no new information to them. On one occasion he mentions having told two suspects, "I know you both very well" and then interrupts his story to tell the audience, "I'd never seen or heard of 'em in all my life".³⁷ Bucket similarly claims false knowledge of people to obtain genuine knowledge. Dickens recognised that much of Field's knowledge must be imaginary, cheerfully telling Wills that

CHARLEY FIELD

is of course an evasive humbug.³⁷

Bucket even claims to be able to read Sir Leicester Dedlock's mind when he is paralysed, but Dickens's irony suggests that the baronet is not really saying, "Take 'em for expenses":

The velocity and certainty of Mr Bucket's interpretation
on all these heads is little short of miraculous. (56 p. 860)

Bucket goes further still, however. Not only does he claim spurious knowledge to gain confessions, but he moulds the characters and actions of others by making them believe what he "knows". Thus the naive Snagsby is told:

You're a man of the world, you know, and a man of
business, and a man of sense. (22 p. 356)

Later, he adds, "you're a man it's of no use pumping; that's what *you* are" (22 p. 365). Bucket has given him a new identity - but only by telling him that he is what he patently is not. After such a conversation, the narrator tellingly remarks:

'Then here's your hat,' returns his new friend, quite as
intimate with it as if he had made it. (22 p. 357)

A transferral has taken place here. Bucket is even more intimate with Snagsby than with his hat and he really has made him in his new role of worldly-wise keeper of secrets. Esther also notices this habit of mind, observing him "addressing people whom he had never beheld before, as old acquaintances" (57 p. 881). She does not seem to suspect, however, that the compliments she so cherishes, such as "You're a pattern, you know, that's what you are" (59 p. 902), might be a further application

³⁷to W. H. Wills, 18 September 1853, *Letters*, op cit, vol. VII, p. 151.

of his customary technique. Woodcourt, by contrast, bases his remarks solely upon behaviour he has seen in Esther and which the reader can readily verify. When he makes his revelations to Esther, unswerving candour is the hallmark of his speech:

I heard his voice thrill with his belief that what he said was true.

(61 p. 937)

Woodcourt has the life-restoring power even Bucket lacks because he adheres strictly to truth. He holds the key to restoring a sense of social interconnectedness because his actions are guaranteed by faithfulness to the relationships of divine love.

Woodcourt always addresses people as they are and not in the role in which he wants to keep them. Dickens remarks on:

A habit in him of speaking to the poor, and of avoiding patronage or condescension, or childishness (which is the favourite device, many people deeming it quite a subtlety to talk to them like little spelling books) ... (46 p. 711)

Here he is most unlike Bucket, whose "Well, well ... you train him respectable, and he'll be a comfort to you, and look after you in your old age, you know" sounds remarkably hollow (22 p. 361).

The detective police, then, embody the mysterious forces within the structure of the city that are to be trusted in clarifying the ontological mysteries of identity and origin. They combine an awesome control over secrets with a fitting sense of duty within the social system. Bucket is able in some sense to show Esther the way out of guilt inherited from her ancestry and shows the layers of meaning possible in the apparently confused city. Dickens, however, is careful to point to his moral ambiguity and limitations, particularly in the face of suffering and death. Such boundaries to his representational effectiveness help the reader to see how Woodcourt, less obviously striking, quietly reveals the mystery to Esther in a way that is genuinely regenerative as well as revelatory. Through his gentle method of combined love and truth, he shows that the connections between people, which are manifestations of divine love, can be brought to light with a power as assured and confident as that figured in the novel by the Metropolitan Detective Force.

“A road of ashes”: revelation and the railways in London.

Bleak House is unusual among Dickens's novels because it focuses upon the revealing agent in the mystery. More typically, especially in the earlier novels, Dickens presents the chase from the point of view of the concealer attempting to escape detection. Whereas Hortense and Lady Dedlock remain out of sight during the pursuit, most of the other stories leave the reader in no doubt as to what the criminal has done and where he or she is hiding. Suspense is created instead by dread of the truth becoming known. The flight of Bill Sikes magnificently delineates the terror of inexorable revelation. In his distracted state of mind, every object belonging to him insists upon the fact of the murder, from the blood-stained hat (*OT* 48 p. 326) to the dog that leads his pursuers to him, despite his attempts to kill it. The London crowd vengefully effects this push towards apprehension.¹ Its millions of eyes were later condensed into the all-pervasive figure of Nadgett who equally fills the whole city and watches from every conceivable point within it. *Martin Chuzzlewit*'s story is not his, however, but rather that of Jonas, as he comes increasingly to fear the power Nadgett represents until the secret is finally exploded. Such dreaded pursuers embody what the preceding chapter labelled "the narrative drive towards discovery inherent in the story". Dickens's concentration upon those running from this force, rather than upon the operation of the force itself, emphasizes the terrifyingly irresistible aspect of the emergence of truth.

Carker in *Dombey and Son* becomes another character in this tradition. Although he is ostensibly running from his employer, it is actually the railway engine, a revealing agent more impersonal and unerring than any yet considered, that catches up with him. Although it is not always in the foreground, its influence may be felt throughout the novel. Dickens relates Carker's flight to Dombey's flight from the truth revealed to him by Florence, by showing both men to be deeply affected by the railway train as an embodiment of their fears. The impact of this phenomenon upon the city of London itself as well as upon its travellers provides the key to placing the much discussed passages about the railway accurately within the novel's symbolic unity. Like the metropolitan detective force in *Bleak House*, the rail network is a part of the city's structure that brings exposure to concealers. This chapter considers how it objectifies the city's timetable of revelation in the novel, bringing death to various individuals, but renewing life through that death; causing social, ontological and spiritual confusion, but pushing relentlessly towards clarity in each of these areas. It concludes by considering how the railway contributes to a

¹This is the theme of the final chapter of this thesis; see pp. 237 ff below.

characteristic pattern in Dickens's novels of bringing destruction to the city as a whole and bringing a transformed metropolis embodying sound human interconnections out of the ashes. Understanding this aspect of *Dombey and Son* is vital because this theme and technique dominate almost all of Dickens's subsequent writing.

I. The railway and Death

Connecting death with the railways did not require an enormous imaginative leap for Victorian readers. The opening of the first passenger line, the Liverpool and Manchester, in 1830 was an ill omen for the development of this new mode of travel. William Huskisson, the President of the Board of Trade and a politician notoriously proud of Britain's rail development, was struck down and killed by the Rocket. As late as 1842, it was felt necessary to introduce an inspectorate by Act of Parliament to reduce the risks involved to passengers. In 1865, Dickens was himself involved in the Staplehurst disaster in which ten people were killed, and unsurprisingly anxieties about safety continued long after Dickens's time.

Dombey and Son turns this fear of the railway into the symbolic driving force of the story. Chapter fifty-five moves Carker to his death with a compulsion and certainty worthy of the steam engine. The reader's sense of gruesome inevitability has been carefully prepared by an association of steam transport with death developed from the earliest pages. Toodles introduces the subject in chapter two and his occupation is clearly seen as a threat to the life of little Paul, reflecting Dombey's anxieties about allowing working class people into close proximity to his son:

"A choker!" said Miss Tox, quite aghast.

"Stoker," said the man. 'Steamingin.'

"Oh-h! Yes!" returned Miss Tox, looking thoughtfully at him, and seeming still to have but a very imperfect understanding of his meaning. (2 p. 16)

Paul's nurse is the wife of this man whose chest is affected by "ashes" (p. 17) - another common feature between the train and death. When the child finally dies, the event is immediately preceded by the completion of the London-Birmingham Railway through Camden Town. Thus when Dombey is shown riding on that line with Toodle himself on the footplate, he subconsciously associates the locomotive with the loss of his son:

The very speed at which the train was whirled along,

mocked the swift course of the young life that had been borne away so steadily and so inexorably to its fore-doomed end. The power that forced itself upon its iron way - its own - defiant of all paths and roads, piercing through the heart of every obstacle, and dragging living creatures of all classes, ages, and degrees behind it, was a type of the triumphant monster,
 Death. (20 p. 275)

Dickens conveniently tells the critic outright that the railway is to be interpreted symbolically in this book. Even Dombey recognizes its symbolic value, drawing a parallel between the fixity of the route and the certainty of mankind's Fate. The train runs on a set track and Paul meets a "fore-doomed end". It is an inflexible "iron way": all are subject to its motion, regardless of background. Division of passengers into first, second and third classes - Euston even had three separate entrances for them! - does not alter the fact that all travel to the same destination. To Dombey, this underlines the solemn truth, earlier conceded to Paul, "that money, though a very potent spirit, never to be disparaged on any account whatever, could not keep people alive whose time was come to die" (8 p. 94).

Both Carker and Dombey, then, instinctively fear the train as a bringer of death against which there is no defence. The sureness and completeness of the Manager's destruction reinforces the sense given in the earlier passage that the utter collapse of the world summarized in the words Dombey and Son is equally inevitable. Furthermore, the premonitions Carker has of the death he is to die emphasize the suggestions of the numinous in Dombey's earlier meditations on the train and the death of his son. Clearly it is something larger than mere fear of his master that causes Carker to flee:

Some other terror ... quite removed from this of being pursued Some visionary horror, unintelligible and inexplicable, ... like Death upon the wing.

Although Carker does not make the connection until later, these experiences are described in terms that immediately evoke the steam engine to the reader:

a trembling of the ground, - a rush and sweep of something through the air He shrunk, as if to let the thing go by. It was not gone, it never had been there, yet what a startling horror it had left behind. (55 pp. 731-2)

There is no railway present when Carker experiences this premonition and he is astonished when he encounters a precise physical embodiment of the sensation at the junction:

For now, indeed, it was no fancy. The ground shook, the house rattled, the fierce impetuous rush was in the air! He felt it come up, and go darting by; and even when he had hurried to the window, and saw what it was, he stood, shrinking from it, as if it were not safe to look. (55 p. 741)

Although this is presented as an unexplained supernatural phenomenon, the train is an actualisation of his internal fears about retribution, as distinct from Dombey, catching up with him. Perhaps the train is also a "remorseless monster" to his master because Dombey is subconsciously aware of a coming judgement for the wrong he remorselessly persists in doing Florence.

Dickens developed this technique of a character externalizing his anxieties by elevating the agents of his exposure into supernatural phenomena from his earlier villain, Jonas Chuzzlewit, who is haunted by the image of his father in the final stages of his delirium, "gabbling in an unearthly tongue". This is described as "an apparition" and as something "ghastly" (*MC* 18 pp. 309-10). Soon Jonas is crying out in his sleep "that the dead man was walking - tramp, tramp, tramp - about the coffin" (19 p. 321). Both Chuffey and Lewsome, who are in a position to reveal hidden information, are presented as spectral, linking them to the murdered Antony. Lewsome's sick room is "Ghostly and dark ... and full of lowering shadows" and the observer feels "as though invisible companions were about his bed" (25 p. 412). It is no surprise then that Nadgett, the central personification of these fears, is referred to as "Another of the phantom forms of this terrific Truth!" (51 p. 783). The capitalized 'T' suggests that something supernatural is operating in Nadgett, even if it only exists in the subjective world of Jonas's hallucinations, expressing those inner neuroses by which "he became in a manner his own ghost and phantom, and was at once the haunting spirit and the haunted man" (47 p. 724). Here the supernatural seems to be contained entirely within the bounds of the human psychology of guilt. *Martin Chuzzlewit* depicts the tension between concealment and revelation operating within the concentrated space of the human mind and as such it is Dickens's most secularized account of the struggle.

Carker's intense "visionary terror" is nevertheless different from Jonas's "pursuing Fate" (*MC* 38 p. 597) because it does not exist solely within his own internal world. There is hardly a character in the later novel who is not conscious of it at some level; it is fundamentally part of *Dombey and Son's* external world. The embodiment of this force - the train - could with equal justice be called "Another of the phantom forms of this terrific Truth". Why, then, is truth, or revelation, the

terrible bringer of death in Dickens's fiction? If, moreover, it is a force registered by most of the people in the novel, on what level does it exist in his created world? Does the train ultimately represent a psychological urge towards social survival on the part of certain characters which counteracts the urge to conceal relationships with the rest of the world, or a genuinely supernatural Providence, which brings social relationships to the light of day?

II. The Railway and Truth

Although *Dombey* identifies the railway so powerfully with death, Dickens is also keen to invest it with properties of a healthy, vital truth. The chief characteristic of Mr Toodles, its first representative, is his honesty. His advice to his children even explains this quality with reference to the steam engine:

wotever you're up to in a honest way, it's my opinion
as you can't do better than be open. If you find yourselves
in cuttings or in tunnels, don't you play no secret games.
Keep your whistles going, and let's know where you
are . (38 p. 512)

One reason for this association between trains and truth that was important to Dickens, the former journalist and editor of the *Daily News*, was the speed with which information could be communicated in the railway age. In 1838, a Travelling Post Office between Birmingham and Liverpool came into being, increasing the speed at which mail could be delivered.² Newspapers were also able to receive reports far more quickly than in the days of coach travel. Dickens knew at first hand the importance of being the first to publish news as soon after it happened as possible. A letter to Thomas Beard of 2 May, 1835, relates the story of his race with a *Times* reporter, "literally neck and neck", to bring the text of a speech by Lord John Russell from Exeter to their respective newspaper offices in London. With the advent of the railway age, the amount of time taken in this process was reduced to an unthinkable extent. Furthermore, national newspapers were at last a possibility. Rail travel allowed distribution at such a pace that affairs reported from London in the *Daily News* could still be current by the time they reached Glasgow.

² J. Richards & J. M. Mackenzie, *The Railway Station: a Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 124.

Thus it is that when Dombey, the very antithesis of Toodle in all his attitudes, thinks of the railways bringing knowledge of his life to "the World", he refers to no small number of people:

When he is shut up in his room at night, it is in his
house, outside it, audible in footsteps on the pavement,
visible in print upon the table, steaming to and fro on
railroads and in ships; restless and busy everywhere,
with nothing else but him. (51 p. 682)³

It is no wonder, then, that Dombey hates the train. Determined to be the untouchable public character of his own creation, Dombey and Son, he does not wish to admit anyone into his private world. Mrs Toodle observes him as "a strange apparition that was not to be accosted or understood" (3 p. 25). When her husband, the driver of the engine, presumes to share in Dombey's grief by wearing black in his cap, he is outraged:

To think that he dared to enter ... into the trial and
disappointment of a proud gentleman's secret heart! To
think that this lost child ... with whom he was to have
shut out all the world as with a double door of gold,
should have let in such a herd ...

(20 p. 275)

For Dombey, with his snobbery adding to the basic dread of discovery, such visibility is particularly horrific and he views the train as the agent by which the public bursts into his private life. This is why it causes him not only to think of death, but also "to think of this face of Florence" (p. 277). It is his daughter that holds the key to the mystery at the centre of Dombey's personality. She knows why he is spiritually empty and has the power to make this blindingly clear. Her father feels:

As if she held the clue to something secret in his breast,
of the nature of which he was hardly informed himself.
As if she had an innate knowledge of one jarring and
discordant string within him, and her very breath could
sound it. (3 p. 31)

Dombey, on the other hand, does not desire that anyone see the reality of his nature - least of all himself. Edith's terror of Carker's penetration of her inner world grimly parallels Dombey's fears of his daughter's more loving insight.

³The final chapter of this thesis deals with the eyes of the crowd penetrating the enclosed milieu of the concealer.

What exactly is the truth that Florence reveals? Most obviously, because of her resemblance to the lost child, she continually reminds Dombey of his shattered hopes. She is the useless female child remaining to him in place of his meticulously meditated posterity. Furthermore, the love she so constantly offers him points out that his materialistic world view excludes him from a vital dimension of life. Because of his refusal to participate in the scheme of familial love relationships, both his wife and his son have turned to Florence instead of conforming themselves to his plans for them.⁴ His daughter's every loving act and gesture emphasizes the effects of his concealment of the links of dependence and obligation between him and the rest of the world. His pride cannot deal with this awareness. Admission of error would demolish the whole basis of his identity as he perceives it. Indeed, ontological renewal for Dombey cannot possibly come until this old, self-defined identity dies.

The truth, then, very clearly threatens to tear down Dombey's world and he feels that Florence is killing him because she makes him aware of his failure as a person. He subconsciously transfers the blame for Paul's death on to her young shoulders. Since she encourages the boy to embrace a different set of values from his own, she kills him as an actor in Dombey's scheme. Her father perceives her as the originator of his destruction, when in fact she is merely the agent showing it to him and encouraging him to confront it at its real source. This is exactly the distinction that Dombey fails to make with regard to the railway and the city slums he is compelled to see through the carriage windows:

it is never in his thoughts that the monster who has
brought him there has let the light of day in on these
things: not made or caused them. (20 p. 277)

Dickens associates Florence with the railway again in the next chapter in the metaphors he uses to suggest Dombey's state of mind during his courtship of Edith. Here he aims to generate another Son and resume his dream, but he is also determined to shut out the light of Florence in so doing. The music his fiancée sings "tamed the monster of the iron road, and made it less inexorable" (21 p. 291). Ironically, however, even this takes up the tune sung by Florence to her dying brother. Edith too comes to love Florence and refuses to comply with his expectations, adding another carriage to the train of defeat heading towards him:

Their pride ... made their marriage way a road of ashes.
(47 p. 618)

⁴See pp. 114 ff above.

Once more, Dickens's metaphor returns to the railway as bringer of death.

Dombey's attempts to escape from the truth are therefore still more desperate than Carker's from the train. A figure of speech in the third chapter eerily links the two men by prefiguring the accident:

perhaps, unlearned as [Richards] was, she could have brought
a dawning knowledge home to Mr Dombey at that early
day, which would not then have struck him in the end
like lightning. (3 p. 29)

Truth behaves like the train, "piercing through the heart of every obstacle" (20 p. 275). It is a ruthless annihilator of falsehood. Both Florence and the engine represent the dynamic force by which the point of clarity is brought about in the mystery - the light that must inevitably shine through "the mist of his pride" (3 p. 31) if Dombey is to be rescued. He experiences this light as a form of death. As his marriage and business collapse and creditors strip his house, he is as much "a broken man" (58 p. 776) spiritually as Carker is physically, and he wanders "through the despoiled house like a ghost" (59 p. 798). The impact that has been expected from the beginning comes with tremendous power and Dombey is on the point of completing the image by killing himself outright when Florence intervenes again.

Alexander Welsh has justly observed that:

For some reason the chapter [in which Dombey travels to
Birmingham] has attracted more readers interested in
railroading than in allegory or the death of Paul.
Neglected altogether is the part Florence plays in the
journey - or the part played by Florence's face, which
becomes increasingly prominent as the pulsating engine of
death fades from the foreground.⁵

Starting to fill this gap in interpretative writing on Dickens, Welsh emphasizes again the centrality of truth to Florence's character. He points to the Victorian heroine's tendency to point the male protagonist to a home beyond the grave, whilst insisting that he must pass through the experience of death to reach it:⁶

The famous railway journey demonstrates the availability
to the Victorian imagination of two angels of death, a
saving angel as well as a destroying angel ... ⁷

⁵*The City of Dickens* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 189.

⁶See pp. 24-5 above.

⁷*The City of Dickens*, op cit, p. 190.

It is indeed striking that the essential characteristic of Dickens's heroines - their uncompromising declaration of truth - should in this passage be explicitly compared to a machine of such terrifying destructiveness. Welsh perceptively reads the train as evidence that transcendent revelation cannot come without a death that it is in the nature of human beings to fear. Indeed, the revelation of new life Florence offers cannot come about unless Dombey's old worldview is smashed to atoms. Here I continue Welsh's challenge to discuss this passage in its symbolic context, expanding on his thoughts about the frightening forces of clarity. My contribution will be to place the trains within their context as part of a whole metropolis which symbolically embodies a scheme of concealment and revelation, taking characters to resurrection through an experience of death.

In giving concrete form to the narrative's metaphors for a truth which brings death to the concealer, the railway engine fulfils a similar function to that of Bucket. Just as *Bleak House* shows a London systematized by the police and the articles suggest an infallible network of information circulating into Scotland Yard, so *Dombey and Son* depicts another highly organized system governing London with information passing endlessly out of it into the country at large. One of the marvels of the age was the speed with which messages could be communicated by the electric telegraph, whose wires invariably accompanied the railway tracks. The first use of this invention was in 1839, between West Drayton and Paddington. By 1843, they were a national feature. Dickens refers briefly to the politicians, who "sent on messages before by the electric telegraph, to say that they were coming" (15 p. 218). What perhaps appealed to the contemporary imagination most about this device, however, was its usefulness in the apprehension of fugitives. In 1896, John Pendleton wrote:

it has checked many a forger in his flight from his dupes and the Assize Court, and more than one murderer trying to travel beyond the memory of his victim, and the uncomfortable sensation that is inseparable from the hangman's touch.⁸

The Victorians quite naturally associated this phenomenon, so strongly linked to the railways, with inescapable truth. Dickens's running men, Carker and Dombey, are similarly apprehended, one physically and the other metaphorically, by a force as unerring and sure.

⁸J. Pendleton, *Our Railways; their Origin, Development, Incident and Romance*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1896), vol. I, p. 118.

Both detective force and railway are part of the physical fabric of Dickens's London, but function also as symbols of the revelation of mystery. They are also invested with supernatural qualities but the exact nature of these is left ambiguous, since the solution to the mystery is itself an ambiguous thing in Dickens. On the one hand, it points to a better way of life, concerned with accepting one's part in a system of love relationships, originating in the love of God the Father, to whom Dickens appeals when such an illumination is to be made (*DS* 43 p. 580; 47 p. 620), towards His children. On the other hand, truth is often painful to accept and mercilessly undermines the protective barriers and structures of personality which the individual has used to define his or her identity. Any burst of clarity that threatens to remove this identity is understandably to be feared; it may be fatal ontologically speaking. Florence is herself described as the ultimate agent of discovery: "My better angel!" (61 p. 824). Nevertheless, her father cannot accept her in this rôle and the reader is told that he "rejected the angel, and took up with the tormenting spirit" (20 p. 278). This same dual nature can be seen in his perception of her representative in his thoughts, the railway. Despite its link with the work of the revealing angel, he chooses to see it as a "triumphant monster", a "remorseless monster" and an "indomitable monster", moving with "a shriek, and a roar" (20 pp. 275-6). Carker also views the trains as "approaching monsters" and each one is "another Devil" (55 p. 741). Like Bucket, Florence and her powerful co-symbol may be described as "Angel and devil by turns" (*BH* 54 p. 837) from the point of view of those who fear the identity-dissolving truth they bring.

III. The Railway and Time

It may seem unlikely that so solid and scientific an object as a railway engine should be felt to belong to a supernatural sphere, let alone one so difficult to categorize in terms of good and evil. Nevertheless, as he describes the rail activity that has come to dominate London, Dickens makes it clear that the reader is to see the trains as more than manmade machines. In a single sentence, he combines the sense of unalterable mechanical order and of incomprehensible mystery they simultaneously presented to the early Victorians:

Night and day the conquering engines rumbled at their distant work, or, advancing smoothly to their journey's end, and gliding like tame dragons into the allotted corners grooved out to the inch for their reception, stood bubbling and trembling there, making the walls quake, as if they

were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers
 yet unsuspected in them, and strong purposes not yet
 achieved. (15 p. 219)

If they are "tame", they are "dragons" nevertheless and even in the station yard they threaten destruction to their shelter, as they vibrate with potential energy. Nevertheless, a higher power is controlling them with astonishing precision. Their journeys are planned out "to the inch". Dickens impresses the reader with the "great powers" and "strong purposes" which he has in store for these engines with authorial foresight of Carker's doom.

On the most prosaic level, it is the London and Birmingham timetable that states when the engines embark on their journeys. Railways are largely given the credit for establishing punctuality as a national virtue.⁹ This was bound to appeal to Dickens, who insisted on good time-keeping. The guiding force determining the movement of the trains in the novel is not merely human, however. After all, the schedule planners did not set out to kill Carker at four am precisely. Rather it is Dickens himself who, as the author, holds the trains back, champing at the bit, until the correct moment for their mission. But Dickens had a profound conviction that even the writer's judgement of the timing of a fictional revelation was only a shadow of an actual providential scheme. He solemnly wrote to Wilkie Collins in 1859:

I think the business of art is to ... shew ... what
 everything has been working to - but only to SUGGEST,
 until the fulfilment comes. These are the ways of
 Providence - of which ways, all Art is but a little
 imitation.¹⁰

He thus considered the narrative drive towards discovery, to which the trains point, as itself a sign of an infallible divine scheme.

Carker certainly perceives the engines as bringers of a judgement described in terms of divine punishment. The "fierce fire dropping glowing coals" (55 p. 741) evokes Hell itself and the aftermath of the accident is inspired by the visitations of Yahweh's wrath in the Old Testament:

others drove some dogs away that sniffed upon the road,
 and soaked his blood up, with a train of ashes.
 (55 p. 743)

This recalls, for example, the complete destruction visited upon Ahab and Jezebel:

⁹See, for example, M. Baumgarten, 'Railway/Reading/Time: *Dombey and Son* and the Industrial World' in *DSA*, vol. XIX (1990) pp. 67ff.

¹⁰to Wilkie Collins, 6 October, 1859, *Letters*, op cit, vol. IX, p. 258.

Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession [of another man's land]? ... In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel ... And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands.

(1 Kings 21: 19, 23; 2 Kings 9 :35)

The nineteenth-century sinner is aware that the trains are likewise controlled by a system he must but cannot escape and that in its time it will come to pass as surely as the word of the Lord. Dickens may have brushed aside what he perceived to be the vengeful God of the first two-thirds of the Bible in his private remarks, but the novels reveal just how much his sense of justice was actually informed by a concept of a God whose punishment of the guilty was irrevocably guaranteed. Carker reflects upon the "irresistible bearing" of his mechanised avenger and thinks "what a cruel power and might it had" (55 pp. 741-2). Each train that passes provides a foretaste of his doom and, as always in Dickens, the condemned man is fascinated by what awaits him. In the space of one short chapter, he becomes "irresistibly attracted" (55 p. 741) to the trains and considers what it would be:

To see the great wheels slowly turning, and to think of
being run down and crushed!

The regularity and power of these revolutions, recall and intensify Longfellow's image of Divine justice as destructive wheels operating to a strict, inexorable rhythm:

Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small.¹¹

All is in irresistible order and the futility of resisting death beyond the decreed moment is masterfully evoked. Time - and in particular, the railway timetable - are thus a guarantor of the operation of Providence in *Dombey and Son*. One of the most chilling sentences in the whole of Dickens's fiction is the uncompromising, matter of fact statement of the station waiter:

Express comes through at four, Sir. - It don't stop
(55 p. 742).

Accurate measurement of time is one of the recurring motives of the novel. Cuttle's admiration of Solomon Gills's science reaches its peak when he imagines his ability to make a timepiece:

¹¹Longfellow's *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford University Press, 1910), p. 141.

I suppose he could make a clock if he tried? And it would go! Lord, how that clock would go!

(4 p. 44)

Gills himself is fiercely proud of the:

tremendous chronometer in his fob, rather than doubt which precious possession, he would have believed in a conspiracy against it on the part of all the clocks and watches in the City, and even of the very Sun itself.

(4 p. 37)

Just such a conspiracy seems to appear, however, nine chapters later:

There was even railway time observed in clocks, as if the sun itself had given in.

(15 p. 218)

The MPs all have "watches in their hands" as part of the same phenomenon. In this London, the railway has replaced the natural world as the reference point for the rhythms that hold the framework of the universe together. Every movement of the modern capital is governed by the railway. People must catch their trains on time and plot their motions accordingly. In fact, in this period, the rail networks significantly reformed the whole conception of time-keeping. Since they connected far-flung parts of the country, they needed to observe the same time system throughout the journey. A process of standardisation ensued and legislation had eradicated local times in favour of Greenwich Mean Time by 1880. The railways had enforced a single framework of time that makes the city a unified whole in this novel.

Dombey and Son represents an advance even on Dickens's own immediately preceding fiction in terms of its conception of what makes London tick. Here, "the heart of this great change" is located firmly at Euston station. Tellingly, the paragraphs in Dickens's periodical, *Master Humphrey's Clock*, that come between the end of *The Old Curiosity Shop* and the beginning of *Barnaby Rudge* had seen the clock of St Paul's as the crucial centre of the city's identity:

marking that ... it ... regulated the progress of the life around, the fancy came upon me that this was London's Heart, and that when it should cease to beat, the city would be no more.

Master Humphrey meditates upon its workings, representing time as an unstoppable machine whose task is inexorably to bring punishment:

as if its business were to crush the seconds as they came trooping on, and remorselessly to clear a path before the Day of Judgement.

This is the same adverb as that used to describe Dombey's impression of the railway and Humphrey goes on to speak of the clock's "indomitable working".¹² By 1848, Dickens has organized his London as an emblem of human life governed by the mighty force of time around the still more "remorseless" and "indomitable monster" that is the train (20 p. 276).

Dickens builds a sense of despair in the good characters as they reflect upon this imposition of order. They feel that the new timetable is very different from the old system of time that has been observed in their lives. Gills laments:

I have fallen behind the time, and am too old to catch
it again. Even the noise it makes a long way ahead,
confuses me. (4 p. 42)

As the plot unfolds, however, it becomes obvious that the disjunction between railway time and that observed by Gills's chronometer is only apparent. It is "The relentless chronometer", for example, not the City clocks, that "announced that Walter must turn his back upon the Wooden Midshipman" (19 p. 266). Eventually, Sol's investments pay off and it is revealed that instead of being behind the time, he is "a little before it, and had to wait the fullness of the time and the design (62 p. 830). The fates of these characters operate to a timetable, which is an evidence of a careful plan. In this book, revelation is not given to the initiate *ad hoc*, but at a perfectly ordained point. The changes that so bewilder Gills militate in his favour, contrary to appearances, and his initially hollow statement, "We are men of business. We belong to the City" (4 p. 91), proves true. The London of the railway age works to their good and the chronometer tallies with Bradshaw after all.

If there is a watch that does not keep railway time, it is surely Cuttle's own, with its accompanying instructions to:

Put it back half an hour every morning, and about
another quarter towards the arternoon, and it's a watch
that'll do you credit. (19 p. 266)

Murray Baumgarten tries to reconcile the two types of time by saying:

Dickens was able to hope that the punctuality so
important for the new railroad civilization would be
informed by the personal ease of Cap'n Cuttle, for he
was still part of a transitional era.¹³

¹²*Master Humphrey's Clock and A Child's History of England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 107, 109.

¹³'Railway/Reading/time', *op cit*, p. 68.

This may well be true, but it is not a complete account of Cuttle's role. His character is founded upon inaccuracy and the eccentric watch fits with his constant mangling of quotations. He represents the ordinary person hopelessly confused by the contradiction between actual events and the articles of his personal faith (summarised by 'Lovely Peg'). His plan for the shape the future will take is that Walter will become the head of the company and achieve greatness. This is identical with Dombey's plan, but for the crucial fact that Walter, whom he describes as "a'most a son of mine" (17 p. 230), has supplanted Paul. Gills jokingly remarks upon this, saying, "The Son's a little in our way, at present, I'm afraid Ned" (4 p. 46). As Dombey must, the Captain must see this dream receive its "death-shock" (32 p. 447) in the process of the real plan before a new and truer version of it can arise. Unlike Gills, Cuttle constantly tries to impose his own Providential scheme for making the story he has devised for Walter happen. His efforts at secret investigation prolong the mystery as his removal from Brig Place prevents his reception of the explanatory letters. In this most fatalistic of Dickens' novels, the hands of the clock may not be put forward or back at will in the way the Captain recommends.

Dombey also must learn this lesson. He has a very firm sense of how the question of his identity is to be answered: he is to be the Dombey in Dombey and Son and he seeks to accelerate time, in order to enjoy this ontological fulfilment the sooner. At Paul's birth, his watch is "running a race" with the doctor's (1 p. 10). Later the reader is told:

how long Paul's childish life had been to him, and
how his hopes were set upon a later stage of his
existence.

He ruminates:

Dear me, six will be changed to sixteen, before we have
time to look about us. (11 p. 139)

The artificial system of education chosen to achieve this causes boys to learn with unnatural rapidity and then to die intellectually. Blimber's clock, with its refrain of "how, is, my, lit, tle, friend!" (11 p. 145), perhaps fascinates Paul because it is a reminder to him of where the time is really leading him, like the rhythmic song of the waves. The more Dombey rushes Paul through his childhood, the more he hastens his death. In contrast to his father, Paul would prefer to hold time back, saying "I had rather be a child". Here, he resembles Gills, who regretfully sighs, "Ah! time, time, time!" (19 p. 335) but, once more, Florence shows the way of truth in accepting circumstances as they are:

But a word from Florence, who was always at his side,
restored him to himself ... (16 p. 293)

Florence teaches both Cuttle and Dombey to perceive the changes of time as mainly benevolent. The railway's power in this novel comes from the fact that it represents a strict timetable, governing the whole city, which brings exposure and consequent destruction of identity at pre-determined times. By constantly recalling the relationships of love Dombey has turned his back on, Florence also reminds her father that a painful dissolution of his identity as Dombey and Son is surely coming. The railway is one way of expressing the certainty of the scheme that works towards revelation of new identity through such a death and Florence is another. She, however, is able to re-assure Paul that this scheme is a Providential one, causing death to come at just the right moment to bring genuine new life as a result of the experience. Ultimately, the railway time, to whose inexorable programme of change Cuttle and Gills surrender their aspirations, proves to bring renewed life and vitality after all.

IV. The Railway and the City

The railway fits into the symbolic pattern of *Dombey and Son* as an agent of revelation, but what is its role within the overarching symbol of the city? It has already been seen that in moulding London's time, rail travel partially recreated the character of life in the metropolis. The two chapters set in Camden Town show the railway taking a more tangible part in shaping the London environment.

The novel's first portrait of Staggs's Gardens during the construction of the London-Birmingham line, is a landscape of death such as may be expected from a region that has dealings with the railway. In fact, chapter six may be said to describe nothing less than the death of a neighbourhood, which is reduced to "carcasses of ragged tenements" subject to the "glare and roar of flames" (6 p. 65). That such destructive terms are used is hardly surprising. Immense damage to the capital was caused as more and more railways drove their way through. H. J. Dyos estimates that by 1867, more than fifty thousand inhabitants of London had had to move out of their homes. In 1866 alone, the building of the North London Railway disrupted more than nine hundred working class families, and the Midland Railway Company demolished four thousand houses, displacing thirty-two thousand inhabitants.¹⁴ And this only accounts for the living! The latter line required the flattening of a cemetery

¹⁴'Railways and Housing in Victorian London' in *The Journal of Transport History* vol. II (1955), pp. 12-13.

and the re-burying of the bodies to reach St Pancras station.¹⁵ Their breathing counterparts had to wait until 1885 for legislation to rehouse them.

The most striking feature of this stage in the process is the incompleteness of the landscape:

Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; ... fragments of unfinished walls and arches, wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places ... unintelligible as any dream. (6 p. 65)

This is the same railway that reduces Carker to "mutilated fragments" (55 p. 743). At the other end of the line stands Birmingham, another metropolis that serves as an enormous embodiment of such fragmentation:

Everything around is blackened. There are dark pools of water, muddy lanes, and miserable habitations far below. There are jagged walls and falling houses close at hand, and through the battered roofs and broken windows, wretched rooms are seen, where want and fever hide themselves in many wretched shapes, while smoke, and crowded gables, and distorted chimneys, and deformity of brick and mortar penning up deformity of mind and body, choke the murky distance. (20 pp. 276-7)

It reads as if the train has collided with Birmingham as it will collide with Carker and has caused a destruction of the city as complete as the destruction of his body. As in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Birmingham is an hellish destination:

It was the journey's fitting end, and might have been the end of everything; it was so ruinous and dreary.

(DS20 p. 277)

This is not only the end of the line, but the end of the world. Dombey interprets the urban landscape in terms which imply that some kind of apocalyptic judgement has fallen upon Birmingham. It suggests to him the collapse his own world is heading for. The city, demolished, like Carker, as if by divine judgement meted out according to the irrevocable timetable, is a grim reminder that no escape is possible from the deathly consequences of concealing one's links with the outside world.

¹⁵John Betjamen, *London's Historic Railway Stations* (London: John Murray, 1972), p. 12.

Although the building of the railways heralded in a new age of civilisation, London and Birmingham rather resemble the remains of one. Like *Little Dorrit*,¹⁶ *Dombey and Son* uses London's physical cityscape as a microcosm of a society in need of, but resisting, complete regeneration. The metaphors of falling greatness, however, immediately apply to the coming collapse of Dombey's business empire. He fears this as an irrecoverable death. The loss of Paul represents the end of his hopes and plans and the speed of the train underlines the impossibility of recalling the past:

great works ... fall like a beam of shadow an inch broad,
upon the eye, and then are lost. (20 p. 276)

Instead of accepting Florence's love and participating in the system of familial love relationships, the only means of restoring life, he leaves his connection with his daughter in a broken state, like the half-finished roads and "bridges that led nowhere" of Camden Town. This fragmented London potently reflects the confused state of his mind.

There is little indication in chapter six that the railway will ever benefit anyone. Echoing the subjective views of the inhabitants of Staggs's Gardens, Dickens says of it, "Nothing was the better for it, or thought of being so " (6 p. 66). Many critics have taken these passages as evidence that:

He painted a horrified picture of the impact of the
railways on London in *Dombey and Son*. ...¹⁷

Comments like this seem curiously to ignore chapter fifteen, where the fruits of this upheaval are shown: "rotten" houses are replaced by "palaces" and "The miserable waste ground" with its "refuse-matter" is replaced by opulence, "warehouses, crammed with rich goods and costly merchandise". A sea change in the correct sense of the term has taken place, turning dead eyes into pearls. Here is the first sign in the book that re-shaping can indeed lead to regeneration and revivification:

new streets that had stopped disheartened in the
mud and wagon-ruts, formed towns within themselves ...
Bridges that had led to nothing, led to villas, gardens,
churches ... (15 pp. 217-18)

A "wholesome", healthy and pure environment has been made out of the city. Dickens's statement that "from the very core of all this dire disorder, [the railway]

¹⁶See pp. 105 ff. above.

¹⁷J. Richards, 'The role of the Railway' in M. Wheeler (ed.), *Ruskin and Environment - the Storm-cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.124.

trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement" (6 p. 65) initially sounds ironic, but it turns out to be extremely accurate. Although the exposure brought by the railway has destroyed the identity of Camden Town, rendering it unrecognizable even to its former inhabitants, this metaphorical death has brought a positive change of identity to the city and created a vibrant new community.

What is done for the city is symbolic of what can be done for the human being. Florence's love offers the dynamic of regeneration but Dombey views her simply as a destructive force. The folly of this is shown in his identical attitude to the railway. Although Dickens describes Birmingham as a "scene of transition", Dombey prefers to characterize it as:

a ruin and a picture of decay, instead of hopeful change,
and promise of better things ... (20 p. 277)

Here he resembles the reactionary inhabitants of Staggs's Gardens, who regard their home as "a sacred grove not to be withered by Railroads" (6 p. 66). The neighbourhood experiences a mass conversion, however, and eventually the force of change is universally embraced. London fills its space with "railway hackney-coach and cab-stands; railway omnibuses, railway streets and buildings" (p. 218). Clearly the city has undergone a substantial change of identity. Camden Town is personified as a convert, who has been through the death of self and emerged in newness of life. It has become "wise and penitent" (p. 218) as Dombey must before the revelation that brings death to his world can bring its own transformative resurrection.

And of course London really was transformed by the building of the railways. Firstly the destruction of adjacent streets exposed the deprivation of slum areas to public view and the consequent outrage prompted middle-class will for change. Engels describes this process taking place in Manchester in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1844:

immediately under the railway bridge there exists a court that in point of filth and horror far surpasses all the others - just because it was formerly so shut up, so hidden and secluded that it could not be reached without considerable difficulty. I thought I knew this entire district thoroughly, but even I would never have found it myself without the breach made here by the railway

viaduct.¹⁸

Charles Dickens's own brother-in-law, Henry Austin, was among those shocked into action by his experience of the London-Blackwall line in the 1830s. During its construction, removal of the houses allowed him to see at first hand the disorder and filth inhabited by many ordinary people, stimulating a lifelong interest in reform. His enthusiasm served as a catalyst for the novelist's own interest in such matters.

The railway, then, served as an actualization of the "good spirit who would take the house-tops off ... and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes" (47 p. 620). This is described as a "terrible ... revelation" and indeed it was for many Victorians. The reader can see this process taking place in the novel. Dombey's journey "let the light of day in on these things" (20 p. 277), making him uncomfortably aware of the living conditions of the poor just as it had done for Henry Austin. The construction of the rail network, presented by Dickens as proceeding with the energy of the trains themselves, has revealed that the network of connections between human beings has gone awry. For Engels, the railway cut through the barriers that concealed the needy from the sight of the rich in Manchester. They also give Dombey his first sustained view of the suffering caused by the wealthy enclosing themselves within their self-defined milieu and cutting off their relationships to people who live in this environment. The truth revealed by the train is therefore primarily social and the resultant transformation of the cityscape essentially physical. As well as raising awareness of social problems, however, the railways actively destroyed many slums, forcing the people to move to other areas. Of course this only led to people being made homeless at first but it encouraged the move outwards towards the more salubrious and carefully planned suburban districts.¹⁹ Andrew Sanders is thus correct to identify the transformation of Staggs's Gardens as an expression of mid-Victorian optimism that the social benefits brought by the railways would outweigh the disruption they had caused. He is further correct in seeing the positivity of that change in the Williamsesque interconnectedness of the city.²⁰ Nevertheless the transformation has a positively supernatural dimension - the train is both machine and "good spirit" and what it shows is "one duty to the Father of one family" (47 p. 620), a God with a definite existence in the world of the novel.

¹⁸quoted in Stephen Marcus, 'Reading the Illegible' in H. J. Dyos & M. Wolf (eds.), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p.268.

¹⁹This at least was how the predominantly middle-class newspapers perceived the situation. H. J. Dyos in his article 'Railways and Housing in Victorian London' (*The Journal of Transport History*, vol. II, pp. 11-19, 90-99) quotes *The Times* as saying on 2 March 1861 that the destruction caused by the building of the lines, "though attended with the present inconvenience of disturbing the occupants, is ultimately of unmixed advantage, by driving them into new and better tenements in the suburbs", p. 15.

²⁰See pp. 9 ff above.

Physical action in social reform was, to Dickens, the operation of God's love in the world, the renewal of relationships of love flowing from God to human beings through their acknowledged connections with each other. Thus, if the ultimately positive depiction of the railways is, as Sanders claims, representative of the spirit of the age, Dickens is optimistic about that spirit because it is "a good spirit", making known a system of love relationships according to a timetable of Providential progress.

V. The Transformed City

London's history may in fact be told in terms of catastrophic disasters that brought about changes in the cityscape, which ultimately regenerated the urban environment. One has only to think of the Great Fire of London in 1666 clearing away some of the most wretched slums, leading to the building of Christopher Wren's fine churches. Although the poor did not directly benefit from this change, the spread of the plague was arrested with the clearance of disease-ridden slums. In addition, the previously depressed ethos of the city centre had become vibrant.²¹ In the twentieth century, the destruction caused by the Blitz, despite the loss of life involved, allowed the replacement of severely deprived East End housing with greatly improved buildings.²² In *Dombey and Son*, the demolition of the capital is equally viewed as a disaster, a "great earthquake" (6 p. 65) that provides for positive renewal. In the reformed world described in chapter fifteen, the "rotten" has been replaced by the "wholesome", the deathbound by the lifebound, the "carcasses" of houses by those which have "sprung into existence". Weariness, in the form of the

²¹Dryden's optimism on this score can be seen in his alchemical metaphors in *Annus Mirabilis* (ll. 1169ff, in *The Poetical Works of Dryden*, G. R. Noyes (ed.), (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Houghton Mifflin, 1950), p. 50.), where the flames are said to produce a golden city. Dickens's assessment in *A Child's History of England* is one of apocalyptic destruction and positive transformation, which he describes with a reprise of the Staggs's Gardens passage:

This was a terrible visitation at the time, and occasioned great loss and suffering to the two hundred thousand burnt-out people But the fire was a great blessing to the city afterwards, for it arose from its ruins very much improved - built more regularly, more widely, more clearly and carefully, and therefore much more healthy. It might be far more healthy than it is, but that there are some people in it still - even now, at this time, nearly two hundred years later - so selfish, so pig-headed, and so ignorant, that I doubt if even another Great Fire would warm them up to do their duty (p. 395).

Three years earlier, he had clearly been able to envisage a second great fire in the railway upheaval, achieving just that.

²²For a balanced discussion of how the Blitz - or more accurately, pre-war fear of the Blitz - forced an acknowledgement of the fact that London's housing problems would have to be dealt with by a fully united metropolis, rather than piecemeal action, see Ken Young and Patricia C. Garsine, *Metropolitan London* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), pp. 221-295.

"streets that had stopped disheartened in the mud and wagon-ruts", has gone and an immense energy has come. All is reminiscent of the words which herald the arrival of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation:

Behold, I make all things new. (21:5)

Dickens finds the changes that take place inspiring because of the same yearning for renewal addressed by the vision of the aged apostle. John's vision, like Dickens's, was of a perfect urban environment in which Christian principles of love for God and for one's brothers and sisters shaped the ethos. Both describe the complete destruction of the current order as absolutely necessary for the emergence of the new city. Whereas John considered the realisation of this vision to be in the future, after the return of Christ, Dickens presents this transforming application of Christ's standards as realisable now. Like Blake, he seeks to build this New Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land. With characteristic optimism, he shows the destruction of London caused by the coming of the railway as the apocalyptic destruction of the self-absorbed world of Dombey and many like him that is needed if this city characterized by new life and relationships of divine love was to come about according to the plan.

Transformation of a cityscape from "The miserable waste ground" to a place where "churches" are prominent (15 p. 218) becomes a recurring feature in Dickens's fiction. *Great Expectations*, for example, underlines the change that has taken place within Pip as he embraces a less egocentric attitude with a new view of the city of London in its Christian aspect:

Wednesday morning was dawning when I looked out of window The river, still dark and mysterious, was spanned by bridges that were turning coldly grey, with here and there at top a warm touch from the burning in the sky. As I looked along the clustered roofs, with Church towers and spires shooting into the unusually clear air, the sun rose up, and a veil seemed to be drawn from the river, and millions of sparkles burst out upon its waters. From me too, a veil seemed to be drawn, and I felt strong and well.

(III 14 p. 430)

Clean air, churches, physical and spiritual health are the results of the drawing away of the veil and the vast scale of London as the symbol of this revelation suggests not only that change is taking place at a societal level, but that a power larger than the human being is bringing it about.

In *Little Dorrit*, this transformation of London becomes the focus of the novel's climax. Once the secrets upon which the city of that novel is built are brought out into the open, the destruction which it is so obviously tending towards occurs cataclysmically. First the metaphorical castle which William Dorrit has built in the air crumbles to atoms, then Merdle's business dissolves financially. The fall of this house, however, is presented as the fall of the entire city which it overshadows. Men and women throughout London's boundaries have invested in the house which contains Society in microcosm, encapsulated in the guests at the dinner parties held there. Dickens follows its collapse with innumerable images of destruction amounting to nothing less than the fall of the entire metropolis, crushing the inhabitants beneath its weight. Bar and Physician:

looked round upon the immense city, and said, If all those hundreds and thousands of beggared people who were yet asleep, could only know, as they two spoke, the ruin that impended over them, what a fearful cry against one miserable soul would go up to Heaven! (II 25 p. 689)

As the dust from Merdle's tumbling city settles, the author progresses to the final fall, which provides a concrete image of the death of secretive London. Once the truth has finally exploded the world Mrs Clennam has built for herself, her house disintegrates like Manfred's castle. Dickens's magnificent rumbling tone captures perfectly the complicated rhythms of an intricate edifice tumbling to the ground:

it heaved, surged outward, trembled asunder in fifty places, collapsed, and fell As they looked up, wildly crying for help, the great pile of chimneys which was then alone left standing like a tower in a whirlwind, rocked, broke, and hailed itself down upon the heap of ruin, as if every tumbling fragment were intent upon burying the crushed wretch deeper. (II 31 p. 772)

This moment, however, is not merely the focal point of the book because it gives meaning to its other crumbling structures, but because it is at this point of death that resurrection can occur. Having made her disclosure to Little Dorrit, Mrs Clennam is given strength for one last attempt at an unselfish action in the light of the truth she has just made public. Similarly, the collapse of the house leads to a new and vital vision of London. At first it seems that the catastrophe will lead only to further concealment. The spectators are "Deafened by the noise, stifled, choked, and blinded by the dust", but the end result is transcendent clarity:

The dust storm, driving between them and the placid sky, parted for a moment and showed them the stars.

(pp. 771-2)

Again, Dickens presents a change of heart that causes the penitent to view London differently.

As in *Dombey and Son* and *Great Expectations*, the panorama's chief characteristics are a healthy lifestyle and unobscured Christianity. Mrs Clennam steps out of her old self-referential world and watches it disappear. Now she finds herself in a new environment where altruistic, merciful values are seen everywhere:

The vista of street and bridge was plain to see, and the sky was serene and beautiful. People stood and sat at their doors, playing with children and enjoying the evening; numbers were walking for air ... (p. 771)

The suffocating London of Arthur's first Sunday back at home (I 3), which, in its prohibition of enjoyment, shared in the Puritanical atmosphere of the house, also seems to have been demolished as well. Familial relationships are fully realised again and men and women are apprehending their connections of love with one another. This realisation of true connections is the correctly understood message of the previously concealed crosses:

As they crossed the bridge, the clear steeples of the many churches looked as if they had advanced out of the murk that usually enshrouded them and come much nearer.

Just as the cross atop St Pauls' has been divorced of its meaning to Jo by all that is represented by the fog, so the Christian meaning of the city has at last been revealed in forgiveness and charity. Little Dorrit has taught Mrs Clennam to see Christianity in its true perspective and this is reflected for the reader in the beautiful change in the city.²³ This is not merely figured by a penetration of the fog, however, but by a radical overturning of the entire metropolitan order.

London's transformation is as complete and as evidently touched by the numinous as the New Jerusalem. Here is John's vision of the eternal metropolis:

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamb is the light thereof.
And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it ...
And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. (Revelation 21:23-5)

²³See pp. 118 ff above for discussion of the specifically Christian nature of the transformation undergone internally by Mrs Clennam and then externally by the city.

The perpetually bright twilight of the reformed London seems a direct allusion to this:

It was one of those summer evenings when there is no greater darkness than a long twilight The smoke that rose into the sky had lost its dingy hue and taken a brightness upon it. 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 glory. (p. 771)

This it is that leads Dennis Walder to conclude that "There is no more profound or original expression of the religious aspect of Dickens's imagination than *Little Dorrit*,"²⁴ and certainly, even if Dickens wants his heaven on earth, it is nonetheless a heaven defined by the genuine divine love that exists between its inhabitants. His supernatural revelation is defined by social care as the manifestation of the love of the God of Jesus Christ.

The city of *Little Dorrit* has changed at the level of its whole ethos. Although the Circumlocution Office remains, Merdle and Cadsby are gone and the dominance of the Puritanical elite has faded. Nevertheless the cityscape looks different only from a subjective point of view privileged by the author. The transformation of the cityscape that occurs in *Dombey and Son* is physical and much more tangible. Although the methodology is different, it again reflects what happens to an individual bound within the confines of a house when his world is smashed to atoms by revelation of a spiritual truth and then built anew by the same force. Dickens perceived a potent emblem of this force in the speed and strength of the railway trains and in the irreversible physical and social alterations they effected in London. For the capital would never be the same again.

VI. The poetry of the railway train

For Dickens, then, there was something genuinely fascinating in the steam engine - but not in the sense in which many are captivated by them today. There are

²⁴*Dickens and Religion* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 195.

few descriptions of the play of light on their colourful metallic surfaces or delineations of their graceful shapes. As with Turner's painting, 'Rain, Steam and Speed', with which Dickens's portraits are so frequently compared,²⁵ what matters instead is the sense of velocity, power and purpose. In *Dombey and Son*, the trains are depicted like this because they represent the supernatural dynamic through which mystery is clarified within an infallible Providential scheme. This force is an inherent factor in the composition of a city that otherwise tends towards the furtherance of confusion. To invest these awesome vehicles with such qualities, symbolically linking them to the inevitable revelation of love relationships offered by Florence, is to make of them something truly beautiful. There is indeed some justification in Ruskin's much quoted accusation that Dickens was "a pure modernist" and "leader of the steam-whistle party".²⁶ By the turn of the century, another critic, A. W. Ward, recognised this aspect of his aesthetic in a more positive light:

Dickens had a strong sense of what I may call the
poetry of the railway train.²⁷

Ruskin would not have acknowledged that such a thing existed for the possession.

Perhaps the major reason for Ruskin's abhorrence of the steam engine as an aesthetic object is that for him, beauty belonged to rest and contemplation. He condemned the desire to decorate passenger stations as "one of the strange and evil tendencies of the present day". He considered rail travel incompatible with beauty because its speed stripped the individual of his or her human connection with the surrounding world and made him or her into a thing:

It transmutes a man from a traveller into a living parcel.
For the time he has parted with the nobler characteristics
of his humanity for the sake of a planetary power of
locomotion.²⁸

For Dickens, however, riding on this rhythm *adds* dignity because beauty is in motion. One has only to experience the pace of his prose and the vitality of his best creations in character to appreciate this. Dickens depicted the dissolution of identity that Ruskin complained of in rail travel as a positive, exhilarating experience that could push towards discovery of a new identity in relation to the rest of the world. He saw in this inexorable metropolitan force an emblem of the Providential timetable that he hoped was taking his society onwards to a transforming apprehension of

²⁵See, for example, 'Railway/ Reading/ Time', op cit, pp. 66 ff.

²⁶Letter to Charles Eliot Norton, *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903-12), Vol. XXXVII, p. 7

²⁷A. W. Ward, *Dickens* (London: Macmillan, 1909), p. 81.

²⁸*The Works of Ruskin*, op cit, vol. VIII, p. 159.

divinely appointed love relationships. Herein, he is at his most modern, resembling Gautier, who called the stations "These cathedrals of the new humanity"²⁹ and G. K. Chesterton, who said of the London terminus:

It has many of the characteristics of a great ecclesiastical building; it has vast arches, void spaces, coloured lights, and, above all, it has recurrence or ritual.³⁰

It is not that the commercial and mechanical have overtaken the religious in the nineteenth-century imagination, but that in them the religious numinous has found a new way to manifest itself.

These important buildings formed most travellers' first solid impression of London and to Londoners themselves, they symbolized the alterations that had come. In 1844, the London South-Western company brought trains to a new station at Waterloo Bridge. The Great Northern's King's Cross was added in 1852, Paddington for the Great Western followed three years later. The 1860s saw the establishment of stations in the City itself in Charing Cross and Blackfriars (1864) and the South-Eastern Railway's Cannon Street was in place by 1867. Before Dickens's death, the Metropolitan, or Underground, was well under way. Although Dickens's fiction rarely lingers inside a station, he would have agreed with Chesterton in grasping their importance as the starting and finishing point of a spiritual journey, where the movement of the railway takes on a divinely ordained character - a setting where a renewing communion of truth can be brought to fulfilment. Conceptually, if not geographically, Euston station is the unnamed centre of *Dombey and Son's* new London and the focus of its rebirth:

To and from the heart of this great change, all day and night, throbbing currents rushed and returned incessantly like its life's blood.

Not only is it the heart of the city, but it is also the heart of the "great change" that the metropolis stands for. Sending and receiving trains around the clock, it "produced a fermentation in the place that was always in action". Perceptively, Dickens describes how the whole ethos of the modern city is designed to facilitate rapid movement:

The very houses seemed disposed to pack up and take trips. (15 p. 218)

London becomes a centre for people and goods to come into and move around in, never staying too fixedly in one place - sometimes to be shipped far across the sea, sometimes to another part of the city. The blood, which is to say the life, of the city -

²⁹quoted in Jean Dethier (ed.), *All Stations, a Journey through 150 Years of Railway History* (London: Thames Hudson, 1981), p. 6.

³⁰G. K. Chesterton, *Tremendous Trifles* (London: Methuen, 1909), p. 219.

and the transforming "great change" which characterizes it, is the "Crowds of people and mountains of goods, departing and arriving scores upon scores of times in every four-and-twenty hours".

When Ruskin takes up this figure of speech one year later in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, the railway makes London itself the heart of the country, not of a progressive force of change. Instead, the movement is symptomatic of "the ceaseless fever of ... life", of which he writes:

along the iron veins that traverse the frame of our country, beat and flow the fiery pulses of its exertion, hotter and faster every hour. All vitality is concentrated through those throbbing arteries into the central cities; the country is passed over like a green sea by narrow bridges, and we are thrown back in continually closer crowds upon the city gates.³¹

Ruskin sees the railway as part of the city world, characteristically diseased ("fever") and even infernal ("fiery", "hotter and faster"), and believes that the countryside is being marginalized, even sapped of its life. Both writers respond to the emerging phenomenon with an identical metaphor but Ruskin's words resemble Dombey's reaction to the scene. Dickens uses the same metaphor to invest the whole backdrop of the novel with a symbolic suggestion of healthy rhythms of the circulation of life.

Other Victorians also saw the accelerated motion of goods more positively. When the railway was introduced to the capital in 1836 with the London and Blackwall, which connected London Bridge and Deptford, its aim was to reduce the volume of freight on the Thames. Major goods stations developed quickly alongside the passenger termini. These appealed to the imagination of Ernest Protheroe, writing in the early years of this century, much as the passenger stations had appealed to that of Dickens:

By eight o'clock at night the platforms of a London goods station are congested with great stacks of goods, every imaginable commodity and every conceivable shape. When the work of loading the vans and trucks commences, one is persuaded that the chaotic array will never be reduced to order. Men, busy as ants, wheel the packages to the waiting vehicles; there is bustle and noise, but no confusion, since each man knows

³¹*The Works of Ruskin*, op cit, vol. VIII, p. 246.

what to do - and does it.³²

This is the world as portrayed in *Dombey and Son*, in all its bewildering variety of experience, subject to the workings of an orderly Providential plan.

If goods are one aspect of what the stations pump around London, however, then people were still more perceived as the cells in the city's "life's blood". Of course most people in the days before the advent of the Underground did not move around London itself by rail, but by more traditional horse-drawn methods. Nevertheless, often the routes of the omnibuses were between the rail termini, as names like "the King's Crosses", "The Great Northern's" and "The Paddingtons" testify.³³ Hackney cabs also benefited as the need to arrive at the platform on time increased. At the start of the 1830s, there were 1265 in operation in the capital. By 1863, this was increased to 6800 and in 1888, the total is estimated at 11000.³⁴ Dickens's comment on the "railway hackney-coach and cab-stands; railway omnibuses" (15 p. 214) was absolutely accurate. London was being made a fuller and yet a faster place to live by the railways.

Baudelaire too, in a passage that has already been quoted in another context and to which this thesis will return, saw the incessant movement of the crowds as the blood of Paris:

Les mystères partout coulent comme des sèves
Dans les canaux étroits du colosse puissant.

Mysteries flow everywhere like the sap
In the narrow veins of this mighty giant

(*Les Sept Vieillards*' I, 1-4)³⁵

The metropolis is kept alive as an artistic entity because of the mysteries contained in the crowd. Whereas the streets are the "canaux étroits" (narrow veins) that keep them in motion in Baudelaire's poem, the veins of Dickens's city are the infinitely more forceful railways. For Dickens too it is human movement within the city, apparently random but governed by elliptical and constantly intersecting patterns, that houses the mysteries of relationship. As this thesis will shortly discuss, the perpetually flowing and circulating crowd has a crucial revelatory and regenerative role to play in the later chapters of *Dombey and Son*. In chapter fifteen, Dickens

³²*Railways of the World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1914), p. 224.

³³Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 4 vols. (New York: Dover, 1968), vol. III p. 337.

³⁴*The Railway Station - a Social History*, op cit, p. 311.

³⁵*The Complete Verse* Francis Scarfe (ed.), (London: Anvil, 1986), p. 177.

establishes the rhythms of that crowd in the reader's mind as having been decisively shaped by the Providential railway time. In this novel mystery depends upon three such flowing forces. Having considered the railway, this thesis must deal with the other two as they appear in Dickens's fiction, namely the river and the crowd itself.

"Oh, the dreadful river" - The Thames within London.

"Dickens' earliest attempt to pull a novel together by repeating a 'symbol' seems to be *Dombey and Son*."¹ In this unflattering tone, John Carey begins his section on Dickens's 'symbols'. His inverted commas indicate that he considers the word misleading. Objects in Dickens's world, he insists, are "intensely themselves, not signs for something else."² Nevertheless, he does not blame over-interpretative critics for symbolic readings of these objects, but Dickens himself, who perpetually comments on their transcendental meaning. This is done, according to Carey's opening sentence, in an "attempt to pull a novel together" and attempt implies failure. It has been an important part of this thesis to demonstrate that London, throughout Dickens's novels, functions as just such a symbol. This chapter therefore explores an essential component of the city, the Thames flowing to the sea, of which Carey is speaking in the extract, and asks what sort of reality it has in Dickens's fiction. Since Roselee Robison considers the river to be "the most complex symbol in all Dickens's novels,"³ looking at the Thames promises to be instructive about the way the writer uses symbols generally. The chapter starts by examining its effectiveness in contributing to the unity of *Dombey and Son*. Is Dickens doing anything more sophisticated than merely "repeating a 'symbol'" and can he signal its symbolic dimension to the reader without damaging the immediacy of the image, the realism which Carey so admires? The following pages chart the development of Dickens's use of the Thames in four key novels, in order to identify what it is symbolic of, especially in relation to the wider motif of the city, and suggests ways in which the author refined his symbolic method in response to the very problems Carey identifies.

I. *Dombey and Son*

The complexity Robison notes comes from the fact that the river is associated with numerous things, often polar opposites, such as corruption and death on the one hand, and innocence and re-birth on the other. As she perceptively remarks,⁴ the river in *Dombey and Son* is generally a conceptual, rather than a directly experienced phenomenon, manifesting itself most remarkably within young Paul's imagination. Nevertheless, however abstract the child's vision of it may be, even his river is not only an archetype, but the actual Thames of London:

¹*The Violent Effigy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), p. 105.

²*ibid*, p. 130

³Time, Death and the River in Dickens' novels' in *English Studies*, vol. LIII (1972), p. 449.

⁴*ibid*, pp. 439-40.

His fancy had a strange tendency to wander to the river, which he knew was flowing through the great city ...

(*DS* 16 p. 220)

It is central to Mr Dombey's world; his trade depends upon it. He is seen "walking in the Docks, looking at his ships" (4 p. 46) with great self-satisfaction, and Walter carries out Dombey's business at the river (6 pp. 76-7). Appropriately, it is introduced in the very first chapter as Dickens reveals how Dombey conceptualizes it:

Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships ... (1 p. 2)

Almost immediately, however, Dickens offers a different perspective of the river rolling towards the ocean, as Mrs Dombey is said to have "drifted out upon the dark and unknown sea that rolls round all the world" (1 p. 11). The first statement is not metaphorical. It comes from a character who is confident that he understands the real world and how it behaves. The second is a totally abstract comment from an author who reveals a conception of a sea that can be known with no such certainty. From this point onwards, it becomes increasingly clear that the novel will be about the tension between a limited apprehension of such things as rivers and seas and a wider one which understands what it is about them that gives meaning to such metaphors.

What, then, does the river suggest so powerfully to Paul? His meditations on the metropolitan Thames continue like this:

he thought how black it was, and how deep it would look,
reflecting the host of stars - and more than all, how steadily it
rolled away to meet the sea. (16 pp. 220-1)

Within this novel's symbolic scheme, the river only has significance in so far as it is connected to the sea. At the first Mrs Dombey's deathbed, the narrator associates the ocean with death because of its properties of being "dark", "unknown" and inevitably omnipresent ("rolls round all the world"). Paul learns to read the river and sea as the narrator conceptualizes them and tries:

to understand what it was that the waves were always saying;
and would rise up in his couch to look towards that invisible
region, far away. (8 p. 111)

The child instinctively associates the river's destination with his dead mother and when he dies, he has a vision of her. He thus feels the movement of his hallucinatory Thames as a journey towards transcendence and new life as well as towards death, telling Florence, that:

the motion of the boat upon the stream was lulling him to rest
.... Now the boat was out at sea ... (16 p. 224-5)

Acceptance of the river's benevolence is not immediate, however. No doubt the boy would have heard his father expressing opinions about the function of the Thames similar to those at the beginning of the novel. Dombey wishes to set Paul into the flowing river of the commercial city as early as possible, showing impatience with the time taken for him to grow into the "Son" that will complete his ambition (8 p. 92). The river is comparable to the passage of time which Dombey wishes to accelerate. Paul's feelings are just the opposite from his father's and he tries to slow down the flow because, at some subconscious level, he perceives that death is at the end of it. His first response is to fear the fixity of its destination:

His only trouble was, the swift and rapid river. He felt forced, sometimes, to try to stop it - to stem it with his childish hands - or choke its way with sand - and when he saw it coming on, resistless, he cried out! But a word from Florence, who was always at his side, restored him to himself

...

(16 p. 293)

Florence later teaches her father not to resist the inevitable power of the unfolding story which the river represents so strongly to her brother. Paul's death is a necessary step in Dombey's reclamation and the boy's vision of restoration to his dead mother and to Jesus himself seems a guarantee that death brings transcendence. The narrator's incidental metaphor frequently confirms the link between the river, the unfolding narrative and the Providential ordering of events:

Through a whole year, the winds and clouds had come and gone; the ceaseless work of Time had been performed, in storm and sunshine. Through a whole year, the tides of human chance and change had set in their allotted courses.

(58 p. 773)

As Paul ceases to struggle against these courses in his hallucinations, a powerful image is provided of the process his father must undergo in surrendering his cherished dreams for new ones.

The river, then, emphasizes the same themes of the inexorable passage of time, death and resurrection to a transformed life of relationships within the divinely originated family as the "throbbing currents" of the railway (15 p. 218), which acts as a stylized version of it. In this it prefigures the use of the metropolitan river in the fragmented world of *The Waste Land*. The flow of the Thames from West to East is all that supplies any definite direction in the fragmented world of this poem or any palpable evidence that the movement from the beginning to the end is actually meaningful. As in *Dombey and Son*, where the Thames seems to embody the flow of the narrative, it is the river itself that is felt to be bearing the quester towards a sea of death, and after this point is reached,

the final section, 'What the Thunder Said', promises, if it does not conclusively deliver, a resurrection. The crucial motif is that of the shipwreck, of "Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead" (l. 312). The quotations from Ariel's song in *The Tempest* leave the reader expecting that something valuable will arise out of such apparent destruction:

Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look! (l. 48)

London here is a symbolic as well as a real environment, a place in which to be both physically and spiritually lost on the quest for revelation and renewal. It is a place that constantly pushes towards its mid-point, the river, and the resurrection that may be found there once the position of ruin and death has been acknowledged.

A blending of the lost in London motif and the image of shipwreck, however, had already been powerfully developed in *Dombey and Son*. Although Walter's shipwreck occurs off-stage, as it were, the accounts of death on the high seas he so cherishes eerily pre-empt his own experience, lending force to the metaphorical and directly symbolic references to the sea later in the novel. The unlikely persons of Cuttle and Dombey are united in the name of the wrecked ship, *The Son and Heir*, a title given to Paul (11 p. 139). The businessman is completely defeated when he has to cope with the loss of his boy and the wreckage of his identity as Dombey and Son. Cuttle's plans for Walter meet with complete devastation too and his initial reluctance to face up to the change of outlook on the world demanded of him complements Dombey's deeper failure to come to terms with death and accept the future.

Only when he acknowledges the smashing of his vision can resurrection truly occur for Dombey. Of all the characters in the novel, he is the most reluctant to surrender to the river. Tellingly, he thinks of the picture of his wife dying in his daughter's arms as a river. Although it shows him "clear depths of tenderness and truth", he cannot bring himself to enter those waters and he is left "on the bank above them ... quite shut out" (3 p. 83). Julian Moynihan famously mocks Florence's readiness to perform this task. Pointing out the volume of tears she sheds, he says:

For Dombey at this point the sharing of love seems a death by water. To be saved from his own stoniness he must leap from the bark and dissolve his proud self in his daughter's tears
Florence wants to get Dombey's head down on the pillow where she can drown him in a dissolving love.⁵

Despite this light-hearted tone, Moynihan has captured Dickens's symbolic aim succinctly. Dombey's surrender to love is closely tied to the motifs of drowning and re-emergence that permeate the novel. It is indeed a baptismal death by water which

⁵'Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son: Firmness versus Wetness' in J. Gross and G. Pearson (eds.), *Dickens and the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 124, 126.

prefigures those that take place in *The Waste Land*. Only when his business collapses and his house is compared to a wrecked ship (58 p. 773) can he apprehend the meaning of the river and the sea and surrender his plans to the waters of death. At exactly this moment, Florence enters bearing a new Paul, in the form of her own child by Walter, to replace the one he has just surrendered. Florence has come to identify the brokenness of her aspirations with Walter's fate, realizing that she is "left like the sole survivor on a lonely shore from the wreck of a great vessel" (48 p. 638). Only once she has the courage to do this may her hopes be legitimately restored to her. Cuttle has learned that in the fatalistic, but ultimately optimistic world of this novel at least, with the renunciation of one's own aims, surrendered visions are given back. This principle is the point of his morbid repetition of the question. "Drowned, An't he?" in chapter forty-nine. Florence dreams of her father dead and never having loved her, but then sees the river and hears Paul's voice exclaiming that the river holds better things ahead:

It is running on, Floy! It has never stopped! You are moving
with it! (35 p. 488)

The Thames is central to London after all, but not in the way Dombey has imagined; its presence is the signal to him, to Florence and to the reader that being lost there is the only way to be found.

Some, then, become capable of interpreting London and the Thames symbolically and some, such as the dying Mrs Skewton, do not. Although "the waves are hoarse with repetition of their mystery", their "speech is dark and gloomy to her". Other narrow-minded characters are said to be "deaf to the waves" (pp. 560-1), yet Mr Toots is aware of a message in them (pp. 554-5). It is interesting that only semi-delirious children and the mentally defective intuitively understand the mystery of the novel's symbolism. This is not merely a Romantic impulse on the part of Dickens. In showing his symbols within hallucinations, dreams and minds that do not function in conventional ways, he may associate the images with the themes of the novel without the necessity for rational exposition. Paul's imagination, for example, acts upon the Thames he knows to produce a surreal terror, followed by an acceptance of its message.

Later, at Fulham, the literal and metaphorical river explicitly meet for the first and only time in the novel. Because Florence has been privy to the symbol as it has operated in Paul's consciousness, she finally grasps the connection between the "current flowing on to rest" and "the darker river rippling at her feet ... which her brother had so often said was bearing him away" (24 p. 340). She is helped here by seeing a reversal of her own situation - a father scorned and unappreciated by his "impatient" daughter. The father is at work upon a broken boat, showing a longing to embark upon the river journey, but, unlike Dombey, he has learned the lesson of the flowing stream. He recognizes that he

will not always have his daughter with him and so loves her while he can. Decoding such an unspoken significance in a symbol is itself a revelation. In fact it is the means by which the reader imaginatively participates in Dombey's discovery of a re-fashioned identity in connections of love with the wider world. The conflicting levels of meaning in rivers and seas suggested by the narrator challenge the reader to decide what the waves *are* always saying. To understand the scheme of revelation of interrelationships, made according to a fixed programme of death and subsequent resurrection, which the river's journey to the sea teaches, is to apprehend the mystery which Dombey must ultimately learn. For Florence must carry the meaning she apprehends in the scene into adulthood, where she will finally teach her father what may be heard in the speech of the waves.

The process, however, by which Paul and Florence learn to read the river symbolically is even more difficult to define than what the river may be said to symbolize. Certainly the reader is as much at a loss to explain "why the sea should make me think of my Mama that's dead" (12 p. 217) as the child is himself. There is no causal connection between the two and she dies far away from the ocean. He is unaware of the narratorial figure of speech that associates them in the reader's mind, yet he has a clairvoyant understanding of Dickens's symbolic pattern. Perhaps something in the very nature of the waves, then, says or conveys something that can be apprehended but not articulated in words. Words evoke the images powerfully but cannot adequately comment upon them. Perhaps Carey is correct in stating that Dickens's symbols are more effective when permitted to speak for themselves as realistically portrayed objects than when he underlines them with paragraphs of moralistic authorial gloss. When the narrator tries to explain verbally what the waves have actually been saying, their voice is less powerful than when they have been simply described. They are made to speak of:

love, eternal and illimitable, not bounded by the confines of
this world, or by the end of time, but ranging still, beyond the
sea, beyond the sky, to the invisible country far away!

(57 p. 773)

This is less, not more, clearly defined than the image it sets out to explain, suggesting that the Christian theology of eternal love with which Dickens is at pains to invest his symbol is also nebulous. Carey's objection to Dickens's "making metaphysical noises about his stage properties, instead of letting the objects ... exist for themselves"⁶ could be sustained here, but fault found with the vagueness of the commentary does not deny the potency of the symbols themselves.

⁶*The Violent Effigy*, op cit, p. 108.

II. *Little Dorrit*.

Nine years later, Dickens was again using the Thames to represent the passage of time. Whereas in *Dombey and Son* the actual river was largely unseen, except in vision and metaphor, it is an important part of the environment in which *Little Dorrit's* characters live. Much reflection takes place as they gaze wistfully upon it, whether it be Amy herself standing on Southwark Bridge or Arthur watching it from Twickenham:

He softly opened his window, and looked out upon the serene river. Year after year so much allowance for the drifting of the ferry-boat, so many miles an hour the flowing of the stream
 And he thought - who has not thought for a moment, sometimes - that it might be better to flow away monotonously, like the river, and to compound for its insensibility to happiness with its insensibility to pain.

(I 16 pp. 194-7)

Again the unalterable character of the river's course and its government by time are emphasized and the Thames seems to call for a surrender to death by water not a million miles from suicide. Clennam, however, perceives this order as ultimately indifferent, rather than as the manifestation of a benevolent Providence.

The real emphasis here is upon the stream as the process by which a person passes from innocence to maturity. Dickens often personifies the Thames as having a "cradle" in the countryside and a "grave" in the sea and as "acquiring ... various experience" as it passes through the contaminating city in between.⁷ *Our Mutual Friend* says of the Surrey and Berkshire reaches:

In those pleasant little towns on Thames, you may hear the fall of the water over the weirs ... and from the bridge you may see the young river, dimpled like a young child, playfully gliding away among the trees, unpolluted by the defilements that lie in wait for it on its course, and as yet out of hearing of the deep summons of the sea. (III 8 p. 497)

Martha the prostitute in *David Copperfield* sees in this a metaphor for her own history:

It comes from country places, where there was once no harm in it - and it creeps through the dismal streets, defiled and miserable - and it goes away, like my life, to a great sea, that is always troubled - and I feel that I must go with it!

⁷On Duty With Inspector Field' in *Household Words*, vol. III (1851), p. 269.

(47 p. 581)

In this aspect, however, the passage of time, as represented in the river, is not merely indifferent, but decisively harmful. It takes the individual to the dirty, "defiled" area of the city, where, Martha finds, moral categories are eroded in the way considered in chapter two of this thesis. There is nothing particularly original in this literary commonplace, which promotes the simplistic city-is-bad and country-is-good scheme of the earlier novels. Nevertheless, Dickens makes something genuinely beautiful of such materials. In *Little Dorrit*, Arthur launches the rose petals given to him by Pet onto the river and watches them floating towards "the eternal seas" (I 28 p. 320). It is understood that he is making a surrender of hopes similar to that in *Dombey and Son*. In the latter, it is not clear specifically why love can only be revealed after a death by water experience. In this book, it is only as the petals, representing neo-adolescent aspirations and fantasies, float towards London, home of the true soulmate, Little Dorrit, that mature love can be found. It is necessary to let go of naïve desires to clear the ground for the real thing. As Arthur performs this action, the description of the river suggests peace and order:

the little green islands in the river, the beds of rushes, the water-lillies floating on the surface of the stream, the distant voices in boats borne musically towards him on the ripple of the water and the evening air, were all expressive of rest.

(p. 325)

In presenting Clennam responding directly to this stimulus and revising his former impressions of the river, Dickens suggests that the river's apparent flow towards death might also constitute a flow towards a transcendent peace. The immediate presence of the Thames in these scenes achieves, more powerfully than pages of *Dombey*-style authorial commentary upon an absent symbol, the sense that the lessons of surrender to the Providential plan are contained in the river itself. This in turn creates a firmer sense that these truths are part of the laws that govern the intrinsic nature of the novel's world. The narrator emphasizes the inseparable unity of the river's depiction of reality and the reality itself:

Between the real landscape and its shadow in the water, there was no division; both were so untroubled and clear, and, while so fraught with solemn mystery of life and death, so hopefully re-assuring to the gazer's soothed heart, because so tenderly and mercifully beautiful.

(p. 326)

The "solemn mystery" of Dickens's novels is discovered in comprehending the oneness of the unspoken meanings of symbols like the Thames with the nature of the real world itself.

In general, however, the Thames in *Little Dorrit* refers more to the passage of time than it does to the baptismal motives of death and resurrection that were so important in *Dombey and Son*. Although the city at large symbolically amplifies the message of transformation through repentant altruism, it is left to other phenomena such as the wind to provide the regenerative dimension.⁸ The Thames rather functions as a place of burial that collaborates in the general concealments of Mrs Clennam and her ilk. It is the dreary, stagnant and decayed area where Mrs Clennam lives, a real background that reflects her character as the house and the surrounding city do. With its "silent warehouses and wharves" and "FOUND DROWNED" bills (I 3 p. 31) it embodies secrecy and burial. The river furnishes the novel's most telling indicator that the deathbound urge to cut off connections with the outside world, which leads to burial and concealment, is the root of atrophy and decay in London.

Little Dorrit develops more fully than *Dombey and Son* the identification of the Thames with the metropolis as a whole, especially in its concealing aspect. In the later novel, the river is the defining equator between the "two frowning wildernesses" of North and South London. From nowhere else is there such a sense of being surrounded by the capital. As the Uncommercial Traveller puts it in 'Down With The Tide', written four years before *Little Dorrit*, "The very shadow of the immensity of London seemed to lie oppressively on the river". The article is devoted to making this connection explicit, speaking of:

the tiers of shipping, whose many hulls, lying close together,
rose out of the water like black streets.⁹

Meanwhile a steamer is "like a quiet factory among the common buildings." The novel reinforces the interconnectedness of the city in its imposing account of:

the secrets of the river, as it rolled its turbid tide between two
frowning wildernesses of secrets ... (*LD* II 10 p. 526)

For Dickens, the Thames had a greater capacity for hiding things than anything else in the city. In 'Down With The Tide', he discusses one example of this:

River thieves can always get rid of stolen property in a
moment by dropping it overboard.¹⁰

The river is full of such incriminating objects, in addition to blood-stained clothes, like those suppressed by Bradley Headstone in *Our Mutual Friend*, and the dead bodies themselves. 'On Duty With Inspector Field' portrays the author as fascinated with these mysteries, but adds that, to such keepers of information as the detective, even these things are well-known:

⁸See pp. 121-2 above.

⁹*All The Year Round*, Vol. III (1860), p. 349.

¹⁰*Household Words*, vol. VI (1853), p. 481.

*He does not trouble his head as I do, about the river at night.
He does not care for its creeping, black and silent, on our right
there ... hiding strange things in its mud.*¹¹

Equally, when Dickens launches into the embryonic version of the *Little Dorrit* passage noted above, the pea-coated Thames Police officer merely coughs irritably. The river in passages like these is decidedly on the side of the city's bewildering dirt, attempting to hide guilt, unacknowledged obligations and severed relationships. It is ranged against the detective figure, who, in the form of Field or Bucket, seems able to penetrate even the obscurities of the Thames.

Nevertheless, the regenerative possibilities of the river are not entirely absent even from its darker treatment in this book. Admittedly its aspect seems unrelentingly obscure and confused from Southwark Bridge, where "the wilderness of masts on the river and the wilderness of steeples on the shore" are "indistinctly mixed together in the stormy haze" (I 9 p. 94). It is from London Bridge, however, that the revelation of the "plain" and "beautiful" transformed cityscape,¹² is seen (II 31 p. 771). Mrs Clennam is even "ascending from the river" as if from a baptism (p. 765). Whilst the Thames is present in the novel realistically, it amplifies *Little Dorrit's* transcendental themes. Dickens no longer subsumes it into the abstract symbol of the sea, but into the concrete symbol of the city. The depth and clutter of the Thames make it a place where the "Lost in London" motif can be explored from its deepest and most unfathomable point.

III. *Great Expectations.*

Chris Brooks contrasts the handling of the river in *Dombey and Son* with that of the fog in *Bleak House* to make a similar comparison of symbolic method:

In the earlier novels, the river ... symbolises personal time: the river is also, within the conventions of realism, real. Symbolic mediation - the sign standing between us and what is signified - and realist immediacy, forcefully held in the same entity, do not surrender their basic natures. They form, in effect, an amalgam. But in *Bleak House* fog cannot be said to symbolise opacity as the river symbolises personal time. It is precisely because the river is not, *in itself*, an instance of the operation of personal time that the mediatory nature of

¹¹op cit, vol. III, p. 269.

¹²discussed at length in the last chapter. See pp. 169 ff above.

symbolism still obtains, while its presence in a realist medium gives its emblematic meaning immediacy. Fog, however, is, *in itself*, opaque: that is, connotation and denotation, metaphoric meaning and realist meaning are not amalgamated but synthesised.¹³

Certainly *Dombey and Son* presents the Thames almost entirely in its mediatory capacity and only rarely in its realistic aspect. It is present and yet not present. Since there is still only a thematic link between the passage of time and the river in *Little Dorrit*, its presence in the later novel appears to belong more to Brooks's amalgam than to his "synthesis". Taken rather as a symbol of the burial of secrets, however, it moves closer to the method of realistic exemplification. After all, the Thames actually does have secrets buried in it and can properly be said to exemplify secrecy as well as representing it. Nevertheless, these are only suggested and none of the secrets of the story itself are actually found in the river to illustrate this. The codicil is buried in the basement of the house, the major motif of the book, which is merely complemented by the river. For the Thames to be given an inherent fitness for its symbolic connotation still more authoritative than the fog in *Bleak House*, Dickens would have to incorporate it into the plot itself. The first major result was *Great Expectations*.

Pip grows up on the margins of the "low leaden line" that is the edge of the Thames estuary (I 1 p. 4). Out of this environment, the menacing convict arises to threaten the boy and upon its waters, he seeks escape. Because so much is hidden in the Thames, one never knows what is going to come out of it. It both represents and exemplifies that great unknown from which information about one's origins unexpectedly emerges and intrudes itself upon the consciousness of the individual. If revelation is excluded by the Thames in *Little Dorrit*, Pip initially wishes that his own Thames could exclude it, rather than wash it up in front of him. Revelation is painful to deal with simply because, as before, it involves the collapse of valued plans and a comfortable sense of identity - in Pip's case, as the young man groomed to marry Estella. In Alfonso Cuarón's 1998 modernized film version, the convict is actually crouching in the water and bursts out startlingly. Although this scene is well done, however, the film misses out on the symbolic unity of the original by making the subway and not the water the venue for the attempted escape. Nevertheless, the director has apprehended that the river is being used in the final part of *Great Expectations* much as the train is used in *Dombey and Son* to evoke the fixity of its route as a symbol of the inexorable narrative plan that organizes events. Dickens's novel, however, keeps the threat of re-emerging guilty

¹³*Signs for the Times* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), p. 54.

origins tightly connected with the struggle to conceal them again by means of Pip's plan to conceal Magwitch in the river from the boggy margins of which he first emerged.

In the later metropolitan chapters, Drummle is another threatening figure lurking in the Thames:

He would always creep in-shore like some uncomfortable
amphibious creature, even when the tide would have sent him
fast upon his way. (II 6 p. 203)

Here he is linked to Magwitch who exclaims, "I wish I was a frog. Or a eel!" (I 1 p. 7) One of the delights of Dickens's fiction is that one never knows which characters are going to re-appear in the streets of his city. Bad characters especially, like Good Mrs Brown and Fagin's gang, have innumerable hidden lairs from which to spring. Fagin is portrayed as equally amphibious:

like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and
darkness through which he moved ... (OT 19 p. 121)

When these land-based layers of traps and their environments are presented at their most furtive and intimidating, the Thames seems to invade the whole city until in *Our Mutual Friend* the characters move among "vessels that seemed to have got ashore, and houses that seemed to have got afloat" (I 3 p. 30). The dirt of the Thames is symptomatic of the blurring of proper categories discussed earlier. It is the water that makes London into such an environment, so deathbound and so fitted for the task of concealment.

Wemmick instinctively understands that this is what the river is about. Neatly isolating this in a metaphor about Jaggers's somewhat dangerous ability to hide knowledge:

A river's its natural depth, and he's his natural depth.
(II 6 p. 205)

Depth implies inaccessibility and obscurity and the London that Jaggers controls is designed to prevent Pip from finding the truth about his origins. The lawyer's whole manner of speech aims at the concealment of all facts - even innocuous ones. The presence of the Thames, even in casual conversation, is a constant reminder that secrets are being kept.

When Pip becomes a concealer of secrets in his own right, he finds the landscape of the river-city uniquely suitable for his purposes. Chinks's Basin is a difficult enough place for Pip to find, let alone a pursuer, surrounded as it is by a multiplicity of unknown names. Furthermore, the river itself is a dangerous place, full of debris and hazards. These threaten death both to hunter and hunted and demand great skill from anyone steering a boat among them:

avoiding rusty chain-cables frayed hempen hawsers and bobbing buoys, sinking for the moment floating broken baskets, scattering floating chips of wood and shaving, cleaving floating scum of coal ...

(III 15 p. 432)

Impossibly huge figureheads decorate the ships, adding up to a surreal nightmare obstacle course.

As early as the *Old Curiosity Shop*, Dickens writes about the river in this way, although there it is not so essential to the novel's action or symbolic pattern. Quilp rows gleefully through an element where "being crunched on all sides like so many walnut-shells" by the steamers is a constant possibility and where each vessel seems "as though she wanted room to breathe" (5 p. 46) - an extension of the threatening, claustrophobic atmosphere he loves to create. He has designed his yard on its banks to be "secure from all spies and listeners" (50 p. 387). London in this novel - and especially the Thames - is so confusing that this all-powerful figure almost seems to have constructed it for similarly malevolent ends. Intruders must not only be kept out, but injured. Unfortunately for the concealer, however, he may at any moment be caught in his own trap. In his self-assured escape, Quilp loses his way and realizes that his potential rescuers "were close at hand, but could not make an effort to save him; that he himself had shut and barred them out" (67 p. 528). This prefigures the link between secrecy and imprisonment explored more fully in *Little Dorrit*. The Thames acts as an arbiter of poetic justice, treating Quilp exactly as he has treated others. Each verb used in describing its handling of the body echoes his own malicious actions:

It toyed and sported with its ghastly freight ... feigning to yield it to its own element, and in the same action luring it away, until, tired of the ugly plaything, it flung it on a swamp ...

The ships in the Thames of *Our Mutual Friend* suggest an equally "fell intention" to Eugene Wrayburn. The depth markers seem to say, "That's to drown *you* in, my dears!":

Not a lumbering black barge, with its cracked and blistered side impending over them, but seemed to suck at the river with a thirst for sucking them under. And everything so vaunted the spoiling influences of water ... that the after-consequences of being crushed, sucked under, and drawn down, looked as ugly to the imagination as the main event.

(I 14 p. 173)

Attributing a vindictive personality to the river, Dickens presents death here as terrifyingly inevitable. This feature of the riverside in *Great Expectations* secures

Magwitch from intrusion, but, as always in Dickens, the concealing element proves equally dangerous and deathbound to the concealer.

Pip's Thames, like Quilp's, is a noisy place with "hammers going in ship-builders' yards, saws going at timber, clashing engines going at things unknown, pumps going in leaky ships, capstans going" and of course the constant curses of the lightermen (III 15 p. 432). Many other participles are used in this passage to suggest a sense of continual movement. Here the contemporary commercial port in which Dickens wrote is evoked rather than that of the quieter period in which the novel is set. Mayhew documents the change in the Thames from the "still highway" of pre-Victorian times to the modern pandemonium, dominated by "the clatter of the steamboats."¹⁴ Pip also notes this difference:

At that time, the steam-traffic on the Thames was far below its present extent the navigation of the river between bridges, in an open boat, was a much easier and commoner matter in those days than it is in these... (III 15 pp. 431-2)

Sometimes in his fiction, Dickens uses this earlier stillness to conjure up a different aspect of death. One has only to think of the "funereal and silent" area near the Adelphi with its:

Long and broad black tiers [of shipping], moored fast in the mud as if they were never to move again it was a deserted place and looked on a deserted scene. (LD II 9 p. 514)

Equally in *Bleak House*, the river at night is a noiseless region:

not only does the stillness attend it as it flows where houses cluster thick, where many bridges are reflected in it, where wharves and shipping make it black and awful, ... but even on this stranger's wilderness of London there is some rest. (48 p. 691)

Such lack of motion is too eerie to be called true tranquillity. Dickens ironically uses it to suggest the danger Tulkynghorn is in as he walks through this environment. The river then evokes a grim variety of deathly atmospheres.

Magwitch's hiding place, however, emphasizes decrepitude and disability, suggesting loss of power on a societal scale. As in *Little Dorrit*, the cityscape points out the life-denying effects of concealment, with its half-personified reminders of decay:

¹⁴*London Labour and the London Poor*, 4 vols. (New York: Dover, 1968) vol. III, p. 327.

rusty anchors blindly biting into the ground a series of wooden frames ... that looked like superannuated haymaking-rakes which had grown old and lost most of their teeth.

(III 17 p. 372)

These ruins have a nautical character, so that London resembles a multiple shipwreck: stranded ships repairing in dry docks ... old hulls of ships in course of being knocked to pieces ... ooze and slime and other dregs of tide. (p. 371)

Pip has already chosen the image of the shipwreck to express the death of his hopes regarding Estella:

I began fully to know how wrecked I was, and how the ship in which I had sailed was gone to pieces . (II 20 p. 320)

Here, Dickens has something different in mind than the atrophy and decay that comes as a result of concealing one's true connections with the external world. It is rather a recognition of the futility of the self-enclosed world he has chosen in place of those true connections and a surrender to its death. Walter's death by water, a more literal shipwreck, is here explored from the inside and it is strikingly placed in a huge urban context like that of Phlebas the Phoenician in *The Waste Land*, which makes the whole capital the wreck of an enormous ship, creating a huge and fragmented environment to evoke the experience of being utterly lost and broken in preparation for resurrection.

There is no shortage of actual deaths on the Thames in Dickens's fiction to aid the baptismal connotations of the river symbol. The form of death most readily associated with the Thames, however, is suicide. Examples abound of the river exerting a semi-supernatural deathbound attraction for men and women. In 'Down With the Tide' "Waterloo", the tollkeeper, complacently catalogues the people who jump off the bridge whose name he shares. The Uncommercial Traveller imagines the street lamps reflected on the surface as marking where suicides have fallen.¹⁵ Dickens returns to this conceit again and again. Esther Summerson, wondering if her mother has escaped her shame by this means, fancies each reflected light to be "a face, rising out of the dreaded water" (*BH* 57 p. 870). Later, in *Little Dorrit*, the bridge lamps shine "like demon eyes, with a terrible fascination in them for guilt and misery", tempting towards self-destruction (I 14 p. 169). The river holds a particular attraction for the hopelessly poor, crying, in *Our Mutual Friend*:

Come to me, come to me! ... I am the Relieving Officer appointed by eternal ordinance to do my work; death in my arms is peacefuller than among the pauper-wards.

¹⁵*Household Words*, op cit, vol. VI, p. 481.

(III 8 p. 497)

Fallen women, more than any other group, are brought here. Nancy feels that she must eventually "spring into the tide" (*OT* 46 p. 316). Martha in *David Copperfield* exclaims, "I belong to it. I know that it's the natural company of such as I am" (47 p. 581). Surely the author shares the obsession with the river that causes her to exclaim, "It haunts me day and night." The scenery on its banks as she prepares to jump resembles the hallucinatory shipwreck seen by Pip:

carcasses of houses [which had] rotted away [and] rusty iron
monsters of steam-boilers, wheels, cranks, pipes, furnaces,
paddles, anchors, diving-bells, windmill-sails, and I know not
what strange objects ... (p. 580)

Resting in peace is an unlikely prospect for anyone throwing themselves into this hellish world:

The clash and glare of sundry fiery Works upon the river-side,
arose by night to disturb everything except the heavy and
unbroken smoke that poured out of their chimneys.

Here objects have "the appearance of vainly trying to hide themselves", echoing the individual's desire to be forgotten in eternal oblivion. Suicide in the Thames is a self-imposed death by water with no prospect of or desire for regeneration - and yet which denies a satisfying end to disgrace.

Nevertheless, Pip does successfully come through this environment into a new life. And, as in *Dombey and Son*, the river itself is conceptualized as the Providential force bringing about revelation, death and regeneration at a predetermined time. Like Fate, the river consistently moves towards a final goal, carrying the characters along as inexorably as the narrative itself. Pip initially feels that it is inevitably transporting Magwitch out of urban imprisonment:

the moving river itself - the road that ran with us,
seeming to sympathize with us, animate us, and
encourage us on - freshened me with new hope.

(GE III 15 p. 431)

There follows a list of far away locations for which the surrounding shipping is bound, including "Rotterdam" and "Hamburg", suggesting that this traveller too should be able to escape. Bella in *Our Mutual Friend* certainly gazes on the boats full of exotic cargo in this light (II 8) and 'Down with the Tide' speculates that "component parts of the sharp-edged vapour that came flying up the Thames at London might be mummy-dust, dry atoms from the temple at Jerusalem, [...] frozen snow from the Himalays"¹⁶ and any

¹⁶ibid.

number of other exotic artefacts. Whereas, however, Paul Dombey's visionary river travels towards a sea of love and release, the Thames, as it affects the young Pip's imagination, flows towards confinement and imprisonment. He pictures himself "drifting down the river on a strong springtide, to the Hulks" (I 2 p. 15). Once more, the reader is taught to understand the Thames by means of the subconscious world. This dream is actualized many years later with the failure of Magwitch's flight. The ambiguity of the Thames is reflected in the contrast between Pip's negative view of its course and the more optimistic perspective of Herbert, who:

had sometimes said to me that he found it pleasant to stand at one of our windows after dark, when the tide was running down, and to think it was flowing, with everything it bore, towards Clara. But I thought with dread that it was flowing towards Magwitch, and that any black mark on its surface might be his pursuers, going swiftly, silently, and surely, to take him. (III 7 p. 378)

As the River Police catch up with the fugitives, these fears are realized. The Thames was only "seeming to sympathize" after all. Optimism has been delusory. In the darker world of this novel, although release may be striven for and suggested, it is not to be found.

Thus the river has an advantage over the railway as an emblem of Fate and the narrative force in that it has a tide that can suddenly turn. One minute it supports the travellers, the next they must fight against it. As Pip reflects upon its changeability, he metaphorically applies it to the events of the chase:

we returned towards the setting sun we had yesterday left behind us, and ... the stream of our hopes seemed all running back. (III 15 p. 443)

This turns out to be literally as well as metaphorically true; the tides of the river itself ultimately prevent Magwitch's escape. Here then is a significant advance in the symbolic function of the Thames. Now it actually determines events and consequently shapes the plot. For example, the changing tide twice prevents Pip from returning home under London Bridge. This leads to him going to a play and discovering with Wopsle's help that Compeyson is following him. Later it causes him to meet Jaggers and find out the truth about Estella's parentage. In the symbolism of *Great Expectations*, real objects vividly exemplify a theme of the novel. The journey along the river's course is directly experienced as part of the story. Now it is not only *like* the passage of time, it *is* the passage of time - and it is running out:

I was a thinking through my smoke just then, that we can no more see to the bottom of the next few hours, than we can see

to the bottom of this river what I catches hold of. Nor yet we can't no more hold their tide than I can hold this. And it's run through my fingers and gone, you see! (III 15 p. 434)

In a few sentences Magwitch shows a unified understanding of the full symbolic function of the Thames in the novel as both a deep dark repository of secrets and as an exemplification of the pre-ordained events of passing time. The symbol's significance is so forcefully apprehended that the characters in the story fashion metaphors from it as a natural way of discussing their world.

IV. *Our Mutual Friend*

Both the message and the method of the river symbolism in *Great Expectations* are very different from that in *Dombey and Son*. If there has been a death by water in the Eliotian sense in the later novel, it is displaced on to Magwitch, who is submerged in his struggle with Compeyson and dies shortly afterwards. With the man who has made him a gentleman out of the way, Pip must refashion his identity as Joe's 'son' after all. It is Joe's fatherly love, offered in spite of previous rejection, that restores Pip to consciousness. He must emulate his brother-in-law's example of achieving selfhood through a blend of generous spirited love and conscientious effort, rather than having it conferred upon him from outside. At first he seeks to make of Biddy a personal heroine to play the part of Little Dorrit, Florence or Agnes Wickfield in pointing the way to the renewed system of relationships through marital love. This is ultimately denied him. At the end it is highly ambiguous whether he finds such a figure in the reformed Estella. *Great Expectations* confronts the possibility that the surrendered dreams will *not* be returned after the death by water.

Dickens's final completed novel returns to the message of *Dombey and Son*. Here not one man, but two go through what may properly be termed a death by water experience and find resurrection into a new life with the aid of women who love them disinterestedly. It is not, however, merely a re-statement of the earlier novel. Dickens has adapted the refinements of symbolic method explored in the intervening books to tell the story in a strikingly different way.

Our Mutual Friend contains far fewer dreams and hallucinations than *Dombey and Son*. It does not need them. The most palpably real scenes, which Dickens's readers could step out of their own doors and look at, are presented with an hallucinatory intensity of their own. Leaving aside the Paul Dombey-like Jenny Wren and her dreams

of children's faces, the transcendental visions of the novel are brought about through the phenomena of the surrounding world. There is no need for "The golden water ... on the wall" (*DS* 24 p. 340) when one can have:

the river itself, craft, rigging, sails, such early smoke as there
yet was on the shore the huddled buildings ... as if they
were cowering, and had shrunk with the cold.

(*OMF* I 14 p. 172)

As in *Little Dorrit*, the river is allowed to represent what it signifies directly. Thus the reader understands more clearly why it is qualified to be a symbolic venue for a death by water experience than any narrative commentary would allow:

Very little life was to be seen on either bank, windows and
doors were shut, and the staring black and white letters upon
wharves and warehouses "looked," said Eugene to Mortimer,
"like inscriptions over the graves of dead businesses."

(pp. 172-3)

From simply looking at the Thames and the decay around its banks, it is obvious that this is the place where London's atrophied collapse is at its most hopeless. Nor is this merely an instructive backdrop. The tactic in *Great Expectations* of incorporating the symbolic environment directly into the plot is crucial to *Our Mutual Friend*.

Furthermore, the river no longer has constantly to evoke the sea. John Harmon, the sailor mistaken for him, Gaffer Hexham, Rogue Riderhood (twice!), Bradley Headstone and Eugene Wrayburn all experience their "death" in the river itself. This gives the novel a claustrophobic unity of vision. This unity also comes from the other lesson, learned from *Little Dorrit*, of placing the Thames at the very centre of the wider symbol of the whole city. London - and especially that part of it whose life is organized around the river - was very closely associated with death without the need for any symbolism to be involved at all. Wrayburn's phrase, "graves of dead businesses", is quite an accurate reflection of the disused buildings and collapsed businesses that lined the shores of Rotherhithe. Gaffer's home was once a mill that has now fallen out of use and now has "a look of decomposition" (I 3 p. 31).

If poverty *per se*, as riverborne traders failed to make a living, was one reason why life on the Thames was so precarious, another was the attendant evil of dirt. Because the river contained so much contaminated matter, the risk of disease to those living nearby was enormous. The social reformer in Dickens had been outraged by the pitiful conditions of riverside areas in these years - especially as the Board of Health had

seen fit to flush the sewers into the Thames in 1849. One letter complains of "offensive smells ... of a most head-and-stomach distracting nature" to be found there."¹⁷

For Victorian reformers, to whom cleanliness really was next to godliness, dirt led very naturally to criminality and a river full of pollution would attract the fallen to an end in its waters. Human beings have been flushed from the rest of the city to Rotherhithe, which is "a dark corner, river-washed and otherwise not washed at all":

where accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed
from higher grounds, like so much moral sewage, and to be
pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk
it in the river. (3 p. 30)

These phrases raise uncomfortable questions about how this criminality with its self-destructive tendencies has actually been generated. The daily life of even the most respectable Londoners seems to create this sewage filling the Thames as a natural outcome of their selfish way of life. Reluctant to take responsibility for this, they, like the Board, flush it out of sight, where it festers in an unnatural concentration. Martha is also seen as "a part of the refuse" but her London seems to be produced by the Thames, which is a contaminating force in its own right, rather than vice versa:

it looked as if it had gradually decomposed into that nightmare
condition, out of the overflowings of the polluted stream.
(DC 47 p. 580)

Our Mutual Friend stresses that it is really the other way around: London in its entirety produces the filthy Thames.

In placing such a river at the imaginative centre of his London, Dickens anticipates the method and themes of *The Waste Land*. Edgar Johnson has already made this point compellingly:

The Thames of *Our Mutual Friend* is the same river that flows
through [Eliot's] waste land, a river sweating tar and waste,
bearing a flotsam of debris in its muddy waters. Once a
symbol of the renewal of life, the waters themselves are
sullied with the muck of the dustheaps infecting their purity in
loathsome solution.¹⁸

Both Dickens and Eliot use the polluted but flowing city river to discuss the stagnation and need for renewed vision of a whole society, even though their proposed means of re-purifying and re-ordering it differ widely. What is particularly interesting here, however, is Johnson's implication that both Eliot and Dickens are concerned with the failure of the

¹⁷to W. W. F. de Cerjat, 7 July 1858, *Letters*, op cit, vol. VIII, p. 598.

¹⁸*Charles Dickens. His Tragedy and Triumph*, 2 vols. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1952), vol. II, pp. 1043-4.

traditional river symbol as a regenerative force in the face of the sterile life of the modern city. Eliot demonstrates this in his ironical use of quotations - for example, those from Spenser - to highlight the tawdriness of today's Thames maidens, but is Dickens really aware of the Thames as a mythic archetype in the same way? And if he is discussing the failure of baptismal symbols in the contemporary metropolis how does he propose to restore their potency and make them relevant again to the nineteenth-century urbanite?

Water mythology is associated with the oily Thames and its litter-strewn banks throughout *The Waste Land*. Sometimes this has the effect of elevating the modern capital to participation in a timeless scheme, but mostly the grimness of the subject matter leaves the decided impression that the mythic archetypes referred to are now impotent, if they ever had any power at all. Dickens's work in general has been identified in this thesis as sharing the major themes of *The Waste Land*, such as individual and societal death and the possibility of a life-giving transcendental revelation through acknowledging that death and emerging from it into a newly ordered life. The universal quest for these has also been shown to be urbanized and placed in a specific city with recognizable place names in these novels in a way that was useful to Eliot. Having identified these similarities of concern and method, it is tempting to pick up *Our Mutual Friend* and see in Gaffer Hexham, in his boat with "no paint, no inscription" (I 1 p. 13), another Mr Eugenides, or an attempt to show that the reality of Frazer's priest fishing for the drowned god, Thammuz, is actually too seedy to be transformative. This, however, is to apply the terms of criticism on T. S. Eliot to a writer unfamiliar with these concepts. Gaffer, although he "was no neophyte and had no fancies" (I 1 p. 17), may indeed be compared to the quester of the poem, who is seen at a geographically similar point:

fishing in the dull canal

On a winter evening round behind the gashouse

Musing upon the king my brother's wreck (ll. 189-91)

Nevertheless, this proves no more than that Gaffer, as he tries to transform the rubbish of the depths into "meat and drink" (I 1 p. 15), typifies a similar area of human experience to that embodied in the Fisher King or indeed in Ferdinand, Prince of Naples in *The Tempest*. What is striking, however, is his consciousness that he does not live up to a role that has been assigned to him, as evidenced in his baffled, defensive words to his daughter:

How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie? The
very fire that warmed you when you were a babby, was
picked out of the river alongside the coal barges.

Such uncertainty as to whether the Thames really is able to renew life provides the tension underlying the remainder of the novel.

When Rogue Riderhood is almost killed by the steamboat, his daughter has a hope that his death by water will have a transforming effect:

some vague idea that the old evil is drowned out of him, and that if he should happily come back to resume his occupation of the empty form that lies upon the bed, his spirit will be altered.

Unfortunately, however, it is the "low, bad, unimpressible face" that is "coming up from the depths of the river, or what other depths, to the surface again" (III 3 p. 441).

Riderhood, like so many in Eliot's poem, is reluctantly re-born into the same oldness of life. In his case it is probably his selfish greed and spitefulness that precludes him from regeneration. Although the Thames suggests a resurrection archetype to Pleasant Riderhood, its reality is ultimately denied to her.

Perhaps this archetype, which she dimly understands, comes to her from Dickens, not through Frazerian anthropology, but through Christian baptism, itself a symbol. Whilst it informs the death by water theme of *The Waste Land*, it is directly evoked in *Our Mutual Friend*. Dickens explores it - and all it represents - through his own symbols to see if it retains any potency in the world of his time. He draws the reader's attention to the Christian archetype involved in his pictures of re-emergence by borrowing the baptismal typology of the Bible. Charley Hexham says of the man he believes to be John Harmon, "If Lazarus was only half as far gone, that was the greatest of all the miracles" (I 3 p. 28). When Harmon re-appears it is just such a miracle to those who know him. Charley then relates the body to "Pharaoh's multitude, that were drowned in the Red Sea". Wrayburn's surprise that the boy is conversant with such phrases and that he applies them to the sordid events of Limehouse draws the reader's attention to these allusions markedly. Readers familiar with their Bibles, however, would remember that although the Egyptians were drowned in the waters, as Riderhood eventually is in the Thames, the Israelites passed through triumphantly, just as Harmon and Wrayburn will. Paul explicitly compares this event to the believer's baptism (1 Corinthians 10:2).

Later, when Gaffer dies, he is said to be "baptized unto Death" (I 14 p. 175). Carey indignantly calls this "a misrememberance of Paul's phrase in *Romans* about being baptized into Christ's death" and denounces the whole baptism/ re-emergence theme as a "similar, and similarly unfortunate bid for religious significance" as the theme of self-sacrifice in *A Tale of Two Cities*.¹⁹ Although the wording of *Romans* 6:3 is in fact,

¹⁹*The Violent Effigy*, op cit, p. 108.

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ were baptized unto his death", Dickens had not misremembered, much less mistaken the meaning of the verse. Christians are baptized in water to show the death of their old way of life. Gaffer too has come to the end of his old life and his immersion in water leads to death which is precisely what is represented in baptism. Dickens's use of the word ironically indicates that Gaffer is only baptized into his own death. He has not made the identification with the death of Christ in his place - or indeed with anything that would allow him to rise from the symbolic waters and "walk in newness of life" (v. 4).

Interestingly, in a letter to Walter Savage Landor in 1841, Dickens said of baptism that the "realities had gone out of the ceremony" and that its chief function was now social.²⁰ It is hard to know what realities Dickens considered baptism once to have had and why he felt it had lost them. Did he believe that there had been a genuine redemption underlying it that was no longer available to mankind or that it was powerless to guarantee change because people were no longer prepared to believe in what it stood for? Since baptism is about the deaths and resurrections and changed lives that form the crux of Dickens's fiction, it is curious that his attitude to the ceremony in real life should have been so despondent. One reason for its loss of potency, however, may be its alteration in Dickens's time in the major branches of the Christian faith into the form of infant sprinkling. In fact the meaning of the act as well as the visual appearance had been radically altered by this change. Immersion baptism emphasizes the burial, new life and hope of resurrection so important to Paul, whereas sprinkling only emphasizes cleansing. Babies, furthermore, have not experienced any such change as that which gives the act significance in the writings of Paul and yet they are said to become "partakers of the Divine Nature" on the strength of this action, which has no personal reality underpinning it for them and, for some, never acquires one to the end of their days. Both the symbol and what it symbolized had actually changed meaning altogether.

Nevertheless, Dickens seems keenly aware of the primary meaning of baptism. This is not surprising given the level of public debate the matter raised during the Victorian era. The extent of this can be seen in that in 1856 another major literary figure in the making, the unlikely figure of Thomas Hardy, was almost persuaded, after strenuous study of the subject and lengthy argument with a workmate, to be baptized by immersion.²¹ In her thesis, 'Entering the Kingdom: Charles Dickens and the Search for Spiritual Regeneration', Karen Ann Kennet Hattaway²² helpfully outlines the main Christian positions on baptism. Tractarians and other High Church Anglicans saw the

²⁰summarized in John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 2 vols. (London: Dent, 1966), vol. I p. 146.

²¹Thomas Hardy (ed. M. Millgate), *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 33-4.

²²(unpublished doctoral thesis: Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1969).

sacrament itself as the time when God's grace visited the helpless and regenerated them. Evangelicals saw it as merely an outward sign of an inner change that had already taken place in a believing adult. Anglican clergymen who agreed with Evangelical doctrine somewhat uncomfortably justified their requirement to perform christenings by claiming them as a hopeful hypothesis of a new birth the child would come to experience. Those of the Broad Church grouping tended to see mankind in general as redeemed irrespective of belief and viewed baptism of whatever type as a re-enactment of Christ's divine cleansing at Calvary. In an editorial in Dickens's supplement, *Household Narrative of Current Events*, entitled 'The Three Kingdoms', support is expressed for an Evangelical Anglican clergyman, whose appointment was resisted because of his opinion that regeneration did not come through the ceremony but by faith. Whilst what Dickens probably resented was the Church's intolerance of a different view and the implication that only Anglican baptism could guarantee regeneration, that he published the piece indicates that the power of baptism, for him, was in what it represented rather than in the ritual itself.

The only baptism depicted at any length in Dickens's novels is little Paul's in *Dombey and Son*. Although it is a christening, the writer takes the trouble to invest it with meanings of death and resurrection more readily associated with immersion baptism, because these themes are associated with water elsewhere in the novel. Tellingly, in order to make him aware that he is going through a symbolic burial, Paul has to be given the superimposed reactions of a much older man. Upon being brought into the church, he "might have asked with Hamlet 'into my grave?' so chill and earthy was the place" (5 p. 58). Mr Dombey, however, is completely oblivious to this significance and baptism does nothing to regenerate or reveal truth to him:

It might have been well for Mr Dombey, if he had thought of his own dignity a little less; and had thought of the great origin and purpose of the ceremony in which he took so formal and so stiff a part, a little more. (5 p. 60)

This sentence was inserted after Forster suggested that readers might see the chapter as a mockery of Christening *per se*²³, but it does show that the ritual has something to teach Dombey about laying to rest his dying identity and taking up a new one. It is, unfortunately, a lesson which he refuses to learn until the death of his self-constructed world of Dombey and Son is forced upon him. This points forward to *Our Mutual Friend*, where many participate in baptismal drownings but only some are regenerated. Baptisms of this kind have life-changing significance for Wrayburn and Harmon, but not for Gaffer and Riderhood, who accept no accompanying inner change. The latter

²³See to Forster, 3 October 1846, *Letters*, op cit, vol. IV, p. 628.

mistakenly believes that the outward form of having drowned is all-sufficient and "that him as has been brought out o' drowning, can never be drowned" (IV 1 p. 623).

Baptism has brought no transformation or revelation to such lives as these. For some it is an empty symbol, for others a vital one. Hattaway draws from this that:

the distinction he makes in *Our Mutual Friend* between baptismal immersions that are renewing experiences and those that are not indicates clearly his partial acceptance of the Evangelical notion that ritual did not always imply spiritual awakening.²⁴

Although in his horror of dogmatism, Dickens may not have accepted the teaching of adult-baptizing Evangelicals, imaginatively he agreed with their view that the symbol is only powerful if representative of a prior change of heart. The references to baptism contribute to a sense of supernatural marvel associated with the genuine re-births; after all, Christ was himself baptized in a river to prefigure his own death and resurrection. Eliot may have given more systematic thought to the question of how the individual may experience regenerative baptism in *The Waste Land*, but Dickens's use and urbanization of the symbol in *Our Mutual Friend* is no less deliberate.

How, then, may people in this novel successfully emerge from these waters into newness of life instead of simply drowning there? Firstly, Harmon realizes the inadequacy of the life he is to inherit from his father, with its fortune acquired from the dustheaps and loveless automatic marriage. He is therefore delighted when, after he has been thrown into the river in another man's clothes, the other man is washed up in his. Since the world believes him to be dead, he seizes the opportunity to *be* dead and to emerge from the waters with, literally, a new identity. As he puts it, "So John Harmon died ... and John Rokesmith was born" (II 13 p. 366). Yet this process is incomplete as long as he remains John Rokesmith. The crucial question of the novel becomes "John Harmon is dead. Should John Harmon come to life?" It is only when he resumes his own identity as John Harmon, married to Bella and having received the inheritance after all, that the transformation becomes obvious. As in *Dombey and Son*, it is exactly the surrendered dream that is returned - but how different it is in the light of a changed personality and how different is the transformed individual. Through genuine love, Harmon and Bella are restored to a proper relationship with the world around them and also with each other. And significantly, John's internal gropings towards re-birth in his own renewed personality take place while he is hopelessly disoriented by the complex labyrinth of the metropolis:

²⁴'Entering the Kingdom', op cit, p. 110.

He tried a new direction, but made nothing of it; walls, dark doorways, flights of stairs and rooms, were too abundant. And, like most people so puzzled, he again and again described a circle, and found himself at the point from which he had begun. (II 13 p. 359)

The city forces him to do in fact what he will ultimately do in a figurative sense. As in *Dombey and Son*, Dickens makes the death by water symbol for personal surrender and regeneration part of the larger motif of being lost in London.

As the story progresses, these events become a precursor to the even more striking transformation of Eugene Wrayburn from idle *flâneur* to responsible gentleman. This is the real focus of the book and Eugene's death by water is directly described as part of the present action of the plot. He too realizes that the life handed down from his "Respected Father" is worthless, but does not know with what to replace it. Only when confronted by a selfless love can he be re-born by water with a renewed place in human society.

In *The Waste Land*, "Madam Sosostriis, famous clairvoyante" and a host of verbal premonitions issue a warning to "Expect death by water" (ll. x)²⁵, lending an air of supernaturally pre-ordained inevitability to the events of the fourth section. In her absence, *Our Mutual Friend* provides a series of inexplicable sensations, a sort of *déjà vu* in reverse. Watching at the waterside pub for the drowned Hexham, Eugene exclaims, "I feel as if I had been half drowned" (I 13 p. 166). Most of the characters throughout Dickens's novels fail to learn from these foretastes of their fate and to prepare themselves adequately. Quilp, for example, gleefully mocks his wife when she fears he has perished in the Thames, but he never dreams that he will actually die in this way. Equally, Riderhood takes no warning from the dangers he passes through at the paddles of the steamboat. There is, then, a meaning in the symbol of the river, which the author, as far as the reader is concerned, or a slightly sinister Providential force, as far as the characters are concerned, strives to make known to them. Such a point of revelation must accompany the death by water if it is to be at all regenerative.

J. Hillis Miller, somewhat extraordinarily, does not see the theme of concealment and revelation as important in the London of the novel as compared to that of renewal. He rather summarily claims that there are no real secrets in *Our Mutual Friend*,²⁶ meaning that there are few facts concealed from the reader as well as from the characters.

²⁵ *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber, 1974), p. .

²⁶ *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 288 ff.

If one is to believe Dickens's rather defensive 'Postscript' to the book, he did not even intend to "conceal" John Rokesmith's true identity, but rather he was "at great pains to suggest" it (p. 798). Although the reader is privy to the secret, however, that secret dominates the atmosphere of the whole novel. Here, the mystery is explored from the inside; how and why is it concealed and how does one decide when the correct moment for revelation has arrived? The reader is, however, allowed to empathize with the confusion of Bella, the recipient of the revelation, by remaining unaware of the Boffins' part in the pseudo-Providential scheme. This actually is a secret and one which Dickens keeps very well. Thus, although it is her husband who is immersed in the water, his part of the storyline is actually the story of Bella's re-birth. Dombey-like, she surrenders her dreams and egocentric identity, only to find the dreams restored in the moment of doing so. She does marry Harmon and share his fortune, but does so in a state capable of correctly valuing these gifts. The Boffins' deception ironically shows her the truth about the world she lives in. Her personal renewal is brought about by a structure of concealment and revelation. Equally, the metropolis of this book is a disorienting place which robs everything of its context, where even such fundamental distinctions as that between pursuer and pursued become meaningless. It sucks its inhabitants into a bewildering river where even human beings become objects without identity. And yet it is a place in which such confusions can ultimately lead to greater clarity as the characters learn to navigate it properly and to haul the truth out of its depths.

Lizzie is the great revealer in *Our Mutual Friend*. She can read the meaning in the meaningless, as, for example, "in the hollow down by the flare" (I 3 p. 38 and elsewhere). Her listeners, such as Charley, ask her to teach them to interpret signs, exclaiming "Show us a picture Tell us where to look" (p. 37). Eugene's death by water would be merely an attempted murder, were Lizzie not on hand to show him what it could mean for him. His struggle to regain consciousness takes place in a scene that recalls the dying Paul in *Dombey and Son*:

A darkened and hushed room; the river outside the windows
flowing on to the vast ocean ... (IV 10 p. 717)

Florence-like, Lizzie's "presence and her touch upon his breast or face" (p. 721) is able to restore him to consciousness. Again the dying person is taught to confide in an angel figure who reveals a Providential scheme of drowning and transcendence.²⁷ She does not nurse him back to his old life, but to a radically altered one. She herself displays complete altruism in rescuing him before she is even sure to whom the body belongs. Once she does know, "she thought of herself only for him" (IV 6 p. 684). Eugene's first

²⁷For a fuller analysis of these two young women, among many others, as angels and agents of re-birth (although with a slightly different emphasis to my own, as discussed in introduction pp. 24-5 above), see Alexander Welsh, *The City of Dickens* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), chapter 12.

act upon coming to himself is to urge Lightwood to let his enemy escape, fearing that Headstone's arrest will reveal facts that could harm Lizzie. In a manner paralleling Paul's testimony of Christian transformation, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20), Eugene's baptism and its accompanying experience has killed his own identity and recreated him in the character of his saviour. Although Dickens never publicly identifies Christ's death with his own in this redemptive way, the Christian disciple's re-birth in the personality of Christ struck a chord in his imagination.

This is probably what J. Hillis Miller means when he says:

Though they do not express orthodox Christian doctrine,
Dickens' novels are religious in that they demand the
regeneration of man and society through contact with
something transcending the merely human.²⁸

Yet God is more present in a positive way in the actions of those who bring about such regeneration than Miller's account acknowledges. Lizzie is certainly conscious of the need for the involvement of a higher power in her act of pulling Eugene's body from the waters. Firstly, she prays, "help my humble hands, Lord God, to raise it from death and restore it" (IV 6 p. 683) and, once she has retrieved it, she adds:

And grant, O Blessed Lord God, that through poor me he may
be raised from death, and preserved ... (p. 684)

The salvation she brings is as much a divine as a human act to Dickens. She reveals the symbolic significance of a drowning in the river: the death and burial of self-interest and the surrender to saving love.

But Lizzie has herself learned something in the course of the novel. Jenny has taught her the value of surrender in her call to "Come up and be dead!" (II 5 p. 280). Even the busy city has places such as the top of Pubsey and Co.'s building where she, like Harmon, can be revived by this novel sensation. Lizzie comes to see how the Thames, initially so abhorrent to her, can be another such venue in the heart of London. At first, to her father's dismay, she hates the task of fishing bodies from the Thames. Gaffer appears to belong firmly to the world of death and not of new life, as reflected in the London that lines the Thames. He resembles the corpses he finds, "Half savage as the man showed, with no covering on his matted head" (I 1 p. 13). His house is plagued with a look of "decomposition" (I 3 p. 31) and his boat appears to deny its ability to fulfil its function of retrieval, "Allied to the bottom of the river rather than the surface, by reason of the slime and ooze with which it was covered" (I 1 p. 13). Nevertheless he is

²⁸op cit, p. 315.

keen to emphasize that objects really can undergo a sea-change in these waters. Extraordinarily, sodden city debris, from the wreckage, perhaps, of a livelihood, can be turned into a fire, something that can sustain new life:

The very fire that warmed you when you were a babby, was
picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very
basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very
rockers that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut out of a
piece of wood that drifted from some ship or another.

(I 1 p. 15)

There were in real life many such characters who kept themselves alive by retrieving things from the river. It would be interesting to know how exactly Mayhew would have classified these "waterside characters." He certainly gives a full account of the mudlarks, who scoured the waters for lost goods to sell to the poor. Society's cast-offs can be changed "Into something rich and strange", even if it is only shillings and pence. Gaffer only extends this principle a little in making money from the retrieval of corpses. He is a skilled fisherman, trawling the depths for shoals that only he understands:

there was no clue to what he looked for, but he looked for
something, with a most intent and searching gaze. (I 1 p. 13)

Far from searching for spiritual renewal, however, he is merely searching for "meat and drink" (p. 15) in the Thames. That this should be obtainable from the decaying human flesh and rubbish of the Thames sickens Lizzie. Like many other Londoners, she and her father must sustain life without being overwhelmed by disgust at their means of doing so. Gaffer lives by capitalizing on the deaths and losses of others and the same is true in less obvious ways of other urbanites in the novel, whose every advantage comes from the disadvantage of another. Mr Venus also depends upon death and decay to continue his livelihood. As London's premier "Articulator of human bones" (I 7 p. 89), he is, moreover, a further example of the city's desperate attempts to re-animate the dead. He appears in the early chapters to be the closest thing in this novel to the revivifying wind, providing T. S. Eliot's "rattle of the bones", if not the "chuckle spread from ear to ear" (I. 186). His raw materials are found "down at the water-side" (III 7 p. 492). As in *The Waste Land*, some Londoners yearn to represent a resurrecting power that the city is too decayed to participate in. Despite his down to earth nature, Gaffer's fishing for corpses is symptomatic of a desire to invest the Thames with meaning.

And Lizzie learns that the river may indeed carry this significance. It is in these distasteful urban waters that she learns the skills that enable her to pull Eugene from the Thames further upstream. His oblivion too is an essential part of his drowning.

Initially, he is "insensible, if not virtually dead" (IV 6 p. 683). Then, as Lizzie attempts to rescue him from delirium, the struggle is conceived as a "frequent rising of a drowning man from the deep" (IV 10 p. 721). Her patience - developed in her years as a waterman's daughter - prepares her for this moment when she can rescue Eugene not merely from these depths, but also from the depths of his former indolent and egocentric nature. She can at last exclaim:

Now, merciful Heaven be thanked for that old time, enabling
me, without a wasted moment, to have got the boat afloat
again, and to row back against the stream! (IV 6 p. 684).

A transformation of the cityscape of a very different sort has occurred. What had seemed grimy, cheerless and deathbound in the activities of London is actually a divine gift for the restoration of life.

The "sure touch of her old practised hand" (IV 6 p. 683) provides the same image as Eliot chooses to represent surrender to the controlling power of love:

Damyata: the boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
To controlling hands (ll. 418-22)²⁹

Because of the vessel's submission to careful steering, the Thames allows it to sail purposefully instead of wrecking it. Critical tradition has been quick to see this control as that of the principle of divine love operating in human relationships, which has been ignored in the London world. George Williamson, for example, reads the phrase "beating obedient" (l. 421) as a "response of the heart ... to the will" as distinct from the "blood shaking" it (l. 402) in response to physical lust. The value of such a response is that it allows the quester to participate at last in transcendent love, meeting:

the conditions of ascent to higher love which would relieve [the
Wastelanders'] anguish. These commands have all been violated in
the Waste Land.³⁰

Strangely, an inherent transcendental meaning is readily assumed by critics in Eliot's use of the image, but only conceded with reluctance in Dickens's. Perhaps this is because it has a localized narrative context in the novel, whereas in the poem it is isolated in a fragment of the interpretation of the Thunder's sybillic utterance. The latter thus draws the reader's attention to it as an image with a universal meaning, emphasizing its themes of skilful control and obedient response to love. Dickens uses the Thames as powerfully as Eliot, however, to evoke a divinely appointed system of love relationships causing the

²⁹*Collected Poems 1909-62*, op cit, p. 79.

³⁰*A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot* (London: Thames Hudson, 1955), p. 151.

flow towards death to become a regenerating flow towards new life after a moment of surrender. It may be that this dimension to the scene has frequently been overlooked because the reader is clearly invited to emulate a specific action on the part of a particular individual. Eliot is concerned primarily with stimulating the longing to surrender oneself to a resurrecting power that has been lost in a London environment where people settle for a sterile world without it. His use of the boat now floating upon the formerly submerging waters captures perfectly the experience of responding to the yearned-for higher love. Dickens's use of it presents both a symbol and a tangible example of it in operation.

A further difference between the two authors' use of the image is that whereas *The Waste Land* mainly focuses on the surrender of the drowned man as a model for imitation, *Our Mutual Friend* invites the reader to emulate the controller, Lizzie, as well as the responder to control, Eugene Wrayburn. This didactic element has perhaps diverted some readers from the fact that the episode symbolizes a religious truth. The control here comes not from a divine force, but from a human being. Nevertheless, human care for brothers and sisters and the "higher love" perceived by Eliot's interpreters are, as earlier chapters have considered, not necessarily very far removed from one another in the mind and work of Dickens. To engage in practical social action on behalf of one's neighbour in need is a direct expression of God's love to his children manifesting itself in the world. Equally, to acknowledge one's dependence upon others is to acknowledge a connection of dependence upon divine love working through human beings. Perhaps Dickens, whose writings had been influenced by Thomas Carlyle in many another way, was creating a fictitious world where the statement from *Sartor Resartus* that "the universe is but one vast symbol of God"³¹ could be true. Teufelsdröck had certainly argued that the actions of righteous people had been symbols of the Almighty himself. Dickens's fiction constantly asserts that the best expressions of Christian love, as he understood it, were in the loving deeds of everyday life. In situating his symbolic river of death and renewal at the heart of the London environment in which the majority of his readers lived Dickens highlighted the need for and availability of such new life in their own immediate circumstances.

This is why Limehouse Hole tends to be the great imaginative centre of London in Dickens's novels, as Euston Station is its "heart" in *Dombey and Son* (15 p. 218), generating the rhythms that bring about surrender to death and emerging clarity within that novel's symbolic scheme. Here it is that innumerable bodies are "FOUND DROWNED" throughout his fiction. Although most remain undeniably dead, many are

³¹London: Chapman & Hall, 1897), III iii, p. 175.

pulled out of the waters at this spot. Bucket immediately looks for Lady Dedlock here (*BH* 57 pp. 868-9), but for her it is too late for resurrection. More than any other place in Dickens's fiction, it concentrates the meaning of the river symbol, that human beings are heading inevitably towards death; that they may be providentially raised to a new life both in this world and the next through resigning egocentric ambitions and embracing altruism, which is an embodiment of the divine character; that the apparently deathbound routine of city life really may contain the potential for restoring vitality.

For Dickens, the opposition this chapter has established between Limehouse as a search for a selfless means of survival in a life-denying city, and as symbolic of the search for spiritual re-birth would have seemed irrelevant. They come of a piece in Dickens's thought and fiction. It is as if the one enables the other to take place. The Thames has always carried this meaning for him, but it is in these final novels where he has vividly brought it into the events of the narrative that it conveys this significance so forcefully. If instead of each individual seeking ways to eke out his or her own existence, society as a whole would follow Lizzie's example of helping others to social regeneration, a divine act worthy of the title of transcendental symbol would be performed.

**"A dream of demon heads and savage eyes" - Dickens's
metropolitan crowd.**

There are, as the last chapters have considered, powerful forces essential to the city's composition, which counteract its atmosphere of deathbound concealment. Some, like the detective police and the railway, push uncompromisingly towards a conclusive revelation of truth that brings a literal or metaphorical death to the person whose world has been built upon concealment of that truth. In the case of the railway, a surrender to this death is followed by a resultant transformative resurrection. Other forces, such as the river, are even more ambiguous, as instrumental in burying facts as in washing them up for public scrutiny. London's crowds, however, constitute a third flowing force in Dickens's city. They are constantly described in terms that evoke the generally adjacent Thames. In *Dombey and Son*, the moving masses are present in the plot, both realistically and symbolically, in a way that the river is not to be until the later novels. Nevertheless, the frequent juxtaposition of these motifs in the novel suggests that they deal, in their different ways, with the same themes of surrendering an old identity to death so that a new one may emerge.

Starting with a comparison of what this symbolic juxtaposition means in *Dombey and Son* with its significance in *The Waste Land*, this chapter turns its attention to the exploration of the crowd in Dickens's earlier fiction that paved the way for such a vision. In particular, the crowd provides the dominant energy in *Oliver Twist* and *Barnaby Rudge*, where the properties which qualify it for its symbolic burden in the later work are already present. It fittingly summarizes all that made the capital as a whole mysterious to Dickens in relation to the great ontological and spiritual mystery of existence, namely the confusion and discovery of love relationships between people. For Baudelaire too, writing at much the same time, the crowds were the essential part of the mystery that gave life to Paris. Although it is the crowds that actually flow through the streets of the "Fourmillante cité" in 'Les Sept Vieillards', the poet says it is mysteries that are moving around Paris:

Les mystères partout coulent comme des sèves
Dans les canaux étroits du colosse puissant.

Mysteries flow everywhere like the sap
In the narrow veins of this mighty giant

('Les Septs Vieillards' ll. 3-4)¹

Dickens also finds the crowd to be synonymous with the revelation and concealment that

¹*The Complete Verse*, F. Scarfe (ed. and trans.), (London: Anvil, 1986), p. 177.

gives symbolic purpose to his metropolis. More ambiguous still than the Thames, it is made of the very people of London and thus it is the most representative microsymbol within the vast macrosymbol of his metropolis.

I. The Crowd and the River

Paul Dombey's vision of the river takes place internally, but it is not altogether without an external referent. The boy is made to think of the Thames by hearing the swarms of people going by outside his window:

By little and little, he got tired of the bustle of the day, the noise of carriages and carts, and people passing and re-passing; and would fall asleep, or be troubled with a restless and uneasy sense again - the child could hardly tell whether this were in his sleeping or his waking moments - of that rushing river. (DS 16 p. 221)

Paul's subconscious mind recasts the blended and incoherent sounds of a human concourse in on-going motion past a fixed spot as the roar of the equally fast-moving Thames. This association between river and crowd is not entirely irrational. The masses he hears are commercial in character and activity. Just as he has always been taught that "Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships" (1 p. 2), his father would have encouraged him to regard these people as the impersonal medium by which the business of Dombey and Son was done and as the faceless public to whom its merchandise was ultimately supplied. It is even possible to imagine a conversation taking place between father and son akin to, if less consciously cynical than, Tigg Montague's words with Jonas in *Martin Chuzzlewit* when he draws his dupe's attention to the "crowded street" outside the window and produces "printed calculations" of the number of people among them that may be expected to insure themselves at the office (27 p. 444). On another level, the urban crowd's direction, speed and density are governed by time as rigidly as the flow of the river, as may be seen in a phrase like "It is half-past five o'clock and the human tide is still rolling westward" (4 p. 38). With this consistent point of comparison in view in the novel, it is no wonder that the moving throng should recall to Paul's mind the other reminder that the plot is taking him inevitably towards a fixed goal.

Along with the river, the masses are part of London's symbolism which Dombey fails to interpret correctly. Like Tigg, he sees them as part of the commercial mechanism by which people can be reduced to the monetary relationships that obtain between him and them. This is the means by which he emphasizes his own distinctive identity as

Dombey and Son. By contrast, Paul apprehends that the movement of the concourse is really part of the mechanism which will bring the house of Dombey and Son to its destruction and this is why the sound of its progress initially disturbs him. He seems instinctively aware that the world view that depends upon reducing individuals to a homogenous crowd is heading inexorably towards collapse.² To lump men and women together in this way is to deny the connections that must exist between oneself and them as human beings. Atrophy and death must result from reliance upon such a conception of the crowd.

In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Dickens had already imagined the anxious hallucinations of the urban invalid as he registers the sounds of the incessant movement on the streets:

Think of a sick man in such a place as Saint Martin's court, listening to the footsteps, and in the midst of pain and weariness obliged, despite himself (as though it were a task he must perform) to detect the child's step from the man's ... the dull heel of the sauntering outcast from the quick tread of an expectant pleasure seeker - think of the hum and noise being always present to his senses, and of the stream of life that will not stop, pouring on, on, on, through all his restless dreams.

.... Then the crowds for ever passing and repassing on the bridges ... looking listlessly down upon the water with some vague idea that by-and-by it runs between green banks which grow wider and wider until at last it joins the broad vast sea ...

(1 p. 6)

London's multitudes often have this melancholy awareness of their community with the river, although it is usually left to the narrator to give expression to this. In his delirium, the man is led by the crowd to think of the river and his own journey towards death. The crowd members themselves make this association between the slow, inevitable movement of the river towards the sea and their own towards decease. Some among them hope that their restless movement along the bridge will end in oblivion, feeling that "to smoke and lounge away one's life ... in a dull, slow sluggish barge, must be happiness unalloyed" and others recall "that drowning was not a hard death, but of all means of suicide the easiest and best". This marks a contrast between the river, which they perceive as travelling towards a desired death, and the crowd, which may continue to flow forever without supplying it. The sick man, however, has the boy's sense of the inexplicable task imposed upon him of being "forced, sometimes, to try to stop [the river] - to stem it

²For the different attitudes of father and son to the passage of time, see pp. 164-5 above.

with his childish hands - or choke its way with sand" (*DS* 16 p. 221). The compulsion is to resist the flow towards death, the dissolution of his identity. In his struggle to assert the individual identity of each pedestrian, the man in St Martin's Court is opposing a motion towards destruction of the self. Each footstep must retain its human significance for him, whereas the rapidity and jumble of the streets would turn it into mere "hum and noise". His insistence upon the separateness of individuals is not an example of the opposite spirit to *Dombey's* blurring of people in the mass. It seems more like an obsessive last minute attempt to assert his own perpetually diminishing identity. His struggle is a refusal to surrender to the dissolving currents of the crowd, which this passage implies would bring an end to his suffering. This, however, only keeps him in a state of artificial living death that brings no peace, "as if he were condemned to lie dead but conscious, in a noisy churchyard, and had no hope of rest for centuries to come", comparable to the condition of the Londoners in *The Waste Land*.

T. S. Eliot also connects the movement of the populace with that of the Thames and links both to the journey towards death:

A crowd *flowed* over London Bridge, so many

I had not thought death had undone so many ... (ll. 62-3, my italics)³

As in the Dickensian passages, there is a real sense that the crowd is governed strictly by time as it circulates around the city, and even the indicators of time are grim reminders of mortality:

Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,

To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours

With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine. (ll. 66-8)

Eliot's sustained allusion to the "woeful city" of the *Inferno*, where the narrator says, "I saw people at the shore of a great river" (III 70), gives these lines their atmosphere of living death. For Dante, as for Eliot, only those who participate in the moral scheme can be said to live and thus he calls his sufferers "These wretches who never were alive". Therefore, their punishment for being "neither rebellious nor faithful to God" (III 39) is to exist for eternity in this state.⁴ Having deprived themselves of a moral context, they possess an eerie eternal life with none of the joyful vitality that term implies:

These have no hope of death,

and their blind life is so abject

that they are envious of every other lot. (III 46-8)⁵

Eliot brings this moral dissolution up to date in his poem. Here is a society that is dead,

³ *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber, 1974), p. 65.

⁴ See Cleanth Brooks, 'The Waste Land: Critique of the Myth' in C. B. Cox, Arnold Hinchcliffe (eds.), *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 128-61.

⁵ *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, J. D. Sinclair (ed. and trans.), (London: Bodley Head, 1958), vol. I, pp. 49-51.

but stubbornly refuses to acknowledge the fact in decent burial. It cannot sprout into new life because it is always at risk of "the Dog" prematurely digging it up. It has ended up in this state, like the Sybil of Cumae in the epigraph, conscious but impotent and imprisoned, or indeed like the "dead but conscious soul" in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and Paul, so long as he resists the flow of the crowd-river.

Whereas, however, the river takes the quester through the city in a definite direction, to a point where resurrection might occur, there is no hint of the crowd sharing its symbolic partner's revivifying element. Madame Sosostris sees only "crowds of people, walking round in a ring" (l. 56), rather than upon a purposeful course. The lessons of surrender and renewal offered by the Thames are neither taught nor learned by the metropolitan multitudes. In *The Waste Land*, then, T. S. Eliot sees no more in the crowd than does Master Humphrey's invalid. To be part of it is to surrender identity and that is too great a price to pay for both the quester and the invalid. There is no question for either that such a loss may lead to the discovery of a new and vibrant identity. London's masses are both death-bound and death-denying because of their divorce from the moral framework. Thus when, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, they are called a "stream of life", Master Humphrey means rather a stream of death-in-life that may be understood as an earlier account of Eliot's deadened concourse that yet refuses to surrender to death.

When, however, the phrase recurs in *Dombey and Son*, the crowd more accurately lives up to this title. Florence is:

*carried onward in a stream of life setting that way, and
flowing, indifferently, past marts and mansions, prisons,
churches, market-places, wealth, poverty, good, and evil, like
the broad river, side by side with it, awakened from its dreams
of rushes, willows, and green moss, and rolling on, turbid
and troubled, among the works and cares of men, to the deep
sea.* (48 p. 639, my italics)

The movement of London's people here conveys both aspects of the river, death and transcendent new life. The experience of baptismally immersing herself in the city's crowd is to be taken as a palpable example to Florence of what surrender to the imagined Thames has done for Paul. Like almost everyone else in *Dombey and Son*, Florence too must have her old identity demolished (in a chapter entitled "The Thunderbolt") before she can emerge into her new life. When she steps out of her role as Dombey's daughter into the anonymity of the crowd, her senses are ultimately aroused rather than deadened by the dissolution of identity she undergoes. Just as the river is itself "awakened from its dreams", its human counterpart is involved in "recalling her in some degree to herself". To be borne along by the timebound crowd is, for Florence, as much an act of yielding to

the death and transformation of her identity and ambitions as burial in the regenerative Thames is for Eugene Wrayburn. At the moment of her surrender to the crowd, she identifies with the shipwrecked Walter, feeling "like the sole survivor on a lonely shore from the wreck of a great vessel" (48 p. 638). In the earlier fiction, the crowd evokes the same sensation in Little Nell and her grandfather, who are presented as "feeling amidst the crowd a solitude which has no parallel but in the thirst of the shipwrecked mariner" (OCS 44 p. 338). In *Dombey and Son*, however, the shipwreck Florence identifies is more like that of Phlebas the Phoenician. In the context of the work as a whole, it has a transforming potential, allowing the surrender to death and consequent regeneration in the crowd yearned for, but ultimately impossible in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and later in *The Waste Land*. Walter will shortly prove that it is entirely possible to re-emerge from a death by water. As the people move to and from work at set hours and hurry to reach the stations on time, the multitudes operate to the same overarching timetable as the other resurrecting agents in the novel, the railway and the river. To be "lost in London", as Florence is twice, is to allow this Providential timetable to operate.

Dickens's attempts to give the crowd its central place in the symbolic pattern of his city did not begin in 1848, however. Both *Oliver Twist* and *Barnaby Rudge* deal with the dissolution and re-discovery of self in the urban concourse and its dual role as both venue for concealment and agent of revelation. The following pages are mainly concerned with the complex ways in which the crowd in these earlier novels conceals the network of relationships between people that form the basis of mystery in Dickens. This is because the later novels transfer the crowd's role as the aspect of London that enacts the process of mystery to the Thames and the river more fully develops London's ambiguous role in bringing death and resurrection, concealment and revelation. As the discussion progresses, however, it will become clear that, even here, the hope of the later fiction that people may emerge from their immersion in the throng with a transformed sense of identity and of relation to human society as a whole is distinctly present. Indeed, Dickens's ability to turn London's crowd into a symbol of the process of mystery in his mature work may be traced to his perceptions about its operation in these two novels.

II. The crowd and loss of identity

That London was a crowded city in Dickens's time scarcely requires

demonstration. Its population had risen from 500 000 in 1660 to 1 250 000 in 1820.⁶ The figures for the intervening years provided by George Rudé⁷ suggest that the rate of growth accelerated in the years of the Industrial Revolution. In 1700, there were 575 000 inhabitants; fifty years later, a steady 675 000. By 1801, this had risen to 900 000 and Rudé estimates a population of two million for 1850. London's area did not expand at the same rate to accommodate this influx and over the course of the nineteenth century, London's population density doubled.⁸ Since Dickens was writing at a time when the capital's streets were crowded to an unprecedented and discernibly increasing extent, it is natural that this should be a major preoccupation in his work.

Both of the earlier novels under discussion have protagonists who come from outside London to add one more unit to the multitude. Barnaby may be said to be fleeing rural poverty, mostly for his mother's sake, like the influx in real life. He is brought by the blind man (an obvious motif) to associate the crowd with gold, which he is informed is "not in solitary places like those you pass your time in, but in crowds, and where there's noise and rattle" (46 p. 428). He goes on to hear "That gold was to be found where people crowded, and not among the trees and in such quiet places" (47 p. 439). Money, however, is not to be made by industry here, except in the sense that the Artful Dodger is "industrious" (*OT* 9 p. 54). Stagg reveals himself to be a pickpocket in chapter sixty-nine, declaring "the streets have been running money" (p. 624). Barnaby, the idiot, taken in like this, is a warning to those who come into the city, expecting the streets to be paved with gold, without encountering criminality. Mrs Rudge and *Oliver Twist* are also attracted to London because of the vast numbers of people there, but their reason for being drawn by the density of the population is not economically motivated. For them, loss of identity in the metropolitan masses is liberating because it allows an escape from their problems. *Oliver* dreams of "London! - that great large place! - nobody - not even Mr Bumble - could ever find him there!" (8 p. 44). The industrial town offers a similar consolation to Little Nell, who says:

we are lost in the crowd and hurry of this place, and if any
cruel people should pursue us, they could surely never trace
us further. There's comfort in that. (*OCS* 44 p. 340)

Mrs Rudge also "hoped by plunging into the crowd, to rid herself of her terrible pursuer" (*BR* 47 p. 440).

Such expectations could only be entertained of a city that was on its way to

⁶Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 146.

⁷*The Face of the Crowd* (New York and London: Harvester, 1988), pp. 224-5.

⁸J. A. Banks, 'The Contagion of Numbers' in H. J. Dyos and M. Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian City*, 2 vols. (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), vol. I. pp. 105-22.

becoming, in the words of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*:

a monstrous town more populous than some continents [with]
darkness enough to bury five millions of lives.⁹

Burial here relates to the possibility of absolute erasure of facts in such an environment. When, however, those facts are the "lives" of human beings, the word suggests that London's vast population is an enormous weight, crushing all that may be called the life out of the Verlocs and all who hide there. Death and the regeneration that may follow it in Dickens is closely bound up with the theme of concealment and revelation in this concept of burial,¹⁰ especially when it is discussed in relation to the metropolitan crowd.

Dickens is no more afraid than Conrad to show the dream of anonymity turning bad. Both Barnaby and Oliver receive a revelation of identity from being lost in London which enables them to be found again, but the process is intensely painful. Dickens also recognizes that the crowd blurs personal contexts, rendering the emotions of the individuals insignificant. Little Nell and her grandfather feel this way about Birmingham:

They were but an atom, here, in a mountain heap of misery,
the very sight of which increased their hopelessness and
suffering. (OCS 44 p. 339)

London, with its greater population, decontextualizes grief all the more. Seeing it from afar, the "stragglers who came wandering into London" in *Dombey and Son* speculate that "their misery there would be but as a drop of water in the sea, or as a grain of sea-sand on the shore" (*DS* 33 p. 462). This is the London in which Florence must necessarily lose herself. Such cold, homogenizing dissolution seems to offer little hope that her true identity can be revealed or that the experience will regenerate her to new life.

Dickens seems to suggest that London's commercial character is ultimately responsible for the loss of identity that takes place in its crowds. Cities, of course, generally originated as market centres for the gathering and selling of the produce and livestock of the surrounding area. London had become the trading centre of a global empire and materials, goods and foodstuffs accumulated there on an enormous scale. As production increased with technology, exportation created employment on the Thames, both manual and clerical, with the development of associated services such as insurance. In their wake, merchants, sailors, labourers and many other classes of people were required to come from all over the country - and indeed the world - to keep the system of import and export running. Many others, who were not required, came also, enticed by the hope of employment. As people came to be regarded as part of a system, an animate resource necessary for the operation of the commercial machine, the sheer numbers

⁹(London and Toronto: Dent, 1923), Author's note, p. xii

¹⁰See pp. 121-123 above.

involved made them as faceless and indistinguishable as the commodities themselves. In Smithfield in *Oliver Twist*, human beings are as penned in as the animals they deal in. The market, in all senses of the word, erodes distinctions between men and things, a characteristic concern of Dickens, and it is the packedness of the place that leads to this perception. As soon as Oliver enters London, he is conscious that children who live there have become the "stock in trade" of the shops which shelter them (8 p. 49). Later, in Jacob's Island, "the visitor" finds himself:

Jostling with unemployed labourers of the lowest class,
ballast-heavers, coal-whippers, brazen women, ragged
children, and the very raff and refuse of the river...

Such people, representing so many labour hours, are piled up like the "great piles of merchandise from the stacks of warehouses" they live among (50 p. 338). Already the ground is prepared for the more modern sensibility of *Hard Times*, where people are reduced to "figures in a soom" (II 5 p. 182) because of their multitude and function within the town. Dickens implies in *Oliver Twist*, *Hard Times* and *Dombey and Son* that this depersonalization will lead to spiritual and social collapse. The crowd is a place where social relationships and responsibilities are concealed by men like Bounderby and Dombey, who see the masses as a stream of anonymous units flowing towards an economic goal. The loss of identity that takes place within it in this commercial aspect is a death with little prospect of regeneration.

A telling simile in *Little Dorrit* connects the removal of personal distinctions in the business-dominated concourse and another great dissolver of vital differentiation:

What the mud had been doing with itself, or where it came
from, who could say? But it seemed to collect in a moment,
as a crowd will, and in five minutes to have splashed all the
sons and daughters of Adam. (I 3 p. 31)

Dirt is here conceived as a bringing together of particles belonging to categories which ought to remain separate, if the framework of relationships between things is to be maintained.¹¹ The crowd further jumbles disparate elements, concealing the true nature of society and one's place in it. Thus *Little Dorrit* uses it as a metaphor to illustrate the confused conglomeration of matter that is the urban mud. Both create an urban environment which vividly figures the ontological confusion of the individual as to his or her own identity in relation to the rest of humanity in a world controlled by concealers. However, just as London's dirt challenges Jo and Esther to tidy it up and re-assess their relation to the world, so the confusion of the crowd leads Florence, Oliver and others to re-evaluate their identity more accurately.

¹¹See pp. 86 ff above.

Dickens develops a concept of the polluted crowd spontaneously generating itself around the activity of the city, much as the Elizabethans believed that flies spontaneously generated themselves around excrement. In fact, when people are densely packed together they come to resemble insects and vermin. *Oliver Twist* describes "heaps of children ... crawling in and out at the doors" (8 p. 49) and Tom-all-Alone's is said to be inhabited by "a swarm of misery" and "vermin parasites":

a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in
walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers
... fetching and carrying fever... (16 p. 256-7)

The density of this environment is as significant as its dirtiness in establishing London as a place resisting attempts to categorize ontological phenomena. Many contemporary social reformers linked overcrowding and dirt in this way, seeing both as contributory to the criminal mentality. The idea of the residuum depended upon such a conflation of the density and dirtiness of the population.¹² Greenslade notes that "Commentators of the eighties were burdened by the inescapable facts of mass poverty" and were able to conceive of the slum-dwellers as "waste" and sewage", the contaminating matter produced by industrialisation that threatened to spread their pollution throughout society.¹³ Apart from the physical link between crowds and dirt, the difficulty of maintaining proper hygiene, the distinctions between people became less discernible with increased numbers. Chadwick's horror that "civilized beings should be herding together without a decent separation of age and sex"¹⁴ is echoed in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which speaks of "dense and squalid masses where social decency is lost, or rather never found" (38 p. 293). Both feel that the enforced intimate contact between people in such places is as harmful as the dirt in diminishing a proper sense of social relationships. Even differentiation between the sexes is lost, as the Victorian reformers noted in disgust, and Dickens too sees in this a root of amorality. Here is the "assemblage of heads" in the *Three Cripples*:

as the eye grew more accustomed to the scene, the spectator
gradually became aware of the presence of a numerous
company, male and female, crowded round a long table
with every mark and stamp of their sex utterly beaten out, and
presenting but one loathsome blank of profligacy and crime...
(26 p. 164)

In *Oliver Twist*, this dirty, amoral - if not essentially wicked - crowd spills out on to the

¹²See pp. 91 ff above.

¹³Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 47-8.

¹⁴*Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, M. W. Flinn (ed.), (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965), p.191.

streets of London, where its resistance to classification overwhelmingly conceals knowledge of the individual's true identity.

III. The mob

With its tendency to confuse right and wrong, the metropolitan crowd easily becomes a mob in these two early novels. *A Tale of Two Cities* demonstrates Dickens's continuing fascination with this transition. *Barnaby Rudge*, however, is the work that most fully allows the reader to participate in the experience of the mob and to explore it from within. In *Oliver Twist*, the crowd, although important, is composed of unknown individuals, whereas in *Barnaby Rudge*, the hero and other well-established characters form part of it. As they are swept along in the action of the riots, they disconcertingly slip from the place they have occupied at the forefront of the narrative. Dickens explained this technique in a letter to John Landseer:

a broad, bold, hurried effect must be produced, or the reader instead of being forced and driven along by imaginary crowds will find himself dawdling very uncomfortably through the town my object has been to convey an idea of multitudes, violence, and fury; and even to lose my own dramatis personae in the throng ...¹⁵

London is to be directly experienced as a bewildering place where all individuality, even character, must be subsumed in the corporate and fundamentally different group identity. Conversely, however, the same persons who are lost in the group contribute significantly, but subtly, to the character of the whole as the reader understands it. A. O. J. Cockshut makes this point concisely:

Our knowledge of the thoughts and personality of three or four people in the crowd imperceptibly modifies our view of the crowd itself.¹⁶

Because Barnaby is naive and irrational, the crowd will be naive and irrational; because Hugh is bestial, the crowd will behave like an animal; because Sim is reactionary and mean, the mob will sometimes share these characteristics. The extent to which individuals shape the mob and that to which the mob changes the actions and attitudes of the individual is of vital importance in these novels.

There is a specific, historical crowd with which to compare *Barnaby Rudge's*

¹⁵ November 1841, *Letters*, op cit, vol. II, p. 418..

¹⁶*The Imagination of Charles Dickens* (London: Collins, 1961), p. 73.

fictional account of these phenomena. The Gordon Riots of 1780 protested against the 1778 Catholic Relief Act, which removed restrictions upon Roman Catholics, such as the prohibition of land inheritance for members of that religion and arbitrary imprisonment for their priests and teachers.¹⁷ Although the march to Parliament on Friday 2 June was initially peaceful, chaos broke loose and several peers were assaulted. Over the next six days, Catholic chapels and the homes and businesses of suspected Papists were ransacked. Various prisons including Newgate were stormed to release those taken captive in the ensuing struggle with the authorities. Dickens had access to a number of contemporary sources about these events, including Thomas Holcroft's report in *The Annual Register*, 1780.¹⁸ Although Dickens remained largely faithful to these in terms of reported speech and incident, he did not intend simply to reproduce what actually happened. In one letter, he exclaims, "I think I can make a better riot than Lord George Gordon did."¹⁹ The differences between the documented events of the uprising and their presentation in *Barnaby Rudge* are worth considering because they show what Dickens regarded as "better" for his symbolic purpose.

Most obviously, Dickens entirely omitted certain important episodes from the story, including the unsuccessful attacks upon the Bank and Pay Office on 6 June. Neither does Dickens comment on the intervention of John Wilkes, a popular radical demagogue, whose attitude as magistrate at the attack upon Newgate was remarkable since he had himself been imprisoned by the government. He even killed two of the rioters himself. When Landseer pointed out this omission, Dickens replied:

No man in the crowd who was pressed and trodden here and there, saw Wilkes ... or anything but a great mass of magistrates, rioters, and soldiery, all mixed up together.

Details like this, he implies, are only important to historians and commentators. To recreate the impressions registered by the uncritical participants, individual figures would have to melt into the blur of the action. Nothing is to be admitted to the narrative that would interrupt the power of the urban crowd once unleashed.

A more subtle difference is that the poverty and criminality that characterize Dickens's mob throughout do not accord with the findings of modern historians. George Rudé points out that of 160 tried at the Old Bailey and Surrey Assizes, seventy-six were wage earners, of whom thirty-six were journeymen or apprentices and only eleven labourers. Twenty-two were small employers. If this is a representative sample of the

¹⁷Most importantly for the government, it allowed Catholics to join the army to fight in America.

¹⁸Gordon Spence has helpfully compiled a comprehensive list of these in Appendix B of the Penguin Classics edition of *Barnaby Rudge* (Harmondsworth, 1973).

¹⁹to John Cay, 21 July 1841, *Letters*, op cit, vol. II, p. 337.

rioters, the very poorest elements of society do not feature heavily. Rudé quotes a witness in T. B. Howell's *A Complete Collection of State Trials* who describes the participants as "the better sort of tradesmen; they were all well-dressed decent sort of people".²⁰ Dickens had this book in his library at Gadshill and must have consciously chosen to make the crowd poorer and more criminal than it was. This is so that he could portray mass violence as arising organically from the atmosphere of the city, incorporating it into his central image of London. Thus his rioters are:

composed for the most part of the very scum and refuse of
London, whose growth was fostered by bad criminal laws,
bad prison regulations, and the worst conceivable police...

(BR 49 p. 453)

Again, Dickens connects the city's crowd and dirt as symptomatic of the collapse of proper social relationships and for this reason he depicts the untidiest of the great unwashed as the dominant element in the riots.

Nevertheless, Dickens's version of events may not be so dissimilar to reality after all. Rudé's figures come only from those who were actually arrested. Many more than 160 were involved in the riots themselves. The respectable Protestant citizens that held initial prominence in the early stages of the march were soon joined by drunken idlers and those bent on looting victims and their properties. Christopher Hibbert, who lists his extensive sources en masse at the end of his book, but infuriatingly does not provide specific references for his statements, asserts that the mob that smashed the Duke Street chapel was composed of "hundreds of street boys and prostitutes, drunks, pickpockets and rowdies", despite the fact that "All thirteen men arrested" for the disruption "were gainfully employed".²¹

Moreover, Dickens does not ignore the unlikely presence of upstanding working people in the mob. The point is not that such men were absent, but that these distinctions of class and occupation, which usually separate people and regulate behaviour, become irrelevant in this situation. In the excitement of the commotion, even the most orderly become part of the "scum and refuse":

sober workmen ... were seen to cast down their baskets of
tools and become rioters in an instant; mere boys on errands
did the like. (53 p.484)

Similarly, when another crowd pursues Oliver, they quickly divest themselves of all that distinguishes them:

²⁰The Gordon Riots: A Study of the Rioters and their Victims', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. VI (1955), pp. 105-6.

²¹*King Mob* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), pp. 59-61.

the butcher throws down his tray, the baker his basket ... the schoolboy his marbles ... (OT 10 p. 116)

That the mob should come from such a multiplicity of sources and form a single unpredictable entity is one of the reasons why it is mysterious to Dickens. It may contain any person and conceal him or her fathoms deep. This is reflected in a simile from the passage in *Barnaby Rudge* above that again compares the crowd to the river:²²

Each party swelled as it went along, like rivers as they roll towards the sea... (53 p. 484)

Here Dickens emphasizes the spontaneous force with which the crowd is propelled, but also conveys a sense of many smaller units being absorbed into a much more powerful whole in which they cannot be traced. Like the river, this is a place where complete dissolution of the self is possible. Like the river again, it is a place where facts may be buried. Individuals in Dickens such as *Oliver Twist* never know which other selves have allowed themselves to be dissolved in the crowd and what relationship they may have to them:

Assembling and dispersing with equal suddenness, it is as difficult to follow to its various sources as the sea itself; nor does the parallel stop here, for the ocean is not more fickle and uncertain, more terrible when roused, more unreasonable, or more cruel. (52 p. 475)

Mrs Rudge and Oliver come to London because of its crowd. In a sense, they are concealers, wishing to bury themselves in the anonymity it offers. They are not seeking any form of resurrection from the experience, but rather resemble figures like Martha in *David Copperfield*, who simply wish to drown themselves in the river and be wiped out altogether. Passages like this show that the stream of people into which they wish to plunge themselves is not heading towards a restful oblivion, but to a malevolent and on-going death-in-life. The power that negates individuality and secures escape from detection is ultimately dangerous and deathbound.

IV. Dickens and crowd psychology.

Dickens is not alone in observing the rioters' tendency to surrender their individuality to the corporate identity. Hibbert, for example, writes of them "losing their

²²Harold F. Holland usefully lists the comparisons made between the mob and the water in "The Doer and the Deed: Theme and Pattern in *Barnaby Rudge*", in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. LXXIV (1959), pp. 406-17.

identities in a fusing welter of destruction."²³ More generally, psychologists have written a great deal about the process of "de-individuation" that takes place once a person becomes part of a large group of people.²⁴ Perhaps the earliest to tackle this issue was Gustave Le Bon, whose politically reactionary book, *The Crowd: a Study of the Popular Mind*, published in France in 1895, exemplifies theoretical thinking on the matter during the Victorian era. Le Bon claims that a large group of individuals becomes a single entity:

A collective mind is formed ... It forms a single being, and is subjected to *the law of the mental unity of crowds*.²⁵

This new personality, as it were, is not, however, the sum total of the component personalities, nor is it an average of them. Instead, it has an entirely new character motivated and guided by wholly different principles.

Le Bon's central idea is that in a crowd people are governed by reason less than usual because their brains are overwhelmed with more sensual impressions than they have power to register simultaneously. They are therefore more susceptible to irrational suggestions and less capable of making accurate judgements. The new identity of the mob as a whole, then, is more likely to act in accordance with basic subconscious instincts than the individuals it contains. Le Bon even goes as far as to suggest that participation in such a group reduces people to a much lower level of human development:

By the mere fact that he forms part of an organised crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian - that is, a creature acting by instinct among the special characteristics of crowds there are several - such as impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgement and of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of the sentiments, and others besides - which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution -

²³*King Mob*, op cit, p. 92.

²⁴Philip G. Zimbardo sets out the definition of this phenomenon in his paper, 'The Human Choice: Individuation, Reason, and Order versus Deindividuation, Impulse, and Chaos', *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, Vol. XVII (1969), pp. 237-307. In one well known - if somewhat bizarre - experiment, for example, subjects deindividuated by being made to work in the dark with coverings for their faces were told that they were administering mild electric shocks to visible young women from a common terminal when they pressed a button. This was repeated with another group, unmasked and in a lighted room, who were further individuated strongly by frequent use of their names throughout the procedure. As predicted, the group operating under conditions of perceived anonymity continued to shock for longer, even after the recipient appeared to be going through severe physical pain. Zimbardo's conclusions from this, and other experiments, are broadly that hostile instincts such as aggression are more likely to be acted upon and altruistic qualities such as pity less likely to motivate people in a deindividuated group.

²⁵(London: Ernest Benn, 1896), p. 26.

in women, savages and children, for instance.²⁶

For Le Bon the barbarous and primitive seems to include an alarmingly wide range of people.

Dickens too suggests that when action is taken by a mass, it is informed by the basic instincts that motivate classes of human being lower than the individual members. In the riot scenes of *Barnaby Rudge*, he bluntly states that "The great mass never reasoned or thought at all, but were stimulated by their own headlong passions" (53 pp. 483-4). Although he does not particularly single out women as Le Bon does, he does describe the behaviour of the mob in terms of children, savages, and others whose minds are not apparently guided by reason in the manner of 'normal' western adults. For example, when Oliver enters London by night (*OT* 8 pp. 48-9), the elements of society on display are those below adult levels of consciousness. There are numerous children who would be asleep anywhere but in this milieu. The rest have had their critical faculties reduced by other factors, such as alcohol.

Certainly that which makes people drop the differentiating tools of their trade and pursue Oliver together is presented as an instinct operating at a very fundamental level, described as "a passion *for hunting something* deeply implanted in the human breast". People are seen as both responding to primitive instincts and susceptible to the influence of pagan charms:

'Stop thief! Stop thief!' There is a magic in the sound.

(10 p. 59)

Equally, when the Maypole Inn is attacked in *Barnaby Rudge*, "the mob quickened their pace; shouting and whooping like savages" (54 p. 495). If the crowd is to be appealed to, the mass manipulator must, according to Le Bon and Dickens before him, draw on mankind's simplest emotions and impulses.

How to stir the response of a large number of people was evidently a question of great importance for Dickens. As a novelist he had to cater for a large readership with varying tastes and degrees of literacy. As Cockshut points out,²⁷ he later became a kind of agitator at the public readings. His most noticeable diversion from the historical Gordon Riots is the inclusion of Gashford, a fictitious demagogue, whose techniques accord with those recommended by Le Bon. Like the psychologist, he points back to prehistoric times to find the key to spurring a vast assemblage of people into action:

To surround anything ... with an air of mystery, is to invest it
with a secret charm, and power of attraction which to the

²⁶ibid, pp. 36-40

²⁷*The Imagination of Charles Dickens*, op cit, p. 66.

crowd is irresistible. False priests, false prophets, false doctors ... veiling their proceedings in mystery, have always addressed themselves at an immense advantage to the popular credulity Curiosity is, and has been from the creation of the world, a master-passion. To awaken it, to gratify it by slight degrees ... is to establish the surest hold that can be had ... on the unthinking portion of mankind.

(BR 37 p. 347)

Passion, awakening and gratification are words that deal rather with raw desires that can be worked upon to control others than with rational motivation. That one of these desires, however, is a yearning for the revelation of concealed things makes the crowd apt for inclusion in the symbolic apparatus of mystery.

London's crowds seem particularly vulnerable to excitement by such curiosity because of the boredom of so many of its members. There is a greater concentration of these people in the capital, disillusioned with society or unhappy in dreary routine-based jobs - and of course many more with no prospect of the employment they came there to seek. Dickens accounts for the fact that the mob tends to be a metropolitan fact of life in this way:

A mob is usually a creature of very mysterious existence, particularly in a large city ... where there must always be a large number of idle and profligate persons. (52 p. 475)

The idleness of Dickens's crowd is shown by their regarding throwing stones at Haredale as an "amusement" (43 p. 410) and burning Catholic property as a "Sunday evening's recreation" (52 p. 482).

In contrast with his mother's search for oblivion in the crowd, Barnaby is largely drawn into the mob through excitement at Stagg's description of the life and activity it offers:

Forgetful of all other things in the ecstasy of the moment, his face flushed and his eyes sparkling with delight, heedless of the weight of the great banner he carried, and mindful only of its flashing in the sun and rustling in the summer breeze, on he went, proud, happy, elated past all telling ... (49 p. 450)

Instinctive and irrational, his response may be taken as typical of those joining the mob. Contemporary commentators describe many like him in accounting for the mounting attraction to the city among rural labourers. H. Llewellyn Smith, a contributor to Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London*, writes of:

the contagion of numbers, the sense of something going on ...

all, in short, that makes the difference between the Mile End
Fair on a Saturday night, and a dark and muddy country lane
... with nothing to do.²⁸

Once such people are in the city, the crowd may be easily stimulated to gratify these expectations. It is very much in this spirit that Barnaby's mother watches her boy lose his individuality:

the whole field was in motion; Barnaby was whirled away into
the heart of a dense mass of men, and she saw him no more.

(48 p. 449)

Ironically it is this promise of life that kills Barnaby as an individual in the scenes that follow.

Another basic instinct which is seen to stimulate the mob powerfully is fear of the those outside the group and Gashford exploits this repeatedly. The narrator sets the products of reason, "Truth and Common Sense" in opposition to the anxiety evoked by a list of bloody deeds which the Catholics allegedly intend to perpetrate:

when terrors and alarms which no man understood were
perpetually broached ... then the mania spread indeed, and the
body, still increasing every day, grew forty-thousand strong.

(37 pp. 347-8)

Gordon's speech has patriotism as its keynote. This becomes tribal hatred once it is disseminated among the mob. Only when he suggests that the crowd might "wade in blood" do they throw up their hats and cheer (35 p. 339), releasing a terrific energy. The crowd here is the very opposite of society. It is an anti-social system of relationship between human beings that is based upon exclusion of the love that ought to bind all human beings together. When the crowd becomes the mob, its breaking down of distinctions between individuals within it is counterbalanced by an intense distinction between themselves and individuals outside that group. They are not united in love, but in hatred. In such a condition, the London crowd seems least able to reveal the regenerating connections between people that makes it a "stream of life" in the later novels.

Of course for these antisocial instincts to be given free rein to this extent, the calculations of morality, self-interest and fear of punishment that normally restrict them must be powerfully overcome. Le Bon proposes that this may happen in a mob because the sheer volume of persons creates a perception of power, emboldening people to do things they would not otherwise contemplate. They also have a subconscious conviction

²⁸10 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1892-7), Vol. III, p. 120.

that since they have become indistinguishable, they cannot be held individually accountable:

the individual forming part of a crowd acquires, solely from numerical considerations, a sentiment of invincible power which allows him to yield to instincts which, had he been alone, he would perforce have kept under restraint. He will be the less disposed to check himself from the consideration that, a crowd being anonymous, and in consequence irresponsible, the sentiment of responsibility which always controls individuals disappears entirely.²⁹

In *Barnaby Rudge*, the multitude's enthusiasm increases strikingly when Gordon speaks of "a hundred and twenty thousand men across the Scottish border" on their side (35 p. 339) and this feeling of group power has a binding effect well into the riots. Members of the mob perceive the anonymity it affords as a protection against responsibility in specifically the way Le Bon mentions. The narrator explains:

the sense of having gone too far to be forgiven, held the timid together no less than the bold at the worst, they were too many to be all punished... (*BR* 53 p. 483)

Dickens's discussion of crowds may be said to contribute to the psychological thinking on the subject of the Victorian age, consolidated at the end of the century in the writings of the reactionary Le Bon. The latter's contemporary, George Gissing, paints a fascinating picture in chapter twelve of *The Nether World* of a savage and animalistic crowd going to see the Great Exhibition. He stresses the decency of the majority of the individual members of the throng:

On the whole how respectable they are, how sober, how deadly dull!³⁰

As they become part of an undifferentiated group, however, and succumb to the influence of alcohol, these people lose their sense of social structure. "No distinction between 'classes' today", Gissing notes³¹ and, to his hierarchical mind, this is where the problem begins. By the evening, the same people have given way to their lowest passions and even the normally worthy Bob Hewett has become a lecherous drunken brawler like those around him. The women within the mass are now "animal, repulsive, absolutely vicious"³² and the fighting men form "a scene of bestial drunkenness".³³ Gissing too feels that the respectable have become the degenerate, to have regressed in the

²⁹*The Psychology of Crowds*, op cit, p. 33.

³⁰(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 109.

³¹ibid, p. 105.

³²ibid, p. 109.

³³ibid, p. 111.

evolutionary scale and to have relinquished their rational humanizing characteristics in this mass of men. Nevertheless, Gissing does not attribute the retrogression displayed in this chapter solely to membership of the crowd. The people are rather "deformed by ill-health" and deprived of "natural development" and generally locked into evolutionary unfitness by the "slavery" of overwork.³⁴ Such negative qualities are part of their identities long before the crowd makes them into animals, but it is nevertheless clear that deindividuation in the multitude magnifies them tenfold.

Much of this contemporary mode of thought and imaginative engagement with the theme is referable to a work published at the beginning of Victoria's reign, namely Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution*. Dickens himself owned the 1837 edition and the 1857 edition was in the Gadshill library at the time of his death. In a letter to John Forster, he claimed to have read "that wonderful book the *French Revolution* [sic] again, for the 500th time".³⁵ Whilst Carlyle is more like the Dickens of *A Tale of Two Cities* than the writer of *Barnaby Rudge* in stressing the long term causes of public up-rising, he simultaneously presents the people themselves as acting with quite irrational motivation. His statements that in the crowd people abandon their normal modes of behaviour in favour of subrational ones anticipate the conclusions of Le Bon:

Seven hundred thousand individuals, on the sudden, find all their old paths, old ways of acting and deciding, vanish from under their feet madness rules the hour.³⁶

This is exactly what has been shown to happen in *Oliver Twist* and *Barnaby Rudge*. People in *The French Revolution* frequently behave like animals. When the Parisians seize firearms in preparation for storming the Bastille, they are said to be "[m]ore ravenous than famishing lions over dead prey".³⁷ Carlyle too feels that human beings return to a more primitive state in a crowd and are no longer governed by intellect, but by primal impulses:

Great is the combined voice of men; the utterance of their instincts, which are truer than their thoughts ...³⁸

Yet whereas Le Bon fears the mob action, Carlyle in large measure approves it and finds a kind of dignity and honesty in it. That Dickens inherited some of this enthusiasm for the vigour and spontaneity of the crowd, and what follows from it, shall be seen later in this chapter.

Dickens makes powerful symbolic use of the thinking on deindividuation in the

³⁴ibid, pp. 109-10.

³⁵Summer 1851, *Letters*, op cit, vol. VI, p. 452.

³⁶3 vols. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896), vol. I, pp. 178-9.

³⁷ibid, p. 188.

³⁸ibid, p. 194.

crowd that was emerging in the mid-nineteenth century. The feeling that people really did merge back into a primitive melange of instincts in crowds enables him to use the mob to amplify the individual's loss of identity in relation to others. In the process, the stimuli that normally inform their moral judgement are blurred and the points of reference that render them individuals accountable to an interconnected society are removed. One of the most notable features of this breakdown is that it becomes as difficult to tell human beings from animals as it is in the mud and fog of *Bleak House*. The crowd is as much an "unintelligible mess" as that in which "Jo, and the other lower animals, get on" (16 p. 258). The network of love relationships between people, which this thesis has posited as the central mystery to be revealed to the initiated in Dickens's fiction, is at its most obscured in this environment.

A practical example of this is provided early on in Dickens's fiction when Oliver Twist struggles to cope with the sensory impressions he receives in a packed Smithfield Market (21 pp. 135-6). Dickens shows how the crowd steadily forms in the course of the morning and the confusion is seen to increase with it. At first, the streets are "noiseless and empty", but soon there are "a few scattered people". The arriving workers seem half-asleep and still in a somnambulistic, subconscious state, "straggling" and "trudging" rather than walking. All is reminiscent of Eliot's morning scene on London Bridge where "each man fixed his eyes before his feet" (l. 65). The fog is common to both scenes and, in tandem with the dirt, aids the process by which people become blurred. In *Oliver Twist*, the crowd is unclean and the dirt and pea-soupers are partially animal in character:

The ground was covered, nearly ankle-deep, with filth and mire; and a thick steam, perpetually rising from the reeking bodies of the cattle, and mingling with the fog ...

The "unbroken concourse of people" itself is composed of "unwashed, unshaven, squalid, and dirty figures constantly running to and fro". Soon disparate social classes become inextricably mixed:

Countrymen, butchers, drovers ... and vagabonds of every low grade, were mingled together in a dense mass ...

This is taken to extremes when, in the "hideous and discordant din that resounded from every corner of the market", human and animal noise is blended quite indiscriminately, including, "the whistling of drovers, the barking of dogs, the bellowing and plunging of oxen". There is no rest here, but eternal movement. One sentence has nineteen verbs ending in "-ing", suggesting constant activity (21 pp. 135-6). The people are as packed in as the animals in the urban marketplace and it is no wonder when they later behave like them. When Oliver is pursued in chapter ten, the mixture of noises is conveyed again by fast active present participles abutting each other without pausing for conjunctions:

tearing, yelling, screaming; knocking down ...

(p. 59, following 1867 edition)

Similarly there is rapid polyphonic conversation without "he said" or indentation. The result of all this "stunning and bewildering scene, which quite confounded the senses" (21 p. 136) is that Oliver becomes incapable of defining any of the things he registers here or of defining himself in relation to his surroundings. Questions of the boy's own identity are amplified by this atmosphere - especially his own confusion as to whether or not he will be subsumed within the collective criminal identity of Fagin's gang.

If, however, people become children, savages and even animals in Dickens's mob, their suspension of rationality is still more fittingly linked to the insane. Although Barnaby is by no means to be understood as a typical crowd member, his enthusiasm within it lends his character of lunacy to the whole. Dickens observes, "The whole great mass were mad" (64 p. 583) and later adds:

In a word, a moral plague ran through the city. The noise, and hurry, and excitement, had for hundreds and hundreds an attraction they had no firmness to resist. The contagion spread like a dread fever: an infectious madness, as yet not near its height, seized on new victims every hour, and society began to tremble at their ravings. (53 p. 484)

London is portrayed as suffering both mental and bodily decay as one individual after another loses his or her separate identity in collective violence. As it starts to destroy London's built environment, the mob seems comparable to those forces that demolish the capital in *Little Dorrit* and *Dombey and Son*. There too an environment is shown to be diseased because it is part of a soiled commercial environment that erodes the distinctions between people and their relationships with one another. The collapse of Merdle's empire,³⁹ is described as the collapse of the whole metropolis in an extended image neatly juxtaposed with the collapse of Mrs Clennam's decayed house. In *Dombey and Son*, the force that brings about the fall of the old world is figured in the railway train as it brings death to the dilapidated Staggs's Gardens and the surrounding city. In *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens hints that the attitudes and neglect which have reduced people to the crowd (49 p. 453) have shaped, in the form of the mob, another inexorable force that hastens the destruction consequent upon adopting a corrupt philosophy. Contagious disease, then, is a fitting metaphor for the instincts that turn the crowd into a mob. There are many individuals using the obscuring of identity it offers to deny their relationships of accountability to others and thus it is part of London's deathbound aspect. As in the other cases considered in this thesis of people using London for this purpose, the only

³⁹See pp. 169 ff above.

result can be a destructive feeding upon self - in this case a frenzied collective one - and ultimately, death.

Le Bon also sees the mob as a diseased force that can bring no good to society, and employs metaphors of decay, unwholesomeness and death:

In consequence of the purely destructive nature of their power, crowds act like those microbes which hasten the dissolution of enfeebled or dead bodies.⁴⁰

This comes rather from his reactionary fear of democracy than from any insight into the moral effects of concealment. Nevertheless, he quite naturally sees the instincts behind mass power not as social, but as detrimental to society; not as healthy, but as self-destructive.

V. The mob and evil

The debate has returned to Georges Bataille's terminology of gratifying instincts that are simultaneously selfish and self-destructive. Certainly in Dickens, everywhere the mob goes, there is an irrational and antisocial delight in destruction for its own sake. Before the assault upon Newgate, the rioters, "rather than do nothing, tore up the pavement of the street, and did so with a haste and fury they could not have surpassed if that had been the jail" (64 p. 583). This even extends to destroying themselves, most notably at Haredale's distillery, where intoxication by the flames and by alcohol drive these savage people to a frenzied death. They:

danced, half in a mad triumph, and half in the agony of suffocation, until they fell, and steeped their corpses in the liquor that had killed them. (68 p. 618)

Barnaby's sense of living intensely in the present, the search for the consuming ecstasy at the expense of the sustaining life, which Bataille calls *dépense*, is shared by the crowd as a whole. Dickens clearly conceives this impulse as evil in a manner comparable to Bataille because it tends inevitably towards a perversely chosen death. This is vividly represented in the hellish imagery of flames and devils, especially at the burning of the prison. These chapters are full of sounds that evoke the howling of lost souls, including the "dismal cries and wailings ... so full of agony and despair" (64 p. 582). Even the paint suffers as a result of the flames in reflection of the suffering of the mob members, "swelling into boils, as it were from excess of torture" (p. 581). Equally the crowd that

⁴⁰*The Psychology of Crowds*, op cit, p. 19.

pursues Sikes consumes itself and undergoes hellish torments:

The cries and shrieks of those who were pressed almost to suffocation, or trampled down ... were dreadful

(OT 50 p. 346).

Dickens clearly understands the root of what he is describing. Crowd - or cread - existed as a verb long before it was a noun, meaning, in the Old English *Chronicle* (937) to press forward. The thought of pressure and discomfort remained the primary aspect as the word developed into its modern usage. Dickens says of this crowd's "multitude of angry voices":

Of all the terrific yells that ever fell on mortal ears, none could exceed the cry of the infuriated throng (p. 344).

This invites comparison with those cries which fall upon the ears of the *immortal* damned.

The mob in Dickens's earlier fiction is an environment that has rejected accountability and the true human interconnections of love that ought to provide the basis for gathering between men and women. The crowd members reveal the evil nature of what they have become by inflicting damage upon themselves in the act of realising their collective identity. Whereas T. S. Eliot's crowd is compared to the damned in Dante's *Inferno*, Dickens's mob members are both devils *and* tormented sinners. The mob is seen to feed upon itself just as much as the atrophied structures with rotting foundations of *Little Dorrit*. The whoops of pleasure in their own destruction explore another aspect of the state of mind that produces Mrs Clennam's delight in her own self-imposed decay. It is this embracing of self-destruction through refusal to acknowledge connections that was seen to be evil in Bataille's terms.

In *Barnaby Rudge*, Gordon becomes anxious when he sees that his Association of "godly men and true" is really a godless, disconnected mob. This leads him to worry that the consequences of unleashing the power of the urban crowd might be evil, replying to Gashford's remark, "they roared like men possessed -" with "But not by devils" (35 p. 338). The scenes at Newgate bear out these fears. At an earlier fire, Dickens presents the connection between flames, the natural habitat of demons, and the demonic energy of the crowd:

The more the fire crackled and raged, the wilder and more cruel the men grew; as though moving in that element they became fiends, and changed their earthly nature for the qualities that give delight in hell (55 p. 507).

Dickens insists that not only does this look like Hell, but it is a realisation of the evil values of Hell. At the destruction of the distillery, phrases like "this hideous lake" and

"liquid fire" echo Dante and Milton (cf. *Paradise Lost* I 228-9). When the prison is burned down, the two phenomena of the crowd fuelling the fire and the fire fuelling the crowd are joined as one symbol. The growth of the fire is built up in an apparently interminable series of "when" clauses, suggesting the inexorable growth of the flames. Finally, as if the narrator has run out of breath in his excitement, the "then" clause bursts in, revealing that the power of the crowd has been growing in proportion:

then the mob began to join the whirl ... with loud yells, and
shouts, and clamour, such as happily is seldom heard ...

(64 p. 581)

The reasons for this parallel may be found in the energy of the flames, described in terms that describe the rioters, such as "crackled, leaped and roared". The firelight also has an intoxicating effect, however, altering the rioter's perception of the environment:

wall and tower, and roof and chimney-stack, seemed drunk,
and in the flickering glare appeared to reel and stagger...

The resultant sensory overload encourages suspension of reason and mad violence, consonant with both Le Bon's theories and Bataille's definition of evil. Loss of identity in the crowd has become complete. No wonder then that the mob is compared to a "mad monster" whose "execrations, hoots, and howlings" (49 p. 453) do not sound earthly. The scene is "a dream of demon heads and savage eyes" (50 p. 465). In Dickens's presentation of the mob, discarding the civilising aspects of humanity in favour of the savage and animalistic, the developing contemporary theory of degeneration is readily apparent. As the mob in Dickens's early fiction magnifies the deathbound tendency of individuals, so it makes the residuum's unaccountable tendency to take mankind backwards in a corrupting journey towards death terrifyingly visible. He presents the mob as hellish in origin and character specifically when they are denying the principles that ought to unite human beings and instead are pushing the conglomeration towards collective annihilation in intense experience. The powerful and much read images of mob behaviour of *Barnaby Rudge*, which contributed to Victorian conceptions of the urban masses, thus suggests that nineteenth-century fear of degeneration was actually a fear of the deathbound and self-absorbed urge that Bataille later labelled as the essence of evil.

Dickens's early heroes are those, such as Oliver Twist and Gabriel Varden, who can resist the pressure of the crowd to ignore the true connections of love between people. In *Oliver Twist*, people are "not able to stand upright with the pressing of the mob" (*OT* 50 p. 341). Nancy has to force her way through the concourse, "elbowing the passengers from side to side" (39 p. 268), in order to do a good action, whereas the crowd assists good-naturedly when she does wrong (ch. 15). Florence's surrender of identity is not allowed to go to this extent. Her baptism in the crowd releases her aims and desires without robbing her of her moral sense in this way. *Barnaby Rudge* and

Oliver Twist show the effect of taking surrendered identity in the crowd too far. In so far as it becomes a tool of concealment, it becomes permanently deathbound instead of regenerative. Its moral dangers are emphasized and explored in preparation for its more optimistic treatment in *Dombey and Son*.

VI. The crowd as revealer

Nevertheless, the crowd is more ambiguous in these two earlier novels than this account suggests. Just as the river can wash up objects and facts as easily as it can bury them in water, so the enforced contact brought about by the pressures of the crowd can unpredictably bring related people together as efficiently as it can mask the relationship between them. Jonathan Raban comments that London in the early nineteenth century was the optimal size for this double function:

A city of less than two millions was big - plenty big enough for people to disappear into it without a trace for years at a time. It was also small enough to ensure that chance meetings, coincidences, would continually happen in it, unexpectedly and out of context.⁴¹

The density of the city's population made it possible that the secret of one's origins may be within arm's length only waiting to be discovered. Mr Pancks in *Little Dorrit* observes of Miss Wade:

I expect ... I know as much about her, as she knows about herself. She is somebody's child - anybody's - nobody's. Put her in a room in London here with any six people old enough to be her parents, and her parents may be there for anything she knows. They may be in any house she sees, they may be in any churchyard she passes, she may run against 'em in any street, she may make chance acquaintances of 'em at any time; and never know it. (II 9 p. 524)

It is indeed possible in an environment as tightly packed as London for the individual to be so close to the solution of his or her own personal mystery and not to realise it. In Dickens's fiction, however, it is more usual for the connection to be made manifest by spontaneous encounters in the crowd, proving, that the author was as fascinated as Meagles by this potential for mystery in the urban concourse. In the same chapter, it is the motions of an obstructed crowd that bring Arthur Clennam into contact with the

⁴¹*Hunting Mr Heartbreak* (London: Picador, 1991), pp. 357-8.

missing Tattycoram and Blandois, who are "so near to him that he could have touched them by stretching out his arm" (II 9 p. 585).

The most famous example of this, however, is probably Brownlow in *Oliver Twist*. If ever an activity depended upon the formation of a crowd, it is pick-pocketing. For the author, however, this crowd functions as a means of bringing together people who would otherwise be separated geographically in London by their apparent social status. The man from whose robbery Oliver flees proves to be a figure connected to his past who will assume a parental role towards him. The force that brings them together and through which the Providential narrative re-asserts relationships of familial love is the very crowd that elsewhere denies the connections between people.

As well as subsuming distinct personalities into an indiscriminate mass, the crowd can also impose and enforce an individuality, whether it is desired or not. Not only does it bury people, but it also unearths them mercilessly. Not only does it bring destruction and death, but it can also restore vigour and life to the individual and society. Consequently, it plays a crucial part throughout Dickens's fiction in the city's task of embodying the positive as well as the negative aspects of the process of mystery. Even in *Oliver Twist* and *Barnaby Rudge*, the crowd performs the revelatory and regenerative aspects of London's work, as it does for Florence in *Dombey and Son*.

Various characters in the earlier novels see in London's crowd a means of escaping identification. Charley and the Dodger, in the ease with which they blend into the mob, illustrate the criminal's need for anonymity. Nancy, too, nimbly manipulates the concourse at Oliver's recapture. Sikes most of all is desperate to retain his status as a member of the crowd. Once his guilt threatens to single him out as a murderer, he seeks a baptism within it that will enable him to conceal his identity. At a rural outbreak of fire, Sikes "flying from memory and himself, plunged into the thickest of the throng" (48 p. 328). For a while he succeeds and even finds this experience of burial in the throng as regenerative as Florence does:

There were people there - men and women - light, bustle. It was like new life to him. (48 p. 328)

Dickens himself found a vivifying escape from anxieties in the anonymity of the crowd, telling Forster, "I don't seem to be able to lose my spectres unless I can lose them in crowds".⁴² But the "new life" sought by Sikes as he surrenders his identity to dissolution in the concourse is actually very different from that enjoyed by Florence. It is an existence in which his connections of responsibility are denied and which is therefore

⁴²20 September 1846, *Letters*, op cit, vol. IV, p. 622.

cut off from the principles of healthy life which Dickens generally locates in interaction with others. It does not give him a new identity as an individual in relation to other individuals, but instead marks a choice of perpetual dissolution of that identity. Thus it is not associated with any of the qualities that normally accompany genuine new life in Dickens. In fact it is an on-going death-in-life more directly comparable to the oblivion sought by Martha in the Thames in *David Copperfield* and by Mrs Rudge and Oliver in London's crowds.

Sikes hopes to keep his identity buried in a multitude of people, but he is not prepared for the exhumation of his identity that the metropolitan crowd moves on to bring about. He wants the benefits of burial of self, without the painful resurrection that accompanies it, but the crowd, like the river, has a tide, and once it has turned, there is no way back. In Dickens, it will not hide individuality forever, but will turn and become a multitude of eyes, staring at the individual and insisting upon his or her identity. Eventually, the mass in which Sikes seeks refuge starts to single him out and press towards his capture. It is keen to discover him and proclaim what he would keep hidden. Ultimately, he cannot accept the genuine resurrection offered by the crowd to characters in the later fiction because in Dickens resurrection is always the product of a terrifying revelation, as Dombey, Mrs Clennam, Pip and others discover. As the tide of the crowd changes direction, he finds himself isolated upon an "Island", which he, as "the visitor" can only reach with some difficulty, "through a maze of ... narrow, and muddy streets, thronged by the roughest and poorest of water-side people" (50 p. 338). This large body of people soon recognizes and pursues him and when even his fellow criminals side with the crowd, his alienation and exposure is complete.

Rudge senior is another person who feels that he is "one man against the whole united concourse". His consciousness of his crime excludes him from groups inside and outside the prison:

The other prisoners were a host, hiding and sheltering each other - a crowd like that without the walls. (65 p. 585)

Not permitted the protection which membership of the mob affords, he too is forced into the role of individual:

In all ... the great pest-house of the capital, he stood alone, marked and singled out by his great guilt, a Lucifer among the devils.

Thus the crowd can hold terrors for those marked out by extraordinary vice as well as extraordinary virtue. The same city and the same crowd that provides a haven of anonymity for other evildoers now turns and points directly to him.

If the mob is animalistic and guided by instincts, Dickens has a particular sort of animal and a particular sort of instinct in mind. In an explanation that forms the *raison d'être* of the crowd in *Oliver Twist*, the narrator comments:

There is a passion for *hunting something* deeply implanted in the human breast. (10 p. 116)

Here Dickens makes explicit an important part of the English conception of large groups of people. The word 'rabble' first appears, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, in *Gawain and the Green Knight* to describe a pack of hunting dogs, and is not found describing a human group until 1513. Those who pursue Oliver are responding to such an urge to track down a common prey together that seems to belong to the bestial world as much as to the human. The reader's compassion for the innocent victim in these scenes prepares the ground for the magnificent extension of sympathy to Sikes, the guilty victim, when it is his turn to be pursued. Chapter fifty builds suspense alarmingly as the power of the crowd in its hunting aspect is first described second-hand, so that it has already acquired a sense of terror when it finally appears. Chitling tells Sikes of how at Fagin's arrest, they behaved like wild beasts:

I can see 'em now ... the people jumping up, one behind another, and snarling with their teeth and making at him ... the women ... swore they'd tear his heart out! (p. 341)

With this in his mind, the slow degrees by which the mob reveals its approaching presence are agonizing to the murderer. First he hears "the tramp of hurried footsteps" (p. 448), then, "a loud huzzah burst from the crowd; giving the listener, for the first time, some adequate idea of its immense extent" (p. 344). Finally they burst in, displaying many of their now expected characteristics. Carried along by their irrational instincts, they move "with the ecstasy of madmen" (p. 345). Although they bring Sikes to justice as far as the plot is concerned, this is not their primary motivation. Their lack of a rational purpose is seen when the failure of Sikes's escape is applauded at the front and "Those who were at too great a distance to know its meaning, took up the sound" (p. 345). Excitement and the fundamental urge to bring the hiding man into the open are shown to be absolutely irresistible.

In *Barnaby Rudge*, the people are again converted into hunting animals, "wild and savage, like beasts at the sight of prey" (49 p. 454), when they riot outside the Houses of Parliament. Even Gabriel feels that they "thirsted, like wild animals, for his blood." Having established the crowd in terms of subhuman instinct, Dickens has invested it with the power needed for the scenes where Rudge is the running man to whom concealment in the mob is denied. He therefore attempts to hide in the darkest corners of Newgate, believing that the crowd which comes to release him intends to treat him as dogs treat their quarry. They are the "furious multitude" and he is terrified of the

"fury of the rabble". Trying to make sense of the noises he hears, his imagination concludes that he is being specifically sought out so that the crowd might kill him:

It might be that the intelligence of his capture having been
bruted abroad, they had come there purposely to drag him out
and kill him in the street (65 p. 584-5).

The more tangible rabble, hunting down its prey and inflicting destruction, externalizes the still more terrible "hunt of spectres" that pursues him in his mind because of his guilt and fear. Such demons fill his brain as the crowd fills all the available space in London:

here all space was full. The one pursuing voice was
everywhere ... (55 p. 504)

This is why he is far more afraid of the crowd than of burning to death.⁴³

Dickens's later novels take up the predatory atmosphere of the urban crowd explored in these books. In *Little Dorrit*, the ashamed Nandy feels that he lives in "a city of cats" (I 31 p. 413). These innumerable feline watchers of London are at home in the darkness, able to observe keenly, whilst remaining invisible themselves but for their constantly alert eyes. They symbolically amplify the power of Blandois, the unwelcome revealer of secrets. Dickens explicitly compares him to the "many vagrant cats ... looking at him with eyes by no means unlike his own" (II 10 p. 527). This atmosphere establishes the crowd as full of terrifyingly watchful eyes, inexorably gaining access to long hidden secrets, so that it comes to represent those to whom the secrets of all concealers must one day be exposed. Thus Mrs Clennam rightly feels "as if she were environed by distracting thoughts, rather than by external humanity and observation" and fears "the turbulent interruption of this multitude of staring faces into her cell of years" (*LD* II 31 p. 766).

This image of an imprisoned person, stared at by the crowd, however, had already been crucial in *Oliver Twist*. Fagin is equally tormented by a throng that echoes his guilt. At his trial, people are impossibly packed in, so that "Inquisitive and eager eyes peered from every inch of space". They are prying into his secrets and suggest the

⁴³In the work of Baudelaire too, the crowds in the streets are terrifying because they give concrete expression to the multitude of evils that riot in the guilt-stricken human consciousness. The French poet speaks of his narrator's internal life in these terms:

Serré, fourmillant, comme un million d'helminthes,
Dans nos cerveaux ribote un peuple de Démons ...

A compact seething horde of demons
Orgies in our brains like a million worms

('Au Lecteur' ll. 21-2)

If Paris is a *fourmillante cité* (crowded city, 'Les Sept Vieillards' l. 1), it is with such demons as much as with human beings that it is *fourmillante*. When Baudelaire's reader is confronted by the tightly packed streets of Paris, he or she remembers the tightly packed brain of this first poem in the collection and feels, like Rudge, that the crowd are both vermin and demons, clamouring for his or her downfall.

company he has in his cell the night before, namely the spirits of:

all the men he had known who had died upon the scaffold;
some of them through his means he could hardly count
them. (p. 360)

Guilty secrets are internal demons externalized in the mob that "assailed him with opprobrious names, and screeched and hissed" (p. 360).

Dombey and Son too, like *Little Dorrit*, may be seen as returning to *Oliver Twist*'s theme of the imprisoned person feeling that the crowd bursting into his cell is full of eyes staring into his secrets. Not the least part of Mr Dombey's torments at the collapse of his business is the thought that the swarm of people at the station have perceptive access into his inner world. He resents that the armband of mourning "should have let in such a herd to insult him with their knowledge of his defeated hopes" (20 p. 275). After his separation from Edith, he, like Rudge, imagines that the vast numbers of people he encounters in London exist purely to expose him:

The world. What the world thinks of him, how it looks at
him, what it sees in him, and what it says - this is the haunting
demon of his mind. It is everywhere where he is; and worse
than that, it is everywhere where he is not he sees it
pointing after him in the street; ... it goes beckoning and
babbling among the crowd; restless and busy everywhere,
with nothing else but him. (51 p. 682)

Paradoxically, the crowd brings death whether it is submerging one's identity or declaring that identity. The latter, as experienced by Mr Dombey, effects a species of revelation that can bring new life; the former, as experienced by Florence, may act as a catalyst for unexpected regenerative revelation.

The way that the imagination of Rudge and Sikes operates upon the crowd is an important aspect of Dickens's own vision of it. Although it is the force that largely defines the character of the metropolis, the crowd is not in this aspect allied to the crooked streets of London that provide what shape it has, nor even to the clarity-reducing mud and fog to which Dickens compares it elsewhere in his fiction. Instead, it is connected to all in Dickens's city that inherently pushes truth into the open, most importantly in the context of the fleeing criminal, the Detective Police Force. This is why Rudge interprets it as a force of revelation, that will bring him to execution:

His guilty conscience instantly arrayed these men against
himself, and brought the fear upon him that he would be
singled out, and torn to pieces. (65 p. 584)

Although the mob's bestiality and irrationality are factors that aid concealment of identity

and threaten to bury humanity in deathbound regression, then, they become the crucial motivators of revelation and enforcers of identity.

In this, the function of the crowd in these novels closely resembles that of the railway system in *Dombey and Son*. Both are represented as an integral part of the city's workings, both operate according to their own rules which are mysterious to the ordinary Londoner and both appear actively to bring about the catastrophe of the plot, whilst they are merely following their own patterns. Indeed, Carker's fear of the train catching up with him and destroying him in a moment of exposure is a reworking of Sikes's flight from the crowd. Dickens uses both as agents of the Providential aspects of the narrative which reveal denied connections between people, punishing the wicked with death and the good with new life, yet both are deeply ambiguous manifestations of Providence, bringing about the desired revelations and resurrections with specifically amoral motivation.

Perhaps Dickens inherited this paradoxical attitude of making Providential use of the baser instincts of the populace from Carlyle. *The French Revolution*, as was seen earlier, shows that the key events it describes came to pass because of the animalistic and crazed actions of the masses. At the same time, however, Carlyle eagerly claims that the Revolution was an onward struggle towards a liberating environment. This tension runs throughout the book⁴⁴ and it often seems that although the people in the crowd do not know what they are doing, the crowd itself is acting purposefully in achieving the necessary actions of history itself. This is exactly how Dickens uses his multitudes. Ignorant, irrational, destructive they may be, but the actions born from these negative qualities drive the novels to the revelatory conclusions of their narratives.

VII. The regenerating crowd

As well as representing the revelatory aspect of mystery, the crowd in Dickens's London holds the promise of renewed life. As with the train in *Dombey and Son*, the revelations it works towards inexorably bring death to those whose world has been built

⁴⁴Michael Goldberg, in his book, *Carlyle and Dickens* (Athens, Georgia: Georgia University Press, 1972), sees this tension as fundamentally unresolved in *The French Revolution*, saying of Carlyle, "Certainly he brightened his pages with illuminating references to his characters, but he finally undermined their full humanity by making them appear as powerless creatures of the historical process" (p. 116). Dickens's fictional account in *A Tale of Two Cities*, however, attracts praise for blending a sympathetic understanding of causality with a constantly vivid and vital account of the members of the crowd: "They are simultaneously the victims of terrible oppression and a mob of howling ruffians" (p. 102).

upon concealment. But equally like the railway in its impact upon Staggs's Gardens, the crowd can bring a genuinely vibrant and healthy new life to those who can embrace the death of their old world. Paradoxically, the crowd that is consistently described in terms of the regressive and deathbound in *Barnaby Rudge* is actually that which restores healthy life. If this is true for the character, it is even more true of the author whose imaginative energy is restored once he starts to describe the activity of the rioters. Despite the criminality and the evil of the crowd, and Dickens's genuine horror at the abandonment of social order, the novelist, as Philip Collins points out,⁴⁵ seems rather in sympathy with the mob than with the soldiers. He is on the side of the devils he describes, but unlike Milton in Blake's famous phrase, he certainly does know it, as his famous relish for the destruction he described may demonstrate:

I have let all the prisoners out of Newgate, burnt down Lord Mansfield's, and played the very devil.⁴⁶

Throughout his private writings, Dickens shows that the life that characterizes his fiction comes from his immersion as an author in the crowds of large cities. In a letter to Forster, he acknowledged his acute consciousness of dependence upon London for the production of vibrant art. He attributes his difficulty in writing in Switzerland to:

the absence of streets and numbers of figures. I can't express how much I want these. It seems as if they supplied something to my brain, which it cannot bear, when busy, to lose a day in London sets me up again and starts me. But the toil and labour of writing, day after day, without that magic lantern, is IMMENSE!! *My* figures seem disposed to stagnate without crowds about them.⁴⁷

Here the metropolitan masses are the solution to atrophy and death, rather than their cause. His daughter, Kate, further commented upon the artistic regeneration he found there:

he would walk through the busy, noisy streets, which would act on him like a tonic and enable him to take up with new vigour the flagging interest of his story and breathe new life into its pages.⁴⁸

Dickens longed to mingle with the crowd again during the writing of *Dombey and Son* because he felt it would provide a resurrection for his creativity. It is no wonder then that this phenomenon became a symbolic expression of the regenerating mystery in his next novel, where Florence experiences immersion in the urban concourse as unreservedly revivifying after her deadening experiences.

⁴⁵*Dickens and Crime* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 45.

⁴⁶to John Forster, 18 September 1841, *Letters*, op cit, vol. II, p. 385.

⁴⁷to John Forster, 30 August 1846, *Letters*, op cit, vol. IV, p. 612.

⁴⁸quoted in Kate Flint, *Dickens* (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), p. 13.

Nineteenth-century writers, however, were by no means united on the subject of whether the crowd fostered or killed creative life. A brief comparison of Dickens's attitude to those of his predecessors and contemporaries illustrates how his presentation of the crowds as both life-giving and deathbound drew upon and developed an on-going debate on how the increasing metropolitan masses were to be incorporated into art.

At the beginning of the century, two of the first generation Romantics differed in their response. Charles Lamb, like Dickens, saw the visual variety and physical energy offered by the crowd as a powerful stimulus to the creation of art. To him, to be immersed in it was to be alive. He wrote to Wordsworth on 30 January 1801:

The wonder of these sights impells me into night-walks about
her crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley
Strand from fullness of joy at so much Life.⁴⁹

Wordsworth, for his part, did not respond to the metropolitan crowd with the excitement of Lamb or Dickens, nor was it part of his aim to fashion it into a symbolic scheme as did these writers. He tended rather to describe the crowd as a place where individual identity is dissolved into extinction, as in the mob scenes of *Barnaby Rudge*. In the seventh book of *The Prelude*, "The slaves" who constitute it are:

Living amid the same perpetual whirl
Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
To one identity, by differences
That have no law, no meaning and no end. (ll.725-8)⁵⁰

This random conglomeration of people thoroughly buries connections between people. Loss of self in the crowd is an unremitting death, requiring a revelation of these social connections that will function as a resurrection. No hope of such an event, however, is held out to the reader. Nevertheless, Wordsworth's distaste for urban life did not stop him from seeing a rich potential for art in the eternally moving masses because of the same visual stimuli that attracted Lamb. *The Prelude*, despite its criticisms of the crowd, notes:

the quick dance
Of colors, lights, and forms
That huge fermenting mass of human-kind [which]
Serves as a solemn background or relief
To single forms and objects, whence they draw ...

⁴⁹*The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976).

⁵⁰*The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, W. J. B. Owen (ed.), (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 157

More than inherent liveliness and power. (ll. 154-5, 621-5)⁵¹

As well as developing Wordsworth's vision of the crowd as the burier of identity and obscurer of connections for the concealing aspects of his symbolic mystery scheme, Dickens expanded upon the potential for vibrancy expressed in these lines for its revelatory aspect. Dickens goes one step further than Wordsworth, however. In his novels, the crowd, like London as a whole, is not merely a backdrop, but frequently becomes the focus of attention. When it is a background, it can conflict violently with the individuals in the foreground, absorbing and sometimes even transforming them. By 1850, Wordsworth's vision was had also changed tone substantially. As Raymond Williams points out, the crowd in the revised version of *The Prelude* is a place where the connections between people are seen more clearly than anywhere else:

among the multitudes
Of that huge city, oftentimes was seen
Affectingly set forth, more than elsewhere
Is possible, the unity of men ...⁵²

Perhaps this transformed perception of the crowd is in some respect a result of Dickens's exploration in the intervening years of its potentialities for effecting a renewing revelation of human interconnectedness.

Another contemporary of Dickens who was impressed by the crowd, both as a smotherer of life and imagination and as a powerful source of them, was Charles Baudelaire. *Les Fleurs du Mal* tends to see the crowd as an obstacle to creativity, as Wordsworth does in the earlier version of *The Prelude*, registering the poet's fundamental need to exclude the crowd in order to produce poetry. Indeed, the effect of poetry is presented as a blessed separation from the masses:

Le Poète serein lève ses bras pieux,
Et les vastes éclairs de son esprit lucide
Lui dérobent l'aspect des peuples furieux ...

The serene poet raises his pious arms,
And the great lightning flashes of his lucid mind
Shut out the sight of mankind's frenzied hordes.

('Bénédiction' ll. 54-6)⁵³

Poetry is seen to be an assertion of individuality and loss of identity in the concourse is generally presented in *Les Fleurs du Mal* as something to be abhorred. It is certainly part of the deathbound aspect of Paris and is only to be embraced by those seeking dissolution

⁵¹ibid, pp. 141, 154.

⁵²*The Country and the City*, op cit, p. 149.

⁵³*The Complete Verse*, op cit, p. 57.

and damnation. The ultimate response of 'Le Crepuscule du Soir' to the movement of people in the evening rush hour of Paris, despite its initial wry affection for the scene, is also:

Recueille-toi, mon âme, en ce grave moment,
Et ferme ton oreille à ce rugissement.

O my soul, withdraw into yourself at this grave hour,
And stop your ears against this roaring din.

(ll. 29-30)⁵⁴

A concrete example of this is provided in the poem 'Paysage' from the *Tableaux parisiens* section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, where the narrator continues to compose Romantic verse in spite of the riot taking place outside and inviting him to join in:

L'Émeute, tempêtant vainement à ma vitre,
Ne fera pas lever mon front de mon pupitre.

The riots of the mob, vainly beating on my window-pane,
Will not make me lift my head from my desk

(ll. 21-2)⁵⁵

In Baudelaire's Paris, there had been more recent and terrible examples of the crowd becoming a mob than was the case in the London in which *Barnaby Rudge* was published. Indeed, it was almost a part of normal life that could erupt at any moment. Baudelaire had seen at first hand the violence of the mob in the 1848 revolution and this may well explain the fearful reaction to the crowd in his poems. The freshness of revolutionary events in the public consciousness can be traced in lines like:

Mon cœur est un palais flétri par la cohue;
On s'y soûle, on s'y tue, on s'y prend aux cheveux!

The rabble have defiled the palace of my heart,
They swill and murder in it, clutching each other's hair ...

('Causerie' ll. 9-10)⁵⁶

Such a view of the masses as a threat to the poet's withdrawal into an inner world of poetry recalls the "double door of gold" with which Mr Dombey hoped to "shut out all the world" and especially "the herd" at the railway station. Both men wish to preserve a carefully designed identity which the crowd seeks to invade and then destroy.

Nevertheless, the curious fact remains that in spite of his contempt for the

⁵⁴ibid, pp. 189-90.

⁵⁵ibid, p. 170.

⁵⁶ibid, p. 130.

Republic, Baudelaire himself took an enthusiastic part in the insurrection of 1848. This was motivated by his excitement at the violence and activity, combined with opposition to his conservative military step-father, Aupick.⁵⁷ His prose, moreover, tends to represent a more positive view of the artist's relationship with the crowd - which evidently exerted an immense fascination over him - than does the verse. His lengthy essay on the painter, Constantin Guys, *The Painter of Modern Life*, discusses the Parisian concourse, not as the deadener of artistic sensibility, to be shut out at all costs, but as the quickener of it. Here, the artist finds the same visual stimulus and energy that Lamb and Wordsworth noted in their different ways at the beginning of the century. He glowingly admires Guys's ability to represent the experience of the crowd, namely "the attitude and the gesture of living beings ... and their luminous explosion in space". The confrontation with otherness which this explosion inevitably affords gives rise not only to gloomy moral reflection, but also to *joie de vivre*. Baudelaire feels that the crowd is the native element of Guys and all who love not death alone, but also vibrant life. He quotes his subject as saying, "Any man ... who can yet be *bored in the heart of the multitude*, is a blockhead!"⁵⁸ By contrast, he asserts, Guys " marvels at the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in the capital cities he delights in universal life." Here, the poet seems to have abandoned his Dombey-like instinct to isolate himself from the crowd, and instead he finds it revivifying as Florence does. Tellingly, he even chooses the same regenerative phrase as Dickens used twelve years earlier to describe the experience:

So out he goes and watches the river of life flow past him in
all its splendour and majesty.⁵⁹

Flâneurs depend upon such a surrender of identity, the ability to "become one flesh with the crowd", if they are to paint "pictures more living than life itself".

The subject matter and form of Dickens's art capture the *flâneur's* excitement at being out in the metropolitan throng as strongly as do the drawings of Constantin Guys. From the beginning of his career, Dickens spells out to the reader the fact that the source of his imaginative energy will be the busy thoroughfares of London and displays a Guys-like intolerance for any who cannot share such pleasures:

What inexhaustible food for speculation, do the streets of London afford! we have not the slightest commiseration for the man who can take up his hat and stick, and walk from Covent Garden to St Paul's churchyard, and back into the bargain, without deriving some

⁵⁷See J. Richardson, *Baudelaire* (London: John Murray, 1994), pp. 120-6.

⁵⁸*The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, Jonathon Mayne (ed. and trans.), (London: Phaidon, 1964), p.10.

⁵⁹*ibid*, p. 11.

amusement ... from his perambulation.

(‘Shops and their Tenants’, *SBB* p.80)

The other *Sketches by Boz*, including ‘Seven Dials’ and ‘Greenwich Fair’ show immense enjoyment of the movement of people through the streets. That Dickens felt the loss of self achieved by plunging into the crowd to be a renewal of creativity has been seen in the letters. It has also been demonstrated that this way of experiencing the crowd is incorporated into the symbolic framework of *Dombey and Son* as Florence’s immersion in the crowd becomes a dissolution of identity that leads to the emergence of a vibrant new one. By contrast, Dombey fears contact with the crowd precisely because it threatens to dissolve his isolated identity as Dombey and Son. For Florence’s response to the crowd as an agent of death *and* resurrection, Dickens has worked upon the early nineteenth-century view of the metropolitan masses summarized in the Lamb letter and developed in Baudelaire’s prose as well as in his own previous fiction. Equally, for Dombey’s attitude in seeing the crowd as bringing death to a fixed identity, he has worked upon the response of the earlier Wordsworth, later reflected in Baudelaire’s verse and explored in the more frightening aspects of the mob in *Oliver Twist* and *Barnaby Rudge*.

The same duality of response is shown, albeit in a less central way, as late as *Our Mutual Friend*. In this book, when the deadness of Wrayburn’s old life is paramount, “the faces of the people” on the streets are compared to the leaves and scraps of paper blown about by the wind which “nibbled and pinched” both the human and inanimate debris of London (I 12 p. 147).⁶⁰ This is contrasted with another sort of metropolitan crowd, that of Paris, which is full of “wonderful human ants” who are able to pick up the fragments of paper and assemble them into a meaningful whole - indeed, the metaphor of ants suggests that they themselves are not an amorphous collection of fragments, but people in an organized society. In Dickens’s final novels, the crowd is used for local effects to complement his other uses of London to symbolise the mystery process. Its use as a central device, however, belongs mainly to the earlier fiction, in which the irresistible force with which the mob impels events is the narrative drive towards discovery embodied elsewhere by the railway and the detective. In the later fiction, the Thames takes over more fully its role as the defining aspect of the metropolis that ambiguously effects the concealments of the self-centred, brings death to the concealer himself or herself, and brings death *and* resurrection at the plot’s predetermined moment of revelation to those elect few who can surrender to that death and emerge from it to walk in newness of life.

⁶⁰This vision resembles the “Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind” which evoke the deadness and directionless erosion of identity experienced by the metropolitans in *Burnt Norton*, ll. 104-110, *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, op cit, p. 193.

Throughout the early novels, the very form of Dickens's writing about the irresistible surge of the crowd forces the reader to participate directly in the journey towards revelation it symbolizes. Constant scene changes and polyphony of voice continually disorient him or her and force him or her to share the experience of submersion in London's population. Raymond Williams comments perceptively upon this identity of form and subject matter in Dickens's fiction:

As we stand and look back at a Dickens novel the general movement we remember ... is a hurrying seemingly random passing of men and women, each heard in some fixed phrase, seen in some fixed expression: a way of seeing men and women that belongs to the street But then as the action develops, unknown and unacknowledged relationships, profound and decisive connections, definite and committing recognitions ... are as it were forced into consciousness. These are the real and inevitable relationships and connections, the necessary recognitions and avowals of any human society. But they are of a kind that are obscured, complicated, mystified, by the sheer rush and noise and miscellaneity of this new and complex social order.⁶¹

This thesis has, of course, claimed that Dickens saw this revelation of connections as a divine operation, bringing the human being who will surrender an identity based upon concealment of relationships with others to a knowledge of his or her place within "human society" and also within the larger scheme of things developing organically out of mankind's relationship with the Father God. Like the river, Dickens's crowded prose carries reader and character towards a disconcerting burial of identity and then works inexorably towards a washing up of truth, a pointing towards the individual, and this is experienced vividly whenever Dickens describes the metropolitan multitude. Even at the moment when the unique style leaves the reader most bewildered, the liveliness of the language and the incessant variety and motion of the crowd re-invigorates him or her and draws him or her forward to the story's conclusion.

The essential ambiguity of the crowd is its ability to lead to both concealment and revelation, both death and resurrection as the Providential mechanism of mystery requires. Its ability to represent and even to enact the revelations and concealments that must take place in the narrative/Providential design are characteristic of the function of the metropolis as a whole. Even to the characters in Dickens's novels, the idea of the one is

⁶¹*The Country and the City*, op cit, p. 155.

inseparable from the other. For Noah Claypole, for example, the masses define London:

he arrived at the Angel at Islington, where he wisely judged, from the crowd of passengers and number of vehicles, that London began in earnest (*OT* 42 p. 286).

Equally their absence defines the country in *Oliver Twist*. The boy loves the churchyard because it is "not crowded":

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. (32 pp. 210)

At the hanging in *Barnaby Rudge*, every available space in the capital is covered by a single, solid mass of people whose shape is identical to London's physical geography:

Every window was now choked up with heads; the house-tops teemed with people - clinging to chimneys, peering over gable-ends, and holding on where the sudden loosening of any brick or stone would dash them down into the street. The church tower, the church roof, the church yard, the prison leads, the very water-spouts and lamp-posts - every inch of room - swarmed with human life. (77 p. 691)

For Bill Sikes too, the crowd is the essential part of the city, again assuming its structure:

tiers and tiers of faces in every window; and cluster upon cluster of people clinging to every house-top. Each little bridge (and there were three in sight) bent beneath the weight of the crowd upon it. (OT 50 p. 346)

No wonder he feels "as though the whole city had poured its population out to curse him" (50 p. 345). The crowd is a summary of London's obscurity/discovery, death/regeneration scheme and more than any other of its features, it takes on the very shape and form of the metropolis.

Michael Slater, in his essay 'Hardy and the City'⁶² shows that the metropolitan throng presented itself in almost identical terms of assuming the shape of the capital itself to Thomas Hardy, who wrote in his *Life*:

as the crowd grows denser, it loses its character of an aggregate of countless units, and becomes an organic whole, a molluscous black creature having nothing in common with humanity, that takes the shape of the streets along which it has lain itself, and throws out horrid excrescences and limbs into neighbouring alleys; a creature whose voice exudes from its

⁶²Charles P. C. Pettit (ed.), *New Perspectives on Thomas Hardy* (Basingstoke and London, 1994), pp. 41-57.

scaly coat, and who has an eye in every pore of its body.⁶³

Dickens's vision of the crowd turning diverse individuals into a single whole, strikingly different from its constituent parts is graphically reflected here. Furthermore, the mass is presented as an organism belonging to a lower, simpler level of development than mankind. To Hardy too, loss of identity in the press of people is a regression as much to be feared as, say, the extinction and reabsorption to the primal slime of his character Henry Knight.⁶⁴ Hardy also notes the sheer number of eyes as one of the most terrifying aspects of the crowd and calls London "a monster whose body had "four million heads and eight million eyes". Thus for Hardy too it is a place that simultaneously erodes distinctions between people within the mass and yet allows no privacy because it is always looking, always eager to discover. Even while it is burying identity, the metropolitan crowd insists upon identity by providing a sensation of being constantly looked at.

Sometimes in Dickens, however, the city both is and is not co-terminous with the crowd and the two views simultaneously appear and clash violently, adding to the universal chaos. Within one paragraph in *Barnaby Rudge*, the mob both opposes London, conceived as its built environment of churches, houses and streets, and *is* London, conceived as the people who form the city. To some it seems "as though it were the intention of the insurgents to wrap the city in a circle of flames", while to others, it seems "as if all London were arrayed against them, and they stood alone against the town" (67 p. 606). With extraordinary flexibility, the throng that represents anarchy and savagery soon comes to stand for society and a kind of order. In one chapter, it is burning down Newgate Prison; in another, it is supporting the public hanging of the rioters. The "roar" of those watching the execution (77 p. 691) closely resembles the roar of the disturbances. It is as impossible to determine whether this mob baying for Hugh's blood is largely the same as that which followed him as it is to ascertain whether the multitude that welcomed Christ into Jerusalem was largely that which demanded his crucifixion five days later. The effect upon the reader is similar, provoking fear at how quickly mankind may be turned from love to hatred and inducing reflection about the consequences of his or her own actions or attitudes, should these be too heavily influenced by pressure from the crowd and not by objective standards of morality. It also shows that the force that destroys society and the force that builds it again are unnervingly the same in Dickens's world.

In chapter seventy-seven, in which Hugh and Dennis are hanged, Dickens is keenly aware of the contrast between the vibrancy of the city architecture - "the roofs and

⁶³quoted in *ibid*, p. 48.

⁶⁴See pp. 86-7 above.

upper stories ... the spires of city churches and the great cathedral dome" - and the focal point of the picture:

in the midst of so much life, and hope, and renewal of
existence, stood the terrible instrument of death. (p. 689)

The contrast between the people of London and their reason for congregating is even more startling. In this scene, all is cheerful bustle. The mob that had left destruction in its wake now seems decidedly revivifying. In fact the description closely resembles Florence's crowd as the "stream of life"⁶⁵ rather than that depicted earlier in *Barnaby Rudge*:

Along the two main streets at either end of the cross-way, a
living stream had now set in, rolling towards the marts of gain
and business.

It is disconcerting to remember that at the "centre" of this "eager crowd" stands the gallows.

Oliver Twist notes this dependency of the crowd's life-giving function upon its death-bringing aspect with great economy at Fagin's hanging. The penultimate chapter closes with the words:

A great multitude had already assembled; ... the crowd were
pushing, quarrelling, and joking. Everything told of life and
animation, but one dark cluster of objects in the very centre of
all - the black stage, the cross-beam, the rope, and all the
hideous apparatus of death. (52 p. 364)

As always, the emergence of new life cannot come about without an experience of death. Both are indispensable stages of the plan. The vitalising revelation of connections between people cannot be fully made without the death of Fagin and his doctrine of "take care of number one" (*OT* 48 p. 293). Whilst this philosophy of "mutual trust" (p. 294) promises to forge a society of sorts out of the crowd with which he is surrounded, it is the ultimate concealment of the true relationships between people because it is based upon self-interest and not upon love. This is why Dickens's London is structured in such a way that the life of the crowd depends upon the death of Fagin, why the re-birth of Staggs's Gardens depends upon the impact of the railway network so feared by Dombey and the self-absorbed philosophy he represents and why Eugene Wrayburn must break with his old way of life in a baptismal drowning in the Thames. The workings of London in Dickens's fiction symbolize the workings of a divinely ordained mystery which reveal, at just the right time, the regenerating network of familial connections with other human beings - and through them with God Himself. This is presented as the

⁶⁵See pp. 216 ff above.

antidote to the death and atrophy that come from mankind's self-absorbed concealment of those relationships. To those prepared to surrender to the death brought about by the old way of life, the revealing aspects of London can effect a transformative resurrection. The most disturbing thing about Dickens's fiction is that the mechanisms of the city that represents this process of mystery seem for the most part frighteningly amoral. The benign order that governs their behaviour is visible to the author and eventually to the reader, but not from the perspective of the characters. The death brought by the railways to Carker is governed by Dickens at one level and by Bradshaw at another. It reminds the reader that this is a truly destructive force that is impervious to considerations of mercy. The direction of the Thames's flow in *Great Expectations* is dictated by its own tidal system and travels as surely towards capture as escape. The crowd discovers Sikes, Fagin and Rudge and pushes towards the capture of these self-absorbed concealers, but ironically it may do so at the instigation of men like Gashford, following its own deathbound motives of concealment. In Dickens's novels the ambiguous behaviour of his creative London emphasizes the duality underlying his version of religious mystery. For him, it is the very force that buries truth fathoms deep, it is the antisocial, the deathbound, even the evil, that ultimately brings about the denouement, that works towards the greater good, that brings new life and ultimately makes inevitable the benevolent revelation.

Conclusion

A thesis which emphasizes the narrative drive towards discovery ought to reach a conclusion as decisive as one of Mr Bucket's denouements. The word itself suggests that revelation and the organizing principle that goes with it will triumph over the bewildering mass of information that is Dickens's oeuvre - and perhaps also this thesis. And indeed these are novels that celebrate the possibility of drawing conclusions. In them, Dickens delights in establishing connections between apparently random groupings of characters and events, revealing origins and relationships between human beings in the process. Many aspects of metropolitan life have been considered in this study in order to achieve an understanding of how Dickens's London as a whole embodies that programme. As a means of summarizing this understanding, I will conclude by distinguishing - with necessary brevity - the position occupied by London in the tension between death, concealment, regeneration and revelation in Dickens from its position in that struggle in the works of other writers in the age of the emerging modern metropolis. Dickens's place in the contemporary debate about how the city was to be perceived may then be compared to the account given of it in the critical views raised in the introduction and that provided in this thesis.

The writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whether they were working within or reacting to a Christian vision of history as a process, moving through temporal confusion towards apocalyptic clarity and eternal life, sought to locate the metropolis within the struggle between death and life. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams has identified four major ways in which these writers sought to adapt the pastoral view of the city as vicious and deathbound and the countryside as innocent and healthy for the new metropolitan realities: "social pessimism", "sceptical pessimism", "religious pessimism" and what may be called "social optimism".¹ The first of these responses is exemplified in George Gissing, who emphasizes a denial of human relationships and of individual identity as the characteristic feature of London life. Physical decay is reflected in an ontological death at a personal and societal level.² In *The Nether World* London's crowds combine with its dirt to cause people to lose their humanizing characteristics and the distinctions between individuals to evaporate. Here, society regresses into a primal chaos, as in Dickens's early fiction.³ The same conditions are observable in James Thomson's *The Doom of a City* (1857) and *The City of Dreadful Night* (1870). In the former, the narrator exclaims:

The cords of sympathy which should have bound me

¹(London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 241.

²See *ibid.*, p. 235.

³See pp. 230-1 above.

In sweet communication with earth's brotherhood
 I drew it in tight and tighter still around me,
 Strangling my lost existence⁴

This urban atrophy that comes from having rejected social connections is consonant with the London of *Little Dorrit*, published the same year, which is again a conglomeration of locked spaces where people fester as a result of cutting themselves off from their true relationship to human society. The difference between Gissing's approach and Thomson's, however, is that the novelist saw this phenomenon as predominantly socio-economic, whereas the poet saw it as the result of the removal of a delusionary, but necessary belief in relationship with the divine. Williams sums up his vision in these terms:

A loss of belief in the false dreams of God or ... of any convincing living purpose, is now the condition of the city.

The Country and the City sees this "sceptical pessimism" as the flipside of the "religious pessimism" later encapsulated in T. S. Eliot. John Ruskin provides an example of this latter tradition more contemporaneous with Dickens. He defines "purity" in *Modern Painters* as "expressive of that constant presence and energizing of the Deity by which all things live and move and have their being".⁵ When in *Fiction, Fair and Foul* he revisits Croxted Lane, which inspired him during his writing of *Modern Painters*, it is just this purity of divine energy that the city seems to have destroyed.⁶ The result of this pollution and death on every side is a "sullen incredulity of all sunshine outside the dunghill". Loss of faith in a higher power and higher values leads to "moral disease ... developed in an atmosphere of low vitality". The chief consequence of this is the lack of individuality and of relationships of care for fellow inhabitants:

the hot fermentation and unwholesome secrecy of the population crowded into large cities, each mote in the misery lighter, as an individual soul, than a dead leaf, but becoming oppressive and infectious each to his neighbour in the smoking mass of decay.⁷

Ruskin views London as both the product and the cause of a society that has rejected God's purity and the life-giving connections between people that result from apprehension of it. Consequently this atmosphere takes individuals and the whole human race towards godless destruction.

Both sceptical and religious pessimists, however, see the city as representing the absence of meaningful human relationships that follows rejection of the idea of

⁴Quoted in *ibid*, p. 237.

⁵*The Works of Ruskin*, E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (ed.), 39 vols. (London: Geo. Allen, 1908-1912), vol. IV, p. 129.

⁶*ibid*, vol. XXXIV, pp. 266 ff.

⁷*ibid*, pp. 286-9; see also pp. 73-5 above.

relationship with God, whether or not He really exists. All three pessimistic traditions agree that London is a place bringing death to individuals and heading for collapse because its structure conceals relationships. The debate between them concerns whether this metropolitan problem is secular or religious in character.

Alexander Welsh reads Dickens's vision of the metropolis as utterly pessimistic. The first three chapters of *The City of Dickens* deal with the physical and metaphorical forms of death brought about by nineteenth-century London and the fourth explains that these factors enabled Dickens to associate the contemporary metropolis with Augustine's earthly city, based on corrupt values and destined for destruction. The novelist presents a city based on a cash culture both unheavenly in character and hostile to the principles of healthy life. According to Welsh, these principles are to be found in familial relationships as expressed in the comfortable home:

the problem that challenges the imagination of Dickens can be named ... the city of death [H]is answer can be named the hearth.⁸

London is a place to withdraw from to the hearth, if any kind of life and revelation of healthy relationships is to be achieved. The fiction is read as charting the Victorian progression from seeing the pessimism generated by London as primarily religious to primarily social, whilst retaining the vocabulary of Christian revelation. This thesis has shown areas in which Dickens's London expresses a movement towards death resulting from the concealment of connections. The tangle of impenetrable streets full of locked doors, the funereal Adelphi arches, the smothering fog and mud have all been seen to create a symbolic environment which hides relationships and brings destruction to those who live in it as well as to the city itself. Dickens's conception of this as a social problem is beyond question. The deliberate obscurity of duty to care for others is emphasized as a cause of London's delapidation in *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, both because it is its physical cause and because it symbolizes the self-destructive results of such concealment. Dickens's novels, however, are as much concerned with the state of mind that produces this self-enclosed atrophy in individuals like Mr Dombey and Mrs Clennam as they are with the external environment which embodies it. Dickens constantly insists that the social problem is based on this state of mind operating at a societal level and he conceives this more fundamental problem as ultimately religious. Mrs Clennam's abandonment of her relationship of responsibility to Little Dorrit is presented in the dénouement specifically as an exclusion of the principles of New Testament Christianity. The fog of *Bleak House* emanates from Chadband as well as the Chancery Court and obscures the cross with its message of self-giving love. The

⁸(Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), pp. 141-2.

concealment of social connections in *Dombey and Son* also stems from the prior obscurement of mankind's relationship with the Father, God, by the values of the city. Re-awakening to this relationship of common descent from God is presented as the solution to the lack of human relationships in the metropolitan atmosphere:

when fields of grain shall spring up from the offal in the by-ways of our wicked cities, and roses bloom in the fat church-yards that they cherish; then we may look for natural humanity and find it growing from such seed.

Oh for a good spirit who would take the house-tops off ... and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their own homes, to swell the retinue of the Destroying Angel Bright and blest the morning that should rise upon such a night: for men, delayed no more by stumbling blocks of their own making, which are but specks of dust upon the path between them and eternity, would then apply themselves, like creatures of one common origin, owning one duty to the Father of one family, and tending to one common end, to make the world a better place! But no such day had ever dawned ... (*DS* 47 p. 620)

Yet this is not the whole story. The city's structure not only conceals relationships, but also actively exposes them. The detective police force and the rail network, both of which drive truth into the open, are as central to the fabric of Dickens's metropolis as the fog and labyrinthine streets. Mr Bucket in *Bleak House* assists Esther in the task of discovering once and for all that her origins do not place her in the guilty relationship with the rest of the world insisted upon in her upbringing. He also exists to re-inforce relationships of responsibility between people and the inevitability of punishment for those who transgress them. The omnipresent police force is a way of comprehensively organizing the city that conflicts with its fog. It shows that beneath its apparent chaos, there is an underlying system which reveals interconnectedness.

Equally, the railway engines in *Dombey and Son* carry the news of Dombey's desertion by Edith, bringing the final downfall of his proud world. They act as the symbolic agent of the narrative drive towards discovery as Bucket does in *Bleak House*. Dickens indicates early in his descriptions of the trains that he has "strong purposes not yet achieved" (*DS* 15 p. 219) for them later in the novel. Just as Bucket's revelations bring death to some, such as Hortense, and life to others, such as Esther, the railway's inexorable power of revelation may bring life as well as death. In fact, it ultimately has a regenerating effect upon London, transforming its culture from "The miserable waste

ground" to a city of "wholesome comforts" including "villas, gardens, chuches, healthy public walks" (15 p. 218).

The metropolis, then, contains a dynamic of change that conflicts with and overcomes the deathbound aspects of its structure. Its modern elements, the railway and the detective, particularly embody this vitalising revelation of interrelationship. This appears to place Dickens in the fourth of Williams's traditions, that of social optimism, as represented by H. G. Wells, who recognized the decaying and regressive nature of city life, but presented a strong hope for change in the "technology" and the "new kinds of social organization" developing in the metropolis.⁹ This is certainly how Andrew Sanders presents the reorganization of the London of *Dombey and Son* by the construction of the railway. He calls the portrait of a society renewed by the construction of the railways a typical example of "mid-Victorian optimism" that technology would inevitably bring social progress.¹⁰ F. S. Schwarzbach also reads Dickens's last novels as a realisation that the city contains a regenerating dynamic, which has its source in the improvements taking place in London's built environment, rather than in a supernatural Providence.¹¹ Whereas he argues that Dickens's career moves from a simple enjoyment of the city in *Sketches by Boz* to the social pessimism of the majority of his fiction, and then to the social optimism of *Our Mutual Friend*, Raymond Williams sees all of his fiction as concerned with the tension between these responses. In his account, "the true significance of the city" in these novels is its simultaneous representation of "the random and the systematic, the visible and the obscured". London's forces of discovered social organization, however, win out, causing Williams to claim that the "creation of consciousness - of recognitions and relationships - can then be seen as the purpose of Dickens's developed fiction".¹² Thus to participate in the city's conflict of forces is a "transforming social experience".¹³ If this is so, however, it is not an uncomplicated social optimism. The forces of concealment of relationships and decay are intensely powerful, although destined for defeat. Instead, Dickens dramatizes the tension between the pessimistic and optimistic views and projects a future where the revelatory metropolitan forces allow social relationships to be seen.

In this, he resembles Blake whose *Songs of Innocence and Experience* present 'London' as a deathbound environment, where the healthy familial relationships that had characterized the largely rural Innocence have been broken. Whereas in 'Infant Joy', the dialogue between mother and child had been healthful and happy, in this environment:

⁹See *The Country and the City*, op cit, pp. 230-2.

¹⁰*Dickens and the Sprit of the Age* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), p. 121.

¹¹See *Dickens and the City* (London: Athlone, 1979), pp. 194-212.

¹²*The Country and the City*, op cit, pp. 154-5.

¹³ibid, p. 164.

the youthful Harlot's curse

Blasts the new born Infant's tear.

The breakdown of the familial relationship here is a microcosm of the the failure of society at large to acknowledge its parental obligation to the poor it has brought into being, as for example, in the "Babes reduced to misery, /Fed with cold and usurous hand" in the 'Holy Thursday' of *Experience*. The solution Blake proposes to this is not retreat into the country, but a renewed city where people again live in the relationships of innocence, fully harmonious with the country. He hopes to build "Jerusalem /In England's green and pleasant land". Blake's work is therefore called a "forcing into consciousness of the suppressed connections" between people in 'London', which is "a precise prevision of the essential literary methods and purposes of Dickens".¹⁴ This can be seen most clearly in *Dombey and Son*, where the obvious denial of familial relationships between Dombey and Florence because of commercial values characterizes a whole society where metaphorical parental obligations are being hidden because of commercial values. Insisting that in failing to care for the "ghastly child, with stunted form and wicked face", the rich "generate disease to strike *our* children down" (47 pp. 619-20, my italics), Dickens implies that they bear a parental relation to both. As was the case with Dombey, one relationship of parenthood is acknowledged and the other is not. The novel shows that death is the result of such unacknowledged connections, but in the London transformed by the railways, Dickens too hopes that London may be working to reveal social relationships as well as to conceal them. In a sense, the reformed Staggs's Gardens is Dickens's New Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land.

What Williams does not comment upon to the same extent is that in Blake, the familial relationship serves not merely as a metaphor for a well functioning society, but also for the relationship between human beings and a trusted God. 'The Chimney Sweeper' who can confidently comfort his friend with the idea that "if he'd be a good boy, /He'd have God for his father and never want joy" is left destitute in the *Experience* version, apparently abandoned by his earthly father and by the Heavenly Father in whose church he ostensibly worships. Equally, in the *Dombey and Son* passage, the collapse of the individual and social family is presented as symptomatic of human rejection of filial relationships with the universal Father. The transformed cityscapes presented in *Dombey and Son* (15 p. 318), *Bleak House* (47 p. 719), *Little Dorrit* (II 31 p. 771) and *Great Expectations* (III 14 p. 430) are all places where human relationships in the city seem restored and, especially when read together, are striking for the prominence of crosses and church spires. These have been built into the city's architecture all along and these scenes imply that the altruistic values of Calvary have now been revealed and acted

¹⁴ibid, pp. 147-9.

upon. Jo sees the cross through the fog when Woodcourt charitably provides for his needs and teaches him by example about the Fatherhood of God, emphasized in the Lord's prayer. The new church-filled cityscape in which people visibly enjoy family life and social interaction in *Little Dorrit* is seen once Mrs Clennam has made restitution to the woman she has wronged. It is an embodiment of the New Testament values she has learned from Little Dorrit and is the direct opposite of the panorama of Sabbatarian London at the beginning of the story (I 3), which had embodied her old religious outlook. The old has collapsed with the house and the new has arisen, albeit from the subjective viewpoint of these characters privileged by the narrator. Although the city's workings create the cross-concealing fog, London also contains the message of Christ's self-sacrifice and proclaims it to those with eyes to see it. London, then, becomes the New Jerusalem in the immediate future without the need for an actual Second Coming, but its transformation into that glorious city is directly effected by the spirit of Christ. Its character as a city where Christian relationships are realized, and the Providentially ordained apocalyptic destruction of the old order that brings this about, makes this New Jerusalem more harmonious with its Biblical ancestor than Williams's entirely secularized account allows. Thus Dickens may be said to represent a fifth response, as it were, a "religious optimism".

The cross, however, is not merely the truth the city conceals and then reveals, but the means by which it is revealed. Indeed, the metropolitan scheme as a totality causes the searching character to re-enact the cross as Christian initiates do. When the apostle Paul says "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2: 20), he refers to the fact that having believed that Christ suffered for his sins, his old, deathbound self has ceased to exist as far as God is concerned. He has therefore buried that old self and allowed God to raise him into a new life, the life of Christ, as figured in the ceremony of baptism:

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life ... Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

(Romans 6: 4-6)

In Paul's scheme, all are heading for death, but the crucial issue is surrender to death. People must realize that it is futile to cling to a deathbound identity and crucify it in identification with Christ's crucifixion on its behalf, so that the new Christlike identity may emerge.

Dickens's London dramatizes a process by which individuals may participate in just such a mystery. All who live within it are heading towards death and the dissolution of a cherished identity, but some find revelation of a renewed life through surrender to this death. *Dombey and Son*, for example, presents a world where all the major characters find their perceptions of themselves smashed to atoms. Dombey's self-referential world, summarized in the words "Dombey and Son" is inevitably destroyed by the death of Paul, the collapse of the marriage (and hence the possibility of generating a replacement for him) and finally with the collapse of the business itself. Cuttle must learn to surrender his equally cherished identity as the father figure to Walter, the heir of Dombey and Son, when the shipwreck smashes his hopes. Even Florence experiences "The Thunderbolt" as she realizes that her old conception of herself as Dombey's beloved daughter was always delusory. Destruction of these worlds is the common destiny and it comes with the inexorability of the novel's railway engines that catch up with Carker. London, as represented by Camden Town, embodies this destruction as the railway irrevocably demolishes Staggs's Gardens. This atmosphere also demonstrates, however, that surrender to demolition allows the emergence of a new and vibrant identity where correct relationships between people are understood and acted upon. The reformed London is the constructive result of the destructive exposure longed for in the "good spirit who would take the house-tops off" elsewhere in the novel (47 p. 620).

London's rail network, then, enforces acceptance of death in order to reveal the way to new life, as the narrative of the novel does, in a manner reminiscent of mystery religion. The railway-dominated city moreover brings this about according to a strict timetable, ultimately controlled by Dickens. The characters who surrender themselves to this timetable find regeneration; those such as Carker who do not, are reduced to a hopeless death and fragmentation.

This view of London itself as the means by which characters participate in an ambiguous scheme of concealment and revelation had been seen in the earlier fiction. In *Oliver Twist* and *Barnaby Rudge*, the defining aspect of city life is the crowd. Like the railway, the crowd enforces the novelist's programme of mystery. Some seek to exploit its natural tendency to blur individual identity and conceal relationships so as to obscure their own guilty relationships with others. Sikes and Rudge, however, find that the crowd in Dickens may turn and insist upon individual identity, hunting the guilty and exposing him or her to its multitude of eyes. Chapter seven of this thesis also considered that these early novels portray immersion in the crowd as bringing a re-invigorating life as well as death and dissolution of human identity. When *Dombey and Son* takes up the motif, the crowd has become part of the railway-organized London, moved around by the trains and travelling along the pavement in time to catch them. Florence immerses

herself in this crowd after "The Thunderbolt" has struck in a burial of her old identity as Dombey's daughter. Almost immediately, she is re-vitalized by the "stream of life" (48 p. 639) and enters into a new existence at the Wooden Midshipman as Walter's wife.

In Dickens's later fiction, however, it is the Thames that assumes the role played here by the crowd and the railway as the central feature of city life, exploited by the concealer, bringing death to all, but also washing up truth and bringing new life to those prepared to surrender to the death of identity which it enforces. In *Little Dorrit*, "the two frowning wildernesses of secrets" of North and South London converge upon "the secrets of the river" in the middle. Chapter six of this thesis has considered the gradual development of Dickens's use of the Thames to include both a sense that the river concentrates London's tension between burial and resurrectionary exhumation and that, like the railway, the fixity of its route embodies the narrative programme of mystery. *Our Mutual Friend* draws these threads together by sucking its major characters into the river, burying their old identities and allowing them to re-emerge with new ones. The city throughout Dickens's fiction has always been a place to be immersed in, whether this is felt through its labyrinthine network of streets, fog or crowds, so that the enforced loss of preconceived identity may lead to the emergence of a new, true and vibrant identity. In making submergence in the river the most palpable part of this metropolitan experience, *Our Mutual Friend* draws the reader's attention to what it really is: a baptism in the mysteries tradition. F. S. Schwarzbach's Pauline language in discussing this novel recognizes the renunciation of a deathbound old self and the emergence of a new self that is figured in the immersions of the two male protagonists in the Thames. They have been "drowning in the cash nexus, and they must die to it to escape it".¹⁵ An old identity and relationship to the world has gone and a new one has come.

Ultimately, however, Schwarzbach feels that this baptism is a borrowing of Christian imagery to describe apprehension of a renewed secular identity. He identifies the "mysterious organizing principle" that underlies London's "teeming anarchic surface" as "what we would now call a social system",¹⁶ rather than a benevolent Providential force guiding the individual to personal transformation. Richard Maxwell also writes of the experience of dissolving the self in a city too large for comprehension as necessary in the development of Dickens's characters, who are forced to acknowledge the limits of their perceptions of London before they can re-emerge with a meaningful sense of identity in relation to the whole system. Again this baptism in bewilderment is seen as bringing an entirely secular revelation:

¹⁵*Dickens and the City*, op cit, p. 205.

¹⁶op cit, p. 80.

it is the city that hides, the city that must be revealed.¹⁷

In this account, Wrayburn and Harmon's new lives are primarily a new understanding of how they fit into a socio-economic system. Dissolution in the city has moved them from acting on a self-centred concept of relation to the total environment to acting upon an understanding of their part in a system of mutual interdependence.

In contrast with these approaches, where immersion in the metropolis brings the death of the self and recognition of the system, J. Hillis Miller sees the new perception of the total environment brought by the experience as a means of achieving "an authentic self, a self which, while resting solidly on something outside of itself, does not simply submit to a definition imposed from without".¹⁸ The "annihilating plunge into the river" brings "a new way of being in the world" or, again in more Pauline terminology, "a special form of engagement in the world, a form impossible to those who have not died to the world".¹⁹ Thus the revelation of relationships with the external world is the new life and it is an ontological rather than a social truth and transformation. For Miller, it is gained through submergence in the dirt, fog and river because these represent the complete "otherness" of non-human matter in its starkest form, possessing "the power to destroy all recognizable forms and to transmute them into its own formlessness".²⁰ London, in this analysis, forces characters to experience the anonymity of death as a necessary step towards awakening them to a more vital consciousness of self and re-engagement with society while alive.

This thesis has tended to moderate between these two views and to propose a third. Dickens's city has been discussed as an overarching symbolic structure, present at the level of the plot, that enforces an annihilating concealment of identity and relationship to human society, specifically so that the revelation of transformed identity and relationship with society that constitutes new life may emerge. For some, such as Florence Dombey or Esther Summerson, who already act towards others in an altruistic spirit, the revelation gained through their urban disorientation is primarily a sense of who they really are, and their new life a liberating enactment of that new identity. For others, however, this very transformation of identity involves a recognition of dependence upon and obligation to a network of other people, immediately filial or conjugal, but spreading outwards to involve living as part of a whole society. Nevertheless, it is hard to claim that what Wrayburn learns, for example, is exactly the workings of "a social system", in

¹⁷*The Mysteries of Paris and London* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1992) p. 15.

¹⁸*Charles Dickens. The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 103.

¹⁹*ibid*, p. 324.

²⁰*ibid*, p. 312.

Schwarzbach's phrase, or that he has ultimately had a revelation of "the city" and its infrastructure, as in Maxwell's argument. Instead, London's revealing agents have replaced old identities with a defining consciousness of self in relationship within the divine family that informs, but is larger than, both renewed personal and social relationships. Mr Dombey's identity as Dombey and Son, smashed symbolically, and perhaps even literally, by the railways that have revolutionized the London lifestyle, has been replaced with a conception of himself as Florence's father. Since this has been connected with his paternal responsibility for the poor within the London economy and this in turn with his filial responsibility "to the Father of one family" (47 p. 620), the city's baptism has been a religious as well as a social and ontological experience. In *Bleak House*, Woodcourt's detective-like piercing of the fog is a revelation of Christian charity and the Fatherhood of God from which the social and ontological truths he brings emanate.²¹ Mrs Clennam's surrender to the collapse of her old outlook in *Little Dorrit* is rewarded with a view of the transformed cityscape that embodies new connections based on New Testament revelation. Lizzie Hexham's rescue of what she believes is a drowned stranger is a microcosm of the connections that ought to obtain within the family of love; in performing it, she explicitly asks for divine aid, knowing that she is performing a divine task.²² The palpable outworking of the new identity may be in the fulfillment of familial and social duty, but the revelation that has produced these results is religious in Dickens's mind by both content and process.

The metropolis in Dickens's mature fiction embodies a Providential scheme that leads people through its fog, dirt and complex structure to recognition that their old conception of identity is deathbound, so that its regenerating aspects, such as the railway and the detective force, may bring a new identity based on an accurate revelation of relationships. The river and the crowds are microcosmic of the whole in bringing both concealment and revelation, death and regeneration. Dickens's London is the means by which a connection with the divine is concealed and then revealed at a preordained point of surrender to death, just as it was in the mystery religions.

Dickens, then, has created a new way of looking at the city that profoundly influenced the next generations of writers. It is directly re-examined, as this thesis has suggested, in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which dramatizes a modern yearning for the revelation and regeneration in a dying world addressed by Christianity and the mystery religions. As in Dickens, London militates against any such clarity by its dirt, decay, homogenizing crowds and by the river which threatens to suck the quester into its mud.

²¹See pp. 113 - 115, 144-9 above.

²²See pp. 207 ff above.

It is made clear that "death had undone so many" (l. 63)²³ because people have perversely rejected real relationships, just as they do in Dickens's fiction. Lil's choice of sterility over motherhood, for example, in the form of "them pills I took to bring it off" (l. 159),²⁴ is presented as the cause of her disintegration into a toothless state, resembling the "dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit" (l. 349). The characteristic Londoner, as in Dickens, lives in a perpetually decaying death-in-life which is figured in the decomposing metropolis that surrounds him or her. "April is the cruellest month" for these people because they cannot tolerate contact with genuine regenerating forces. They have too strong a desire to keep their connections with the outside world buried and persist in their deathly, but never fully dead, existence. In this they demonstrate the same warped outlook diagnosed as characteristic of London society in *Our Mutual Friend*. Strangely, for example, Mortimer Lightwood says of Harmon Senior, "He directs himself to be buried with certain eccentric ceremonies and precautions against his coming to life, with which I need not bore you" (I 2 p. 26). Generally burial customs are designed to provide for rather than to prevent resurrection, but in the London of these two works, people have chosen a self-enclosed culture that leads to death, and rejected the regenerative connections between people. At the same time they refuse to acknowledge that their chosen path leads ultimately to the destruction they have cut themselves off to protect. Thus they shore up their crumbling identities until the last possible moment and never make the surrender to death that can lead to resurrection, as John Harmon and Eugene Wrayburn ultimately do.

Yet like them, Eliot's poet/quester hopes that the city may also be functioning like Dickens's London, with the Thames at its centre taking those prepared to surrender to a baptismal "death by water" to a revelation of spiritual life. Indeed, the city tantalizingly suggests that such is its purpose. The quester reads Ariel's song of transformation out of shipwreck from *The Tempest* in vibrant music from a public house and the promise of spiritual vitality in the city churches:

'This music crept by me upon the waters'
 And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
 O city, city, I can sometimes hear
 Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
 The pleasant whining of a mandoline
 And a clatter and a chatter from within
 Where fishermen lounge at noon: where the walls
 Of Magnus Martyr hold

²³*Collected Poems 1909-62* (London: Faber, 1974), p. 65.

²⁴*ibid.*, p. 68.

Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold (ll. 257-65)²⁵

In the final section, the cityscape even seems to experience an apocalyptic destruction in the manner of that which befalls London in *Dombey and Son* in preparation for the emergence of new life. Although Eliot is less optimistic than Dickens that this collapse will precipitate the arrival of the New Jerusalem, his question "What is the city over the mountains" (l. 371) keeps the hope in view. Like so many of Dickens's novels, this poem is concerned with the failure or success of the traditional symbols of Christianity to sound out a message of regenerative revelation in a modern urban context. *The Waste Land* is a song of hope that London may represent a Providential scheme of regenerative revelation through immersion in its deadening confusion as Dickens had encouraged the world to view it - and of despair that it may not be so. Dickens had opened up a way of perceiving the city and of writing about it as the symbolic mechanism for the operation of the mystery programme of spiritual regeneration. It is just as impossible to view the city in the same way after the creative energy of Dickens has taken hold of it, as it is for the Staggs's Gardeners in *Dombey and Son* after the impact of the railway stamps its own vision upon Camden Town.

²⁵ibid, p. 73.

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