'When I was a very small boy indeed, both in years and stature, I got lost one day in the City of London.' So Dickens begins his essay, 'Gone Astray'.

It is a sentence that hovers over his entire career. So insistently does Dickens write about London - its streets, its people, its hidden places - that certain parts of the city are forever haunted by him. Going Astray: Dickens and London examines the novelist's fascination with that labyrinthine city, where streets and alleyways twist and turn, compelling both writer and writing to 'go astray'.

Drawing on all Dickens' published writings, and giving readings of all the major novels, Jeremy Tambling considers the author's kaleidoscopic characterisations of London: as prison and place of the law; as the heart of empire and of traumatic memory; as national capital and as rival to Benjamin's Paris as 'capital of the nineteenth century'. It sees London both as a series of uncanny spaces, and as an old curiosity shop.

Ranging from specific locales, to the river that ploughs through the city's heart, Tambling's study examines the relationships between narrative and the city, and explores how, for Dickens, the metropolis came to encapsulate certain problems of modernity. The historical contexts of Dickens and London are explored by comparing Dickens with Wordsworth, writing before Dickens, and Gissing, writing afterwards, and with reference to Dickens' contemporaries.

Interweaving literary and cultural theory with an assemblage of historical maps, contemporary photographs and contextual detail, Jeremy Tambling's book is an indispensable guide to Dickens, to nineteenth century literature and to nineteenth century London. It is, too, a significant and original contribution to our understanding and appreciation of the modern city.
GOING ASTRAY
DICKENS AND LONDON
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Going Astray: Dickens and London reflects an ongoing fascination with Dickens, which started abstractly enough by considering his relationship to Benthamite Utilitarianism and Romanticism. F.R. Leavis’ analyses of Bentham in relation to Dickens were significant and influential here, of course, but it was a turn in my thinking when I read Michel Foucault on Bentham, in Discipline and Punish, and saw how the Panopticon, that fantasised prison-house which would do everything for society, worked by architecture, and this was, then, a way of creating how people think and behave: ‘Morals reformed, health preserved, industry invigorated, instruction diffused, public burdens lightened, economy seated, as it were, upon a rock, the Gordian knot of the Poor Laws not cut but untied – all by a simple idea of Architecture!’ (Bentham quoted Foucault, 207). From here it was a step to considering the city, as both architectural creation, and as necessarily, anti-architecture. I wrote about this in an essay which Stephen Wall generously accepted for Essays in Criticism (1986), and which became part of a monograph on Dickens, Dickens, Violence and the Modern State: Dreams of the Scaffold (1995), and continued to think about it through a book called Henry James: Critical Issues (2000) which involved discussion of James on New York’s architecture, but which was intended to lead into a bigger project. This appeared with the title Lost in the American City: Dickens, James, Kafka (2002). It compared Dickens on the American scene with James, with much discussion of the American prison at Philadelphia, which both Dickens and James visited. How Kafka imagined the American urban, in Der Verschollene, i.e. ‘The Man Who Was Never Heard of Again’, which is better known by Max Brod’s title, Amerika, was its third part.

On completing this book, and coming upon a title, which of course quotes from Dickens’ essay ‘Gone Astray’, I noticed a compulsion to repeat at work, because of course Going Astray echoes my American book’s title. And since night thoughts are a form of going astray, it may be relevant that I also wrote about Blake’s London in my monograph Blake's Night Thoughts (2004), and research for that leads into this present work on Dickens and London, which relies on that previous work, and draws on it.

This earlier writing happened while I was teaching in the University of Hong Kong, a locale allowing me to consider the colonial Asian city. The results of this appear in a book on the Chinese, ex-Portuguese colony of Macao: Walking Macao, Reading the Baroque (2008), which I co-authored with Louis Lo, who took the photographs of the city which attempt to give a sense of city spaces
baroque spaces, folds and interleavings of different spaces – in a city which is, as great cities are, unrepresentable, impossible to capture. Louis Lo has also taken photographs for this book, so bringing interest in urban theory to the consideration of another, non-Asian city, and I am grateful for the insights that he has given: making the selection from over 2000 photographs was hard indeed. The difficulty with London is that it has been photographed and imaged endlessly: a library visit, or an internet search will quickly reveal images of everything that I discuss in this book; the task, then, has been to find images which will not seem like every other image, but which will show London in ways that de-centre the reader’s expectations of the city.

My warmest thanks are due, then, to those who have helped with the book. They include those who have showed me London, or walked it with me, some over many years; in particular the late Graham Martin, and Colin Davies, giving the comments of a scientist. I must thank Chris Barlow and Malcolm Andrews; they both read a draft of the text, making very helpful comments. I thank also Pam Morris, always inspirational on Dickens, for reading the chapters, though I have not stolen her suggestion, which I am sure is right, that Bradley Headstone and Eugene Wrayburn are two sides of Dickens in different moments of his career, in conflict with each other. Brian Worthington, who taught me *Little Dorrit* at ‘A’ Level, also helpfully read the chapter on that novel. Chapter three was first read in draft at a *Dickens Quarterly* conference at Edinburgh in 2004; and I am glad to have met Dickens scholars there who have been a source of encouragement, such as David Paroissien. And Malcolm Andrews has been wonderfully supportive throughout, as has Michael Hollington. At the University of Manchester, colleagues who have helped with discussion and information include Malcolm Hicks, Roger Holdsworth, Jeremy Gregory. I must also thank Jan Piqqott, for clarifying some points of detail. Also I thank Philip Langeskov for being such an ideal publisher, especially in his vision for the book and desire to make it a reality, and for marshalling six readers whose clarity of comments have been in inverse ratio to my ability to work out their identity. Thanks are due to Colin Reed for the layout of the book. I must thank Pablo Tsui and Ian Fong who both helped as research assistants in Hong Kong, and the staff of the University Library there, and in Manchester, Rose Goodier and the John Rylands library of Manchester. And thanks to Paul Fung, for assistance in preparation of the manuscript. I am grateful to John Fisher, Jeremy Smith, Michael Melia and Jason Burch at the Guildhall Library in the City of London, Jo Wisdom at St Paul’s Cathedral, and the Image and Design Department at London Metropolitan Archives for help in providing me with the maps which appear in the book. (The Collage image database of the Guildhall will supply many other images and maps for the interested.) I am grateful to the museum of the Royal Bethlem Hospital in Beckenham, South London, for their guardianship of the Cibber statues of melancholy and madness which have so much motivated the thinking in this
book. Paragraphs of material on *Sketches by Boz* appear in different forms in a chapter on the prison in Dickens and Charles Reade, in a book edited by Jan Alber, *Stones of Law: Bricks of Shame*, to be published by Toronto University Press (2008). Members of my immediate family have supported and encouraged me in many ways: Pauline, to whom the book is dedicated, with everything, and much more besides, Kirsten with her own enthusiasms which entailed us looking at Samuel Richardson’s London, Felix for walking the city and photographing, and developing his own extensive knowledge of London.

*Publisher’s acknowledgements*

The publishers are grateful to the Guildhall Library, City of London, for permission to reproduce the maps of London in the plate section.
NOTE ON TEXTS

The citations of Dickens below are taken from the new Penguin editions, both for convenience of reference, because they have good notes and accurate texts, and because in the case of Cruikshank and Phiz, they both use the full range of illustrations. Other Dickens texts which do not appear in the Penguin have been cited below, with the abbreviations used in the book. Further editions of Dickens which have been used, usually because they have excellent notes or introduction, appear in the Bibliography. Throughout the text, a reference is first cited in the text with a full endnote citation; after that a short reference appears either in the text or the endnote, and the reader is referred to the Bibliography for full details.

DS Dombey and Son, ed. Andrew Sanders, 2002.
PI Pictures from Italy, ed. Kate Flint, 1998.
J1 Sketches by Boz and Other Early Papers, 1833–39, ed. Michael Slater.
NOTE ON TEXTS

J2 The Amusements of the People – Reports, Essays and Reviews, 1834–5, ed. Michael Slater.

J3 Gone Astray and Other Papers from Household Words, 1851–59, ed. Michael Slater.


MHC Master Humphrey’s Clock and Other Stories, ed. Peter Mudford (London: Everyman 1997).


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INTRODUCTION
Going Astray: Dickens and London

Dickens’ daily walks were less of rule than of enjoyment and necessity. In the midst of his writing they were indispensable, and especially, as it has often been shown, at night. Mr Sala is an authority on London streets, and [...] has described himself encountering Dickens in the oddest places and most inclement weather, in Ratcliffe-highway, on Haverstock-hill, on Camberwell-green, in Gray’s-inn-lane, in the Wandsworth-road, at Hammersmith Broadway, in Norton Folgate, and at Kensal New Town. ‘A hansom whirled you by the Bell and Horns at Brompton, and there he was, striding out, as with seven-league boots, seemingly in the direction of North-end, Fulham. The Metropolitan Railway sent you forth at Lisson-grove, and you met him plodding speedily towards the Yorkshire Stingo. He was to be met rapidly skirting the grim brick wall of the prison in Coldbath-fields, or trudging along the Seven Sisters-road at Holloway, or bearing under a steady press of sail underneath Highgate Archway, or pursuing the even tenor of his way up to the Vauxhall-bridge road’. But he was equally at home in the intricate byways of narrow streets as in the lengthy thoroughfares. Wherever there was ‘matter to be heard and learned’, in backstreets behind Holborn, in Borough courts and passages, in City wharfs and alleys, about the poorer lodging-houses, in prisons, workhouses, ragged-schools, police-courts, rag-shops, chandlers’ shops, and all sorts of markets for the poor, he carried his keen observation and untiring study. ‘I was among the Italian boys from 12 to 2 this morning’, says one of the letters. ‘I am going out to-night in their boat with the Thames Police’, says another. ‘[...] For several consecutive years I accompanied him every Christmas Eve to see the marketings for Christmas down the road from Aldgate to Bow; and he had a surprising fondness for wandering about in poor neighbourhoooods on Christmas-day, pass the areas of shabby genteel houses in Somers or Kentish Towns, and watching the dinners preparing or coming in’. Life 11.3.836–37

London. London’s streets, its people, its crowds, its buildings. It is Dickens’ constant subject, from his early journalism, Sketches by boz, to The Uncommercial Traveller, from his first novel, Pickwick Papers, to the unfinished The Mystery of Edwin Drood. The range of the London his writing absorbs can be gauged from his biographer, John Forster (1812–76), quoting Sala. It shows that the novelist not only knew and used London, but that it was an obsession for him. And, it seems from Sala, walking London, not using the new Underground system, which, opening in 1863, ran between Paddington and Farringdon Road.

And, because this is Dickens, he is not simply walking but writing London, which means he is writing about London, and, by writing, creating London. As
Whistler said about painting Brussels, that its inhabitants had no idea of its beauty, ‘I will have to invent their town for them as I did the Thames for the Londoners’. The same could be said of Dickens. And ‘writing London’ is a pun: London also writes, constructing Dickens.

London in cliché has become ‘Dickensian’: OED dates the word from 1881, ten years after his death. The journalist Walter Bagehot (1826–77) noted the special relationship:

Mr Dickens’ genius is especially suited to the delineation of city life. London is like a newspaper. Everything is there, and everything is disconnected. There is every kind of person in some houses, but there is no more connection between the houses than between the neighbours in the lists of ‘births, marriages and deaths’. As we change from the broad leader to the squalid police-report, we pass a corner and we are in a changed world. This is advantageous to Mr Dickens’ genius. His memory is full of instances of old buildings and curious people, and he does not care to piece them together. On the contrary, each scene, to his mind, is a separate alertness of observation that is observable in those who live by it. He describes London like a special correspondent for Posterity.

Bagehot is right, while underestimating how much Dickens does affirm connections. But London is not just explicitly Dickens’ subject, nor his content, it is the origin of his art, producing its poetry, writing Dickens. But however much of ‘heritage’ interest there may be in Dickens, in films and in television, there is no immediate approach for us to that source; we can only return to the clichés of what London looks like. In Huysmans’ novel, A Rebours (1884), Des Esseintes decides, on a whim, to visit London. But he wanders into an English bar in Paris for a drink:

He drifted into a daydream, calling to mind some of Dickens’ characters, who were so partial to the rich red port he saw in glasses all around him, and peopling the cellar in fancy with a new set of customers – imagining here Mr Wickfield’s white hair and ruddy complexion, there the sharp, expressionless features and unfeeling eyes of Mr Tulkinghorn, the grim lawyer of Bleak House. [. . .] The Londoner’s home as described by the novelist – well lighted, well heated and well appointed, with bottles being slowly filled by Little Dorrit, Dora Copperfield or Tom Pinch’s sister Ruth – appeared to him in the guise of a cosy ark sailing snugly through a deluge of soot and mire. He settled down comfortably in this London of the imagination, happy to be indoors, and believing for a moment that the dismal hootings of the tugs behind the Tuileries were coming from boats on the Thames.

Even though this representation of ‘the Dickens world’ does not include Dickens’ working-classes and people on the verge of ruin, it suggests how early that comfortable image of Dickens as the novelist of middle-class London has stuck with readers. Present-day London offers little access to that Dickens and his London. Sites that Dickens records may be there still by accident, but their connection is gone, like many of the specific buildings which are discussed. Four years after Huysmans’ gentle Dickensian parody, Henry James (1843–1916)
noted the historical break between Dickens and then contemporary London, writing about Christmas week in 1888, ‘when the country houses are crowded at the expense of the capital’, ‘then it is that I am most haunted with the London of Dickens, feel most as if it were still recoverable, still exhaling its queerness in patches perceptible to the appreciative’. Apart from the modernisations of London at the end of the nineteenth century, which eliminated many places Dickens wrote about specifically, no attempt to revisit Dickens' sources can get beyond the Blitz of 1940. Not can it penetrate the destruction wrought by post-war urban planning, pulling down markers of nineteenth-century London: the Euston arch (1837), James Bunstone Bunning’s Coal Exchange (1849) and Blake’s birthplace in Soho being small examples.

One novel, *Hard Times* (1854), varies the rule that Dickens writes exclusively about London. Intensely urban, it is set in ‘Coketown’, an anonymous Lancashire mill-town, Manchester or Preston. But that is like a colony of London: Mr Gradgrind, its capitalist, becomes a Member of Parliament, so he moves up from Coketown, while Mr Harthouse patronises it as a London snob. Otherwise, overwhelmingly, Dickens responded to London, not statically, but as it altered during his writing years. Many novels give a pre-railway London of the 1820s and 1830s. *Pickwick Papers* (1836–38) is set in 1827. *Bleak House* (1852–53) is of the 1830s. *Little Dorrit* (1855–57) is specifically of 1825. The year 1824 was memorialised in *David Copperfield* chapter 11, when Dickens was twelve and worked in the blacking-factory. That is also the period of *Great Expectations* (1860–61). In contrast, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65) and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1869–70) both use the railway, even more than *Dombey and Son* (1846–48), but its existence is implicit from *Pickwick Papers*, when it turns Shakespeare’s ‘The course of true love never did run smooth’ (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* 1.1.134) into chapter 8’s title, ‘Strongly illustrative of the Position, that the Course of True Love is not a Railway’. Dickensian London was disappearing before the novels appeared: the Preface to *Little Dorrit* knows that, noting how the Marshalsea had completely vanished. Today, whoever tries to find Dickens’ London on the ground, will find it substantially gone: fragments only remain, as suggested by the photographs included here to help invent that vanished London.

The topic, then, is Dickens and London, and for the next two sections of the Introduction I will give reasons for thinking it significant. The final section gives specific hints on how the book should be read, and used.

II

Why should we, living in the twenty-first century, in a multi-ethnic – indeed, post-colonial – London, driven mainly by finance and business services, be interested in the configuration of Dickens’ London? Is it not nostalgia? Nostalgia means looking back on something that never existed, and refusing to live in
the present: the danger is that looking at Dickens' London produces an eccentric disregard of the historical processes that have shaped the city, and makes for a readership who simplifies Dickens along with the city, which is looked at only for its Dickensian past. And is not the idea that there can be some access back to a London of the past 'essentialist', meaning by that word that it presupposes some ahistorical quality to 'London' which survives through all changes, and which can cause it to be described as a unity? Has there ever been a single London? What continuity is there between the Strand of 1827 – the year of Blake’s death, the fictional year of the *Pickwick Papers* and known to us only through historical representations – and the Strand today?

Perhaps being able to think about the London that has been called Dickensian acts as a critique of the present London as a world city. It suggests that the old city, with its problems, can critique the new. London now, with huge inequalities of wealth (top directors paid 113 times more than the average UK worker), which are more massive than anywhere else inside the country of which it is the capital, is part of two divisions: one North–South, and the other capital versus provincial, and part of a geography of inequality, which has produced the danger of making all other places in Britain seem irrelevant in comparison to it. And disparities between London and the regions are more than matched by increasing inequalities inside London’s boroughs. Indeed, they have exacerbated them. London has the highest incidence of child poverty, a wider gender pay gap, more homelessness and overcrowding, and more disparities in life chances than any other region. Women in Kensington and Chelsea live nearly six years longer than women in Newham, men from these first two areas six years longer than men from Southwark. The success of London as a ‘global city’ rests on these inequalities. These reflections on the present-day city, as overlarge, and cannibalistic on the rest of the country on which it nonetheless depends, make it quite different from the Victorian city, which was never so monolithic in comparison to Birmingham, or Manchester, or Liverpool, but there are also continuities. Mr Wemmick’s reflection that he was new to London once (*GE* 21.111) – his father came from Liverpool – suggests how the city has pulled people towards it not just because of its attraction (as for Pip), but because it has created poverty outside it: the Irish after the Famine drawn to London’s slums in *Bleak House* indicate that.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Mr Podsnap’s question to the foreigner ‘How Do You Like London?’, saying that it is ‘Very Large’ and ‘Very Rich’, suggests the tie-up between government laissez-faire (present-day neoliberalisation) and London’s wealth. Podsnap asks: ‘And Do You Find, Sir... Many Evidences that Strike You, of our British Constitution in the Streets of the World’s Metropolis, London, Londres, London?’ His question is quite empirical, like one part of this book, because the inquiry is related to the streets, not to anything theoretical or abstract: ‘I Was Inquiring... Whether You Have Observed in our Streets as We should say Upon our Pavy as You would say, any Tokens –’. The word
INTRODUCTION

'tokens' he glosses, for the foreigner, as 'Signs', 'Appearances', and 'Traces' (OMF 1.11.135–36). Taking the hint from Mr Podsnap, this suggests that the streets can be read for signs, i.e. for indications of what cannot be seen, perhaps because it has been repressed. Also, they are to be read for what is on the surface, for its appearances, for what can be seen. Third, the streets can be read for their traces, as the foreigner has done, when he has found obvious evidences of horses having been in them. The alliance of horse-dung, or dung of any kind, with money is not merely a key to Our Mutual Friend, but shows what the Constitution is worth, in its promotion of London as having its streets paved with gold. So Mr Dorrit thinks of 'the golden street of the Lombards' (LD 2.16.645). Mr Podsnap can see that is the way the conversation is going, so he does not pursue his question: he specialises in not knowing what he does not want to know about.

The word ‘traces’ leads also, by association, to what the philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) calls ‘the trace’, an idea alluded to with the corpse of Nemo, in Bleak House, found dead in chapter 10 of the novel, and, as a victim of London’s poverty, never seen by the reader while he was alive:

And, all that night, the coffin stands ready by the old portmanteau; and the lonely figure on the bed, whose path in life has lain through five-and-forty years, lies there, with no more track behind him, that any one can trace, than a deserted infant. (BH 11.173)

‘Track’ and ‘trace’ are, of course, etymologically linked. There are traces associated with Nemo, however, which, once discovered, in the form of love-letters, will lead to the threat of blackmail that runs through this text. The ‘trace’ means, as it does in Derrida, the pre-existence of writing which has inscribed the street, the human body, and the city alike. All these have the signs of writing upon them, the markers of history; the city is textual throughout, not accidental, not just there, but culturally produced, and to read the streets is the aim of urban analysis. With Dickens, it is not possible to read his streets literally, but his novels show the trace, invisible markers of how the city has been culturally constructed, the memory of history, much of it repressed.

Streets are the sphere of interest of the sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1901–91), whose work on ‘everyday life’ appeared in a book on urban space, The Production of Space, which insists on the idea that space (including in that term what we understand by places, zones and areas) is not pre-given; we do not start with it; it comes into existence as a result of social forces which produce it. Space cannot be thought of either abstractly, or geometrically (having natural perspectives), but as what is inhabited in ways where borders define it, and dictate social relationships and subjectivity. Lefebvre discusses three conceptual modes for thinking about space: (a) spatial practice, (b) representations of space, and (c) representational spaces, which might be better called spaces of representation. ‘Spatial practice’ means how people make sense of
space in their everyday lives, how people perceive and use their space. Representations of space refer to how people conceive space, for example by mapping it. Spaces of representation means how space is lived, and imagined, ‘changed and appropriated’. This book will give many examples of people’s use of space, for instance, in the habitual journeys they take between office and home. Space is mapped throughout; the city is seen as complete, as when Wemmick names the six bridges of London ‘as high as Chelsea Reach’ (GE 2.17.291). And people appropriate space, even the prison, or, with the garden at the top of the offices in St Mary Axe (OMF 2.5.276).

Going Astray: Dickens and London explores how Dickens’ texts perceive the space of London, how they map it, aware of its contrasts, and how they imagine space as comprising areas characterised by different moods which create character. But not all spaces are representable, or mappable. Some are so incomprehensible that they cannot be made sense of: the point applies to Mrs Todgers’ servant Tamaroo in Martin Chuzzlewit whose general ‘total lack of comprehension’ makes her ‘a perfect Tomb for messages and small parcels; and when dispatched to the Post-Office with letters, had been frequently seen endeavouring to insinuate them into casual chinks in private doors, under the delusion that any door with a hole in it would answer the purpose’ (MC 32.479). These letters provide a classic case, in London, of ‘going astray’. The significance of space – which creates the necessity for letters and indeed for the Post-Office – has been neither realised, nor mapped. Tamaroo does not live within urban space; she has been overwhelmed by it.

While Lefebvre requires noting how people can represent space to themselves, Martin Chuzzlewit’s sense of people living in urban space tests the sociologist’s divisions, as with Mrs Gamp’s description of how to reach the mythical Mrs Harris: ‘Mrs Harris through the square and up the steps a turnin round by the tobacker shop’ (MC 40.588). This creation of spatial relationships which she believes in indexes Mrs Gamp’s mind as not single but split. As there is no way to find Mrs Harris, there is no way to map Mrs Gamp’s mind. Though she thinks in terms of spatial relationships, there is still an aporia in her thinking, i.e. a gap, a space which cannot be bridged or crossed to reach Mrs Harris: her directions are not complete. Architects think of spaces with no aporias between them, as do town planners, as Dickens’ illustrator Phiz shows in the American section of Martin Chuzzlewit, picturing, on a map, ‘The thriving town of Eden, as it appeared on paper’ (MC 21.339). (The town, of course, has not yet been built.) Space in Martin Chuzzlewit, ‘chuzzles’ the wit, whatever that means – perhaps a stronger form of ‘puzzles’ – by being both vertiginous and labyrinthine, so it must be appropriated, tamed. Architecture is a means of expressing dominance over it, like the splendid offices of the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Insurance Company, with its main offices with massive blocks of marble in the chimney-pieces, and a parapet on the top of the house (MC 27.410–11). Dickens’ novels define space, map it, and attempt
to change it, but they include at their centre awareness of the aporia: i.e. that all systems of thought, all maps, all narratives, can only be constructed by ignoring an uncanny space inside them. Reading Dickens in and on London, then, must respond to a double demand. One sees the space created in the novels as responding to London as a pre-given, social reality which, however intimidating, must be faced. The other is intrigued by the possibility of finding other spaces, not mappable, in that given space of the city.

III

Cities have increasingly come to the forefront in arguments about post-modernism, post-colonialism, and globalisation. They may be industrial, or capital, or new and planned, or old, ‘colonial city’, or ‘world city’, or ‘global city’, or ‘post-colonial city’, marked by modernity and by an ancient past. They may be unknowable, or construct specific forms of mood and subjectivity; they both break down communities or create the conditions for multi-culturalism; they are marked by a distinctive architecture which they nonetheless exceed, and they produce specific spaces. Anyone embarking on a study of London must consider both the texts which deal with cities in these contexts, to say nothing of a massive literature on London itself. One dominant and essential discussion of the city is that of Walter Benjamin (1892–1941) in his work on nineteenth-century Paris, the *Arcades Project*. The writing was interrupted by the Second World War, and by the occupation of Paris by the Nazis; Benjamin, before committing suicide, rather than fall into the hands of the Nazis, left the manuscript with the librarian of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Georges Bataille. And hence it reached publication in its unfinished form. I draw on the *Arcades Project* in this study, to compare Paris and London, and to conceptualise the city. Benjamin's work takes the form of a mass of quotations, put together as if in a montage; in this way he broaches the Paris arcades, fashion, prostitution and gambling, the streets of Paris, the panorama, modes of lighting the streets, and photography. Every stray detail locatable about Paris was drawn on; no piece of information was to be left out from the various folders he compiled as irrelevant; even if its relevance was not discernible at the time, it was collected for further use.

Benjamin called Paris ‘the capital of the nineteenth century’, which must be seen as a major challenge to a conceptualisation of Dickens’ London: for why was London, despite being greater in size, not the ‘capital’? Why does it take second place, as in Des Esseintes’ sense of it in *A Rebours* as a combination of fog and middle-class comfort? The question haunts this book, and several answers will be attempted to it. Benjamin, who refers only a few times to Dickens, noted how much he needed London: needed it in ways which this book explores. Benjamin wrote when criticism, as opposed to appreciation of Dickens was still comparatively new, relying on G.K. Chesterton, who discussed
Dickens in 1906. The insights accumulate, and suggest some pointers for this book. They occur within the sections on the flâneur, the stroller, the distinctive Parisian type created by the newly built Arcades, the observer of the market-place. Benjamin quotes from the German Marxist Franz Mehring:

Dickens. In his letters he complains repeatedly when travelling, even in the mountains of Switzerland... about the lack of street noise, which was indispensable to him for his writing. 'I can't express how much I want these [streets]', he wrote in 1846 from Lausanne, where he was working on one of his greatest novels, *Dombey and Son*. 'It seems as if they supplied something to my brain, which it cannot bear, when busy, to lose. For a week or a fortnight I can write prodigiously in a retired place... and 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...' (Arcades 426; for the letter to Forster, see *Letters* 4.612)

While ‘noise’ and ‘retired’ contrast with each other, suggesting that Dickens missed London noise, the letter indicates more the need of London streets and crowds, ‘numbers of figures’. Benjamin meditates on the ‘magic lantern’, quoting Chesterton, that Dickens’ ‘tales always started from some splendid hint in the streets’ (57). Dickens bears this out: a letter to Forster from Genoa (8 October 1844) discusses his difficulties in starting to write: ‘Put me down on Waterloo-bridge at eight o’clock in the evening with leave to roam about as long as I like, and I would come home, as you know, panting to go on’ (*Letters* 4.200). Another extract, including a quotation from Dickens’ fragment of autobiography, reprinted by Forster in his *Life of Charles Dickens*, Benjamin calls: ‘On the allegorical element’:

Dickens... mentions, among the coffee shops into which he crept in those wretched days [when he was working at the blacking-factory at the age of twelve] one in St Martin’s Lane, ‘of which I only recollect that it stood near the church, and that in the door there was an oval glass plate with COFFEE ROOM painted on it, addressed towards the street. If I ever find myself in a very different kind of coffee room now but where there is such an inscription on glass, and read it backwards on the wrong side, MOOR EEFFOC (as I often used to do then in a dismal reverie), a shock goes through my blood’. That wild word, ‘Moor Eeffoc’ is the motto of all effectual realism (233) [the coffee-shops were in Maiden-lane; ‘one in a court (non-existent now) close to Hungerford-market, and one in St Martin’s-lane’ (*DC* 897–98)].

What does it mean to think of Dickens in ‘allegorical’ terms, even when he is being autobiographical? It obviously means seeing the world in reverse. And as disconnected, and yet organised (with those double letters: OO, EE and FF). Why the MOOR? Another Chesterton passage follows immediately, ‘Dickens and stenography’, which has to do with ‘arbitrary characters’, i.e. ones which cannot be read, letters lacking a recognisable physiognomy:

He describes how, after he had learnt the whole exact alphabet, ‘there then appeared a procession of new horrors, called arbitrary characters – the most despotic characters I have ever known; who insisted, for instance, that a thing like the beginning
of a cobweb meant “expectation”, and that a pen-and-ink skyrocket stood for “disadvantageous”’. He concludes, ‘it was almost heartbreaking’. But it is significant that somebody else, a colleague of his, concluded, ‘There never was such a short-hand writer’. (Arcades 233–34)

The passage has the potential to make the city a text, with a system and a defiance of any system of reading built into it. While compelling reading to become allegorical, seeing that which is ‘other’, it makes the writer produce a script from which he is alienated. We shall not understand Dickens if we do not see his writing London as writing short-hand. It all has the suggestiveness and baffling nature of MOOREFFOC, which looks like a code to be deciphered.

Benjamin quotes Chesterton: Dickens has ‘the key to the street’ (437). The phrase seems technical; meaning that the door is closed to someone. Mr Lowten tells Job Trotter, who should be in the Fleet prison, but has been locked out when the prison closed for the night: ‘you can’t get in tonight; you’ve got the key of the street, my friend’ (PP 46.621). Uriah Heep points out that, however ‘umble his origins were, he never was ‘in the streets’, unlike David Copperfield (DC 52.754). Pickwick Papers uses the conceit of the prisoner locked out of the prison; Little Dorrit the free man locked inside the prison, and later, Amy Dorrit locked out of the jail which is her home, and spending the night in the streets. These are suggestive, but Chesterton’s insight is, as picked up by Benjamin, potentially deeper: ‘He could open the inmost door of his house – the door that leads into that secret passage which is lined with houses and roofed with stars’ (438). The street here becomes the most secret inner chamber, an interior. It leads into the next citation headed ‘Dickens as a child’, which combines looking and thinking as something allegorical, never looking at the thing itself, but at something other, and that in a virtually traumatised state:

Whenever he had done drudging, he had no other resource but drifting, and he drifted over half London. He was a dreamy child, thinking mostly of his own dreary prospects . . . He did not go in for ‘observation’, a priggish habit; he did not look at Charing Cross to improve his mind or count the lampposts in Holborn to improve his arithmetic. But unconsciously he made all these places the scenes of the monstrous drama in his miserable little soul. He walked in darkness under the lamps of Holborn, and was crucified at Charing Cross. So for him ever afterwards these places had the beauty that only belongs to battlefields. (Arcades 438)

The pun on ‘cross’ reads place-names allegorically. The passage suggests the next, called ‘On the psychology of the flâneur’:

The undying scenes we can all see if we shut our eyes are not the scenes that we have stared at under the direction of guide-books; the scenes we see are the scenes at which we did not look at all – the scenes in which we walked when we were thinking about something else [. . .] We can see the background now because we did not see it then. So Dickens did not stamp these places on his mind; he stamped his mind on those places. (Arcades 438)
The first half of this quotation suggests allegorical vision: seeing is not beholding what is in front of the eyes, but seeing differently, other; the mind is made of what has not been consciously viewed. The last sentence suggests that there is no agency here; the mind and places change places, the mind is full of places which the memory cannot necessarily remember seeing, and places meet the subject with memories of earlier looking; the disconnection between mind and memory means that places intrude with traumatic force, as memories of battlefields. Nor are places deserted, as the next entry from Chesterton shows:

In May of 1846 he ran over to Switzerland and tried to write *Dombey and Son* at Lausanne... He could not get on. He attributed this especially to his love of London and his loss of it, 'the absence of streets and numbers of figures... *My* figures seem disposed to stagnate without crowds about them'. (*Arcades* 438)

If the history of the nineteenth century can be written through its addictions, London was Dickens’ drug, his ‘magic lantern’, even if ‘London looks very dull and is dark, and dreary enough after the bright sea side’ [i.e. Broadstairs] (*Letters* 5.628). Streets, figures and crowds, they generate, for Dickens as *flâneur* his own ‘figures’: figures of speech, fictional characters, and a ‘figural’, that is to say, allegorical, sense of reality.¹⁴

IV

How should the reader use this book? Any way that is wanted, of course, though the ideal reader will go through it from start to finish. It is for those interested in London, and therefore in Dickens, and equally for those primarily interested in Dickens, at whatever level. I discuss the novels and the journalism cumulatively, but despite its Gazetteer at the end, the book is not encyclopaedic, and there are some London places that Dickens mentions, for instance in his journalism, which are not included, nor are the photographs representative of London, even, necessarily, of Dickens’ London.

I have taken the novels chronologically; though I do not specifically discuss *Martin Chuzzlewit*, because I have already done so in *Lost in the American City*; nor *Hard Times*, nor *A Tale of Two Cities*, whose historical London I read through *Barnaby Rudge*. (‘Two cities’, however, suggests that the city in Dickens is a metonymy for a civilisation, so putting two ways of life under comparison; unless, that is, the ‘two cities’ are Paris before and during the Revolution.) Lastly, material on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is combined with *Our Mutual Friend*. For the novels I have discussed, each chapter has a desire to relate the texts to London, another, to see how foregrounding London locales shapes a reading, and an interest in critical theory. The city can be seen empirically, but every reading must have a theoretical aspect; much of what needs to be said cannot be seen empirically. The critical theory derives
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from the three 'masters of suspicion', as Paul Ricoeur called them, who write about urban modernity: Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. The city is present for each of them, and each has created traditions of critical theory, some German, some French and some British and American, all of which intersect interestingly with each other. Each leads to new ways of reading, whose validity I test here in the accounts given of the novels.

A second way to take the book is as giving an approach to reading the nineteenth-century city: London, but not just London. A third will see it as a contribution to critical writing about cities. However the reader approaches it, the book combines several things. It is empirical about places on the ground, some of which can still be visited, and which for some readers still contain their ghosts of Dickens. While remembering that Dickens' London is perceived allegorically, it also tries to be specific about sites, their histories and their differences, remembering Disraeli's advice to himself as novelist: 'One should generally mention localities, because very often they indicate character'. So localities are in here, and the gradations between them are discussed, and as many pieces of information are included about them, which attempt, however loosely, to relate them to Dickens. The book uses knowledge of localities and refers, especially in endnotes, to then contemporary pictures. The photographs here are not reprints from the past, but contemporary; working from images which were available in Dickens' time, and not yet lost. This empiricist approach is not separate from the attempt to be theoretical both about Dickens and about the city. Though the subject of Dickens and London has been tried before, in scholarly work I have been glad to use, I do not think it has yet found its decisive discussion, because that would have to respond both to urban cultural studies and to Dickens; it would have to both know London and conceptualise the nineteenth-century city.

The reader may need to follow discussion of the novels with the Dickens text. Ideally, for some of the chapters, an A to Z of London will help, supplementing the older maps of London which have been reproduced. And the book was written in part from the basis of specific itineraries made following routes specified in Dickens' texts, and these itineraries, given here, may be followed, as with a guide-book. Chapter three, on Oliver Twist, suggests some routes that may be walked; so does chapter five, which looks specifically at Camden Town (for Dombey and Son) and chapter six, which looks at the Strand for David Copperfield. Chapter seven looks at Holborn, for Bleak House. Chapter eight has a section on Southwark, for Little Dorrit. Chapter eleven discusses the Thames, and some specific waterside sites there, such as Limehouse. The ideal reader will follow some of the itineraries proposed, either mentally or on foot, while responding to the modern photographs of London.

The photographs were taken over seven days, travelling on foot, by bus, underground and occasionally car, looking for fragments of that London which existed for Dickens, while knowing that London then was no more than a
fragment, or a ruin, not a whole world which has now been lost. At no time was there the intention to illustrate the novels, or even to suggest that they could be better understood by photographs. As in Dickens’ time, there were revealed the same juxtapositions of wealth and poverty (a quarter of a mile’s walk out of Bishopsgate, past Norton Folgate into Shoreditch will show that); poor areas had remained poor, though some poor areas now looked gentrified, like the Wilton Square in Hoxton which Gissing discusses, which is surrounded by impoverished twentieth-century buildings. Looking for London by night, it was striking to see that modern street and flood lighting now made Dickens’ night-scenes brighter than day-time photographs. The night is now not ‘other’ to the day, but has become the day in a more kitsch-like form. Baudelaire said that the ghost haunts Paris in broad day; and it can hardly now do so in the City and Westminster at night-time, where there are no longer any shadows to give differences. Men sleeping in boxes under the arches at the viaduct of Cannon Street station, site of the medieval Steelyard for the merchants of the Hanseatic league, were in brightly lit, floor-lit passages; a difference from the experience of the lost that the Uncommercial Traveller has in ‘Night Walks’. The photograph in each case works from an image that was part of pre-1870 visual culture, but obviously includes modern buildings, and, often, signs of a new consumer-culture replacing an earlier Victorian consumerism. But this seems justifiable, because the city shows at any moment different chronologies, details which were then and are now anachronistic; it has its emergent and disappearing forms of life and architecture at all times. It makes the point that the London Dickens looked at was both objective and contemporary, but also non-contemporary; looking both at cultural forms which were subordinate and vanishing, and also invoking a London not yet but perhaps about to come into being: the city is not just the subject of representation, but of a creation, which is of itself at different moments. The photographs, aware of these different folds of time within them, invert chronology: some new things seem old, or repeat the old, some old seem new.

The book contains, apart from the endnotes, historical maps and a gazetteer, to give a sense of different spaces, and to identify places, and to see what can be said about them, without thinking that such information can cover their personal memories of which the texts are a record. The last map will be most recognisable today: the Crutchley Ordnance Survey Map of 1863, which shows the state of the railways then; it gives the largest overview of London and the new suburbia. In contrast, the first is that of the Dutch Johannes de Ram, who mapped London in the 1690s; it shows the city as it was being rebuilt after the Fire: it should be looked at in conjunction with chapter one, which describes how London extended itself through the eighteenth century. The next group of nine are from the Greenwood map of London, published in 1827, relating to a London that Dickens knew at the age of fifteen. No. 10 is the Cruchley map of 1846, which gives an overview of the city, with details of the West End and
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East End following. I deliberately chose to work with old maps, which the reader is urged to follow with a magnifying-glass and to make comparisons with the A to Z, because I wanted to give the texture of London as it was represented then, which modern maps could not do. The Gazetteer has dictionary entries for parts of London, districts, streets, and specific sites, that Dickens names, or which are associated so closely with his work that they cannot be excluded. It does no more than supplement the main text, acting like snapshots of London in contrast to the photographs; if readers look at it independently, they must consult the index to see where the place appears in the text. Omissions in the Gazetteer are usually because all I have to say about the site already appears in the main text.
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