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*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

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**URBAN IMAGES OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY LONDON:**

**THE LITERARY GEOGRAPHY OF CHARLES DICKENS**

**by**

**Priscilla Kaufmann**

**A Thesis**

**Presented to the**

**Department of Geography/Geology**

**and the**

**Faculty of the Graduate College**

**University of Nebraska**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Arts**

**University of Nebraska at Omaha**

**December 1987**

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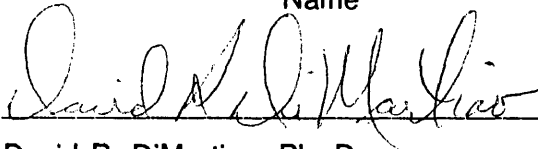
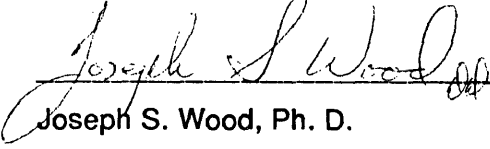

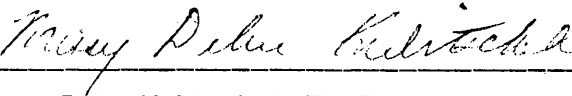


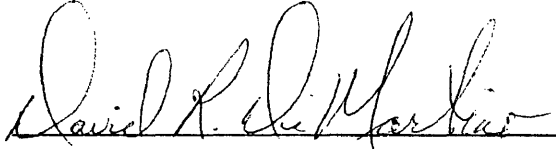
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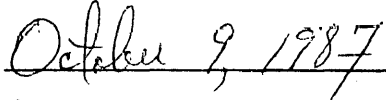
## THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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 David R. DiMartino, Ph. D.	Geography
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Date

**TO MICHAEL AND KATHRYN WITH LOVE**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES. . . . .	vii
LIST OF MAPS. . . . .	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	ix
 CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION. . . . .	1
Thesis Statement . . . . .	1
Geography: A Science and an Art. . . . .	4
II LITERATURE REVIEW . . . . .	8
Origins of Literary Geography . . . . .	8
The Use of Literature for Geographic Research: Theory and Philosophy. . . . .	10
Value, Contributions, and Strengths of Literary Geography. . . . .	10
Methodologies and Techniques . . . . .	12
The Use of Literature for Geographic Research: Selected Studies and Applications. . . . .	16
Use of Literature in Teaching Geography. . . . .	16
Cultural Landscape Descriptions. . . . .	17
Experience of Place in Literature . . . . .	19
III FOCUS ON DICKENS . . . . .	25
Literature Appropriate For Geographic Research. . . . .	25
Why Charles Dickens?. . . . .	26

## CHAPTER

Reality and Verisimilitude. . . . .	26
Knowledge of the Landscape. . . . .	28
Emphasis on Place. . . . .	28
Landscape as a Depository of Meaning and Value. . . . .	29
The Influences on Dickens's Writings as Geographies. . . . .	30
Formal Education . . . . .	31
Books. . . . .	34
Travel . . . . .	34
Walking. . . . .	35
Selection of Dickens's Writing for Analysis . . . . .	36
<i>Sketches By Boz</i> . . . . .	36
<i>Bleak House</i> . . . . .	39
<i>The Uncommercial Traveller</i> . . . . .	41
<i>Our Mutual Friend</i> . . . . .	43
IV THE MATERIAL LANDSCAPE OF DICKENS'S LONDON . . . . .	47
The Altered Physical Environment of Nineteenth-century London	48
Climate. . . . .	48
Vegetation . . . . .	53
Topography. . . . .	62
The Built Environment of Nineteenth-century London. . . . .	65
Street Patterns. . . . .	65

## CHAPTER

Buildings . . . . .	70
Land-use . . . . .	74
Public Transportation. . . . .	81
Environmental Problems . . . . .	89
Changes on the Landscape . . . . .	95
V THE PERCEPTUAL LANDSCAPE OF DICKENS'S LONDON. . . . .	100
London as a Landscape of Hostility . . . . .	101
Fear/Repulsion. . . . .	101
Loneliness . . . . .	105
Confusion . . . . .	107
London as a Landscape of Comfort. . . . .	111
Refuge. . . . .	111
Opportunity . . . . .	113
London As Home . . . . .	117
VI CONCLUSION. . . . .	119
The Value of Literature for Geographic Research . . . . .	119
The Value of Dickens's Writings as Geographies. . . . .	121
Areas for Further Study. . . . .	123
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	126



## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 "Dickensland Attractions" Tourist Landscape Brochure . . . . .	3
Figure 2 Dickens's Major Published Works. . . . .	37
Figure 3 Title Page from <i>Sketches By Boz</i> . . . . .	38
Figure 4 Title Page from <i>Bleak House</i> . . . . .	40
Figure 5 Title Page from <i>All the Year Round</i> . . . . .	42
Figure 6 Title Page from <i>Our Mutual Friend</i> . . . . .	44
Figure 7 Riah's Roof-top Garden. . . . .	57
Figure 8 Picnic in the Churchyard. . . . .	59
Figure 9 The Thames. . . . .	64
Figure10 Peggotty's House . . . . .	75
Figure11 Monmouth Street . . . . .	80
Figure12 The Post Chaise . . . . .	83
Figure13 The Hackney Coach . . . . .	84
Figure14 The Cabriolet . . . . .	86
Figure15 The Omnibus. . . . .	87

**LIST OF MAPS**

	Page
Map 1 Rochester-Chatham Area. . . . .	32
Map 2 Camden Town . . . . .	33
Map 3 The Victoria Embankment. . . . .	45
Map 4 Nineteenth-century London Parks. . . . .	54
Map 5 Topographic Map of London . . . . .	63
Map 6 London: Early 19th Century. . . . .	67
Map 7 London: 1870s. . . . .	68
Map 8 London's Streets . . . . .	69
Map 9 St. Albans. . . . .	115

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Thesis Statement

The hypothesis of this thesis is that literature can be a valuable source of geographic information. Literary landscapes capture both the material and perceptual images of places, and often reflect the real world upon which they are based. In addition, literary geography plays an important integrative role of binding together two separate disciplines, literature and geography, and demonstrates that knowledge about the world can be obtained from both the artistic as well as the scientific approaches. The primary strength of the use of literature for geographic research is that it captures the human experience with the landscape. The following two examples demonstrate this point. The first is a description of London that was taken from an 1823 gazetteer:

London: the metropolis of the British Empire situated mostly in Middlesex, chiefly in the N. bank of the Thames, 60 miles from the seas; . . . The number of males in 1811 was 457,481, and of females 552,765; inhabited houses 141,732; streets, lanes, alleys and courts about 8,000; squares, 60 . . . From a report made in 1815, it appears there were then in the city no less than 15,288 beggars and it had been computed that as many as 50,000 females gain a wretched subsistence from vice (Lanegran and Toth 1976, 5-6).

Now compare this description of London written by Charles Dickens:

Streams of people apparently without end poured on and on, jostling each other in the crowd and hurrying forward, scarcely seeming to notice the riches that surrounded them on every side; while vehicles of all shapes and makes, mingled up together in one moving mass like running water, lent their ceaseless roar to swell the noise and tumult.

As they dashed by the quickly-changing and ever-varying objects, it was curious to observe in what a strange procession they passed before the eye. Emporiums of splendid dresses, the materials brought from every quarter of the world; tempting stores of everything to stimulate and pamper the sated appetite and give new relish to the oft-repeated feast; vessels of burnished gold and silver, wrought into every exquisite form of vase, and dish, and goblet;

guns, swords, pistols, and patent engines of destruction; screws and irons for the crooked, clothes for the newly-born, drugs for the sick, coffins for the dead, and churchyards for the buried -- all these, jumbled each with the other and flocking side by side, seemed to flit by in motley dance like the fantastic groups of the old Dutch painter, and with the same stern moral for the unheeding restless crowd.

Nor were there wanting objects in the crowd itself to give new point and purpose to the shifting scene. The rags of the squalid ballad-singer fluttered in the rich light that showed the goldsmith's treasures, pale and pinched-up faces hovered about the windows where was tempting food, hungry eyes wandered over the profusion guarded by one thin sheet of brittle glass -- an iron wall to them; half-naked shivering figures stopped to gaze at Chinese shawls and golden stuffs of India. There was a christening party at the largest coffin-maker's, and a funeral hatchment had stopped some great improvements in the bravest mansion. Life and death went hand in hand; wealth and poverty stood side by side; repletion and starvation laid them down together (*Nicholas Nickleby* Ch XXXII, 490-491).

Dickens has captured the crowding, the noise, the variety, and confusion of the immense city so that it is alive and vibrant, not just a record of factual dimensions and statistics. This passage recorded the living city in all its success and failure, in all its vice and virtue so the reader could feel the impact of the environment as it was experienced by Dickens over a century ago.

The goal of this thesis is to analyze Charles Dickens's use of his literary landscapes to bring attention to the environmental problems of nineteenth-century London. Such a study is justified because his writings shaped the popular image of the city and presented a picture of London to the thousands of people who read his books. Even today, the "Dickens landscape" is familiar to us, not only from reading his books, but also from movie, television, and stage adaptations of his writings and the English tourist landscapes associated with his works (Figure 1).

Dickens is known for his social and environmental criticisms of nineteenth-century London. He recognized that he had an extraordinary capacity not only to observe and record the details of a scene, but also to articulate their meaning. One of the goals of his writings was to bring attention to the problems of the urban environment in an attempt to bring about reform (Schwarzbach 1979, 121-123; Wilson 1970, 7; Nelson 1981, 172; Drabble 1979, 213). While many scholars have studied his contribution to social reform, this study is unique in analyzing how Dickens used elements of his literary landscapes to advocate environmental reform in

# Dickensland Attractions

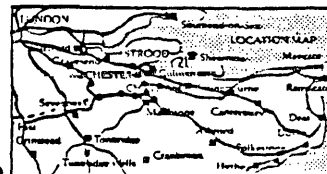
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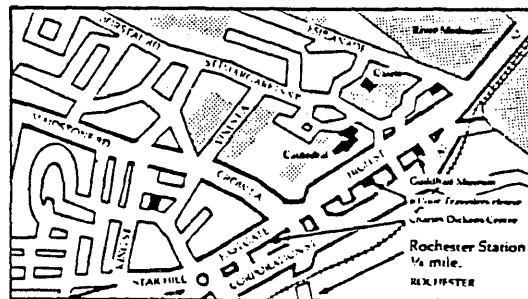
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Figure 1

nineteenth-century London. In addition, this study will demonstrate that the sociological novel, which has by and large been ignored by literary geographers, has value for geographic research.

### Geography: a Science and an Art

Every academic discipline is defined by its substantive knowledge or phenomenon of interest and by the methods or modes of inquiry used to gain that knowledge. Geography, as a formal discipline, is misperceived by many people outside of the academic environment as a field of study concerned with memorizing place names, principal rivers of the world, and major exports of a region. In reality, geography is a very broad-based, integrative field of study that seeks to understand the complexity of the physical and cultural world. Because of the eclectic nature of the discipline, few geographers could state a definition of their field of study that would gain a wide base of support from their colleagues. Most never try. Periodically, however, attempts are made to assess the discipline and search for areas of agreement on the scope and method of geographic research.

In 1954, the Association of American Geographers published *American Geography: Inventory and Prospect*, a review of the discipline up to that time and an attempt to provide guideposts for the future of geographic research. In the introduction to this publication, Preston E. James wrote, "Today as in the past, geography is concerned with the arrangement of things on the face of the earth, and with the associations of things that give character to particular places" (1954, 4). James thus identified "place" as the phenomenon of interest in the field of American geography. Geographers often use other words such as "location," "area," or "landscape" interchangeably with "place" to define their subject of interest.

A review of the discipline's literature indicates that most geographers agree on the phenomenon of interest; however, the methods and techniques used to study that phenomenon have been at the center of debate throughout the history of geographic thought.

Today, the methods of geographic research fall all along a continuum between two philosophically-based extremes. At one end of the spectrum are those who view geography as a science, that is a unified body of physical laws and argue that only objective, verifiable methods of analysis are appropriate. At the other end of the spectrum are those who view objectivity alone as inadequate for capturing the true essence of place and so prefer a subjective approach.

The prevailing philosophical attitude of any academic discipline influences that discipline's paradigm, that is, the pattern or model against which research is conducted. The paradigm dictates the types of questions asked and the methods, techniques, or modes of inquiry used to answer them. The major paradigm in geography throughout most of the twentieth century has been based on objectivity and empiricism. In its attempt to overcome the environmentalist orientation that characterized the discipline in the earlier decades of the century, "scientific" geography seemed to offer the respectability that geographers were seeking (Salter and Lloyd 1977, 1). Yet a small number of geographers, Carl O. Sauer among them, questioned the narrow limits of the scientific methodology:

A good deal of the meaning of area lies beyond scientific regimentation. The best geography has never disregarded the esthetic qualities of landscape, to which we know no approach other than the subjective. Humboldt's "physiognomy," Banse's "soul," Volz's "rhythm," Gradmann's "harmony" of landscape, all lie beyond science. These writers seem to have discovered a symphonic quality in the contemplation of the areal scene, proceeding from a full novitiate in scientific studies and yet apart therefrom. To some, whatever is mystical is an abomination. Yet it is significant that there are others, and among them some of the best, who believe, that having observed widely and charted diligently, there yet remains a quality of understanding at a higher plane that may not be reduced to formal process (1925, 344-345).

Sauer recognized that geographers had to go beyond empiricism: "Beyond all that can be communicated by instruction and mastered by techniques lies a realm of individual perception and interpretation, the art of geography" (Sauer 1956, 298).

Sauer was not alone in recognizing the study of geography as both a scientific and an artistic pursuit. J. K. Wright also promoted the use of artistry and subjectivity in geographic research. Wright's ideas were best expressed in his 1947 Presidential Address to the



Association of American Geographers entitled "Terrae Incognitae: The Place of the Imagination in Geography" (1947). This address argued that subjectivity is valid in geographic research because subjectivity is not the opposite of objectivity; rather, subjectivity is a different method of conceiving of things realistically. The difference is that subjectivity conceives of things in reference to oneself. He outlined an imaginative process called aesthetic imagining, which had as its end purpose the creation of an independent work of art or the introduction of artistry into a purely scientific study. Recognizing the danger that aesthetic imagining can lead to illusion and error, Wright nevertheless believed that its use was not only legitimate but desirable if the effect was to increase "the clarity and vividness of the conceptions that we seek to transmit to reader or hearer . . . [to] make him see and feel through our eyes and feelings" (1947, 9). Wright also stated that geographers need not rely on their own imagining alone but should borrow the imaginative perceptions of others -- "farmers and fishermen, business executives and poets, novelists and painters, Bedouins and Hottentots. . . ." (1947, 12).

The imaginative perceptions that Wright recognized were further explored in an essay by Yi-Fu Tuan. Tuan coined the word "Topophilia" to describe the unexpected sensual impact of the landscape that touches our emotions and stimulates our minds (1961). He believed that these experiences were the source of creativity for novelists, poets, and painters but that few geographers drew on these resources for expressing the experience of place. Tuan wrote, "Geographers, I think, might take time off from their practical duties, and join -- at least now and then -- the artists and poets in portraying the splendor of the earth" (1961, 32).

By the early 1970s, a number of geographers began to agree with Donald W. Meinig that "the skillful novelist often seems to come closest of all in capturing the full flavor of the environment" (Meinig 1971, 4). Many geographers found that the methodologies of scientific geography were inadequate for exploring the human feelings toward the physical and cultural world. For a small number of geographers, literature offered the artistry and insight that they were seeking in their own search for the meaning of place. While a handful of pioneering studies

demonstrated that literature could be an important source of data for geographic research, literary geography as a sub-discipline had its basis in the post-positivist revolution of the 1970s, the subject of Chapter Two.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Origins of Literary Geography

Geographers have been very creative in utilizing new tools, methods, and data sources in their attempt to understand the complexity of the physical and cultural world. J. K. Wright was among the first to recognize literature, primarily the novel, as a source of data for geographers. In a 1924 article in *The Geographical Review*, Wright praised the "geographical instinct" of some authors and expressed the hope that geographers would explore the relatively untouched resource of fictional writing. He cited H. R. Mill's "Guide to Geographical Books and Appliances" (1910) and Miss D. Wharton's "Short List of Novels and Literary Works of Geographic Interest" (1920), compiled for the Leeds Branch of the British Geographical Association, as attempts to promote the use of fictional writing for geographical research. By 1938, numerous requests for literary sources appropriate for landscape studies prompted the library of the American Geographical Society to publish a list of "Bibliogeographical Sources for Geographical Fiction" (*The Geographical Review* 1938, 499-500).

A pioneer geographic study utilizing fictional writing as the primary source of data was H. C. Darby's "The Regional Geography of Thomas Hardy's Wessex", published in *The Geographical Review* in 1948. By extracting passages from the novels, Darby recreated Thomas Hardy's landscapes from his descriptions of the physical geography as well as the human activity and cultural features of Wessex. In so doing, he set the stage for the development of a new sub-field, often referred to as literary geography. However, the interest in scientific geography and the quantitative revolution in the 1960s and early 1970s delayed the full development of literary geography at that time.

A resurgence of interest in literary geography took place in the mid 1970s which gathered force for two reasons. First, the Association of American Geographers conferred legitimacy on the use of fictional writing for geographic research when it sponsored a well-attended paper session entitled Landscape in Literature at its 1974 annual meeting; five years later the Institute of British Geographers hosted a similar session at its annual meeting. Second, the 1970s witnessed a growing dissatisfaction with scientific geography and the quantitative revolution. Literary geography offered an alternative to those seeking to incorporate a more humanistic approach in their geographical research.

Within the sub-discipline of literary geography, a number of studies explored the philosophical or theoretical approaches to the use of fictional writing for geographic research. These studies presented the value, contribution, or strength of literary geography, or developed new methodologies, techniques, or modes of inquiry.

A second body of research demonstrated the use of literature for geographic investigation. These studies presented examples of how novels have been used in teaching geographic concepts, how scholars search out factual data in the literature to describe physical or cultural landscapes, or how the human values or feelings about the landscape can be explored through the use of fictional writing. Many studies combined both elements of landscape description and the experience of place in the research.

Two themes seem to emerge as to the value of literary geography from the authorities studied. First, literature is able to portray the material characteristics of locations. Second, literature captures the human experience with the landscape. This thesis will focus on both of these themes by recreating the material landscape of Charles Dickens's London and by exploring the perceptions of his characters toward that landscape.

## The Use of Literature for Geographic Investigation: Theory and Philosophy

### Value, Contributions, and Strengths of Literature in Geography

Regional geographers, particularly those from Britain, were among the first to recognize the value of literature in geographic research (Darby 1948; Gilbert 1960, 1972; Paterson 1965). For example, British regional geographer E. W. Gilbert compared the two disciplines, geography and literature, in their approaches to regional studies. In a published lecture entitled "The Idea of the Region" (1960) Gilbert stated "The task of the regional geographer can resemble in some respects that of the regional novelist. The regional geographer strives to integrate the multitude of seemingly disconnected facts about nature and man in the region he is describing" (Gilbert 1960, 167). Arguing that "the intense power of environment in men's lives has been clearly perceived by many writers who are not geographers," Gilbert looked at the writings of four novelists, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and Arnold Bennett, and showed the strength of their writings in depicting the "reality" of their regional settings (1960, 167). He then demonstrated this idea with a passage from Bennett's *Whom God Hath Joined* (1906):

All around the horizon . . . the yellow fires of furnaces grow brighter in the first oncoming of the dusk. The immense congeries of streets and squares, of little houses and great halls and manufactories, of church spires, and proud smoking chimneys and chapel towers, mingle together into one wondrous organism that stretches and rolls unevenly away for miles in the grimy mists of its own endless painting.

Bennett vividly portrayed the industrial landscape in a way that captured the character of the Potteries region of nineteenth-century England. In Gilbert's words, "I urge you to read and re-read their [regional novelist's] books. If a geographer reads Hardy and Bennett, he is not wasting his time" (1960, 169). Gilbert's lecture focused on the idea that the region had been an important concept in European thought since 1800 and played a role in academia, the arts, and politics. This idea was demonstrated by Gilbert's discussion of regionalism in novels as well as in

the way governments delineated administrative areas. Gilbert believed regional geography was "the very pith and core" of the discipline because it was part of the larger intellectual thought of the past century and a half in Europe.

J. H. Paterson believed the value of literature for geographic research was the way in which the author portrays the character of the landscape. In an essay entitled "The Novelist and His Region: Scotland Through the Eyes of Sir Walter Scott," Paterson recognized that Scott could not be considered a regional novelist in the strictest sense. Yet, his writings have a "regional content" that make them of importance to the field of geography because they helped shape the public image of Scotland. According to Paterson, literature played an important role in how we think and feel about places, particularly places we have never seen. Paterson presented three strengths of Scott's writing: first, Scott had the ability to articulate a "new dimension" in the imagination of the observer, to the landscape itself; second, Scott paid great attention to the details of the scenery; thirdly, Scott can be credited with introducing the Scottish landscape to those outside the region (Paterson 1965, 146-147). In addition, Paterson identified the geographical detail in Scott's poems and novels, his conception of the landscape, and the manner in which the author portrayed the various regions of Scotland. The interesting element of Paterson's essay is his emphasis on regional studies as the foundation of geography. Like Gilbert, Paterson believed regional geography was the core of the discipline and seemed to be attempting to portray Scott as a regional novelist to justify the use of his work for geographic investigation.

In the post-positivist era, the strength and value of the use of literature for geographic investigation has been recognized by humanistic geographers, in particular Yi-Fu Tuan (1961, 1973, 1976, 1978). In an essay entitled "Literature and Geography: Implications for Geographical Research" (1978), Tuan outlined three reasons why geographers have turned to literature: first, geographers recognized that their writing needed greater literary quality; second, they acknowledged that literature was a source of factual data for geographers; finally, they

appreciated literature as a perspective on how people experience the world (1978, 194). Tuan is asking geographers to look at the world in a way similar to how the artist views the world. The scientist seeks clarity, which is a linear way of thinking leading to conclusion. The artist seeks completeness, a circular way of thinking, which produces a fuller appreciation of the complexity of the world.

Tuan's basic premise in his essay "Literature, Experience, and Environmental Knowing" was that literature depicted human experience which he defined as "the sum of means through which we know reality and construct a world. Experience includes sensation, feeling, perception, and conception or cognition" (1976, 260). Tuan listed five ways in which literature articulates human experience: first, it captures human perceptions of absence; next, it describes the physiognomy of places; it explores the world of fleeting noises and light; it captures the ambiguity in the interpretation of shared perceptions; and finally, it looks at differing attitudes toward nature. Tuan concluded this essay with an explanation as to why the use of literature was not more widespread among geographers: "The literary perspective has been neglected because the evidence is not in quantitative form, and because the experiences described in literature rarely throw much additional light on the way people pursue rational economic ends" (Tuan 1976, 271). Tuan is once again asking geographers to view the world from the perspective of the humanities rather than that of science, which he believes fails to capture the human experience with the environment.

### Methodologies and Techniques

While humanist geographers have played an important role in presenting the value of literature in geographic research, they have offered little in the way of methodology for those who seek a standard procedure that will produce verifiable or repeatable results. Humanistic geography is based on the philosophy of phenomenology. While difficult to define,

phenomenology, as used by humanistic geographers, is generally concerned with describing the "essence" of a particular place. According to J. Nicholas Entrikin, "An overview of the literature [of humanist geography] suggests that there is no common agreement on method: humanist geography is best characterized by its eclecticism concerning method" (1976, 627). Addressing Entrikin's concerns, Anne Buttimer rejected the need for a defined methodology, believing that "It is in the spirit of the phenomenological purpose, then, rather than in the practice of phenomenological procedures, that one finds direction" (1976, 280). Humanist geographers use a wide variety of techniques and approaches, many of which would be unacceptable to the "scientific" geographer.

Christopher L. Salter and William J. Lloyd believed that the flexibility of method may be one of the greatest strengths of literary geography. Yet, they cautioned that "this freedom also demands that careful and detailed attention be given to the methods employed and to the kinds of conclusions which those methods permit" (1977, 3). Salter and Lloyd developed a Resource Paper under the auspices of the Association of American Geographers to present some approaches that would be appropriate for the study of landscape in literature (1977). The methodology they developed was based on the idea of the landscape "signature", which is a term used originally in remote sensing. Salter and Lloyd explained the adaptation of this term for use in literary geography:

In interpreting remotely sensed imagery, a certain landscape feature -- such as an agricultural crop -- may have a specific polychromatic intensity unlike the tones of other features such as urban areas, fresh water, or snow cover. This kind of uniqueness is called a signature. In the cultural landscape, we can also speak of signatures as representative of specific conditions. A signature is a personal, unique mark that connotes a specific pattern of human expression by its author (Salter and Lloyd 1977, 7).

Salter and Lloyd defined two categories of signatures. First was the *structural* signature, which involved decision-making removed from the individual such as patterns of settlement, agriculture, livelihood, sacred space, and transportation. To demonstrate their idea of a structural signature, they selected a passage from Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) as an



example:

They say that a pagan temple stood where Notre Dame now stands, in the old Roman days, eighteen or twenty centuries ago -- remains of it are still preserved in Paris; and that a Christian church took its place about A. D. 300; another took the place of that in A. D. 500; and that the foundations of the present cathedral were laid about A. D. 1100. The ground ought to be measurably sacred by this time one would think.

The site was recognized as sacred, yet responsibility was difficult, if not impossible to place. The signature had been structured over time by succeeding groups of people as they expressed value and feeling for that location.

Salter and Lloyd's second category of signature was the *behavioral*, which was created by an individual in shaping personal space such as house types, gardens, and landscapes of entertainment. A behavioral signature was demonstrated through a passage from Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* (1969). In this paragraph the personality of a woman was expressed in the house being built by her husband so that it is not simply a building but a manifestation of the individual:

"I didn't know a house could be designed for a woman, like a dress. You can't see yourself here as I do, you can't see how completely this house is yours. Every angle, every part of every room is a setting for you. It's scaled to your height, to your body. Even the texture of the walls goes with the texture of your skin in an odd way."

The house reflected the woman's personality, and even her physical appearance. It was an individual mark left on the landscape representing her tastes and values.

Salter and Lloyd described their method simply as an attempt "to illuminate the uses of landscape signatures in the development of a work of creative literature" (1977, 8). Salter restated the methodology in his essay "Signatures and Settings: One Approach to Landscape in Literature" (1978) but encouraged geographers to develop their own methodology.

In his study of the urban novel, Lloyd developed a methodology using environmental images (1976):

Environmental images found in urban novels divide into two general categories: individual character geographies and author's narrative. The former

consist of thought, dialogue, and behavior involving space or landscape, and attributed by authors to specific characters or characterizations. The latter, which range from objective description to fantasies of the author's imagination, resemble personal geographical essays or vignettes. In the first instance, the author is doing what he does best -- creating characters. In the second, he is doing what the geographer calls his own -- understanding and explaining space and landscape (Lloyd 1976, 279).

Lloyd's methodology resembled conventional environmental perception studies such as that conducted by Kevin Lynch in his book *The Image of the City* (1960); however, it used the mental images and perceptions of the characters and author's narrative instead of collecting data from real people. The strength of Lloyd's study was that he used a large number of novels and a variety of authors; consequently, he was able to develop a generalized view of nineteenth-century Boston as depicted in fictional writing. In addition, the division of images into two general categories, individual character geographies and author's narrative, was a useful organizational approach.

Using three novels about the southwestern United States, Myongsup Shin developed a methodology whereby passages were extracted from the novels to explore the relationship between landscape perceptions and changes of character mood (Shin 1976, 274). David Seamon argued that Shin's study was weak "because it too arbitrarily relates a particular author with a particular use of landscape description" (Seamon 1976, 287). Like Salter and Lloyd, Seamon acknowledged that this type of methodology is more commonly used by the literary scholar than the geographer but agreed with Tuan that geographers could benefit from more familiarity with the techniques of literary analysis.

Literature is able to capture the values, feelings, and perceptions about the landscape as expressed by the characters and narrator. In addition, it is able to present the characteristics of cultural landscapes. Methodologies are varied and less rigid than those used by "scientific" geographers. This flexibility of method was viewed by some as a strength of literary geography, yet most studies indicated that more work was needed in the development of methods, techniques, or modes of inquiry that would be acceptable to larger number of geographers.

## The Use of Literature for Geographic Research: Selected Studies and Applications

### Use of Literature in Teaching Geography

Some of the most practical applications of the use of fictional writing by geographers have been studies that used literature in teaching geographic concepts. A. J. Lamme presented four themes that could be explored through novels in the teaching of historical geography of the United States: landscape, human ecology, strategy, and regionalism (1977). Michener's *Centennial* (1974) was offered as an example of a novel that explored each of these themes. He cautioned that the novel alone cannot replace traditional textbooks but can give students a "feel" or "spirit" of a place and time.

Sherman E. Silverman demonstrated a use of novels in the teaching of cultural geography of the United States (1977). In a course he designed and used at Prince George's Community College in Largo, Maryland, Silverman focused on four major topics: the rural landscape, spatial mobility, the urban landscape, and assimilation. He outlined his teaching strategy and method of evaluation of students as well as identified the textbooks and journal articles that provided the conceptual foundation for the course. Nine novels were used in addition to video cassettes and field trips, which incorporated "visual aids" into the course. After teaching the course for two semesters, Silverman evaluated the course as "generally successful" but felt it attracted only those students who were willing to accept the heavy reading demands.

While Lamme and Silverman used literature as a teaching aid in the classroom, C. L. Salter used literature and traditional material in authoring a geography textbook, *The Cultural Landscape* (1971). Salter's theme was that the cultural landscape is an artificial landscape created by humans as they reshape the natural environment to meet their needs. Salter identified three major transformation processes: man's mobility, husbandry of the earth, and organization of space. Each of these processes was explored by traditional geographic methods but Salter used

examples from fictional writing where the geographic concepts were expressed in the dialogue and narrative of characters as well. The end goal was to help students learn to understand the contemporary cultural landscape.

### Cultural Landscape Descriptions

Geographers and historians have both used fictional writing to fill in the gaps about the past when traditional data is missing. Tuan, Salter and Lloyd agreed that combing the literature for factual data was the weakest use of fictional writing for geographic study (Tuan 1976, 261; Salter and Lloyd 1977, 4). The power of literature, from a geographic standpoint, is its ability to capture the experience of place (Tuan 1976, 261; Salter and Lloyd 1977, 4; and Gilbert 1960, 169). Yet, the stories are set in specific locations and at defined periods in time. Unless the landscape is known to the reader, the experience of place has no context. Likewise, the reproduction of setting as a research goal is shallow and meaningless. Most geographers attempt to combine both elements, that is, landscape description and articulation of human experience.

*A Writer's Britain: Landscape in Literature* by Margaret Drabble (1979) and *Literary Landscapes of the British Isles* by D. Daiches and J. Flower (1979) are examples of how the writings of several different authors describe the same landscape or interpret factual data about the landscape. Others, such as John Freeman's *Literature and Locality: the Literary Topography of Britain and Ireland* (1963), comb the literature for topographic details, often with the purpose of producing a travel guide for the literary pilgrim. Numerous literary topographies have been written about Dickens's landscapes because of his practice of using real locations as settings in his novels and essays. Many of these locations have been translated into tourist landscapes, particularly in the Rochester-Chatham area of England. Studies that focus on cultural landscape descriptions assumed objective accuracy on the part of the author. While writers have the freedom to create and alter their literary landscapes, verisimilitude is important for maintaining

credibility with the reader; therefore, most literary landscapes are based on reality (Salter and Lloyd 1977, 5). Studies of landscape descriptions are shallow and meaningless when no attempt is made to relate the human experience with the landscape.

In contrast to studies that produced objective landscape descriptions as depicted in fictional writing are those that looked at the landscapes that inspired creative writers. The Journal of the National Geographic Society has published articles on the landscapes of Thoreau, Cather, Frost, Tolstoy, Andersen, and Twain (Howarth 1981; Howarth 1982; MacLeish 1976; White 1986; Arden 1979; and Grove 1975). While *National Geographic* is one of the most popular journals in the United States, some geographers criticise these studies as being too descriptive or "travelogish" (Ford 1984, 103).

D. R. McManis identified the characteristic settings found in British detective-mystery fiction in his study "Places for Mysteries" (1978). By focusing on two of Britain's most popular mystery writers since the 1920s, Dame Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, McManis identified the role that landscape elements played in the development of plot in the British mystery novel of that time. His study differed from the simple literary topographies described above by relating the elements of landscape characteristics with the writing technique of a specific genre of literature.

Geographers have also explored idealized landscapes found in fictional writing. Brian Goody used the topographical details of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* to explore and map this idealized landscape (1970). By comparing the geographical elements of site and situation, Goody concluded that Utopia was modeled after the British Isles. Further evidence showed that Utopia's capital city of Amaurotum strongly resembled London of More's time. Goody also pointed out that More's Utopian ideas were used by Ebenezer Howard in 1903 in his building of Letchworth Garden City, which inspired other new-town construction projects in England and around the world. Thus, fictional writing originally grounded in Idealism was translated into geographical reality.

Some writers chose to create landscapes that were microcosms of the larger, real world.

Rasipuram K. Narayan, recognized as one of India's foremost living novelists, frequently set his writings in the fictional small city of Malgudi, which Allen G. Noble believed to be a microcosm of urban India (1976). Noble explored three phases in the development of Malgudi in Narayan's novels: in the early phase, the structure of the city and the urban character were developed; the middle phase explored the geographical factors of urban growth and expansion; in the later phase, "the personality of Malgudi, both Indian and British, is [sic] familiar. The reader has come to know the geography and feel of the place, as well as, and perhaps better than, he knows his own town" (Noble 1976, 109). Narayan was recognized as having captured the growth and change of urban India in his novels in much the same way that the real urban landscape of India had changed. Narayan's landscapes may be viewed as subjective models of the actual landscapes upon which they were based.

In contrast to Noble's study, C. S. Aiken's analysis of Faulkner's novels attempted to offer an alternative interpretation to the commonly held idea that Faulkner's landscape was a microcosm of the South (1979). Aiken searched out specific topographical details in the writing and examined the uplands/lowlands and rural/urban contrasts suggesting that Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County was actually a specific geographic location. By drawing parallels between the settings of Faulkner's novels and the real Lafayette County and Oxford, Mississippi, Aiken was able to support his argument.

#### Experience of Place in Literature

A stronger body of research is made up of studies that focused on the idea of the experience of place found in fictional writing. These studies explored the elements of human interaction with the landscape. While less concerned with objective landscape description, the studies usually include a reproduction of the cultural landscape's built environment and altered physical environment to give context to the meaning and values expressed in the writing.

Regions were often the focus of this group of literary geographic studies. In most cases, the action and personages could not be moved to another geographic location without distortion in the perception of environment.

British geographers have had a long tradition of interest in regional geography and have led the way in the field of literary geography. Likewise, British authors have contributed significantly to the development of the regional novel. One of the most prolific scholars of literary geography is British geographer, D. C. D. Pocock (1979, 1981a, 1981b). In his essay "Place and the novelist", Pocock explored the works of a number of different authors to assess the relationship between humans and their environment as expressed in fictional writing (1981b). Pocock argued that the novel, which replaced the epic and drama as the main literary form in the eighteenth century, was time-specific and place-specific. Therefore, place took on an added importance in fictional writing. Pocock's "The Novelist's Image of the North" presented the idea that the North of England was more a region of the mind than a distinctly geographical place (1979). This collective view of the North had the same regional characteristics for all fictional writers who wrote about the area -- bleak climate; strong, hard-working people; landscape disfigurement by industrial activity; and the consequent desire to escape from this devastation. This image of the North originated in the novels of the second quarter of the nineteenth century and persists in works of contemporary writers.

In contrast to Pocock's studies, which focused on the writings of a number of authors, L. J. Jay looked at the writings of one author, Frances Brett Young, whose novels were set in the western midlands of England (1972). Because the region had been at the center of manufacturing activity in England from the beginning of the industrial revolution, the area was often called the Black Country. Jay recognized that regional consciousness could be observed and measured from the outside, using traditional archival material or field methods, which was the approach taken by most geographers. However, there is a regional consciousness that is expressed by those who live inside the region. The use of a regional dialect best illustrated the

ability of the novelist to capture this sense of place from the insider's perspective. Jay used a passage from the novel *My Brother Jonathan* (1928), where a factory worker attempted to obtain a sickness note from the doctor:

I bain't a mon to jag up without good reason, gaffer. I conna abear to lose the brass, and that's straight. It's the craump that must have cotched me, bost it! when I was lifting the pigs. Now I bin all croodled up in the loins, and dussent move a leg forrats for the kench it gives me.

The use of dialect placed the story in a defined location. When the author conveyed feelings toward that location through the characters or dialogue, the reader is able to get a better understanding of the area from the insiders perspective. For example, Young has captured the local people's perspective on the factory system when the worker had to choose between his wages and his pain. The reader not only got some insight into the system that kept this man on the job even though he was injured, but also the effect of this system on the man's self image. This is the kind of insider's perspective that is difficult to capture from traditional regional geographic studies.

While most literary geographic studies suggested the idea that geographers should take a closer look at literature for geographical research, Brian J. Hudson argued the reverse -- that writers should take a closer look at the writings of geographers (1982). Hudson noted that poets have found the writings of Carl O. Sauer to be stimulating and instructive in their work. His study examined the development of the geographic thought and imagination of regional novelist Arnold Bennett. By examining the author's formal geographical education as well as the books he read and the places he visited, Hudson attempted to identify the elements that contributed to Bennett's development of geographical thought. Hudson then looked at the geographical elements of location, space, distribution, landscape appreciation and the influences of determinism in Bennett's writing. "For the geographer and literary scholar of today Bennett has much to offer, most importantly, perhaps, because his work amply demonstrates the valuable contribution that geography can make to the field of literature" (Hudson 1982, 377).



Human-environment interactions are a fundamental theme in geographic study. This theme was explored by B. Birch when he looked at the development of the "naturalist" group of novelists, writing in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Nature novelists were strongly influenced by the scientific, particularly Darwinian, ideas of their time (1981, 353). They also hoped to develop a new approach that would contrast with and set them aside from the social novelists who preceded them. Birch believed that the nature novelists developed the element of "encompassing the fictional characters and their communities within a carefully drawn environment in such a manner that the individuals in the stories could be seen as part of a continuum of vegetable, animal and human life within a defined habitat, seeing man as part of the total ecology of the chosen area" (Birch 1981, 353). According to Birch, the naturalist novelists demonstrated the same environmental determinism that was a fundamental theme in geographic research at the same time. By comparing the novels of many different Wessex writers from that period, Birch was able to show that this technique of relating the "laws of nature" to human action was characteristic of the naturalists novelists of that time and was an attempt to give their writing a stronger environmental basis (Birch 1981, 348 ).

Another fundamental theme in geography is that of movement. The push and pull factors of migration and the affects change of location on people have long been a topic of interest to geographers. A. K. Dutt and R. Dhussa used the writings of Indian novelist Sarat Chandra Chatterji (1876-1938), to examine the author's perception of his home land, the southern Bengal Region of India (1981). A second essay, again using the novels of Chandra, looked at Bengali communities established outside the home region by Bengali migrants (1983). Chandra explored the problems of cultural identity, emotional attachment to the homeland, and the contrasting perceptions of second and third generations of Bengalis born in Probash (foreign lands). This set of studies was unique in that it explored the region as an experience as well as the region as an image in the mind. Dutt and Dhussa also explored the writings of a number of Indian novelists to study urban images of Calcutta in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

(1976).

This theme of migration has also been explored in much of the creative literature written about the Great Plains of North America. Historical geographers such as Ralph H. Brown (1948) and historians such as Walter Prescott Webb (1931) have long recognized that distorted perceptions of the area gave rise to the image of the "Great American Desert."

For half a century the idea of a Great American Desert extending eastward of the Rocky Mountains existed in the official records, and for a longer time in the unofficial, but equally influential, popular writings (Brown 1948, 370).

As a result of this image, the area was settled relatively late. The so-called Great Dakota Boom occurred from 1879 to 1886 when several years of above-normal rainfall attracted settlers to this relatively uninhabited region. D. A. Lanegran's article (1972) on O. E. Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth* (1927) demonstrated how the author was able to capture the isolation of the Dakota plains for the first settlers to the area. The two main characters, Per Hansa and his wife Beret, represented the two types of settlers on the American frontier. Per Hansa was the adventurer, the builder, who enjoyed the challenge of the physical environment. His wife, Beret, longed for the already settled area left behind. Lanegran believed that Rolvaag captured the experiences of the first arrivals to the Dakota plains so that we can gain a better understanding of that place and time by reading *Giants in the Earth*. He writes of the book:

". . . we have the opportunity to go back in time to the first settling of the plains. We can see the landscape as it appeared to the new arrivals, fresh, strong, and challenging. We can share their hopes and fears for the future, share their depression and despair over leaving their former homes. Once we have witnessed their midwest we can understand why they wanted it tamed" (Lanegran 1972, 351-352).

Willa Cather's writings about the Great Plains have also attracted geographers because of her vivid sense of place as depicted in her novels. In her M. A. thesis, P. L. Krone used the writings of Willa Cather to demonstrate the use of the humanistic perspective in the study of South Central Nebraska between 1880 and 1920 (1979). Like Jay, Krone examined the sense of place from the insider's perspective.

The field of literary geography is as broad-based as the discipline of geography itself. Some studies have discussed the possibility of using fictional writing for geographic research, others have actually done so. The methodologies range from those that look for objectivity and factual elements to those that search out the more elusive subjectivity and artistry in the writing. Numerous geographers have found that literature incorporates a more humanistic element into their geographic research.

Both landscape description and landscape perception of the writings of Charles Dickens will be incorporated into this study. Chapter III will demonstrate that Dickens was an extremely accurate observer of the urban environment and used his perceptions of the landscape to raise his reader's consciousness to the problems inherent in a rapidly growing and changing city. The methodology for this study will be a content analysis, whereby passages from Dickens's writings will be used in Chapter IV to recreate the material landscape of nineteenth-century London. Chapter V will explore Dickens's perceptions of that material landscape through the dialogue and narrative of his characters.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **FOCUS ON DICKENS**

##### Literature Appropriate For Geographic Research

Not all forms of literature lend themselves well to geographic research. Certain genres such as classical drama and epic are characterized by being "universal", hence are neither time-specific nor place-specific. As D. C. D. Pocock has pointed out, when the novel replaced the epic and drama as the favorite literary form in the eighteenth century, it broke with the tradition of universality. Certain novels, particularly those from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, are time and place-specific and have become the popular genre of literature for geographic study (Pocock 1981b, 337).

Several different forms of the novel have been used by geographers in their study of the phenomenon of place. Regional novels, particularly those of Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett, Frances Brett Young, and Charlotte Bronte have been used most often because of their focus on specific locations. In addition, the short novel, particularly those by Willa Cather and William Faulkner, continue to attract geographers. The sociological novel generally seeks a solution to a social problem and is therefore, a sub-genre of the Problem Novel (Holman and Harmon 1986, 474). Sociological novelists such as Charles Dickens, Upton Sinclair, and George Eliot have focused their writings on the relationship between characters and the society in which they live. The sociological novel, which has been by and large ignored by geographers, should be explored more because it creates interesting forums in which various, and often contrasting, environmental perceptions can be studied.

### Why Charles Dickens?

Just as some literary forms lend themselves better to geographic study than do others, so too do some authors. The following criteria were developed for this thesis based on the review of studies in the sub-field of literary geography. The criteria can serve as guidelines for selecting an author(s) whose work(s) would be appropriate for geographic study. First, the author(s) should base the setting on reality; therefore verisimilitude is important. The author(s) should have extensive knowledge of the landscape in which the story is set. The author(s) should emphasize place in the writing. Finally, the author(s) should present the landscape as a depository of meaning and value.

Charles Dickens's work has been cited many times in the theoretical and philosophical discussions of the legitimacy and value of literature for geographic investigation (Salter and Lloyd 1977; Pocock 1978, 1981; Tuan 1976, 1978; Jay 1974). In addition, Dickens's literary critics and biographers reveal his concern for the social and environmental problems of nineteenth-century London and his desire to use his writing to bring attention to these problems (Drabble 1979, 204; Collins 1973, 541; Wilson 1970, 225). Therefore Dickens's writings are appropriate for geographic investigation and focus on a fundamental theme in geography -- human-environment interactions.

### Reality and Verisimilitude

In the middle of the nineteenth century a movement developed in reaction against Romanticism; writers began to feel that fidelity to actuality was essential in their literature. This literary method, often called realism, was based on a philosophical and political attitude that stressed "the truthful treatment of material" (Holman and Harmon 1986, 413). Romantic realism characterized the early stages of the movement when authors colored their writings to give

greater impact. Donald Fanger explored the use of romantic realism as a literary style in the nineteenth century and examined Dickens's use of that technique. According to Fanger, Dickens's world was,

in fact, our own world transfigured by vision, sometimes comically, sometimes pathetically. The *objects* are all real and minutely observed. It is only their functions, their relations, that are different. Circumstantial realism, realism of topography, physical ambience, dress, custom, is present, but tinged romantically with the sense of strangeness and wonder that is Dickens' own contribution to fiction and to the varieties of romantic realism (Fanger 1965, 71-72).

Dickens's use of real places has prompted numerous scholars to search out the localities made famous by his books. "The novels are crammed with vivid portrayals of localities that thousands of his readers will recognize, from the narrow lanes darkened by the walls of Lincoln's Inn to the tall genteel houses between Portland Place and Bryanston Square" (Johnson 1952, 111).

Dickens's focus on reality is best captured in his journalistic essays. Philip Drew examined a series of Dickens's papers entitled *The Uncommercial Traveller* which were published at intervals between 1859 and 1867 in All the Year Round, a periodical that Dickens edited. *The Uncommercial Traveller* is often compared with *Sketches By Boz*, which was Dickens's first published work, because they are of a similar style. According to Drew,

"What is impressive about *The Uncommercial Traveller* is Dickens's resolute insistence on seeing what is to be seen and describing it 'with scrupulous exactness': it gives the book its quality of solid circumstance, the living facts recorded by an accurate eye" (Drew 1985, 72).

Drew emphasized that Dickens was a keen observer and, when he chose to do so, could provide objective, descriptions of the real landscape. For the geographer, the writings of Charles Dickens provide detailed images of nineteenth-century London and serve as an excellent source of information about the urban environment.

### Knowledge of the Landscape

Like most writers, Charles Dickens drew on his life's experiences as material for his writing. Most of his novels and essays were set in the south of England, particularly London, where he lived from the age of ten. Occasionally other locations appear in his writings but London was his most common setting. His life-long passion for walking provided the opportunity to experience the landscape and gain a knowledge of it that few others have equalled.

Philip Collins's essay "Dickens and London" explored the author's knowledge of the city and the image of it that he portrayed to his readers (Collins 1973). Using quotes from those who knew Dickens or were contemporaries, Collins demonstrated that Dickens was unequalled in his knowledge of the city. Dickens's closest friend, John Forster, wrote, "There seemed to be not much to add to our knowledge of London until his books came upon us, but each in this respect outstripped the others in its marvels" (Collins 1973, 546). The detailed descriptions in Dickens's novels caused Walter Baghot to write in 1858, "He [Dickens] describes London like a special correspondent for posterity" (Collins 1973, 551). "He was, too, a special correspondent for the non-metropolitan reader at that time, and one tribute to the power of his projection of a vision of London is the way in which he formulated the view of it which American and Continental, and provincial, readers held" (Collins 1973, 551). Quoting eminent people such as Hawthorne and Henry James, as well as ordinary people, Collins pointed out that visitors to London were generally impressed by Dickens's accuracy of description. Dickens not only had extensive knowledge of London but was also able to describe the landscape in accurate detail.

### Emphasis on Place

According to Donald H. Ericksen, as Dickens matured in his writing, he developed what is known as a "visual narrative style" (Ericksen 1984). Ericksen writes that Dickens's visual

narrative style "refers to his tendency to create set scenes, pictures, or tableaux in which objects or people are arranged or blent so as to create montages or images that can be 'read' like the arrangements of similar details in narrative paintings" (Ericksen 1984, 35). The argument presented is that Dickens, strongly influenced by the narrative genre paintings of the 1850s and 1860s, used many of the same elements in his writing. This technique reached its full realization in *Bleak House* and represented Dickens's maturity as an artist (Ericksen 1984, 35).

Harland S. Nelson also recognized the importance of place in Dickens's writing, describing them as a series of scenes linked together by the narrator (Nelson 1981, 119). Dickens's "novelistic world is spatial, so to speak " (Nelson 1981, 120), so that his characters and plot were always carefully set in a specific location. Much of the narration of his novels was devoted to describing these locations so that the reader got the distinct impression that place was an important element of the story.

#### Landscape as a Depository of Meaning and Value

According to Robert H. Tener, "Dickens and Ruskin may be the two prose writers in all of English literature, and are certainly the two in the literature of the nineteenth century, who see the physical world most clearly and who attempt in the greatest detail to elicit and understand its meaning" (Tener 1984, 5). Dickens recognized that the landscape was a reflection of human values and feelings. In his novel *Dombey and Son* (1846-1848), Mr. Dombey observed the London slums that had been exposed to view by the completion of the railroad through Staggs's Gardens:

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. As Mr. Dombey looks out of his carriage window, it is never



in his thoughts that the monster who has brought him there has let the light of day in on those things; not made or caused them (*Dombey and Son* Ch XX, 340).

The imprint on the landscape was one of moral indifference. While literary critics debate the symbolic meaning of the passage, literally it illustrates the idea that Dickens saw this landscape as a reflection of human neglect. England was one of the most powerful nations at that time, yet thousands of its own citizens lived in extreme poverty and want because those in power chose to ignore the problems. The results of their decisions were etched on the urban landscape so clearly that Dickens couldn't fail to miss their messages. Dickens's literary landscapes present these same messages that he recognized in the material landscape of nineteenth-century London.

### The Influences on Dickens's Writings as Geographies

Charles Dickens is known as a great novelist, a social critic, an amateur actor, a philanthropist, a journalist, and an avid traveller. He can also be considered a geographer for, as David Lowenthal points out, anyone who contemplates the world is a geographer (Lowenthal 1961, 242). Dickens, however, went beyond the common development of geographical awareness. In his creative writings, he attempted to describe how his characters experienced the world. While that objective is frequently the goal of authors, Dickens's writings also attempted to explain the milieu of urban England. Thus, his approach has much in common with that taken by geographers. Scenes in Dickens's novels were not simply backgrounds upon which the action took place, but were ways of "increasing awareness of relations, complexity, ambiguity, and potentiality" (Nelson 1981, 121). Because of his extensive use of place, his writings increase our understanding of the landscapes of his novels and the reality of the world as he saw it.

Dickens's writings were strongly influenced by his life's experiences. The geographic elements in his novels and essays can be understood better when we know how humans

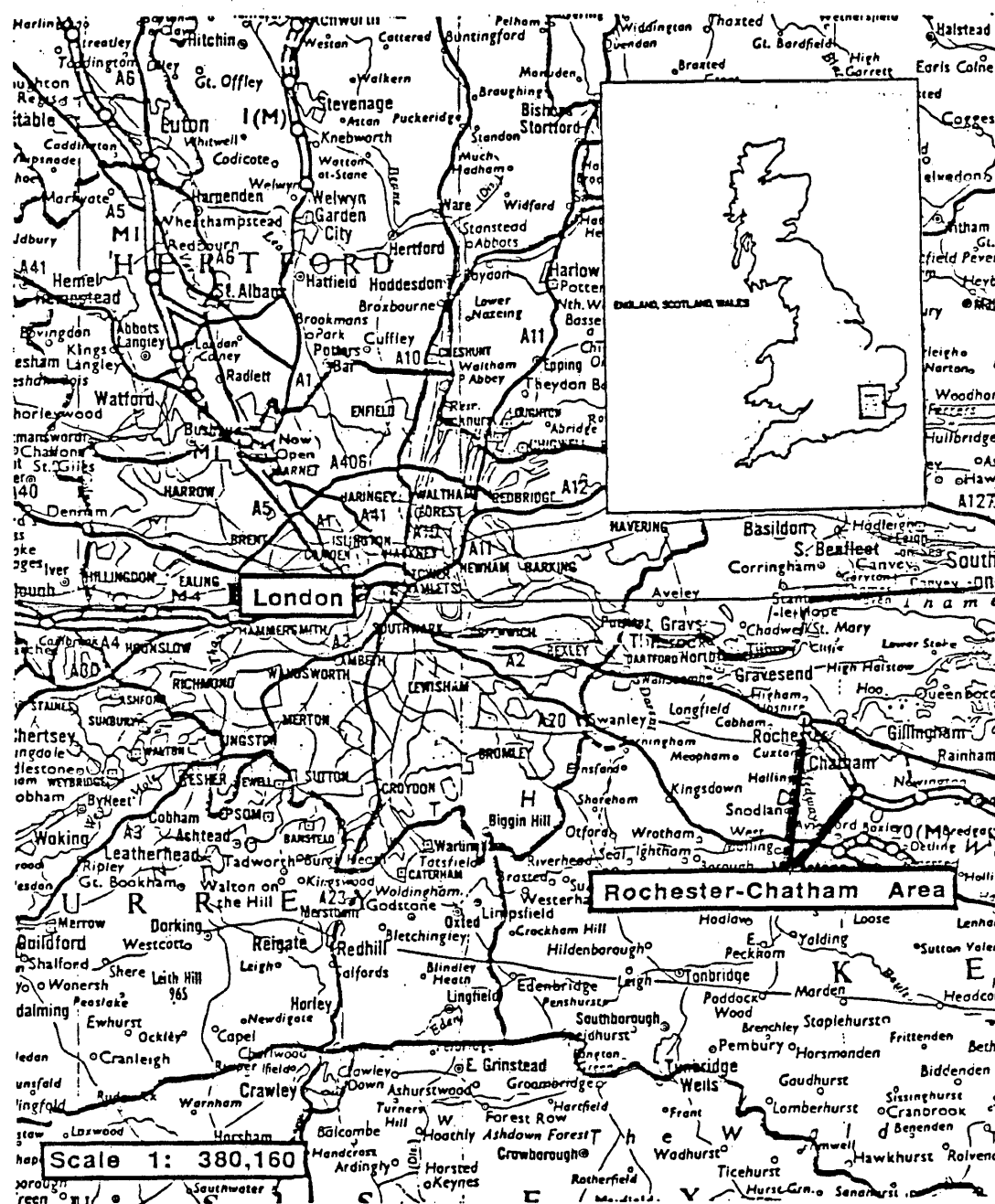
develop geographic knowledge. Lowenthal explored this topic in his essay, "Geography, Experience, and Imagination: Toward a Geographical Epistemology" (Lowenthal 1961):

Every image and idea about the world is compounded, . . . of personal experience, learning, imagination, and memory. The places that we live in, those we visit and travel through, the worlds we read about and see in works of art, and the realms of imagination and fantasy each contribute to our images of nature and man. All types of experience, from those most closely linked with our everyday world to those which seem farthest removed, come together to make up our individual picture of reality (Lowenthal 1961, 260).

Charles Dickens's writings were strongly influenced by his geographical awareness of the world and in particular, the landscape that he chose to write about most often, nineteenth-century London.

### Formal Education

There is little evidence to indicate that Charles Dickens's formal education contributed significantly to his view of the world. At the age of nine, he was enrolled in a preparatory day school in Chatham but was removed after one year because his parents were experiencing financial difficulty, a condition that plagued them most of their lives (Map 1). The Dickens family moved to Camden Town, a shabby London suburb, where young Charles was unable to continue his education at that time (Map 2). Two years later his parents' improved financial situation allowed him to enter Wellington House Academy, a mediocre private school, which offered little for a young mind as sharp and eager as his. Little is known of the subjects he studied there except that the curriculum emphasized "the classics" such as Latin. One would think that a father who had sacrificed to send his son to school, in spite of continuous financial difficulty, would be proud to have the world know of his efforts. Yet, when the elder Mr. Dickens was asked where his famous son had been educated, he replied, "Why, indeed, Sir -- ha! ha! -- he may be said to have educated himself" (Forster 1904, 53).

**ROCHESTER-CHATHAM AREA**

### Map 1

Source: Base Map Adapted From *The Reader's Digest Complete Atlas of the British Isles*.

(No Date). London: The Reader's Digest Association.

## CAMDEN TOWN



Map 2

Source: Daiches, D. and Flower, J. 1979. *The Literary Landscapes of the British Isles*. London: Paddington Press

## Books

Perhaps a greater influence on the young boy's awareness of the world, or at least on the development of his imagination, was the books he read as a child. Dickens was a voracious reader, reading the books in the family library over and over again, especially the small collection of eighteenth-century novels, which made a great impression on him (Johnson 1952, 20-21; Wilson 1970, 33-34). From these books he learned the power of words in describing places. His biographer, John Forster, relates a story that Dickens had shared with him. After reading George Coleman's *Broad Grins*, Dickens was so impressed with Coleman's description of Covent Garden that he stole down to the market to compare it with the book: "He remembered, snuffing up the flavor of the faded cabbage leaves as if it were the very breath of comic fiction" (Forster 1904, 19). According to Wilson, Dickens's autobiographical novel *David Copperfield* reveals more about the books that so impressed this young man's mind -- *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Humphrey Clinker*, *Tom Jones*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Arabian Nights* (Wilson 1970, 34). Dickens's imagination was stimulated by the geographical locations of these novels such as Defoe's imaginary island or the far-off Arabian peninsula. He stated, "Every barn in the neighborhood, every stone in the church, and every foot of the churchyard had some association of its own, in my mind, connected with these books, and stood for some locality made famous in them" (*David Copperfield* Ch IV, 71).

## Travel

As a child, Dickens had little opportunity to travel beyond the region of South England, particularly, the Rochester-Chatham area and London. It is these childhood locations that appear most often in his writings. However, when he became a successful young author, he began a life-long succession of travels within Great Britain and Ireland as well as to the continent and

America. These trips stimulated two travel books, *American Notes* and *Pictures From Italy* and two novels, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which places a portion of the story in America, and *Hard Times*, which is set in the industrial Midlands. Travel also gave him a better perspective on the locations with which he was most familiar. It was as if the exposure to new locales stimulated him to take a closer look at his own homeland.

### Walking

Without a doubt, the most important element that led to his development of geographic thought was his life-long passion for walking (Forster 1904, 86; Nelson 1981, 38, 40-41). His father took him on long excursions in the Rochester-Chatham area, where as a small boy he marvelled at the ships on the River Medway, the lovely homes, and the innocent pleasure of the English countryside. When his family was forced to move to Camden Town, young Charles became intimately familiar with the streets of London as he traveled back and forth between the debtor's prison where his father was confined and the place where he lodged. Traveling different routes each day took him through a wide variety of neighborhoods and streets. Later, as he worked as a solicitor's clerk and a newspaper reporter, Dickens developed a keen sense of observation and attention to detail that was to serve him well the rest of his life (Wilson 1970, 63-78; Johnson 1952, 51-61).

It was not unusual for Dickens to walk twenty miles in an evening just observing the urban landscape (Schwarzbach 1979, 40). He walked until he found just the correct building or street for his current project and often brought his illustrator to the site to view the scene. Later in life, when he experienced bouts of insomnia, he took up the habit of walking at night. Reports had him spotted at remotely different locations within the city so that it seemed that there must be no place that he had not explored (Collins 1973, 545). This passion for walking provided the opportunity, or perhaps the stimulus, for the development of his keen sense of observation and

attention to detail which is so accurately demonstrated in his writing. He formed impressions of the urban environment from these walks and recreated these impressions in the literary landscapes that appear over and over again in his novels and essays.

### Selection of Dickens's Writings for Analysis

Charles Dickens's prolific writing career produced fifteen novels, numerous essays and short stories, and several travel books (Figure 2). Two novels and two collections of essays have been selected as the manuscripts to be analyzed in this work: The novels *Bleak House* (1852-1853) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865), the collections of essays *Sketches by Boz* (1836) and *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1860). Examples from Dickens's other writings will be included when appropriate. Quotations from Dickens's writings are taken from the thirty-volume edition published by Peter Fenelon Collier, New York, entitled *The Works of Charles Dickens* (no date). Chapters from which the quotations are taken are identified to help the reader locate cited passages within other editions of Dickens's writings. These works were chosen because they focus on the urban landscape and because they span almost the entire period of his publishing career (1832-1870). In addition, they demonstrate Dickens's ability to use the environment in both fictional writing and journalistic reporting.

### *Sketches by Boz*

Charles Dickens's first published work was an essay which appeared in the *Monthly Magazine* in 1832. However, his real recognition came when he joined the *Morning Chronicle*, where his series of essays entitled *Sketches by Boz* first appeared (1834). They were published collectively in 1836 (Figure 3). Almost overnight, Dickens became one of the most popular writers of his day. Edgar Johnson gives an enthusiastic description of *Sketches by Boz*:

### DICKENS'S MAJOR PUBLISHED WORKS

<i>Sketches By Boz</i>	1836 Essays
<i>The Pickwick Papers</i>	1836-37 Novel
<i>Nicholas Nickleby</i>	1837-39 Novel
<i>Oliver Twist</i>	1837-39 Novel
<i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i>	1840-41 Novel
<i>Barnaby Rudge</i>	1841 Novel
<i>American Notes</i>	1842 Travel
<i>Martin Chuzzlewit</i>	1843-44 Novel
<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	1843 Short Story
<i>Pictures From Italy</i>	1846 Travel
<i>Dombey and Son</i>	1846-48 Novel
<i>David Copperfield</i>	1849-50 Novel
<i>Bleak House</i>	1852-53 Novel
<i>Hard Times</i>	1854 Novel
<i>Little Dorrit</i>	1855-57 Novel
<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	1859 Novel
<i>Great Expectations</i>	1860-61 Novel
<i>The Uncommercial Traveller</i>	1861 Essays
<i>Our Mutual Friend</i>	1864-65 Novel
<i>The Mystery of Edwin Drood</i>	1870 Novel

Figure 2



# TITLE PAGE FROM *SKETCHES BY BOZ*

FACSIMILE OF DESIGN FOR WRAPPER DRAWN BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK  
FOR MACRONE.

No. I.

Price 1s.



Figure 3

Source: Dickens, Charles. 1895. *Sketches By Boz*. New York: Macmillan And Co.

In *Sketches*, the outstanding triumph of this descriptive faculty is the sharp accuracy with which it captures exactly what the everyday observer would note as most characteristic and colorful, if only he *were* observant enough to do so. There is no distortion, no oddity of choice, but the very essence caught and transfixed, so that whether the scene is a shabby second-hand shop, a gin palace glittering with gilt and mirrors, an excursion steamer jammed with people, the flaring lights of a pantomime at Greenwich Fair, or a crowded slum with broken windows and slimy gutters, the details are still as true and the picture as convincing as when it flowed from Dickens's pen (Johnson 1952, 111).

The *Sketches* are divided into four sections: Our Parish, Scenes, Characters, and Tales. The second section, "Scenes," is considered the best by far (Wilson 1970, 83; Johnson 1952, 111) and is of greatest interest to the geographer. Angus Wilson articulates the power of "Scenes" in a way which accents its geographic qualities:

There are two pieces: "The Streets -- Night" and "The Streets -- Morning", which give in journalistic synopsis all that extraordinary sense of the city's life being extinguished to all but a few revellers and an army of the homeless, and of the city awaking again to the life of the markets -- a city still fed by carts coming in with produce from the country -- that is so essential a part of the movement of his novels. . . Coming from Dickens's own creatively tormented prowling through the city streets, they bring to the English novel for the first time a cinematic mobility: intensely detailed observation that swells out into dreamlike impressionism, forward in close-up focus and backward into out-of-focus, cloudlike shapes. Such passages in his work make earlier scenes of movement, even the occasionally brilliant crowd pieces of Sir Walter Scott, seem like old stills. In *Sketches by Boz* we see how a brilliant young journalist's observation of London's movement is just on the point of taking wings into imaginative art (Wilson 1970, 84),

The landscape has come to life in *Sketches By Boz* and we are able to sense the complex interactions that make Dickens's London real.

### *Bleak House*

*Bleak House* was published in 1852-1853, about midway in Dickens's career (Figure 4).

The novel focused on a popular topic of the day, the Courts of Chancery, which sat in judgement in inheritance cases. The bureaucratic system that surrounded Chancery had long been recognized as outdated and insensitive, and reformers of the day were calling for change.

TITLE PAGE FROM *BLEAK HOUSE*

FACSIMILE OF THE ORIGINAL WRAPPER TO THE FIRST PART.

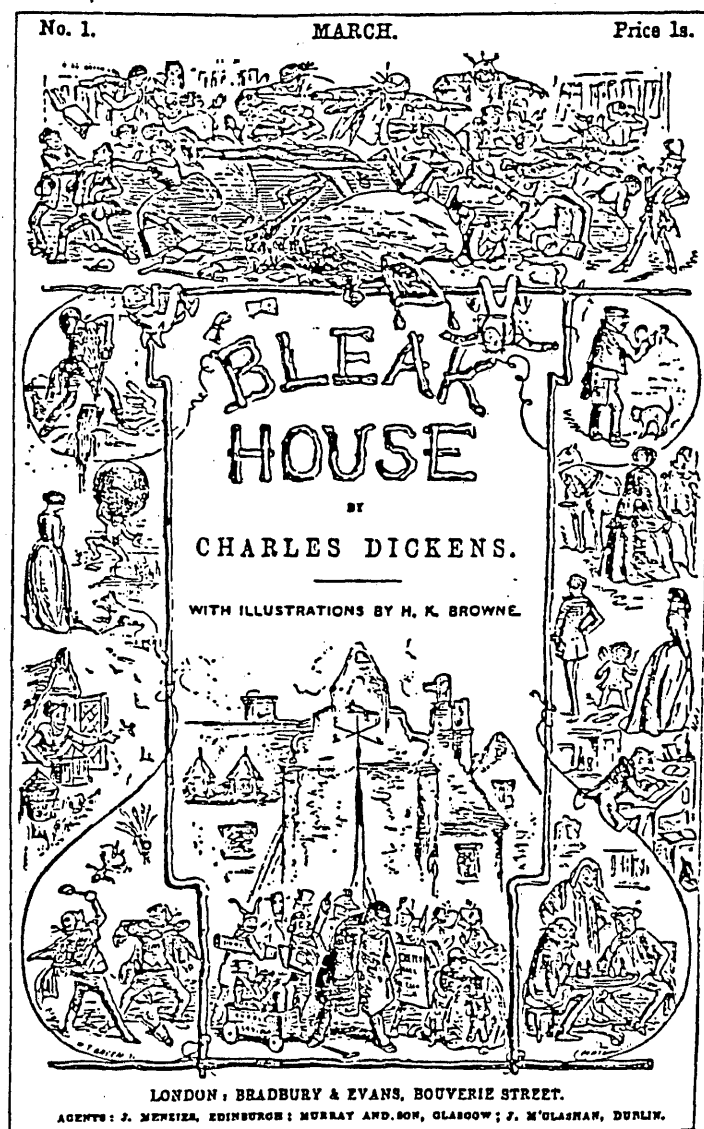


Figure 4

Source: Dickens, Charles. 1895. *Bleak House*. New York: Macmillan And Co.

Dickens chose this topic and successfully related the indifference of the system to the broad spectrum of English society; like the legal system, the social system was cruel and indifferent. Dickens examined the entire spectrum from the Lord Chancellor at the top to Jo, the homeless street sweeper and ultimate victim. For the geographer, this novel is interesting for two reasons. First, the social structure of the city is revealed as well as the character's perceptions of their environments. Also, of all of Dickens's novels, *Bleak House* used climatic elements most successfully in demonstrating the degradation of the physical environment.

### *The Uncommercial Traveller*

*The Uncommercial Traveller*, a collection of essays, was originally published as separate articles in All the Year Round (Figure 5), a weekly magazine edited by Dickens (1859-1867). Seventeen of the essays were collectively published in 1860 under the title *The Uncommercial Traveller*. Eleven more were added for a new edition in 1865. The Illustrated Library edition (1875) and the Gad's Hill edition (1890), both published after Dickens's death, added more essays with the 1890 edition containing a total of thirty-seven essays (Drew 1985, 66). This study uses the 1890 edition. Similar in style to *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens's first major publication and written late in Dickens's career, the essays of *The Uncommercial Traveller* present an interesting contrast to the earlier works. Philip Drew identified the contribution of *The Uncommercial Traveller*:

Dickens is adapting in the essays a deliberate stance and style: we may be reminded here of *Little Dorrit* and there of *Our Mutual Friend* or *Edwin Drood*, but in general Dickens is consciously working in a different and in many ways more difficult medium. We may therefore indeed come away from the essays with an enhanced opinion of Dickens's technical powers and intellectual grasp. The comparisons that are prompted by *The Uncommercial Traveller* are more naturally with social critics, with Arnold, or Shaw, or Samuel Butler, or, in the resolute refusal to see only one side of a case, with Carlyle or Ruskin. In the rapid sizing up of a mechanically complex operation only Kipling comes to mind as a rival. But such parallels serve to indicate the scope of the essays, rather than their force. For that we must return to *The Uncommercial Traveller* itself, a

TITLE PAGE FROM *ALL THE YEAR ROUND*

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal  
CONDUCTED BY  
**CHARLES DICKENS**  
WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED  
"HOUSEHOLD WORDS"

No. 1. NEW SERIES.	SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1868.	PRICE TWOPENCE.
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TO THE PUBLIC.

*A very unjustifiable paragraph has appeared in some newspapers, to the effect that I have relinquished the Editorship of this Publication. It is not only unjustifiable because it is wholly untrue, but because it must be either wilfully or negligently untrue, if any respect be due to the explicit terms of my repeatedly-published announcement of the present New Series under my own hand.*

CHARLES DICKENS.

Figure 5

Source: Wilson, Angus. 1970.

*The World of Charles Dickens*. New York: The Viking Press.

work which deserves to be recognized as that of a master of English prose at the height of his powers exhibiting the life of his own city, his own country, and his own society with the selflessness that eschews all stylistic display (Drew 1985, 81-82).

The geographer will find in these essays a wealth of information and perspectives on Victorian London. In addition, they present a view of the urban landscape by one of the most perceptive individuals of his time, twenty-five years after he first explored the great city.

### *Our Mutual Friend*

*Our Mutual Friend* is Dickens's last completed novel, published in 1864-1865 (Figure 6). In 1855, Parliament had established The Metropolitan Board of Works to develop a clean and efficient sewage removal and drainage system for the city of London. In addition, a number of new transportation systems were under construction at that time, including an underground railroad (Schwarzbach 1979, 195). These projects helped to transform the crowded, dirty walking city into a modern metropolis that was better able to deal with the urban problems that had been the focus of Dickens's earlier writings.

*Our Mutual Friend* is valuable to the geographer because it captures the dynamic nature of the city of London as it went through this transformation. It also focuses on a portion of the London landscape that was to be soon lost forever -- the Thames riverfront. The Victoria Embankment, a project to control flooding and manage the water resources of the Thames, was completed in the 1860s (Map 3). This novel centers on the riverfront as it was before the Embankment was constructed and has recorded the images and perceptions of that location.

Charles Dickens wrote about the landscapes that were most beloved and most familiar to him, the working-class neighborhoods of London. Occasionally his stories were set in other locations, but he was always drawn back to London, and the places that stimulated his creative talents. Like most authors, Dickens wrote with a purpose. He hoped his writings would bring

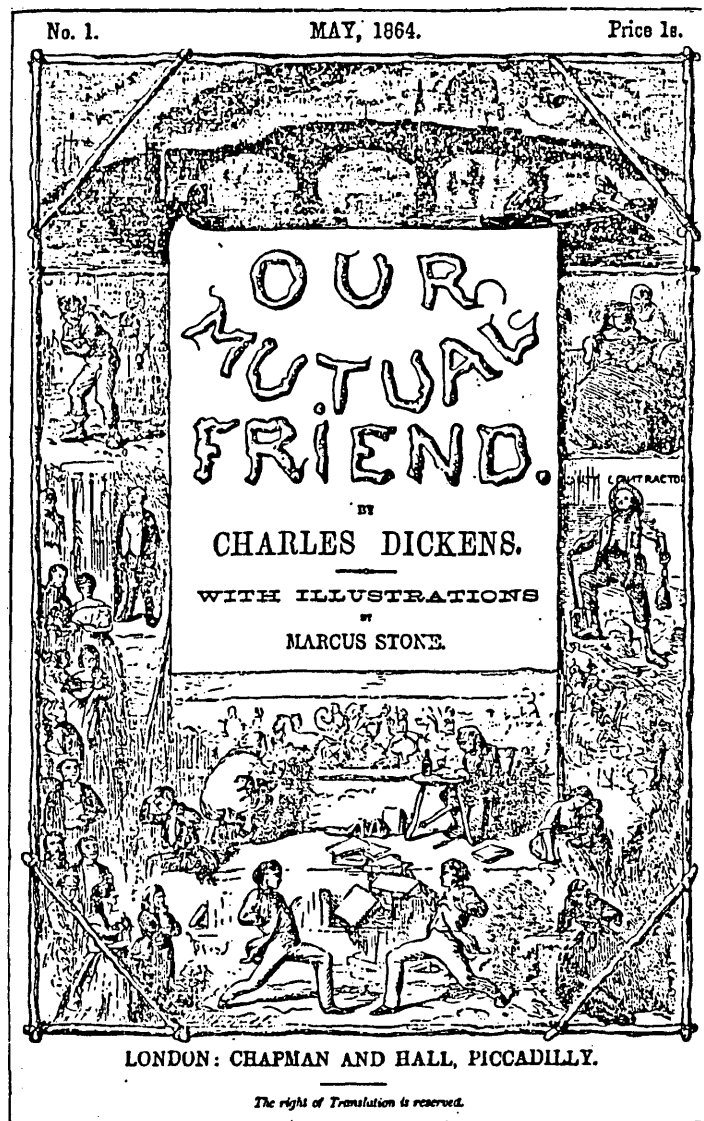
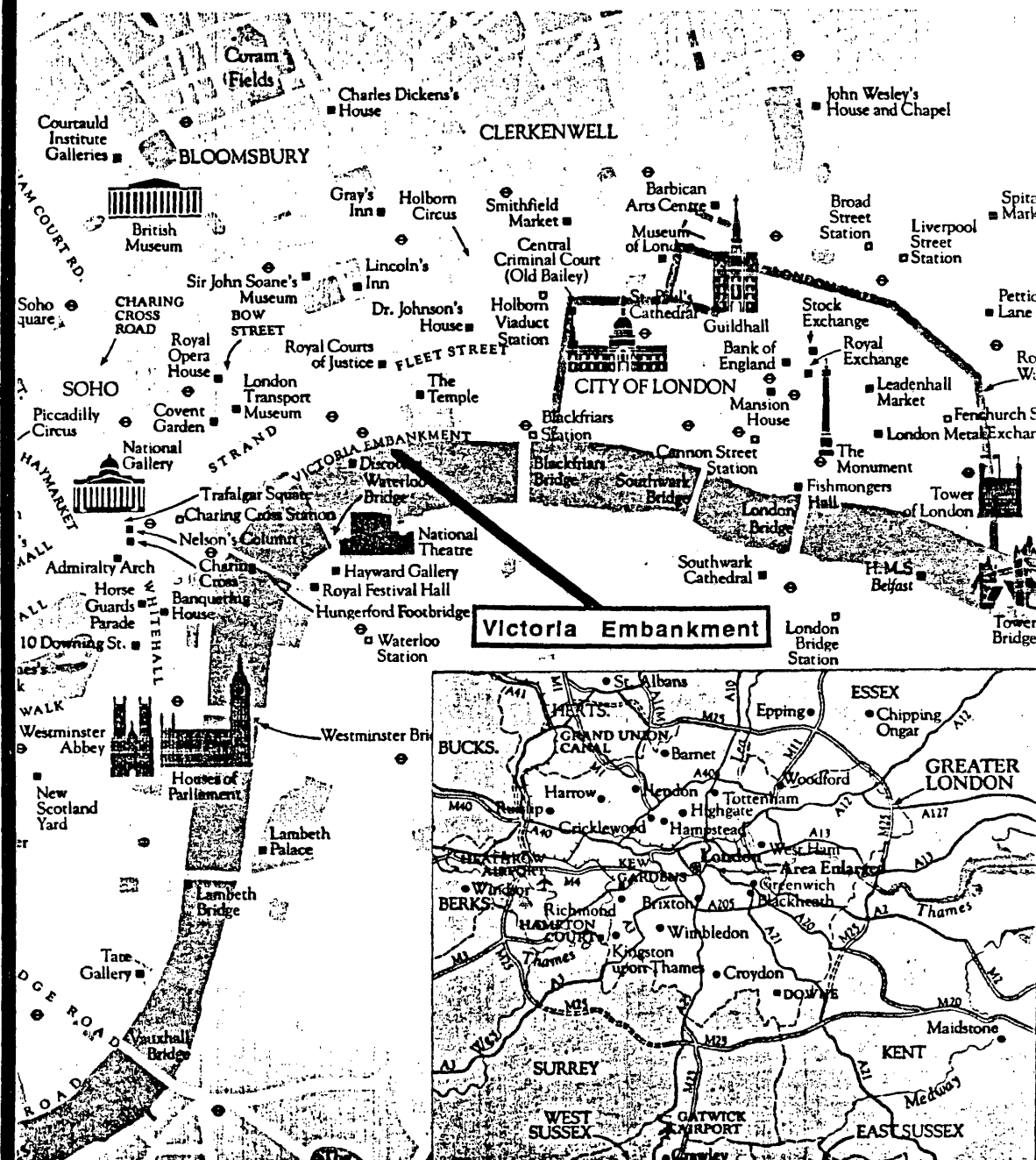
TITLE PAGE FROM *OUR MUTUAL FRIEND*

Figure 6

Source: Dickens, Charles. 1895. *Our Mutual Friend*. New York: Macmillan and Co.

# THE VICTORIA EMBANKMENT



Map 3

Source: National Geographic Society, 1985. *Discovering Britain & Ireland*.

Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society.



attention to the horrid environmental conditions in which thousands of London's residents lived. This could best be accomplished by painting vivid, but accurate pictures of these landscapes. In so doing, his writings played an important role in bringing about environmental reform in nineteenth-century London.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **THE MATERIAL LANDSCAPE OF DICKENS'S LONDON**

The goal of this thesis is to use examples from the writings of Charles Dickens to increase our understanding of his literary landscape, which is a reflection of the real world upon which it was based. Dickens hoped that by creating graphic images of the urban environment he could bring attention to the problems inherent to a rapidly growing and changing city. By analysing the material and perceptual images found in his writings, we gain a better understanding of the role this popular literature played in bringing about environmental reform in nineteenth-century London. Chapter IV will focus on Dickens's portrayal of the material landscape of London, which will include both the altered physical environment and the built environment. The following questions will be examined:

What is the climate like and how has it been altered by human actions?

What types of vegetation are evident?

What can be learned of the topography of Dickens's London?

What kind of street patterns are mentioned?

What can be learned of London's buildings and their ornamentation?

What land-uses are evident?

What forms of public transportation are used?

What environmental problems such as air and water quality are evident?

What changes are taking place on the landscape?

The following chapter will examine Dickens's values and feelings about nineteenth-century London as expressed through the thoughts, behavior, and dialogue of his characters. This study will show that the city is perceived as a dichotomy based upon character/location relationships. At times the city is viewed as a place of hostility as characters

experience repulsion, fear, loneliness, or confusion. These same characters may also be drawn to London for refuge, for the opportunity it offers, or because it symbolizes home. Thus the city is also perceived as a place of comfort. This paradox is best understood in terms of the vastness and variety of the material landscape of nineteenth-century London.

### The Altered Physical Environment of Nineteenth-century London

#### Climate

One of the most distinguishing features of the Dickens landscape is the climate, which he uses both symbolically and literally. In a 1964 study, David Lowenthal and Hugh C. Prince identified "atmosphere" as one of the important elements of the English Landscape. They write:

Climate, weather, and sky affect the appearance of landscapes everywhere. In some parts of the world the atmosphere is an inert, transparent background against which a skyline of terrestrial forms is silhouetted. In England sky and weather are active and tangible, impossible to disregard. . . The characteristic view of anything is apt to be suffused with moisture; outlines are blurred, colors are softened, the whole appearance of things is more subtle, more mysterious, more romantic, than if seen under direct sunlight. Instead of standing out clearly separated, objects melt into one another as in a dream (Lowenthal and Prince 1964, 315-316).

Indeed, Dickens recognized this characteristic of England's climate:

When I think I deserve particularly well of myself, and have earned the right to enjoy a little treat, I stroll from Covent Garden into the City of London . . . A gentle fall of rain is not objectionable, and a warm mist sets off my favorite retreats to decided advantage (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XXI, 446).

Dickens also found the mist and dampness of a winter's night equally appealing:

But the streets of London, to be beheld in the very height of their glory, should be seen on a dark, dull, murky winter's night, when there is just enough damp gently stealing down to make the pavement greasy, without cleansing it of any of its impurities; and when the heavy lazy mist, which hangs over every object, makes the gas-lamps look brighter, and the brilliantly lighted shops more splendid, from the contrast they present to the darkness around (*Sketches By Boz "Scenes"* Ch II, 66).

Dickens's rendition of London's climate is accurate, even when it is used symbolically. The British Isles has a marine west-coast climate characterized by a small range of temperatures throughout the year (Espenshade 1982, 8). According to historical climatic data, the lowest mean temperature of 36.9 F occurs in February while the highest mean temperature of 68.7 F occurs in July or August (Chandler 1965, 128). Freezing temperatures rarely occur. The average annual precipitation for London is about 23.95 inches, which is distributed in every month with the highest amounts received in the late fall and early winter, and in the summer months of July and August (Chandler 1965, 219).

In the summer, violent thunderstorms can occur with sudden intensity. A scene in the novel *Bleak House* captures such an event:

The weather had been all the week extremely sultry; but the storm broke so suddenly -- upon us, at least, in that sheltered spot -- that before we reached the outskirts of the wood, the thunder and lightening were frequent, and the rain came plunging through the leaves as if every drop were a great leaden bead. . . It was grand to see how the wind awoke, and bent the trees, and drove the rain before it like a cloud of smoke; and to hear the solemn thunder, and to see the lightning (*Bleak House* Ch XVIII, 308).

Because of the climate of the region, clear weather is a rare occurrence, with London experiencing only about twenty-nine cloudless days per year (Chandler 1965, 107). Dickens comments humorously on that phenomenon in this passage from *Sketches By Boz* :

Monday was a fine day, Tuesday was delightful, Wednesday was equal to either, and Thursday was finer than ever; four successive fine days in London! Hackney-coachmen became revolutionary, and crossing-sweepers began to doubt the existence of a First Cause. The *Morning Herald* informed its readers that an old woman in Camden Town had been heard to say that the fineness of the season was "unprecedented in the memory of the oldest inhabitant"; and Islington clerks, with large families and small salaries, left off their black gaiters, disdained to carry their once green cotton umbrellas, and walked to town in the conscious pride of white stockings and cleanly-brushed Bluchers (*Sketches By Boz* "Tales" Ch XI, 539-540).

The snow-covered landscapes depicted in many of the American commercial versions of the Dickens Landscape, such as movies, greeting cards, and Christmas paraphernalia, appear to be distortions of the author's work. In reality, snow falls only about fourteen days out of the year,

on the average, and snow is on the ground only about six days a year (Chandler 1965, 235-236). The common image many of us have of Dickens's immortal holiday classic, *A Christmas Carol*, is a snow-covered landscape as Scrooge prepares to leave his shop at the end of the day. Compare Dickens's description of the setting:

It was cold, bleak, biting weather -- foggy withal -- and he could hear the people in the court outside go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The City clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already -- it had not been light all day -- and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighboring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that, although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale (*A Christmas Carol* Stave I, 11).

There is no mention of snow, yet the Hollywood versions usually substitute the idealized American snow-covered Christmas scene for the Dickens creation. That is not to say that the Dickens landscape is completely devoid of snow, simply that snow scenes are not commonly found in his writings. When present, they are depicted as occasional events of short duration, which is fitting with the climate of the area.

In *Bleak House*, Dickens chronicles the weather over a period of about twenty-four hours. These passages realistically capture a winter snow storm that would be typical of a marine west-coast climate:

It had set in snowing at daybreak, and it now snowed hard. The air was so thick with the darkness of the day and the density of the fall, that we could see but a very little way in any direction. Although it was extremely cold, the snow was but partially frozen, and it churned -- with a sound as if it were a beach of small shells -- under the hoofs of the horses, into mire and water (*Bleak House* Ch LVII, 424).

By the end of the day the scene is changing:

The day is now beginning to decline. The mist, and the sleet into which the snow has all resolved itself, are darker. . . (*Bleak House* Ch LVIII, 441).

By the next morning, the thaw has begun:

From the portico, from the eaves, from the parapet, from every ledge, and post

and pillar, drips the thawed snow. It has crept, as if for shelter, into the lintels of the great door -- under it, into the corners of the windows, into every chink and crevice of retreat, and there wastes and dies (*Bleak House* Ch LVIII, 445).

It must be kept in mind that in the nineteenth-century, most of Europe was experiencing the very end of the "Little Ice Age", a period between 1400 and 1850 when temperatures were the coolest recorded in the past 1000 years. So it can be assumed that London may have had more snow than is indicated from the historical record of 1871-1950 used in this research (Chandler 1965, 234). Even so, his writings reflect few of the snow-covered landscapes dear to the American commercial image.

Perhaps the most commonly portrayed climatic event in Dickens's writings is London's fog, known in his time as a "London particular":

He was very obliging; and as he handed me into a fly, after superintending the removal of my boxes, I asked him whether there was a great fire anywhere? For the streets were so full of dense brown smoke that scarcely anything was to be seen.

"Oh, dear, no, miss," he said. "This is a London particular."  
I had never heard of such a thing.

"A fog, miss," said the young gentleman (*Bleak House* Ch III, 43).

Fog appears in almost every one of Dickens's novels and most of his other writings, creating a mysterious, often romantic setting. Dickens recognized the difference between the naturally occurring fog of the English countryside and that experienced by Londoners. One of his most often quoted passages demonstrates this idea:

It was a foggy day in London, and the fog was heavy and dark. Animate London, with smarting eyes and irritated lungs, was blinking, wheezing, and choking; inanimate London was a sooty specter, divided in purpose between being visible and invisible, and so being wholly neither. Gas-lights flared in the shops with a haggard and unblest air, as knowing themselves to be night-creatures that had no business abroad under the sun; while the sun itself, when it was for a few minutes dimly indicated through circling eddies of fog, showed as if it had gone out and were collapsing flat and cold. Even in the surrounding country it was a foggy day, but there the fog was grey, whereas in London it was, at about the boundary line, dark yellow, and a little within it brown, and then browner, and then browner, until at the heart of the City -- which call Saint Mary Axe -- it was rusty black. From any point of the high ridge of land northward, it might have been discerned that the loftiest buildings made an occasional struggle to get their heads above the foggy sea, and especially that the great dome of Saint Paul's seemed to die hard; but this was not perceivable in the streets at their feet, where the whole metropolis was a heap

of vapor charged with muffled sound of wheels and enfolding a gigantic catarrh  
(*Our Mutual Friend* Book III Ch I, 5-6).

Dickens uses the word "fog" to mean both the naturally occurring condensation of water vapor in the atmosphere as well as the smoke and particulate-laden fog of the urban environment, which we now call smog. The reader knows the difference by his description of its color as well as its effect on the buildings and people who lived with it. London's "fog" was an extremely severe environmental problem in nineteenth-century London and will be explored in more detail below.

Urban environments are physically complex because of the alterations made to the natural environment by human activity. The introduction of foreign materials, often man-made, such as concrete, steel, and glass alter the thermal properties of the surface materials and affect the absorption and reflection of solar radiation. In addition, the "texture" of the urban landscape is highly variable because of buildings, landscaping, and transportation systems. This variation in conditions strongly affects the speed and direction of surface winds. As Chandler has pointed out in his study of the climate of London, "wind is amongst the most fickle of elements, changing appreciably over limited distances and through short period of times" (Chandler 1965, 49).

Dickens questions this phenomenon in a humorous passage from *The Uncommercial Traveller* :

I wonder why metropolitan gales always blow so hard at Walworth. I cannot imagine what Walworth has done to bring such windy punishment upon itself as I never fail to find recorded in the newspapers when the wind has blown at all hard. Brixton seems to have something on its conscience; Peckham suffers more than a virtuous Peckham might be supposed to deserve; the howling neighborhood of Deptford figures largely in the accounts of the ingenuous gentlemen who are out in every wind that blows, and to whom it is an ill high wind that blows no good; but there can hardly be any Walworth left by this time. It must surely be blown away (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch VI, 265-266).

Dickens's writings reflect the variations of wind speeds and directions within the urban environment and help the reader experience the human impact on the natural environment.

Wind direction is also used symbolically in his writings, as in this passage from *Bleak House* :

"The wind's in the east."  
"It was in the north, sir, as we came down," observed Richard.  
"My dear Rick," said Mr. Jarndyce, poking the fire, "I'll take an oath it's either in the east, or going to be. I am always conscious of an uncomfortable

sensation now and then when the wind is blowing in the east."

"Rheumatism, sir?" said Richard.

"I dare say it is, Rick. I believe it is" (*Bleak House* Ch VI, 85).

Mr. Jarndyce experiences this perception of an easterly wind when he is confronted by an unpleasant situation. In this passage, the easterly wind is used symbolically. Schwarzbach has pointed out in his book *Dickens and the City* that London lies within the band of the westerlies so that the prevailing wind direction is from the west. The fashionable homes were located in the western part of the city, which was up-wind from the pollution plume, which normally blew down the Thames Valley to the sea (Schwarzbach 1979, 125-126). An easterly wind would increase the level of air pollution in the city, particularly for west-enders. Mr. Jarndyce's moral discomfort is expressed symbolically in the form of air pollution, which the wealthy are not as protected from as they would like to believe. As this preceding passage demonstrates, Dickens often uses accurate climatic events, such as wind patterns, symbolically as well as literally.

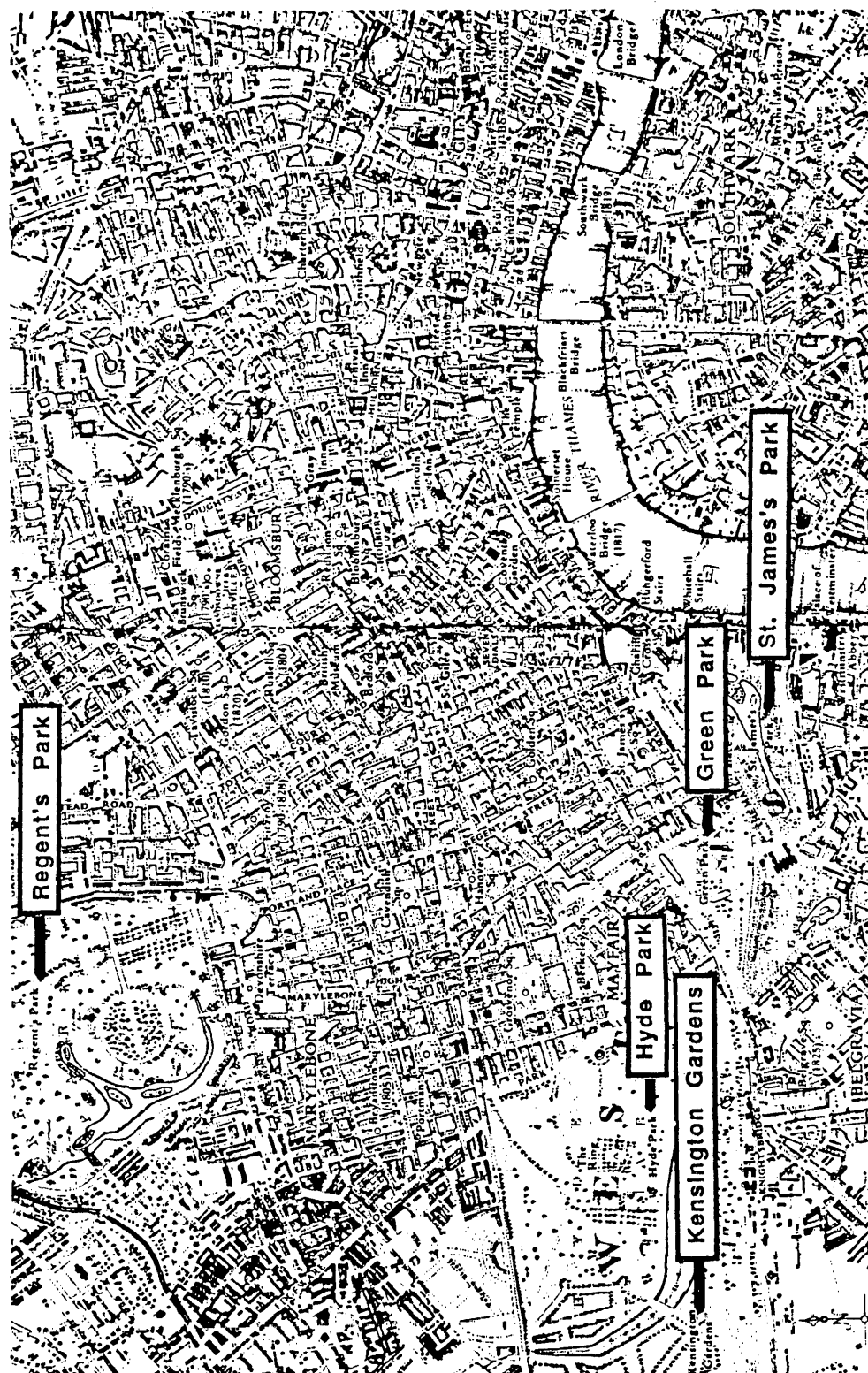
Climatologists have collected and analyzed data about England for well over a century so we now have a fairly accurate picture of the historical record of the area. Climatological data is generally presented with tables and charts and objective explanations of the material. The use of fictional writing enhances the meaning behind this data as it relates to the humans who experience it. The marine west coast climate of England and the effects of human intervention in that climate are vividly captured in Charles Dickens's novels and essays so that the reader receives the information accurately but in a different, and perhaps, more interesting format.

### Vegetation

London in Dickens's time boasted a number of parks and open spaces which he refers to as the "lungs of London" (*Sketches By Boz "Scenes"* Ch XII, 128). Regent's Park, Hyde Park, Green Park, St. James's Park, and Kensington Garden formed an extensive network of landscaped areas for west-enders (Map 4). But that was not the London of Dickens's writings,



# NINETEENTH-CENTURY LONDON PARKS



## Map 4

Source: Daiches, D. and Flower, J. 1979. *The Literary Landscapes of the British Isles*. London: Paddington Press

and he makes little reference to these areas. The vegetated London of the Dickens landscape is found in small private gardens, "Tea Gardens" on the fringes of the great metropolis, and the church yards that dotted the city.

The English passion for gardens and gardening is found throughout his writing. Neighborhood descriptions make reference to "small back gardens" (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch III, 226), which were often treed and graveled (*Sketches By Boz* "Our Parish" Ch III, 23). The vegetation is often described as stressed by the urban environment in which it is found:

Some London houses have a melancholy little plot of ground behind them, usually fenced in by four high whitewashed walls, and frowned upon by stacks of chimneys; in which there withers on, from year to year, a crippled tree, that makes a show of putting forth a few leaves late in autumn when other trees shed theirs, and, drooping in the effort, lingers on, all crackled and smoke-dried, till the following season, when it repeats the same process, and perhaps if the weather be particularly genial, even tempts some romantic sparrow to chirrup in its branches. People sometimes call these dark yards "gardens" (*Nicholas Nickleby* Ch II, 19);

While most of his characters seem to value gardens and vegetative landscaping, Dickens compares the habits and attitudes of the City man and the Suburban man in a delightful essay entitled "London Recreations":

If the regular City man, who leaves Lloyd's at five o'clock, and drives home to Hackney, Clapton, Stamfordhill, or elsewhere, can be said to have any daily recreation beyond his dinner, it is his garden. He never does anything to it with his own hands; but he takes great pride in it notwithstanding; . . . his delight in his garden appears to arise more from the consciousness of possession than actual enjoyment of it (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch IX, 108).

The Suburban man takes a much different view of his garden:

There is another and a very different class of men, whose recreation is their garden. An individual of this class resides some short distance from town -- say in the Hampstead Road, or the Kilburn Road, or any other road where the houses are small and neat, and have little slips of back garden . . . In fine weather the old gentleman is almost constantly in the garden; and when it is too wet to go into it he will look out of the window at it by the hour together. He has always something to do there, and you will see him digging, and sweeping, and cutting, and planting, with manifest delight. In spring time, there is no end to the sowing of seeds, and sticking little bits of wood over them, with labels, which look like epitaphs to their memory; and in the evening, when the sun has gone down, the perseverance with which he lugs a great watering-pot about is perfectly astonishing . . . when one of the four fruit-trees produces rather a

larger gooseberry than usual, it is carefully preserved under a wine-glass on the sideboard, for the edification of visitors, who are duly informed that Mr. So-and-so planted the tree which produced it, with his own hands (*Sketches By Boz "Scenes" Ch IX, 109*).

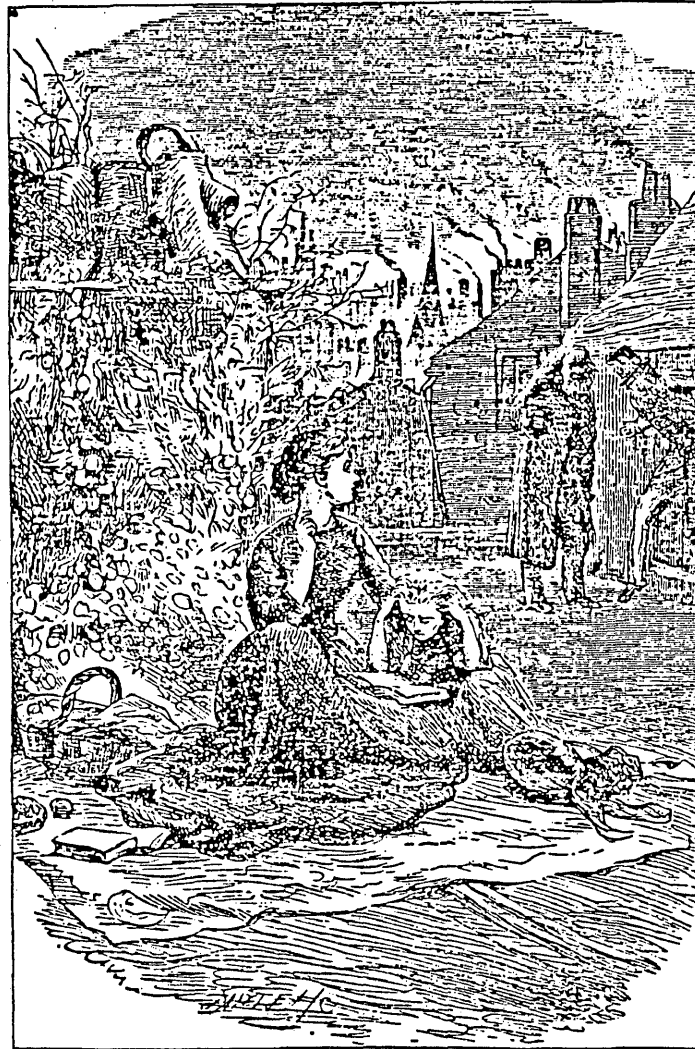
For the city man, the garden is a source of pride as a possession. He has no desire to cultivate the soil with his own hands so that the reader senses a detachment from the natural environment. His life is linked with the cycles of the city, not nature. In contrast, the suburban man is closely in tune with the seasons and the natural cycle of life and death, dormancy and revival. His pride comes not from ownership but from husbandry and production. Suburban gardens focus on the production of food items in contrast to ornamental vegetation of the city garden. The suburbs, as the word is used by Dickens, referred to rural areas that had been absorbed by the rapidly expanding city so the people, who were country folk, were used to the raising of crops and animals. This predilection for husbandry continued after the suburban areas were absorbed by the expanding city.

City gardens are often tucked away in small unused places such as alley ways or roof tops. In the novel *Our Mutual Friend*, one of the characters has established a small garden on the roof of the building where he lives and works (Figure 7). "A few boxes of humble flowers and evergreens completed the garden; and the encompassing wilderness of dowager old chimneys twirled their cowls and fluttered their smoke, rather as if they were bridling, and fanning themselves, and looking on in a state of airy surprise" (*Our Mutual Friend* Book II Ch V, 338).

For the Londoner with no garden of his own, outdoor recreation could be found in the "Tea Gardens" located on the outskirts of the city. Sunday excursions brought scores of people to these green spaces for picnicking and games. A great value was placed on these rare patches of greenery, as demonstrated in this description of Greenwich Fair:

the humblest mechanic, who has been lingering on the grass so pleasant to the feet that beat the same dull round from week to week in the paved streets of London, feels proud to think, as he surveys the scene before him, that he belongs to the country which has selected such a spot as a retreat for its oldest and best defenders in the decline of their lives (*Sketches By Boz "Scenes" Ch XII, 132*).

## RIAH'S ROOF-TOP GARDEN



THE GARDEN ON THE ROOF.

Figure 7

Source: Dickens, Charles. 1895. *Our Mutual Friend*. New York: Macmillan and Co.

Another popular Tea Garden was Vauxhall Gardens, which is now well within the city but in Dickens's time was near the transition area into the rural parts of England. He writes of "the shade of the tall trees" and the "illuminated groves" (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch XIV, 146) in Vauxhall Gardens, which contrast to the sooty, crowded city the pleasure seekers were trying to escape.

Within the city, the few patches of greenery other than the small private gardens were found in the churchyards (Figure 8). The trees mentioned are the Lombardy Poplar or plane tree, which are common varieties found in cemeteries. Here, as in other scenes of the urban setting, vegetation is sparse and unhealthy:

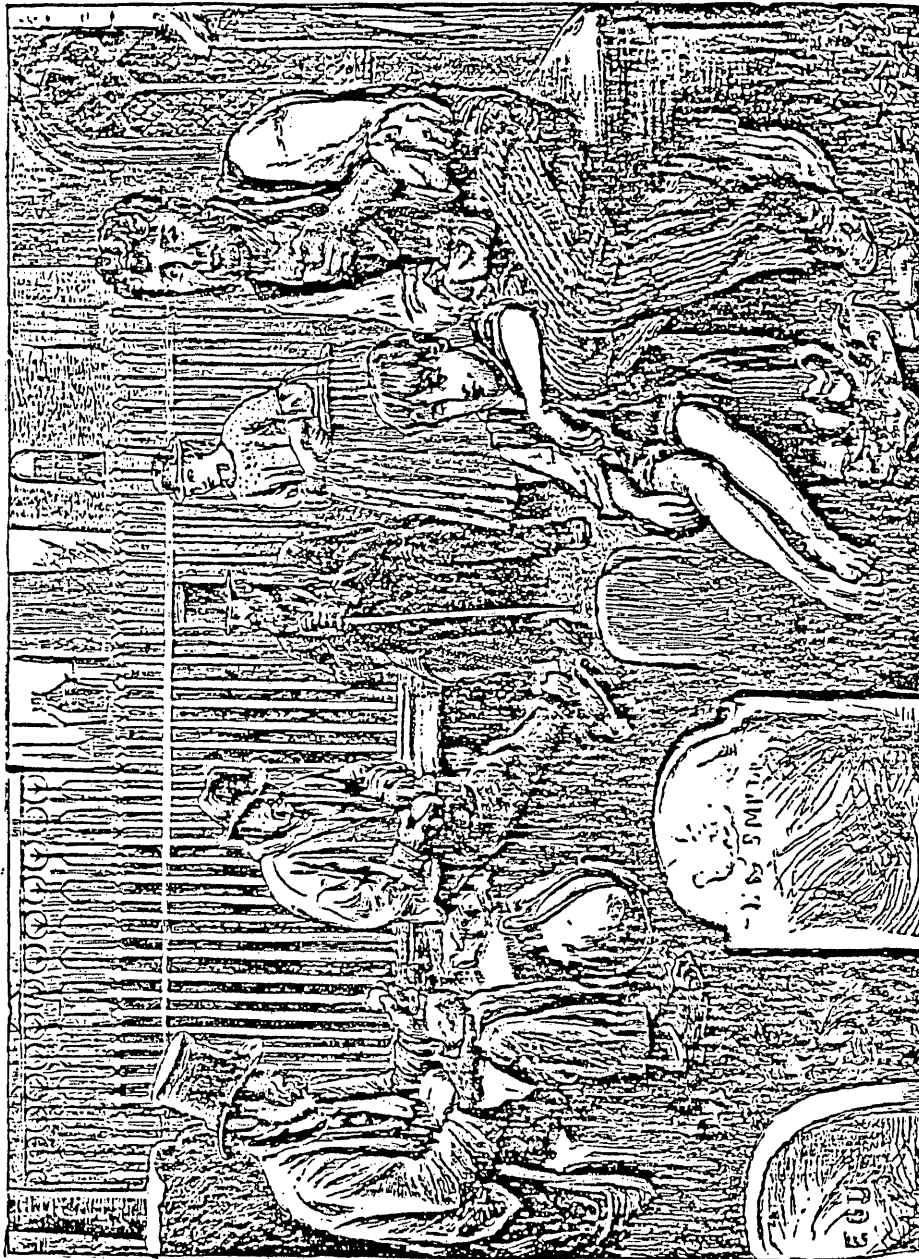
. . . any tokens of vitality, are rare indeed in my City churchyards. A few sparrows occasionally try to raise a lively chirrup in their solitary tree -- perhaps as taking a different view of worms from that entertained by humanity -- but they are flat and hoarse of voice . . . caged larks, thrushes or blackbirds, hanging in neighboring courts, pour forth their strains passionately, as scenting the tree, trying to break out, and see leaves again before they die (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XXI, 450);

There were churches also, by dozens, with many a ghostly little churchyard, all overgrown with such straggling vegetation as springs up spontaneously from damp, and graves, and rubbish. In some of these dingy resting places -- which bore much the same analogy to green churchyards as to the pots of earth for mignonette and wallflower in the window overlooking them did to rustic gardens -- there were trees, tall trees, still putting forth their leaves in each succeeding year, with such a languishing remembrance of their kind (so one might fancy, looking on their sickly boughs) as birds in cages have theirs (*Martin Chuzzlewit* Ch IX, 165-166).

The churchyard trees and the caged birds seem to have a symbiotic relationship, perhaps symbolizing the relationship between the "trapped" urban residents and the scarcity of green spaces for London's working class residents.

The Dickens landscape is unnatural and unhealthy, which is probably an accurate portrayal of nineteenth-century London. Urban scholars have uncovered the environmental problems of the city at that time; Dickens articulates them in a way that makes them more understandable. The struggle for survival in a harsh environment, such as the streets of London,

# PICNIC IN THE CHURCHYARD



"BLANKING OLD MEN WHO ARE LET OUT OF WORKHOUSES BY THE HOUR, HAVE A TENDENCY TO SIT ON BITS OF COFFIN STONE IN THESE CHURCHYARDS. . . . THE MORE DEPRESSED CLASS OF BEGGARS TOO, BRING HITLER BROKEN MEATS, AND MUNCH."—"THE CITY OF THE ABSENT."

Figure 8

Source: Dickens, Charles. (No Date). *The Uncommercial Traveler*. New York: P. F. Collier.

forced many to utilize whatever resources were at hand. In the following paragraph, Dickens recounts a scene observed in a city churchyard "last summer on a Volunteering Saturday evening toward eight of the clock":

I beheld an old, old man and an old, old woman in it, making hay -- yes, of all occupations in this world, making hay! It was a very confined patch of churchyard lying between Gracechurch Street and the Tower, capable of yielding say an apronful of hay. By what means the old, old man and woman had gotten into it, with an almost toothless hay-making rake, I could not fathom. They used the rake with a measured action, drawing the scanty crop toward them; and so I was fain to leave them under three yards and a half of darkening sky, gravely making hay among the graves, all alone by themselves (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XXI, 448-449).

The small amounts of grass that did grow in these churchyards are presented as a valuable resource, both in the material sense as well as in the psychological sense. The process of harvesting was presented as uplifting and joyful in the oppressive urban environment. Scenes such as this can be interpreted to indicate Dickens's predilection for the rural over the urban which was identified by Lowenthal and Prince in their study of English landscape tastes. The English "abominate city life and regard towns as prisons to flee from at every opportunity. Townsmen though they are, they still think of rural England as home, the countryside as the essential nation" (Lowenthal and Prince 1965, 187).

The crowded walking city could spare little space for trees and grass and the sooty, smoky environment treated them with indifference, at best. While traditional greenery struggled to survive in Dickens's London, molds and slime proliferated:

Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half-a-dozen houses, with holes from which to look upon the slime beneath . . . (*Oliver Twist* Ch L, 454).

Allied to the bottom of the river rather than the surface, by reason of the slime and ooze with which it was covered, and its sodden state, this boat and the two figures in it obviously were doing something that they often did (*Our Mutual Friend* Book I Ch I, 6),

On the shelving bank of the river, among the slimy stones of a causeway . . . (*Our Mutual Friend* Book I Ch XIII, 199),

I choose my church, and go up the flight steps to the great entrance in the tower. A mouldy tower within, and like a neglected wash-house . . . (*The*

*Uncommercial Traveller* Ch IX, 303).

. . . rot and mildew and dead citizens formed the uppermost scent . . . (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch IX, 310),

The environment is seen as unhealthy, producing only signs of human destruction and decay.

Dickens views the vegetation of the rural scene as innocent, lush, and healthy, in contrast to the sparse and sickly vegetation of the city. This picture of the pastoral landscape of rural England was first presented in a collection of essays titled *Pickwick Papers*, which launched the author on his writing career with the stories of Samuel Pickwick and his group of adventurous friends:

Bright and pleasant was the sky, balmy the air, and beautiful the appearance of every object around, as Mr. Pickwick leaned over the balustrades of Rochester Bridge, contemplating nature, and waiting for breakfast. The scene was indeed one which might well have charmed a far less reflective mind than that to which it was presented.

On the left of the spectator lay the ruined wall, broken in many places, and in some overhanging the narrow beach below in rude and heavy masses. Huge knots of sea-weed hung upon the jagged and pointed stones, trembling in every breath of the wind; and the green ivy clung mournfully round the dark and ruined battlements. Behind it rose the ancient castle, its towers roofless, and its massive walls crumbling away, but telling us proudly of its own might and strength, as when, seven hundred years ago, it rang with the clash of arms, or resounded with the noise of feasting and revelry. On either side the banks of the Medway, covered with corn-fields and pastures, with here and there a windmill, or a distant church, stretched away as far as the eye could see, presenting a rich and varied landscape, rendered more beautiful by the changing shadows which passed swiftly across it, as the thin and half-formed clouds skimmed away in the light of the morning sun (*The Pickwick Papers* Ch V, 79-80).

In contrast to the slime and molds of the city, the seaweed and ivy are vibrant and alive. The ruins of the ancient castle are viewed as picturesque and historic, another characteristic of English landscape tastes identified by Lowenthal and Prince (Lowenthal & Prince 1965, 196). This landscape is bountiful and productive, a place where hunger is unknown, which contrasts with many of the urban landscapes in his writings. Dickens's writings continued to be dotted with pastoral scenes, but they never captured his imagination in the way the urban environment did.

Vegetation in Dickens's London was a scarce commodity. Small private gardens were a



source of pride and recreation for those who owned them; however for much of the middle-class, Tea Gardens on the edge of the city provided a weekend retreat, while those who could afford it were able to escape into the idealized pastoral landscape of the English countryside. The urban poor, trapped in the city, found small glimpses of greenery and pastoral delight in the city churchyards.

### Topography

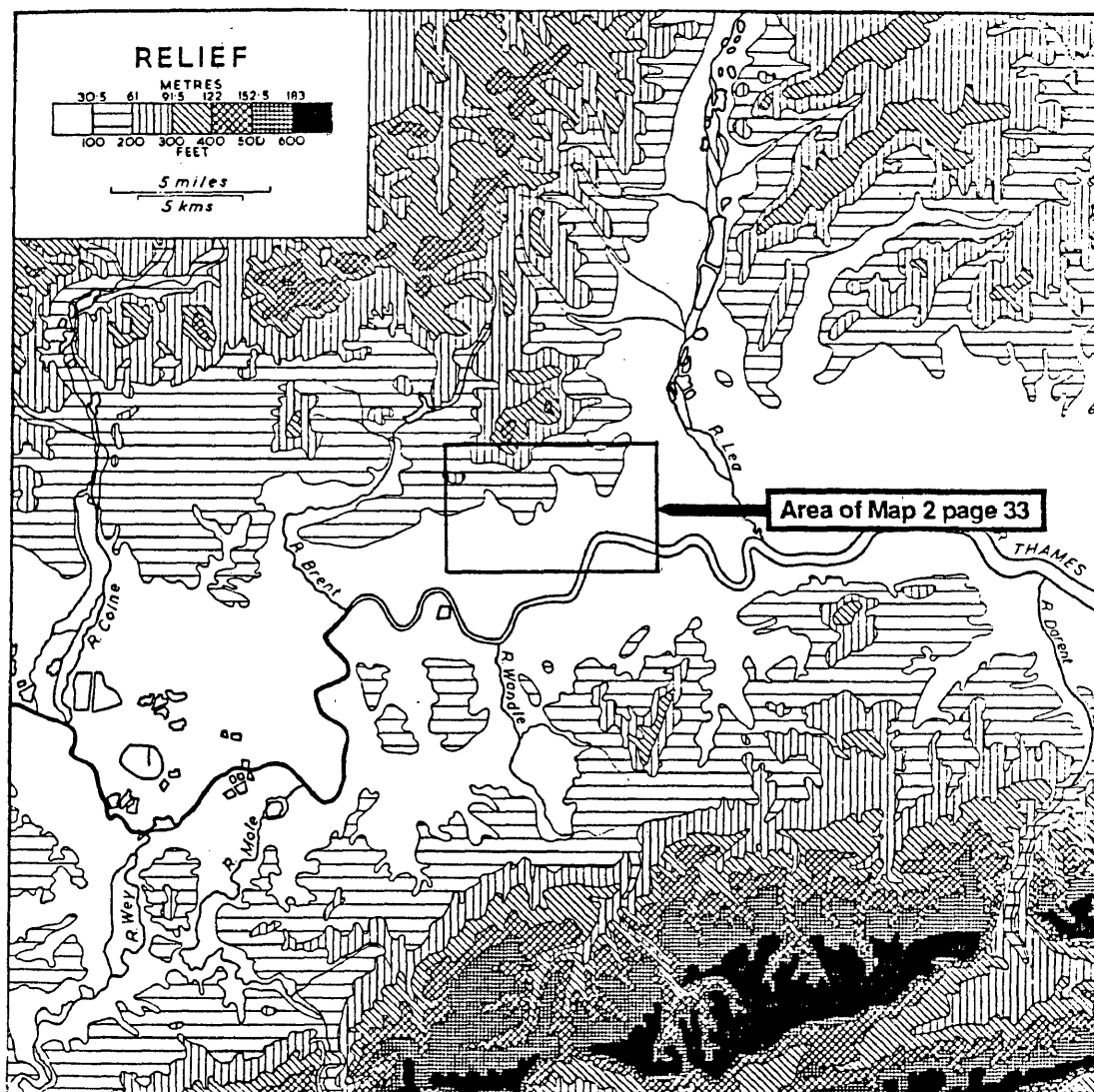
The site of the present city of London had been occupied for centuries before Dickens's time. Layers of ruins piled upon one another as successive groups of people occupied the banks of the Thames River. The succeeding groups of conquerors -- Celtic, Roman, Norman, Viking, Saxon -- each made extensive alterations to the landscape, and remnants of their contributions are still visible. Dickens occasionally refers to the "narrow hilly streets in the City that tend due south to the Thames" (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch IX, 302), which reflect the folded topography of the English lowlands. These hills ran parallel to the river valley and strongly influenced the street patterns of the early city. Most of the urban area of nineteenth-century London occupied the central London basin between the chalk outcrops on the northwest and an area of higher hills to the south, some exceeding eight hundred feet in relief (Map 5).

The topographical features produced by the Thames River are most often mentioned in the novel *Our Mutual Friend*, which focuses on the riverside landscape of the city (Figure 9):

The schools -- for they were twofold, as the sexes -- were down in that district of the flat country tending to the Thames, where Kent and Surrey meet, and where the railways still bestride the market-gardens that will soon die under them (*Our Mutual Friend* Book II Ch I, 263-264).

An examination of the topographical map reveals that the area mentioned is at the site where the river meanders northward to make a broad loop south of the city of London. The broad, level flood plain would have been a desirable location for agricultural activities. In the same novel he

# TOPOGRAPHIC MAP OF LONDON



Map 5

Source: Chandler, T. J. 1965. *The Climate of London*. London: Hutchinson & Co.

# THE THAMES



"LIZZIE, LOOKING FOR HER FATHER, SAW HIM COMING, AND STOOD UPON THE CAUSEWAY THAT HE MIGHT SEE HER."

Figure 9

Source: Dickens, Charles. (No Date). *Our Mutual Friend*. New York: P. F. Collier.

writes of a "high ridge of land northward", which could be a reference to the river terraces west of the Lea, a tributary of the Thames which enters the main river on the eastern side of the city (*Our Mutual Friend* Book III Ch I, 5).

Before modern river management, the ocean tide was evident as far inland as London, a distance of about sixty-five miles. Dickens captures the daily effects of the ocean tides on the streets and banks of the river:

A little winding through some muddy alleys, that might have been deposited by the last ill-savored tide, brought them to the wicket-gate . . . (*Our Mutual Friend* Book I Ch III, 32).

Or here, where the structures along the river are threatened by high tides:

This description applies to the river-frontage of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters . . . [which] was all but afloat at high water (*Our Mutual Friend* Book I Ch VI, 76-77).

Dickens seems to recognize the relationship between the natural physical features upon which the city developed and the way in which human occupants have altered and adapted to the physical restraints of topography. By closely reading his books, we can gain some insight into the historical development of the city of London.

### The Built Environment of Nineteenth-century London

#### Street Patterns

One of the most distinct imprints humans make on the landscape is the result of transportation routes. Roads, canals, and railroads, for example, often require extensive alterations of the natural terrain and remain etched on the landscape for great periods of time. The streets of nineteenth-century London still retained the irregular pattern dictated by natural topography before modern transportation innovations brought about a widening and straightening of the streets. London's street pattern appears to have little meaning at first glance,

but an examination of nineteenth-century maps of the city shows streets to be radiating away from the Thames River (Maps 6 and 7). Dickens describes them as "narrow hilly streets in the City that tend due south to the Thames" (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch IX 302). Also, the city is bisected by a number of major thoroughfares such as Holborn and Fleet Street (Map 8), which Dickens comments on as having a great deal of traffic (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch XVIII, 164). Some of these thoroughfares were quite modern for their day. Take for example his description of the Waterloo Road:

Here is a straight, broad, public thoroughfare of immense resort; half a mile long; gas-lighted by night; with a great gas-lighted railway station in it, extra the street lamps; full of shops; traversed by two popular cross-thoroughfares of considerable traffic; itself the main road to the South of London (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XXXVI, 601).

Yet, much of London was made up of a confusing maze of streets and alleys which were "narrow and ill paved" (*Bleak House* Ch XLIX, 301). Strangers often found themselves lost or confused. Esther Summerson, the main character of the novel *Bleak House*, comments on this upon her arrival in London:

We drove slowly through 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 (*Bleak House* Ch III, 43-44).

One such infamous location which served as the setting for much of Dickens's writings was a place known as the Seven Dials (Map 8) because of its street pattern:

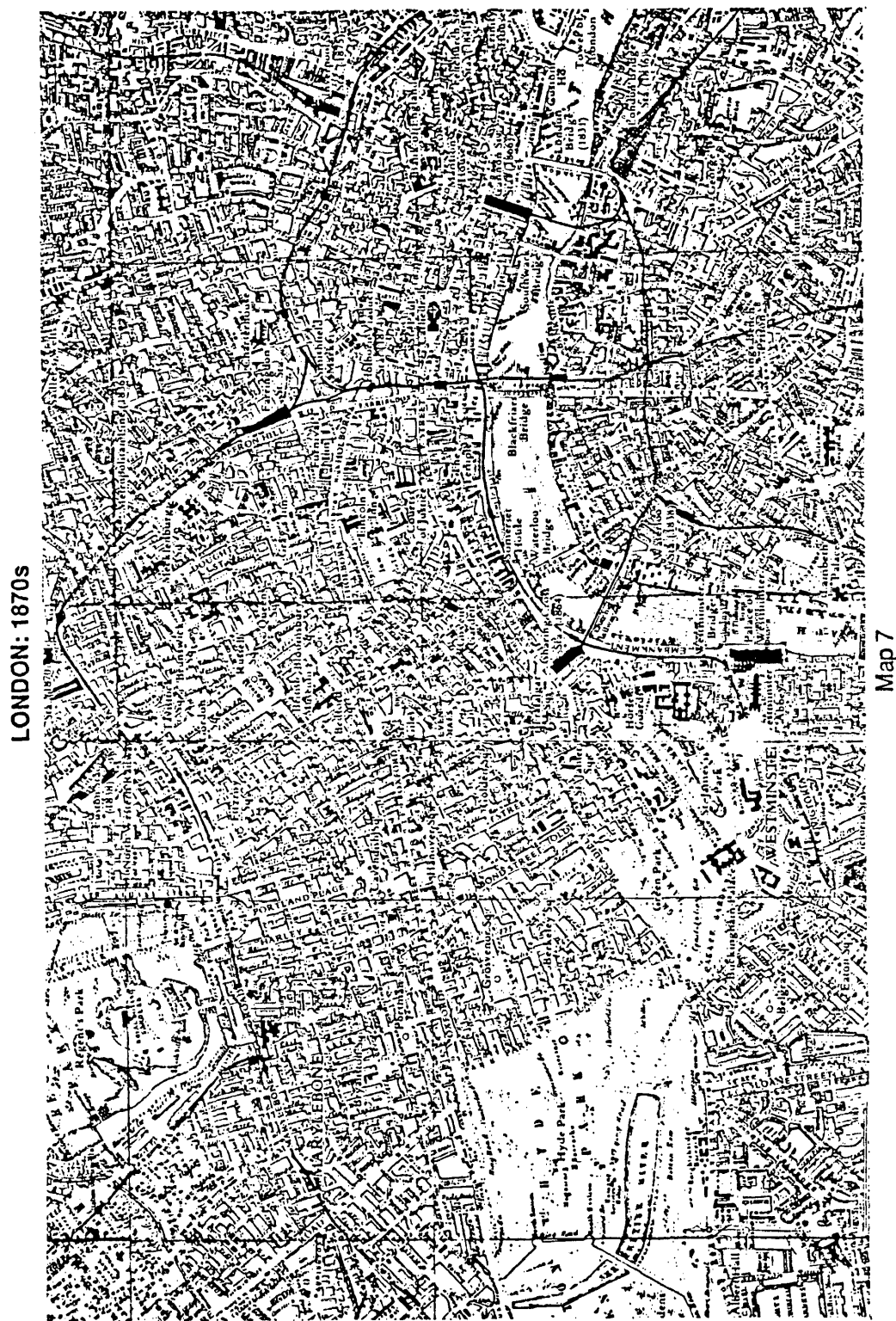
Where is there such another maze of streets, courts, lanes, and alleys? Where such a pure mixture of Englishmen and Irishmen, as in this complicated part of London? . . . . .  
The stranger who finds himself in "The Dials" for the first time, and stands, Belzoni-like, at the entrance of seven obscure passages, uncertain which to take, will see enough around him to keep his curiosity and attention awake for no inconsiderable time. From the irregular square into which he has plunged, the streets and courts dart in all directions, until they are lost in the unwholesome vapor which hangs over the house-tops, and renders the dirty perspective uncertain and confined; and lounging at every corner, as if they came there to take a few gasps of such fresh air as had found its way so far, but is too much exhausted already to be enabled to force itself into the narrow alleys around, are groups of people, whose appearance and dwellings would fill any mind but a regular Londoner's with astonishment (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch V, 83).

## LONDON: EARLY 19TH CENTURY



Map 6

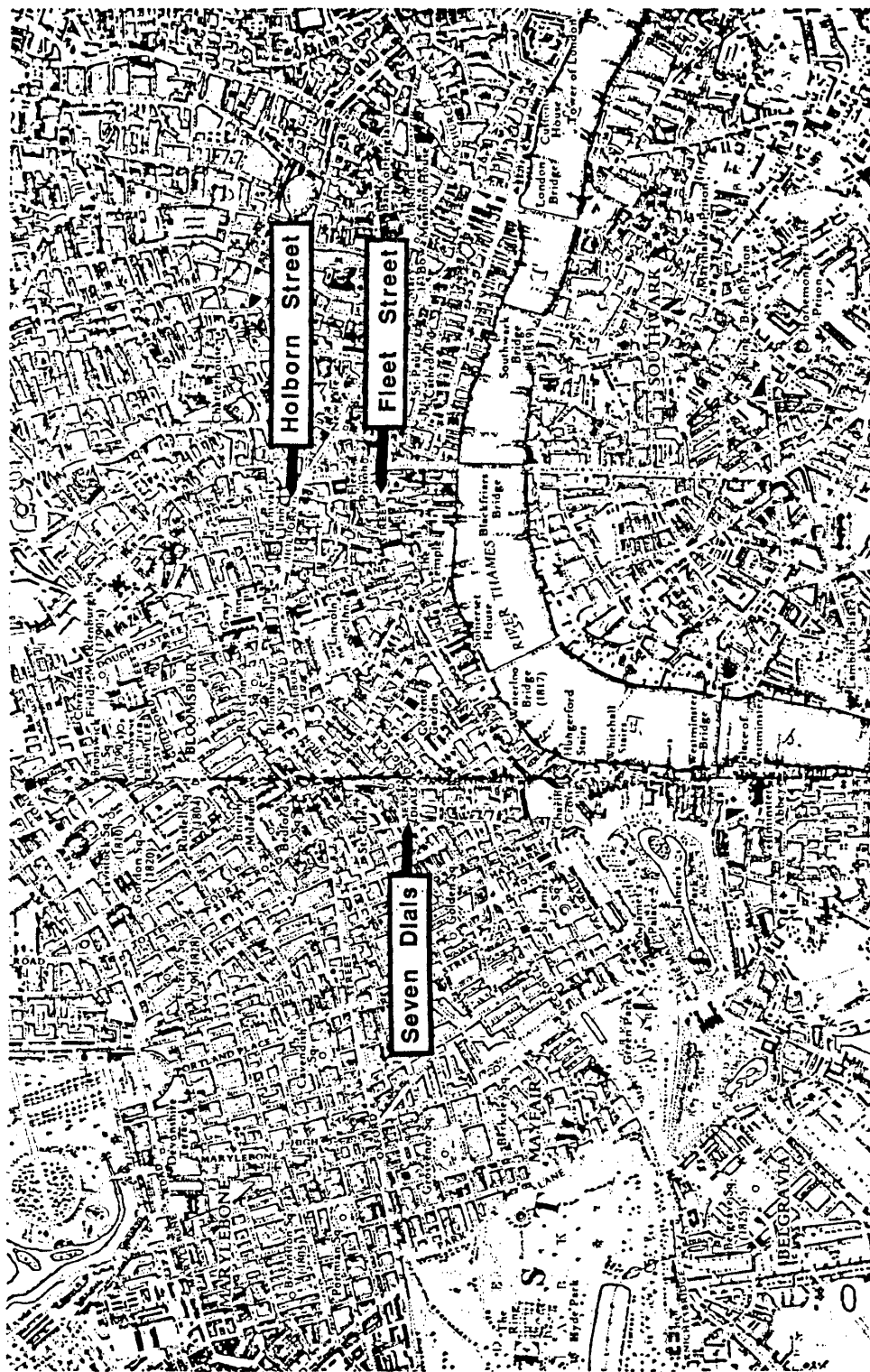
Source: Daiches, D. and Flower, J. 1979. *The Literary Landscapes of the British Isles*. London: Paddington Press



Source: Daiches, D. and Flower, J. 1979. *The Literary Landscapes of the British Isles*. London: Paddington Press



## LONDON'S STREETS



Map 8

Source: Daiches, D. and Flower, J. 1979. *The Literary Landscapes of the British Isles*. London: Paddington Press



This type of irregular street pattern held a certain fascination for Dickens, and many of his neighborhoods are set in a confused, jumbled layout. Take for example, this description of Todgers's neighborhood:

You couldn't walk about in Todgers's neighborhood, as you could in any other neighborhood. You groped your way for an hour through lanes and byways, and courtyards and passages; and never once emerged upon anything that might be reasonably called a street. A kind of resigned distraction came over the stranger as he trod those devious mazes, and, giving himself up for lost, went in and out and round about, and quietly turned back again when he came to a dead wall or was stopped by an iron railing, and felt that the means of escape might possibly present themselves in their own good time, but that to anticipate them was hopeless. Instances were known of people who, being asked to dine at Todgers's, had traveled round and round it for a weary time, with its very chimney pots in view; and finding it, at last, impossible of attainment, had gone home again with a gentle melancholy on their spirits, tranquil and uncomplaining. Nobody had ever found Todgers's on a verbal direction, though given within a minute's walk of it. Cautious emigrants from Scotland or the North of England had been known to reach it safely by impressing a charity-boy, town-bred, and bringing him along with him; or by clinging tenaciously to the postman; but these were rare exceptions, and only went to prove the rule that Todgers's was a labyrinth whereof the mystery was known but to a chosen few (*Martin Chuzzlewit* Ch IX, 165).

The narrow, winding streets were more conducive to foot travel because they carried less vehicular traffic. Dickens's passion for walking made these locations more appealing to him. In addition, these streets were often in the poorer neighborhoods where Dickens found the stimulus for his reform writings. London did have some wide, straight roads but they were not as interesting to him or as often mentioned as the irregular patterns of the back streets.

### Buildings

Specific architectural styles are difficult to identify in Dickens's writings, but his frequent references to the look of certain buildings give some clues to the general architectural character of the city. Like contemporary London, nineteenth-century London was not afraid to experiment with new styles and embellishments. Dickens wrote a humorous essay on the rapidity with which the city incorporated new ideas into the design and construction of its buildings, particularly the

commercial establishments, and the changes in land use:

It is a remarkable circumstance that different trades appear to partake of the disease to which elephants and dogs are especially liable, and to run stark, staring, raving mad periodically. . . . .  
 We will cite two or three cases in illustration of our meaning. Six or eight years ago, the epidemic began to display itself among the linen-drapers and haberdashers. The primary symptoms were an inordinate love of plate-glass and a passion for gas-lights and gilding. The disease gradually progressed, and at last attained a fearful height. Quiet dusty old shops in different parts of town were pulled down; spacious premises, with stuccoed fronts and gold letters, were erected instead; floors were covered with Turkey carpets; roofs supported by massive pillars; doors knocked into windows; a dozen squares of glass into one; one shopman into a dozen . . . The disease abated. It died away. A year or two of comparative tranquility ensued. Suddenly it burst out again among the chemists; the symptoms were the same, with the addition of a strong desire to stick the royal arms over the shop door, and a great rage for mahogany, varnish, and expensive floor-cloth. Then, the hosiers were infected, and began to pull down their shop fronts with frantic recklessness. The mania again died away, and the public began to congratulate themselves on its entire disappearance, when it burst forth with tenfold violence among the publicans, and keepers of "wine-vaults." From that moment it has spread among them with unprecedented rapidity, exhibiting a concatenation of all the previous symptoms; onward it has rushed to every part of town, knocking down all the old public-houses, and depositing splendid mansions, stone balustrades, rosewood fittings, immense lamps, and illuminated clocks, at the corner of every street (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch XXII, 206-208).

This passage implies that London is always changing and always experimenting in its architectural design and embellishments. More important, Dickens seems to delight in architectural fads, which are so much a part of the urban scene. Also, he shows little interest in what might be termed "high architecture", preferring instead the vernacular styles of the local region.

Some of nineteenth-century London's architectural characteristics appear over and over in Dickens's writings. For example, a common house type appeared to be the row house:

Our parish is a suburban one, and the old lady lives in a neat row of houses in the most airy and pleasant part of it (*Sketches By Boz* "Our Parish" Ch II, 17-18).

The row of houses in which the old lady and her troublesome neighbor reside comprises . . . (*Sketches By Boz* "Our Parish" Ch III, 22).

It was a little row of houses, with little squalid patches of ground before them, fenced off with old doors, barrel staves, scraps of tarpaulin, and dead bushes; with bottomless tin kettles and exhausted iron fenders thrust into the gaps. Here, the Staggs's Gardeners trained scarlet beans, kept fowls and rabbits,

erected rotten summer houses (one was an old boat), dried clothes and smoked pipes (*Dombey and Son* Ch VI, 84).

The passages above that describe row houses all refer to suburban locations; however, the row house was not confined to the suburbs, being found in the city as well:

It is a dull street under the best conditions; where the two long rows of houses stare at each other with that severity, that half a dozen of its greatest mansions seem to have been slowly stared into stone, rather than originally built in that material (*Bleak House* Ch XLVIII, 273-274).

The buildings in Dickens's writings are made of a variety of materials and often embellished with iron work or brass:

Complicated garnish of iron-work entwines itself over the flights of steps . . . (*Bleak House* Ch XLVIII, 274)

Crossing a quiet and shady courtyard, paved with stone, and frowned upon by old red-brick houses, on the doors of which were painted the names of sundry learned civilians, we pause before a small, green-baized brass-headed-nailed door . . . (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch VIII, 101).

. . . it was a narrow lopsided wooden jumble of corpulent windows heaped one upon another. . . (*Our Mutual Friend* Book I Ch VI, 76).

. . . in addition to a brass plate upon the street door, and another brass plate two sizes and a half smaller upon the left hand door post, surmounting a brass model of an infant's fist grasping a fragment of a skewer, and displaying the word "Office," it was clear that Mr. Ralph Nickleby did, or pretended to do, business of some kind (*Nicholas Nickleby* Ch II, 17).

Gables seem to be an important architectural element of Dickens's buildings, as he mentions them frequently:

Behind the most ancient part of Holborn, London, where certain gabled houses some centuries of age still stand . . . (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood* Ch XI, 307).

The top of the house was worthy of notice. . . Gables, housetops, garret-windows, wilderness upon wilderness. Smoke and noise enough for all the world at once (*Martin Chuzzlewit* Ch IX, 168).

Most of the buildings are multistoried structures, typical of the densely populated nineteenth-century city of London. Some houses even reflect the medieval practice of extending the upper stories of the buildings over the streets:

. . . we turned up under an archway, to our destination; a narrow street of high

houses, like an oblong cistern to hold the fog (*Bleak House* Ch IV, 51).

. . . he walks beneath tottering house-fronts projecting over the pavement (*Oliver Twist* Ch L, 454).

Like the irregular street patterns, irregularly shaped buildings fascinated Dickens. Again, there is the feeling of confusion and disorientation for those who are unfamiliar with the structure. Perhaps the best description of such a building is that of Bleak House in the novel of the same title. While this house is not in London, it is typical of the irregular house types in Dickens's writings:

It was one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another, and where you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are, and where there is a bountiful provision of little halls and passages, and where you find still older cottage rooms in unexpected places, with lattice windows and green growth pressing through them. Mine, which we entered first, was of this kind, with an up-and-down roof, that had more corners in it than I ever counted afterward, and a chimney (there was a wood fire on the hearth) paved all around with pure white tiles, in every one of which a bright miniature of the fire was blazing. Out of this room you went down two steps into a charming little sitting-room, looking down upon a flower garden, which room was henceforth to belong to Ada and me. Out of this you went up three steps, into Ada's bedroom, which had a fine broad window, commanding a beautiful view (we saw a great expanse of darkness lying underneath the stars), to which there was a hollow window-seat, in which, with a spring lock, three dear Adas might have been lost at once. Out of this room you passed into a little gallery, with which the other best rooms (only two) communicated, and so, by a little staircase of shallow steps, with a number of corner stairs in it, considering its length, down into the hall. But if, instead of going out at Ada's door, you came back into my room, and went out at the door by which you had entered it, and turned up a few crooked steps that branched off in an unexpected manner from the stairs, you lost yourself in passages, with mangles in them, and three-cornered tables, and a Native Hindoo chair, which was also a sofa, a box, and a bedstead, and looked, in every form, something between a bamboo skeleton and a great bird-cage, and had been brought from India nobody knew by whom or when. From these, you came into Richard's room, which was part library, part sitting-room, part bedroom, and seemed indeed a comfortable compound of many rooms. Out of that, you went straight, with a little interval of passage, to the plain room where Mr. Jarndyce slept, all the year round, with his window open, his bedstead without any furniture standing in the middle of the floor for more air, and his cold bath gaping for him in a smaller room adjoining. Out of that, you came into another passage, where there were back stairs, and where you could hear the horses being rubbed down, outside the stable, and being told to Hold up, and Get over, as they slipped about very much on the uneven stones. Or you might, if you came out at another door (every room had at least two doors), go straight down to the hall again by half a dozen steps and a low archway, wondering how you got back there, or had ever got out of it (*Bleak House* Ch

VI, 86-88).

This long paragraph, (which incidently has only ten sentences in it), shows Dickens's delight in the unpredictability of such structures. The reader is swept along with his description of the house as he takes us up and down stairs, through doors, and shows us the changing views from the windows. The house appears to be similar to Dickens's urban landscape in its irregularity, confusion, and variety of form. Bleak House can be viewed symbolically as a microcosm of the city and Dickens may be using it to explain the evolutionary development of London.

Another interesting feature of Dickens's buildings is the frequency with which objects, such as boats, are reused as dwellings or storage buildings. For example, in the novel *Our Mutual Friend*, an old mill is being used as a house "being very old, knotted, seamed, and beamed, . . . [and] abounding in old smears of flour (*Our Mutual Friend* Book I Ch III, 29). The Peggotty family in *David Copperfield* resides in a boat (Figure 10). The following passage demonstrates Davy's delight upon seeing it:

If it had been Aladdin's palace, roc's egg and all, I suppose I could not have been more charmed with the romantic idea of living in it. There was a delightful door cut in the side, and it was roofed in, and there were little windows in it; but the wonderful charm of it was, that it was a real boat which had no doubt been upon the water hundreds of times, and which had never intended to be lived in on dry land (*David Copperfield* Ch III, 40).

While distinctive architectural styles are difficult to determine from Dickens's writings, his landscapes are characterized by buildings that are highly varied in design. His writings present a picture of the creativity of those who design, build, and alter structures to meet their needs and satisfy their tastes.

### Land Use

London in Dickens's writings is in transition between the walking city and the modern western industrial city. This transition is perhaps best captured in land-use patterns. Some of his writings, and not necessarily the earlier ones, include examples of mixed land use within the same

# PEGGOTTY'S HOUSE



"THAT'S NOT IT?" SAID I, "THAT SHIP-LOOKING THING!" "THAT'S IT HAS 'N DAVY," RETURNED HAM.

Figure 10

Source: Dickens, Charles. (No Date). *David Copperfield*. New York: P. F. Collier.

location. The distribution pattern of goods, services, and activities is relatively uniform and the density of activity is high. This pattern was characteristic of cities before modern transportation provided fast, inexpensive, and efficient movement of people and goods. Distances people were willing or able to travel were limited by time and energy when movement was on foot or by drayage. People lived, worked, shopped and found entertainment all within a relatively small area; therefore, a mixture of land uses was common in the walking city. An example of this can be found in the novel *Bleak House*, where Mr. Snagsby, the law stationer, "appears; greasy, warm, herbaceous, and chewing" (*Bleak House* Ch X, 165) to greet a patron. Mr. Snagsby lives and works in the same structure, which was the practice before modern transportation brought about a widespread separation between the work-place and the home in western cities.

Throughout Dickens's writings are examples of buildings that serve more than one purpose. An interesting shared activity was the use of theaters for Sunday evening religious services, which Dickens discusses in an essay entitled "Two Views of a Cheap Theater" (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch IV, 239-251). Another example is from the novel *Bleak House*, where a public house, The Sol's Arms, is used for a coroner's inquest into the death of a man. Dickens describes the scene:

At the appointed hour arrives the Coroner, for whom the Jurymen are waiting, and who is received with a salute of skittles from the good dry skittle-ground attached to the Sol's Arms. The Coroner frequents more public-houses than any man alive. The smell of saw-dust, beer, tobacco-smoke, and spirits is inseparable in his vocation from death in its most awful shapes. He is conducted by the beadle and the landlord to the Harmonic Meeting Room, where he puts his hat on the piano, and takes a Windsor-chair at the head of a long table formed of several short tables put together and ornamented with glutinous rings in endless involutions made by pots and glasses. As many of the Jury as can crowd together at the table sit there. The rest get among the spittoons and pipes, or lean against the piano. Over the Coroner's head is a small iron garland, the pendant handle of a bell, which rather gives the Majesty of the Court the appearance of going to be hanged presently (*Bleak House* Ch XI, 181).

It was easier to bring the coroner to the location than the witnesses to the coroner. Large enough to handle the group and centrally located within the neighborhood, the public house was a

practical solution to overcoming the deficiencies of poor transportation.

In the walking city, the center of the city was most desirable because of its relative location near the central business district. Generally only the wealthy could afford to live in the central location because of its high land value. In *Bleak House*, Mr. Guppy, a law clerk, commutes daily from the suburb of Pentonville, once an independent rural community, to Lincoln's Inn, where he works (*Bleak House* Ch IX, 156). Mr. Tulkinghorn, the successful lawyer who is "at home in the country-houses where the great ones of the earth are bored to death" (*Bleak House* Ch X, 163) lives in Lincoln's Inn. This spatial pattern is another remnant of the walking city, where the more fashionable addresses were near the city center and the poor and working-classes lived in the suburbs.

London in the nineteenth century went through a dramatic transformation process in structure as it moved toward the modern era. Before the century was over, and certainly in Dickens's lifetime, similar industrial and commercial activities began to cluster for greater efficiency. Dickens was very conscious of these landscape patterns and recorded the distinctions between different neighborhoods in an essay he titled "On the Amateur Beat":

Facing eastward, I left behind me Smithfield and Old Bailey . . . and went my way upon my beat, noting how oddly characteristic neighborhoods are divided from one another hereabouts, as though by an invisible line across the way. Here shall cease the bankers and money changers; here shall begin the shipping interest, and the nautical-instrument shops; here shall follow a scarcely perceptible flavoring of groceries and drugs; here shall come a strong infusion of butchers; now, small hosiers shall be in the ascendant; henceforth, everything exposed for sale shall have its ticketed price attached. All this as if specially ordered and appointed (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XXXIV, 590).

From this passage we note a clustering of like activities. He recognizes not only the differences of land use but also how these activities vary from the fashionable west end to the working-class east end:

. . . a single stride, and everything is entirely changed in grain and character. West of the stride, a table, or a chest of drawers on sale, shall be of mahogany and French-polished; east of the stride, it shall be of deal, smeared with a cheap counterfeit resembling lip-salve. West of the stride, a penny loaf or bun shall be compact and self-contained; east of the stride, it shall be of a sprawling



and splay-footed character, as seeking to make more of itself for the money (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XXXIV, 590).

In *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens describes a variety of neighborhoods, which he is able to distinguish from one another by observing "clues" on the landscape. This field method has been explored by a number of contemporary scholars such as Alan Jacobs in his book *Looking at Cities* (1985) and Grady Clay in his book *Close-up: How to Read the American City* (1973). Dickens's "reading" of the landscape gives a great deal of information about the people and activities that use that space. Let us begin with his description of Drury Lane and Covent Garden:

This is essentially a theatrical neighborhood . . . The consequence is, that there is not a marine-store shop in the neighborhood which does not exhibit for sale some faded articles of dramatic finery, such as three or four pairs of soiled buff boots with turn-over red tops, heretofore worn by a "fourth robber," or "fifth mob"; a pair of rusty broadswords, a few gauntlets, and certain resplendent ornaments, which, if they were yellow instead of white, might be taken for insurance plates of the Sun Fire-office. There are several of these shops in the narrow streets and dirty courts, of which there are so many near the national theaters, and they all have tempting goods of this description, with the addition, perhaps, of a lady's pink dress covered with spangles; white wreaths, stage shoes, and a tiara like a tin lamp reflector (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch XXI, 204).

The articles such as faded theatrical costumes and props are the clues that reveal the character of the neighborhood. His description evokes a picture of the cheap theaters that provided entertainment for the common working-class people of the city. He moves on to a different quarter:

Look at marine-store dealer's in that reservoir of dirt, drunkenness, and drabs; thieves, oysters, baked potatoes, and pickled salmon -- Ratcliff Highway. Here the wearing apparel is all nautical. Rough blue jackets, with mother-of-pearl buttons, oil-skin hats, course checkered shirts, and large canvas trousers that look as if they were made for a pair of bodies instead of a pair of legs, are the stable commodities. Then, there are large bunches of cotton pocket handkerchiefs, in color and pattern unlike any one ever saw before, with the exception of those on the backs of the three young ladies without bonnets who passed just now. The furniture is much the same as elsewhere, with the addition of one or two models of ships, and some old prints of naval engagements in still older frames. In the window are a few compasses; a small tray containing silver watches in clumsy thick cases; and tobacco-boxes, the lid of each ornamented with a ship, or an anchor, or some such trophy (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch XXI, 204-205).

The shops in this neighborhood have a different look from those in Covent Garden. Here the

patrons have a preference for items that lend themselves to the needs of the sailor. While the buildings may or may not look the same in both neighborhoods, Dickens doesn't tell us, the landscape has been altered by the needs and desires of those who live there. Finally, he takes the reader to a depressing location on the south side of the Thames:

Cross over to the Surrey side, and look at such shops of this description as are to be found near the King's Bench Prison and in "the Rules." How different, and how strikingly illustrative of the decay of some of the unfortunate residents in this part of the metropolis! Imprisonment and neglect have done their work. There is contamination in the profligate denizens of a debtor's prison; old friends have fallen off; the recollection of former prosperity has passed away; and with it all thoughts for the past, all care for the future. First, watches and rings, then cloaks, coats, and all the more expensive articles of dress, have found their way to the pawnbrokers. That miserable resource has failed at last, and the sale of some trifling article at one of these shops has been the only mode left of raising a shilling or two, to meet the urgent demands of the moment (*Sketches By Boz "Scenes"* Ch XXI, 205).

The prison system was a favorite target of Dickens's critical writings and these prison landscapes are found in many of his books. This cruel system is reflected in the material landscape of Surry with its proliferation of pawn shops. The residents and the landscape both seem to be in a state of decay and depression. Dickens has read the clues on the landscape and recognized the unique character of each location. He also recognizes the relationship between the landscape and the people that alter and shape that space.

In addition to neighborhoods with specific characteristics and land uses, Dickens also notices that certain streets seem to focus on a particular activity or commodity (Figure 11). Activities clustered together along major arterials where they were able to compete with one another and attract a large number of people. For example: Banks were located along Lombard Street (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XXI, 452); boarding houses seemed to be predominately along Great Coram Street, Spring Gardens, Newman Street, Berners Street, Gower Street, Charlotte Street, and Percy Street (*Sketches By Boz "Tales"* Ch I, 310; *Sketches By Boz "Tales"* Ch II, 347; *Sketches By Boz "Characters"* Ch IX, 288); specialized shopping ranges from secondhand clothing on Monmouth Street (*Sketches By Boz "Scenes"* Ch VI, 88), furniture in

# MONMOUTH STREET



Figure 11

Source: Dickens, Charles. 1895. *Sketches By Boz*. New York: Macmillan And Co.

Longacre (*Sketches By Boz "Scenes" Ch XXI, 201*), and wine merchants along College Hill and Mark Lane to the Tower and Dockyard (*The Uncommercial Traveller Ch XXI, 453*).

Other land uses focused on industrial activity. As in most cities, industries that have high transportation costs were usually located near a river-front, port, or railroad. Many of the industries mentioned by Dickens were located along the Thames, where they were close to transportation and on low-cost flood plain land. Crossing London Bridge you found yourself "down by the waterside on the Surrey shore among the buildings of the great brewery." (*The Uncommercial Traveller Ch XIII, 354*). Near Whitechapel Church were "sugar refineries -- great buildings, tier upon tier, that have the appearance of being nearly related to the dock warehouses of Liverpool" (*The Uncommercial Traveller Ch XXXIV, 590-591*). The lead mills were located close to the Limehouse Church where they convert pig-lead into iron-lead (*The Uncommercial Traveller Ch XXXIV, 592-593*). It is curious to note that Dickens describes the locations of these industrial activities in relation to churches.

Dickens's writings give the reader insights into the patterns and densities of land use activities in nineteenth-century London. Urban scholars have pieced together the general picture, but Dickens gives us a feel for the landscape through his powerful descriptions and use of words. The reader can picture the image of the urban environment through Dickens's writings.

### Public Transportation

Like the author himself, Dickens's characters are voracious walkers and find foot travel to be practical, enjoyable and safer than many of the vehicles that competed for the crowded London streets. Yet, Dickens delighted in the variety of conveyances that were available in nineteenth-century London. From his books we learn about the post chaise, hackney coach, omnibus, cab, and other vehicles. Dickens loves to poke fun at the discomfort and inconvenience of using public transportation and some of his best comic writing deals with that

topic.

For long distance travel, the post chaise was the vehicle of choice. The post chaise was a closed, four-wheeled coach or carriage drawn by fast horses, used to carry mail and passengers (Figure 12). The reader could hardly anticipate much pleasure in traveling in a post chaise after reading Dickens's account of what could be expected:

We have often wondered how many months' incessant traveling in a post-chaise it would take to kill a man; and wondering by analogy, we should very much like to know how many months of constant traveling in a succession of early coaches an unfortunate mortal could endure. . . . If we had been a powerful churchman in those good times when blood was shed as freely as water, and men were mowed down like grass, in the sacred cause of religion, we should have lain by very quietly till we got hold of some especially obstinate miscreant, who positively refused to be converted to our faith, and then we would have booked him for an inside place in a small coach, which traveled day and night; and securing the remainder of the places for stout men with a slight tendency to coughing and spitting, we would have started him forth on his last travels; leaving him mercilessly to all the tortures which the waiters, landlords, coachmen, guards, boots, chambermaids, and other familiars on his line of road, might think proper to inflict (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch XV, 151-152).

From this passage we imagine that the vehicle itself was small and uncomfortable and also that the companions and attendants could be difficult to endure for any great length of time. In spite of his criticisms, Dickens held a romantic view of the post chaise and regretted its disappearance from the English countryside. One afternoon he makes a trip to a former coaching town and finds a remnant of what had once been an important part of the landscape:

It was a post-chaise taken off its axle-tree and wheels, and plumped down on the clayey soil among a ragged growth of vegetables. It was a post-chaise not even set straight upon the ground, but tilted over, as if it had fallen out of a balloon. It was a post-chaise that had been a long time in those decayed circumstances, and against which scarlet beans were trained. It was a post-chaise patched and mended with old tea trays, or scraps of iron that looked like them, and boarded up as to the windows, but having a KNOCKER on the off-side door. Whether it was a post-chaise used as tool-house, summer-house, or dwelling-house, I could not discover, for there was nobody at home at the post-chaise when I knocked; but it was certainly used for something, and locked up (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XXII, 462).

Within the city there was a wide selection of vehicles from which to choose. Dickens believes hackney-coaches (Figure 13) "belong solely to the metropolis" (*Sketches By Boz*

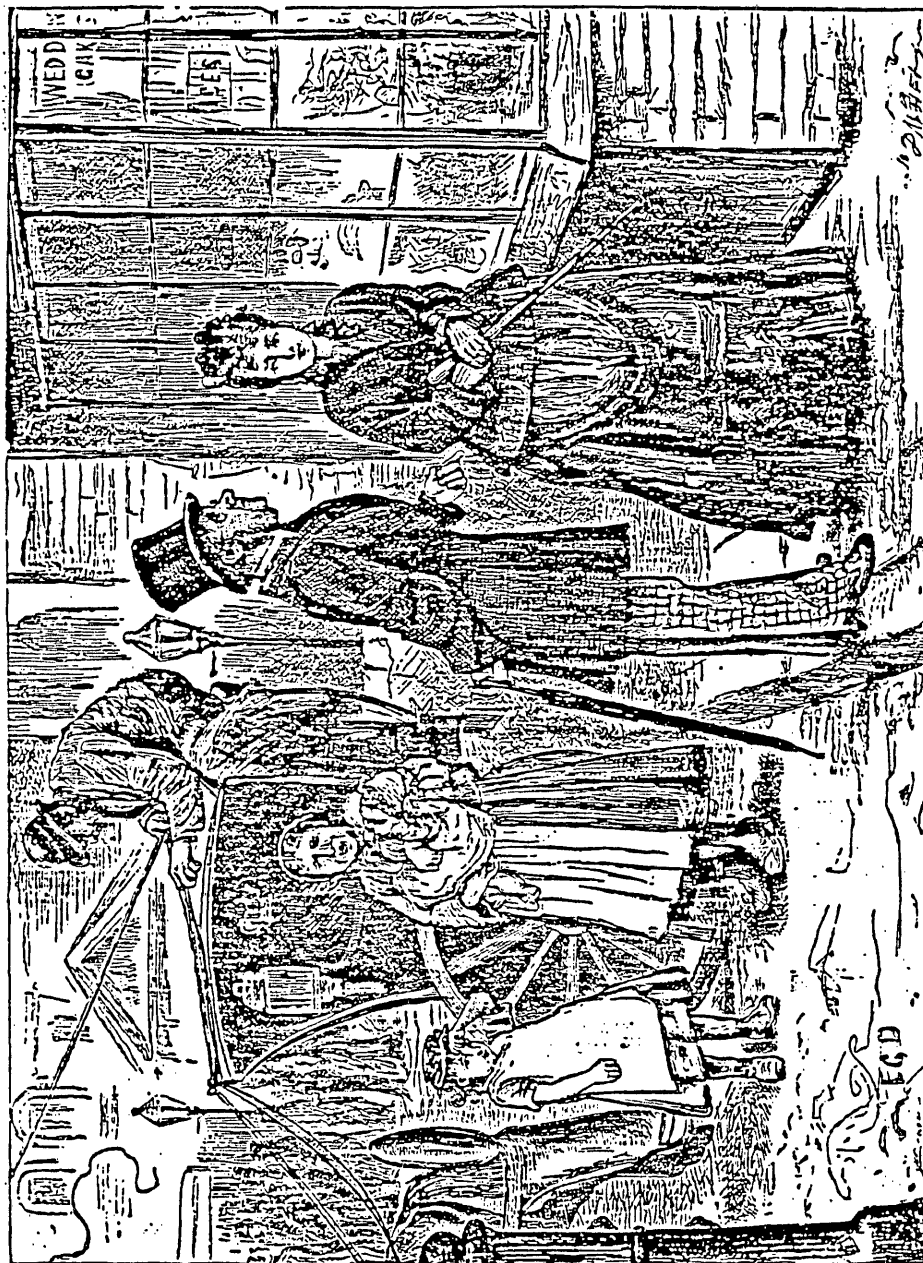
## THE POST CHAISE



Figure 12

Source: Dickens, Charles. 1895. *Pickwick Papers*. New York: Macmillan And Co.

# THE HACKNEY COACH



"MR. GRAZINGLANDS LOOKED IN AT A PASTRY COOK'S WINDOW, HESITATING AS TO THE EXPEDIENCY OF LUNCHING AT THAT ESTABLISHMENT."

Figure 13

Source: Dickens, Charles. (No Date). *The Uncommercial Traveller*. New York: P. F. Collier.

"Scenes" Ch VII, 96), but while other cities have their hackneys "which may look almost as dirty, and even go almost as slowly, as London hackney-coaches" (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch VII, 96), they cannot claim to compete:

Take a regular, ponderous, rickety, London hackney-coach of the old school, and let any man have the boldness to assert, if he can, that he ever beheld any object on the face of the earth which at all resembles it, unless, indeed, it were another hackney-coach of the same date. We have recently observed on certain stands, and we say it with deep regret, rather dapper green chariots, and coaches of polished yellow, with four wheels of the same color as the coach, whereas it is perfectly notorious, to every one who has studied the subject, that every wheel ought to be of a different color, and a different size. These are innovations, and, like other miscalled improvements, awful signs of the restlessness of the public mind, and the little respect paid to our time-honored institutions. Why should hackney-coaches be clean? Our ancestors found them dirty, and left them so. Why should we, with a feverish wish to "keep moving," desire to roll along at the rate of six miles an hour, while they were content to rumble over the stones at four? These are solemn considerations. Hackney-coaches are part and parcel of the law of the land; they were settled by the Legislature; plated and numbered by the wisdom of Parliament (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch VII, 96-97).

The Hackney-coach must have been a colorful part of London's landscape. Dickens delights in the make-shift maintenance producing dirty, odd-colored, and mismatched vehicles that added variety and interest to London's streets.

The cabriolet or "cab" was a light, two-wheeled, one-horse carriage that had a reputation for turning over easily (Figure 14). Another objection to the cab had to do with the difficulty of getting in and out, which Dickens describes tongue in cheek:

The getting into a cab is a very pretty and graceful process, which, when well performed, is essentially melodramatic. . . .

The getting out of a cab is perhaps rather more complicated in its theory, and a shade more difficult in its execution. We have studied the subject a great deal, and we think the best way is, to throw yourself out, and trust to chance for alighting on your feet . . . (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch XVII, 163).

The least expensive form of urban transportation in Dickens's London was the omnibus, a long stage pulled by a pair of horses (Figure 15). The omnibus driver was notorious for attempting to crowd in more people than the vehicle could accommodate comfortably. As with the other forms of transportation, competition for fares was fierce and Dickens relates the



# THE CABRIOLET

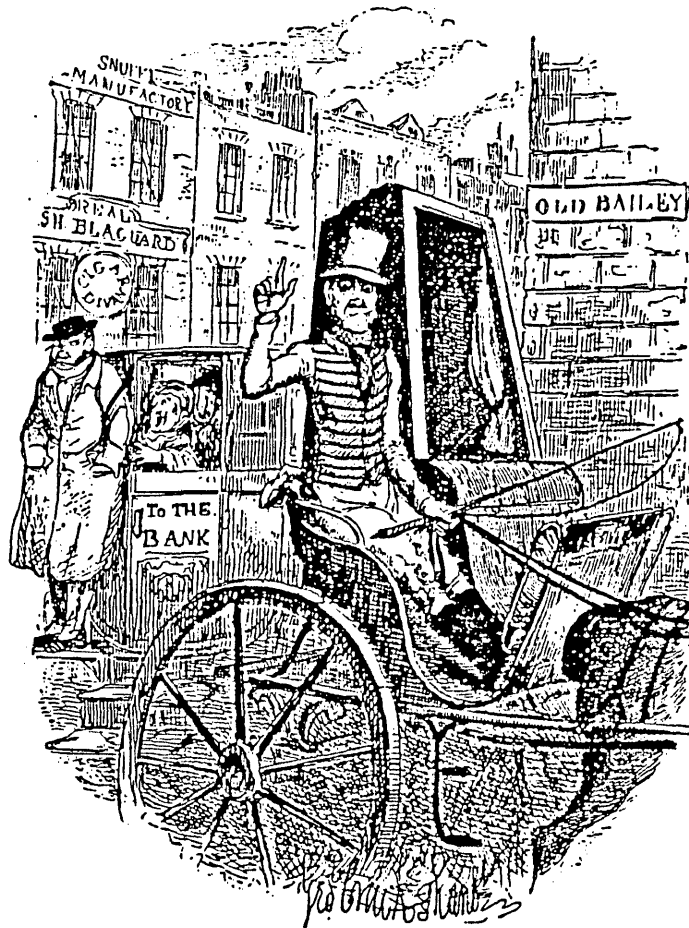
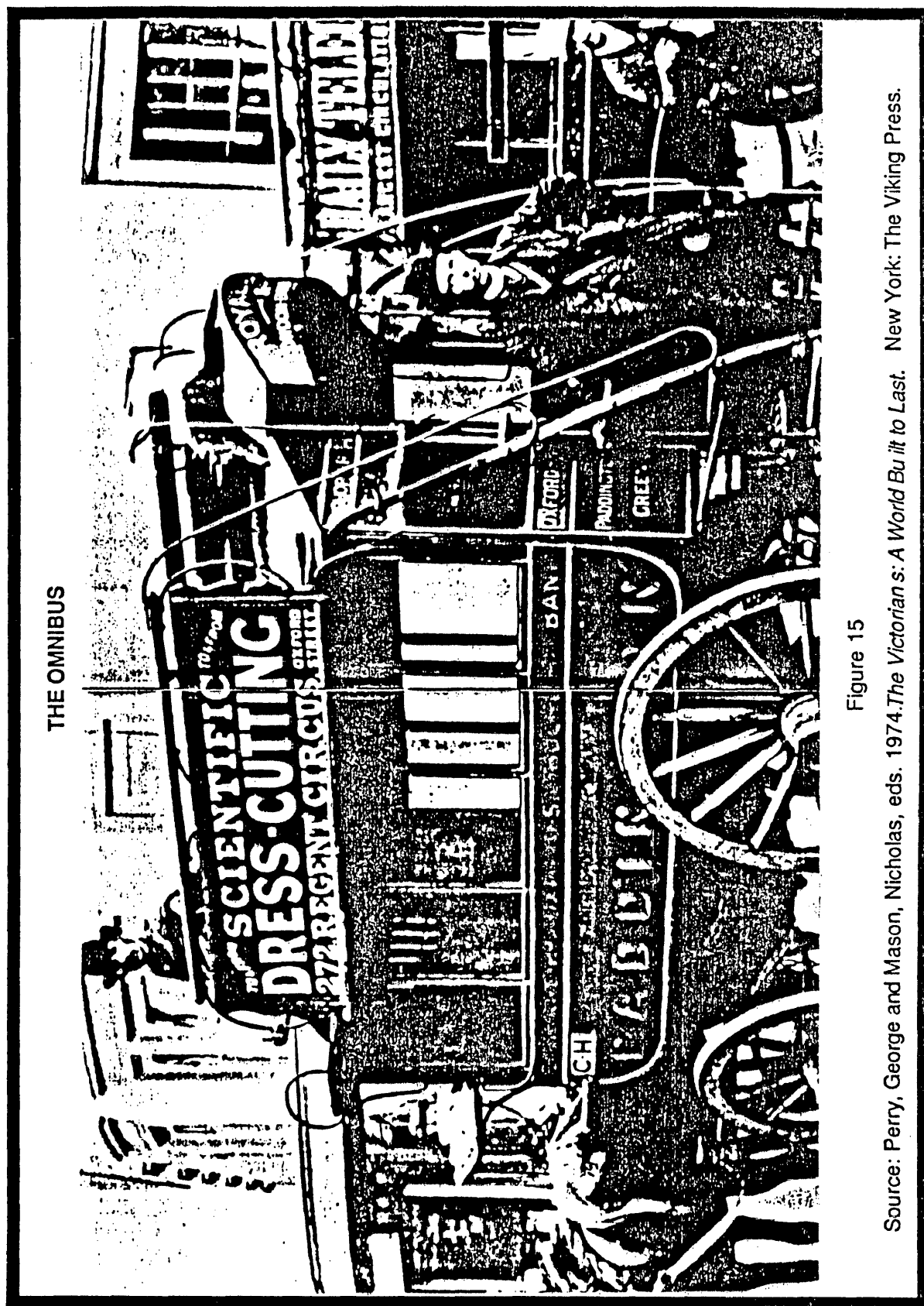


Figure 14

Source: Dickens, Charles. 1895. *Sketches By Boz*. New York: Macmillan And Co.



experiences of a certain Mr. Dumps, who, after determining that a cab was too dangerous and a hackney-coach too expensive, ventures to ride an omnibus:

An omnibus was waiting at the opposite corner . . . . .

"Now, sir!" cried the young gentleman who officiated as "cad" to the "Lads of the Village," which was the name of the machine just noticed. Dumps crossed.

"This vay, sir!" shouted the driver of the "Harkaway," pulling up his vehicle immediately across the door of the opposition. "This vay, sir -- he's full." Dumps hesitated, whereupon the "Lads of the Village" commenced pouring out a torrent of abuse against the "Harkaway"; but the conductor of the "Admiral Napier" settled the contest in a most satisfactory manner for all parties, by seizing Dumps round the waist, and thrusting him into the middle of his vehicle, which had just come up and only wanted the sixth inside.

"All right," said the "Admiral," and off the thing thundered, like a fire-engine at full gallop, with the kidnapped customer inside, standing in the position of a half doubled-up bootjack, and falling about with every jerk of the machine . . .

After a great deal of struggling and falling about, Dumps at last managed to squeeze himself into a seat, which, in addition to the slight disadvantage of being between a window that would not shut and a door that must be open, placed him in close contact with a passenger who had been walking about all the morning without an umbrella, and who looked as if he had spent the day in a full water-butt -- only wetter.

. . . "Hollo! hollo!" shouted the persecuted individual, as the omnibus dashed past Drury Lane, where he had directed to be set down. -- "Where is the cad?"

. . . "Hold hard!" said the conductor; "I'm blowed if we ha'n't forgot the gen'l'm'n as vas to be set down at Doory Lane. -- Now, sir, make haste, if you please," he added, opening the door, and assisting Dumps out with as much coolness as if it was "all right." Dumps's indignation was for once getting the better of his cynical equanimity. "Drury Lane!" he gasped with the voice of a boy in a cold bath for the first time.

"Doory Lane, sir? -- yes, sir -- third turning on the right-hand side, sir."

Dumps's passion was paramount; he clutched his umbrella, and was striding off with the firm determination of not paying the fare. The cad, by a remarkable coincidence, happened to entertain a directly contrary opinion, and Heaven knows how far the altercation would have proceeded, if it had not been most ably and satisfactorily brought to a close by the driver.

"Hollo!" said that respectable person, standing up on the box, and leaning with one hand on the roof of the omnibus. "Hollo, Tom! tell the gentleman if so be as he feels aggrieved we will take him up to the Edge-er (Edgeware) Road for nothing, and set him down at Doory Lane when we comes back. He can't reject that, anyhow."

The argument was irresistible; Dumps paid the disputed sixpence . . .  
(*Sketches By Boz "Tales" Ch XI, 540-543*).

The picture of public transportation in nineteenth-century London, as painted by Dickens, is comical in its blunt presentation of reality. The reader gets a feel for the experience of using these various types of vehicles, but Dickens does not comment on the role that public

transportation played in shaping the city. By the early 1860s the underground railroad was under construction in London, which would quickly and efficiently move people within the city. Commuter trains had already become a part of the urban landscape as well, but they are seldom mentioned in his writings. While Dickens applauds progress, he seems to retain a affection for the slower means of locomotion, which perhaps allowed observation of the minute details of the urban fabric.

### Environmental Problems

Charles Dickens devoted much of his life to social and environmental reform (Wilson 1970, 7; Nelson 1981, 172; Drabble 1979, 213). He realized that many of the problems of the modern urban environment such as air and water pollution, inefficient or nonexistent sewage disposal, and slum housing, were the result of human decisions and could, therefore, be solved. A series of cholera epidemics in the mid-nineteenth-century combined with his intimate knowledge of the city prompted him to begin an active campaign for sanitation reform (Wilson 1970, 226). After he took over publication of *Household Words* in 1850, he began publishing articles in that magazine as well as in the *The Examiner* to bring attention to these issues (Schwarzbach 1979, 118).

The critical problem as Dickens saw it was that the people of London had become used to living in these unsanitary conditions and had become insensitive to the reality of their environment. Dickens believed he could use his writing to make them become more aware of these urban problems (Schwarzbach 1979, 121-123). Some scholars have even suggested that the scenes described by Dickens were not only accurate, but in some cases, *less* horrifying than the real world they depicted (Daiches and Flower 1979, 67). That becomes hard to believe when reading the famous opening chapter of the novel *Bleak House* :

London. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in

Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes -- gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foothold at street corners, where tens of thousands of other foot-passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tires of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all around them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds (*Bleak House* Ch I, 11-12).

Fog, mud, polluted water, -- the city is seen as being buried and suffocated in its own filth. This passage reminds us of what London fog was like before the Smoke Abatement Acts of the nineteenth century and the Clean Air Acts of the twentieth century (Drabble 1979, 209). Dickens recognized that "fog" could be and often was dirty and unhealthy in the urban environment:

Those who study the physical sciences, and bring them to bear upon the health of man, tell us that 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 [homes of the wealthy], and rolling slowly on to corrupt the better portions of the town (*Dombey and Son* Ch XLVII, 233).

As has been pointed out, the wealthy generally lived up-wind from the pollution plumes, and were protected most of the time by the prevailing westerly winds. Symbolically, however, this passage predicts disaster for those in power who make public law and policy if they fail to make environmental changes.

His writings also present numerous passages about the soot and grime associated with the smoke-filled air:

. . . Cook's Court was in a manner revolutionized by the new inscription in fresh paint, PEFFER & SNAGSBY, displacing the time-honored and not easily to be deciphered legend, PEFFER only. For smoke, which is the London ivy, had so wreathed itself around Peffer's name, and clung to his dwelling-place, that the affectionate parasite quite overpowered the parent tree (*Bleak House* Ch X, 159).

Behind the most ancient part of Holborn, London . . . is a little nook composed of two irregular quadrangles, called Staples Inn . . . It is one of those nooks where a few smoky sparrows twitter in smoky trees, as though they called to one another, "Let us play at country," and where a few feet of garden mould and a few yards of gravel enable them to do that refreshing violence to their tiny understandings (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood* Ch XI, 307).

From his writings, we also get a vivid picture of the water supply of nineteenth-century London. The Thames, which still provided water for many of the city's inhabitants, is described as "impure" (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XXX, 547) and the author's own reflection is described graphically as "the youngest son of his filthy old father Thames" (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch III, 227). Because London lacked an adequate sewer system, the filth from the city washed into the river. The following passage from the novel *Our Mutual Friend* refers to this sewage metaphorically:

. . . down by the Monument and by the Tower, and by the docks; down by Ratcliffe, and by Rotherhithe; down by 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 forces it over the bank and sunk it in the river. (*Our Mutual Friend* Book I Ch III, 28).

Dickens is telling us that the "scum of humanity" is being washed into the river, but it is really the wastes of humans, animals, and industrial activity. Numerous references are also made to the seepage of wastes into the ground or its flow over the surface, particularly from burial grounds, industrial activity, wells, or privies, resulting in the contamination of water supplies and the spread of disease:

Beyond it was a burial-ground -- a dreadful spot in which the night was very slowly stirring; but where I could dimly see heaps of dishonored 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 . . . drenched in the fearful wet of such a place, which oozed and splashed down everywhere . . . (*Bleak House* Ch LIX, 459),

... and bears off the body of our dear brother here departed, to a hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed (*Bleak House* Ch XI, 187-188);

Miles of close wells and pits of houses, where the inhabitants gasped for air, stretched far away toward every point of the compass. Through the heart of the town a deadly sewer ebbed and flowed, in the place of a fine fresh river (*Little Dorrit* Book I Ch III, 40).

It is a fine steaming night to turn the slaughter-houses, the unwholesome trades, the sewerage, bad water, and burial-grounds to account, and give the Registrar of Deaths some extra business (*Bleak House* Ch XXXII, 28).

Mud-covered streets abound in Dickens's writings . . . "The street was very narrow and muddy" (*Oliver Twist* Ch VIII, 78) . . . "The mud lay thick upon the stones" (*Oliver Twist* Ch XIX, 170) . . . "never can there come mud and mire too deep" (*Bleak House* Ch I, 12). Schwarzbach gives some insight to Dickens's seemingly obsessive interest in mud:

The mud of mid-century London was, after all, quite different from the harmless if messy stuff children today make into pies. It was composed of loose soil to be sure, but also of a great deal more, including soot and ashes and street litter, and the fecal matter of the legion horses on whom all transport in London depended. In addition, many sewers (such as they were) were completely open, and in rainy weather would simply overflow into the streets. Dogs, cattle in transit either to Smithfield or through the town (many dairies were still inside the city), and many people as well as used the public streets as a privy, but then even most privies were simply holes in the ground with drainage into ditches or another part of the street. (London was still a good fifteen years away from having an effective drainage system.) The mud must at times have been nothing less than liquid ordure (Schwarzbach 1979, 124).

Dickens's interest is thus only apparently excessive; however, it should be viewed as another attempt to bring public attention to the squalid conditions of London's streets.

Dickens was appalled, almost obsessed by the horrid living conditions of thousands of nineteenth-century London's poor. Slum clearance and housing reform became two of the most important issues in his writings. Filled with descriptions of these wretched neighborhoods, his books expressly intended to raise his reader's consciousness that such conditions existed in the capital city of the most powerful country in the world. While his writings were significant contributions in themselves, he went beyond that. Together with philanthropist Angela Burdett Coutts, who helped with many of his projects, Dickens served as an advisor for one of the most

important housing schemes in London's history (Wilson 1970, 226). The project consisted of removing slum housing and replacing it with architecturally designed houses for the low-income people of the city. The period of time in which he was working on this project coincided with the writing of the novel *Bleak House* (Schwarzbach 1979, 128-129), in which Dickens describes the home of Jo, a pathetic character who make his living as a street crossing sweeper:

Jo lives -- that is to say, Jo has not yet died -- in a ruinous place, known to the like of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone's. It is a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people; where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced, by some bold vagrants, who, after establishing their own possession, took to letting them out in lodgings. Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As, on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so, these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever, and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years -- though born expressly to do it (*Bleak House* Ch XVI, 268).

Dickens blames the living conditions in Tom-all-Alone's for bringing the human inhabitants down to the level of insects and reptiles, who will eventually spread and infest the upper classes with fever. This is a theme that is repeated over and over again in his writings. As a reformer, Dickens generally chose to work with private individuals or projects rather than lending his support to government programs. His frustration with the bureaucratic system -- Lord Coodle, Sir Doodle, etc. -- caused him to become very pessimistic about the government's ability to solve urban problems, and this is reflected in his writing:

Much mighty speech-making there has been, both in and out of Parliament, concerning Tom, and much wrathful disputation how Tom shall be got right. Whether he shall be put into the main road by constables, or by beadles, or by bell-ringing, or by force of figures, or by correct principles of taste, or by high church, or by low church, or by no church; whether he shall be set to splitting trusses of polemical straws with the crooked knife of his mind, or whether he shall be put to stone-breaking instead. In the midst of which dust and noise there is but one thing perfectly clear; to wit, that Tom only may and can, or shall and will, be reclaimed according to somebody's theory but nobody's practice. And, in the hopeful meantime, Tom goes to perdition headforemost in his old determined spirit.

But he has his revenge. Even the winds are his messengers, and they serve him in these hours of darkness. There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood



but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute, this very night, the choice stream (in which chemists on analysis would find the genuine nobility) of a Norman house, and his Grace shall not be able to say Nay to the infamous alliance. 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, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high. Verily, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his revenge (*Bleak House* Ch XLVI, 242-243).

Again we see the concern with environmental degradation, but the point is that Dickens is warning the wealthy and powerful that they may not be able to continue to protect themselves from these problems and should, therefore, do something to correct them. Perhaps the most familiar slum area in Dickens's writings is Jacob's Island, a fictional location described in *Oliver Twist*, which topographers have failed to locate exactly, but could have recognized in many parts of nineteenth-century London:

Near to that part of the Thames on which the church at Rotherhithe abuts, where the buildings on the banks are dirtiest, and the vessels on the river blackest with the dust of colliers and the smoke of close-built, low-roofed houses, there exists, at the present day, the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of its inhabitants.

To reach this place the visitor has to penetrate through a maze of close, narrow, and muddy streets, . . . he makes his way with difficulty along, assailed by offensive sights and smells from the narrow alleys which branch off on the right and left, and deafened by the clash of ponderous wagons that bear great piles of merchandise from stacks of warehouses that rise from every corner. Arriving, at length, in streets remoter and less frequented than those through which he has passed, he walks beneath tottering house-fronts projecting over the pavement, dismantled walls that seem to totter as he passes, chimneys half crushed, half hesitating to fall, windows guarded by rusty iron bars that time and dirt have almost eaten away, and every imaginable sign of desolation and neglect.

In such a neighborhood, beyond Dockhead in the borough of Southwark, stands Jacob's Island (*Oliver Twist* Ch L, 453-454).

This passage gives a description that touches all of our senses, so that we can feel and experience this place fully. Dickens has captured the most horrid image of the urban environment and presented in a way that few other authors have succeeded in doing.

### Changes on the Landscape

Nineteenth-century London experienced great change in the cultural landscape as a result of population growth, new technology, and change in fashion. Dickens recognized that the city was dynamic and often commented on the changes he observed and speculated on the causes of these changes. The combination of population pressures and innovations in transportation resulted in London's expansion well beyond the boundaries of the walking city. In the novel *Dombey and Son*, Dickens compares two houses; one is in the city, the second was once in the country but the city has now expanded beyond this area leaving a trail of destruction:

The neighborhood in which it stands has as little of the country to recommend it as it has of the town. It is neither of the town nor country. The former, like the giant in his traveling boots, has made a stride and passed it, and has set brick-and-mortar heel a long way in advance; but the intermediate space between the giant's feet, as yet, is only blighted country, and not town; and here, among a few tall chimneys belching smoke all day and night, and among the brick-fields and the lanes where turf is cut, and where the fences tumble down, and where the dusty nettles grow, and where a scrap or two of hedge may yet be seen, and where the bird-catcher still comes occasionally, though he swears every time to come no more -- this second home is to be found (*Dombey and Son* Ch XXXIII, 28).

From this passage we see the landscape as a victim of urban growth. "Turf is cut", obviously for the new homes, and the clay soils are dug for brick-making, which will be the major building material for these new homes and buildings. The disturbed vegetation is overgrown with "dusty nettles" leaving only "a scrap or two of hedge," which formerly graced the country homes. The ecosystem has been altered so that now there is little habitat left for wildlife; "the bird-catcher still comes occasionally, though he swears every time to come no more." As the process of urban growth continues, these areas that were once passed over are eventually "in-filled." He makes a trip to one of the former rural almshouses that is now surrounded by the city:

But it is neither to the Almshouses in the country, nor to new Almshouses by the railroad, that these present Uncommercial notes relate. They refer back to journeys made among those commonplace smoky-fronted London Almshouses, with a little paved courtyard in front inclosed by iron railings, which have got snowed up, as it were, by bricks and mortar, which were once in a

suburb, but are now in the densely populated town -- gaps in the busy life around them, parentheses in the close and blotted texts of the streets (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XXVII, 511).

This term "texts of the streets" represents Dickens's articulation of his sense of being able to "read" the landscape. He recognizes that the artifacts combine to tell a story of the historical development of the cultural environment.

As the city expanded outward, many of the neighborhoods began to deteriorate or change function. Once-fashionable neighborhoods near the center of the city were abandoned as the wealthy inhabitants moved to the planned neighborhoods on the fringes of the city, which were now serviced by the railroads:

Among the narrow thoroughfares at hand there lingered, here and there, an ancient doorway of carved oak, from which, of old, the sounds of revelry and feasting often came; but now these mansions, only used for storehouses, were dark and dull, and, being filled with wool, and cotton, and the like -- such heavy merchandise as stifles sound and stops the throat of echo -- had an air of palpable deadness about them which, added to their silence and desertion, made them very grim (*Martin Chuzzlewit* Ch IX, 166).

The references to "deadness," "silence," and "desertion" gives the reader a feel for the loss of neighborhoods as the city went through its evolutionary process. The theatrical neighborhoods, which Dickens knew and loved so well, were also affected:

Those wonderful houses about Drury Lane Theater -- which in the palmy days of theaters were prosperous and long-settled places of business, and which now change hands every week, but never change their character of being divided and subdivided on the ground-floor into mouldy dens of shops . . . (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch IV, 239).

In an essay titled "Shops and their Tenants," Dickens chronicles the succession of occupants and activities in the building:

There is one whose history is a sample of the rest, in whose fate we have taken especial interest, having had the pleasure of knowing it ever since it has been a shop. It is on the Surrey side of the water -- a little distance beyond the Marsh Gate. It was originally a substantial, good-looking, private house enough; the landlord got into difficulties, the house got into Chancery, the tenant went away, and the house went to ruin . . . In this state of things, the marine-store dealer at the corner of the street, in the most obliging manner took the knocker off, and sold it; the unfortunate house looked more wretched than ever.

We deserted our friend for a few weeks. What was our surprise, on our

return, to find no trace of its existence! In its place was a handsome shop, fast approaching to a state of completion, and on the shutters were large bills, informing the public that it would shortly be opened with "an extensive stock of linen-drapery and haberdashery". . . we felt a fatal presentiment that the shop was doomed -- and so it was . . . At last the company's man came to cut off the water, and then the linendraper cut off himself, leaving the landlord his compliments and the key.

The next occupant was a fancy stationer. The shop was more modestly painted than before, still it was neat; but somehow we always thought, as we passed, that it looked like a poor struggling concern. We wished the man well, but we trembled for his success . . . . .

As we passed one morning, the broker's men were removing the little furniture there was in the house, and a newly-posted bill informed us it was again "To Let." . . . . .

We were somewhat curious to ascertain what would be the next stage -- for that the place had no chance of succeeding now was perfectly clear. . . The shop -- not a large one at the best of times -- had been converted into two; one was a bonnet-shape maker's, the other was opened by a tobacconist . . . . .

The tobacconist remained in possession longer than any tenant within our recollection. . . The tobacconist was succeeded by a theatrical hair-dresser, . . . The bonnet-shape maker gave place to a green-grocer, and the histrionic barber was succeeded, in his turn, by a tailor . . . . . When we last passed it, a "dairy" was established in the area, and a party of melancholy looking fowls were amusing themselves by running in at the front door, and out at the back one (*Sketches By Boz "Scenes" Ch III, 73-77*).

Stability was a rare commodity in nineteenth-century London. Urbanization was dynamic, resulting in change in function for neighborhoods as the city grew and adjusted to new demands and opportunities. Deterioration and instability were followed by revitalization and relative stability and the cycle was repeated. We get the feel for this dynamic process in the writings of Charles Dickens and a sense for the human scale of this change on the landscape.

Perhaps the greatest cause of change on the urban landscape of nineteenth-century London was the coming of the railroads. Like modern highway construction, the railroad tore through the city with little regard for the physical or cultural landscape. Dickens foreshadows the coming of the railroad in this passage from the novel *Bleak House* :

Railroads shall soon traverse all this country, and with a rattle and a glare the engines and train shall shoot like a meteor over the wide night-landscape, turning the moon paler; but, as yet such things are non-existent in these parts, though not wholly unexpected. Preparations are afoot, measurements are made, ground is staked out. Bridges are begun, and their not yet united piers desolately look at one another over roads and streams, like brick and mortar couples with an obstacle to their union; fragments of embankments are thrown up, and left as precipices with torrents of rusty carts and barrows tumbling over

them; tripods of tall poles appear on hill-tops, where there are rumors of tunnels; everything looks chaotic and abandoned in fell hopelessness. Along the freezing roads, and through the night, the post-chaise makes its way without a railroad on its mind (*Bleak House* Ch LV, 381).

Dickens has captured the confusion and jumbled appearance of the landscape as it is undergoing a massive engineering project. Equipment and materials appear to be scattered without purpose. The former landscape is torn apart with little regard for what had been, only for what is to come. In the following passage, Dickens graphically captures the effect of the railroad on the urban landscape as it cuts through the suburb of Staggs's Gardens:

The first shock of a great earthquake had, just at that period, rent the whole neighborhood to its center. Traces of its course were visible on every side. Houses were knocked down; streets broken through and stopped; deep pits and trenches dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking, propped by great beams of wood. Here, a chaos of carts, overthrown and jumbled together, lay topsy-turvy at the bottom of a steep unnatural hill; there, confused treasures of iron soaked and rusted in something that had accidentally become a pond. Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; temporary wooden houses and inclosures, in the most unlikely situations; carcases of ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing. There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. Hot springs and fiery eruptions, the usual attendants upon earthquakes, lent their contributions of confusion to the scene. Boiling water hissed and heaved within dilapidated walls; whence, also, the glare and roar of flames came issuing forth; and mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way, and wholly changed the law and custom of the neighborhood.

In short, the yet unfinished and unopened railroad was in progress; and, from the very core of all this dire disorder trailed smoothly away upon its mighty course of civilization and improvement (*Dombey and Son* Ch VI, 82-83).

The analogy of the railroad to an earthquake would lead the reader to believe that Dickens viewed this project as natural and unavoidable. While the process was destructive, the end result brought about "civilization and improvement." Many of these railroad projects resulted in and focused on the clearing of tenements and slum housing, which is not that dissimilar from modern highway projects.

Finally, Dickens recognizes that many place-names remain etched on the landscape

from past activities or associations. For instance:

. . . he *has* heard say that a brook "as clear as crystal" once ran right down the middle of Holborn, when Turnstile really was a turnstile leading slap away into the meadows. . . (*Bleak House* Ch X, 163).

This euphonious locality was situated in a suburb, known by the inhabitants of Staggs's Gardens by the name of Camberling Town; a designation which the Strangers' Map of London, as printed (with view to pleasant and commodious reference) on pocket-handkerchiefs, condenses, with some show of reason, into Camden Town (*Dombey and Son* Ch VI, 82).

In such a neighborhood, beyond Dockhead in the borough of Southwark, stands Jacob's Island, surrounded by a muddy ditch, six or eight feet deep and fifteen or twenty wide when the tide is in, once called Mill Pond, but known in these days as Folly Ditch. It is a creek or inlet from the Thames, and can always be filled at high water by opening the sluices at the Lead Mills from which it took its old name (*Oliver Twist* Ch L, 454).

Change manifests itself in the urban fabric -- both in the physical features and the names associated with places. Charles Dickens's novels and essays have captured this change in words that paint vivid images of the dynamic city of London as it rushed toward the twentieth century.

Urban scholars have pieced together a variety of data sources in their attempt to understand the landscape of nineteenth-century London. Any number of books on the city's geography, history, or social development can give a fairly accurate account of the processes and events that helped to shape the city. The "facts" are fairly well known. However, this chapter has demonstrated that the use of fictional writing can enhance our understanding and feel for the urban environment by viewing it through the eyes of a skilled observer who was able to also articulate the image as he saw it. Chapter IV presented a picture of the material urban landscape, that is, what Dickens observed, smelled, heard, or touched. Yet there is another element of the landscape that is composed of not only what lies before our eyes but what is in our heads as well (Meinig 1979, 34). This is the perceptual landscape, the subject of Chapter V.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PERCEPTUAL LANDSCAPE OF DICKENS'S LONDON

The built environment and altered physical environment of Charles Dickens's nineteenth-century London were explored in the last chapter through elements of the landscape that could be physically sensed. Yet there is another element of the landscape that exists in the mind. As Donald Meinig has pointed out, "any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads" (Meinig 1979, 34). Landscapes evoke different feelings in each person according to his/her past experiences, values, education, and expectations. These feelings influence human behavior, which alters the landscape (Lukermann 1964, 169). Therefore the landscape can be viewed as a depository of meaning and value. As Peirce Lewis has stated, "Our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible form" (Lewis 1979, 12). The cultural geographer searches out meaning and value through landscape elements such as buildings, street patterns, or gardens. The literary geographer can study these same values and feelings about the cultural landscape through fictional writing because the creative writer captures the human experience with the material landscape and articulates its meaning and imagery.

Human experience with the landscape varies so that not everyone perceives it in the same way. Donald Meinig explored this idea in his essay, "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene" where he shows that although we may all look at the same scene at the same time, we actually perceive different landscapes. Dickens recognized this and reflected these varying perceptions through his characters so that his writings present many different renditions of the same landscape.

Dickens often used dichotomies in his writing. The most recognizable may be the opening passage of *A Tale of Two Cities*. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, . . . (A

*Tale of Two Cities* Book I Ch I, 7). This same technique is used when he writes about the interactions of his characters with their environment. Dickens's perceptions of nineteenth-century London seem to have a dichotomous relationship. The city is viewed at times as a place of extreme hostility where fear, repulsion, loneliness, or confusion dominate. London is also perceived by Dickens's characters as a place of comfort that draws people to it for refuge, opportunity, or because it is home. The paradox is that the characters experience both perceptual extremes. In that sense, Dickens has captured the natural human experience with the urban landscape.

This chapter will explore these varying perceptions of nineteenth-century London through the dialogue and narrative of Dickens's characters. Such a study reveals the complexity of the urban landscape and adds to our understanding of that popular image of nineteenth-century London. In addition, this study will show that Dickens used these varying environmental perceptions to bring attention to urban problems in his attempt to bring about reform.

### London as a Landscape of Hostility

#### Fear/ Repulsion

Nineteenth-century London was extremely diverse in its material structure as well as its social fabric. Environmental problems of poor air quality, impure water, inadequate or absent sewage disposal, and crowded living conditions made some parts of London vile places indeed. Many people born and raised in those conditions considered them normal and familiar while those who managed to escape such an environment because of their wealth and position were shocked and repulsed by the abhorrent landscapes of the poor. In the novel *Bleak House*, Lady Dedlock, disguised as a servant, is led through the streets of London by Jo, the wretched



street-crossing sweeper, as she searches for the places associated with her former lover, who is now dead. As the wife of a wealthy baronet whose "family is as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable" (*Bleak House* Ch II, 20), Lady Dedlock is accustomed to the great country houses and city mansions. When she observes the loathsome landscape of London's poor, she is repulsed and disgusted:

"Go before me, and show me all those dreadful places. Stop opposite to each, and don't speak to me unless I speak to you. Don't look back. Do what I want, and I will pay you well." . . . . .

By many devious ways, reeking with offense of many kinds, they come to the little tunnel of a court, and to the gas lamp (lighted now), and to the iron gate.

"He was put there," says Jo, holding to the bars and looking in.

"Where? Oh, what a scene of horror!"

"There!" says Jo, pointing. "Over yinder. Among them piles of bones, and close to that there kitchen winder. They put him verry nigh the top. They was obliged to stamp upon it to get it in. I could unkiver it for you with my broom, if the gate was open. That's why they locks it, I s'pose," giving it a shake. "It's always locked. Look at the rat!" cries Jo, excited. "Hi! Look! There he goes! Ho! Into the ground!"

The servant shrinks into a corner -- into a corner of that hideous archway, with its deadly stains contaminating her dress; and putting out her two hands, and passionately telling him to keep away from her, for he is loathsome to her, so remains for some moments. Jo stands staring, and is still staring when she recovers herself. . . . .

She drops a piece of money in his hand, without touching it, and shuddering as their hands approach. "Now," she adds, "show me the spot again!"

Jo thrusts the handle of his broom between the bars of the gate, and, with his utmost power of elaboration, points it out. At length, looking aside to see if he has made himself intelligible, he finds that he is alone (*Bleak House* Ch XVI, 273-275).

Jo feels no repulsion for the pauper's burial ground and is even willing to go in and dig through the common grave for the body of the man. He is excited by the rat as it scurries among the graves. Life and death, disease and filth, are common elements of his world. Yet to Lady Dedlock, this same landscape is offensive and shocking because her aristocratic position has isolated her from such scenes. Yet, the middle classes, who were much closer to these conditions, find them fearful. Take, for example, the scene in the same novel where Mr. Snagsby is taken to the vile neighborhood of Tom-all-Alone's:

When they came at last to Tom-all-Alone's, . . . Mr. Snagsby passes along the middle of a villainous street, undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud

and corrupt water -- though the roads are dry elsewhere -- and reeking with such smells and sights that he, who has lived in London all his life, can scarce believe his senses. Branching from this street and its heap of ruins, are other 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 (*Bleak House* Ch XXII, 374).

Dickens writes that Mr. Snagsby has lived in London all his life, but leaves it to the reader to remember that Tom-all-Alone's is within a few blocks of Mr. Snagsby's own home and business. Dickens often writes about the precarious position of the middle-classes. Mr. Snagsby considers himself to be a successful, prosperous businessman, but the reality of how close he is both physically and socially to this environment of Tom-all-Alone's "sickens him in body and mind" as he fears that he too could be dragged down into the same circumstances of the poor. Lady Dedlock's perceptions of the landscapes of the poor are based more on repulsion to the filth and disease, while Mr. Snagsby fears these landscapes because he could easily end up there himself.

In contrast to the perceptions of the middle and upper-classes to the landscapes of London's poor, the humbler classes were uncomfortable with the landscapes of the rich. In an essay in *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens writes about the actions of a common working man who is sent by his employer to the wealthy neighborhood of Russell Square:

Sometimes, there is a letter or two to take up to his employers, in Russell Square; and then the wealthy man of business, hearing his voice, calls out from the dining-parlor -- "Come in, Mr. Smith"; and Mr. Smith, putting his hat at the feet of one of the hall chairs, walks timidly in, and being condescendingly desired to sit down, carefully tucks his legs under his chair, and sits at a considerable distance from the table while he drinks the glass of sherry which is poured out for him by the eldest boy, and after drinking which he backs and slides out of the room, in a state of nervous agitation from which he does not perfectly recover until he finds himself once more in the Islington Road (*Sketches By Boz* "Characters" Ch I, 245).

The reader infers from the narration that Mr. Smith is totally intimidated by the presence of this wealthy man and cannot enjoy the landscape elements because he perceives himself as not part of it and not worthy of it. His comfort is restored only after he is back in his own familiar environment. Dickens has captured the influences of social boundaries in his writings and how

they influence individual behavior in hostile landscapes.

When a writer uses the omniscient point of view, the narrator is capable of knowing and expressing whatever he or she wishes, which is the style Dickens uses in most of his writings. Dickens often tells the reader that he is expressing his own perceptions and feelings. We get a good feel for Dickens's perception of London as being inferior to other landscapes in the following passage:

The shabbiness of our English capital, as compared with Paris, Bordeaux, Frankfort, Milan, Geneva -- almost any important town on the continent of Europe -- I find very striking after an absence of any duration in foreign parts. London is shabbier in contrast with Edinburgh, with Aberdeen, with Exeter, with Liverpool, with a bright little town like Bury St. Edmunds. London is shabby in contrast with New York, with Boston, with Philadelphia. In detail, one would say it can rarely fail to be a disappointing piece of shabbiness to a stranger from any of those places. There is nothing shabbier than Drury Lane in Rome itself. The meanness of Regent Street, set against the great line of Boulevards in Paris, is as striking as the abortive ugliness of Trafalgar Square set against the gallant beauty of the Place de la Concorde. London is shabby by daylight, and shabbier by gaslight. No Englishman knows what gaslight is until he sees the Rue de Rivoli and the Palais Royal after dark (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XXIII, 466).

The feelings expressed here seem to conflict with much of his other writings, in which he praises the gas-lighted landscapes of London. It is important to keep in mind that he spent very little time in other cities, especially American cities. His tour of the United States resulted in a perception that was developed by "a man who had travelled too quickly and too crowdedly to get more than a very brilliant impression" (Wilson 1970, 161). He was on holiday and was escorted and guided to the best parts of the American cities he visited. While this statement of the splendor of American cities is also in conflict of many of his other writings, it does point to the important issue. Dickens was not nearly as familiar with any other landscape as he was with the city of London. His perceptions as expressed in the passage above represent the views of one who was intimately acquainted with the splendors and horrors of London. So while the shabbiness of London repulsed him at times, it also excited and stimulated his creative powers.

London was perceived as a landscape of fear and repulsion in much of Dickens's

writings. The aristocracy, who were isolated socially and physically from the horrid environmental conditions of the poor, were repulsed by the filth of these places in contrast to the middle classes who feared these landscapes because their own existence was so precariously close to them. Dickens's concern with the social inequities of his day explain why he chose to demonstrate the differing perceptions of those who felt securely isolated from these horrors and those who feared that they would be dragged down into them.

### Loneliness

The immense city of London in the nineteenth century, as today, was vibrant and dynamic. Its movement, activity, and change -- often cruel and impersonal -- left individuals feeling alone and hopeless. For those who wanted to withdraw from the hustle and bustle of the busy city, there was plenty of opportunity. Dickens writes:

Being in the humor for complete solitude and uninterrupted meditation this autumn, I have taken a lodging for six weeks in the most unfrequented part of England -- in a word, in London (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XVI, 388).

But many people experienced the loneliness of the great city, not simply because they chose solitude in the impersonal surroundings, but because the social and physical characteristics of the city made it difficult for people to develop close personal relationships. For example, as a result of the rigid social system, artificial barriers prevented interaction among people of different stations. It is not unusual to find, therefore, that the landscapes of the wealthy are often perceived as being lonely places, such as Lady Dedlock's street in the novel *Bleak House* :

It is a street of such dismal grandeur, so determined not to condescend to liveliness, that the doors and windows hold a gloomy state of their own in black paint and dust, and the echoing mews behind have a dry and massive appearance, as if they were reserved to stable the stone chargers of noble statues (*Bleak House* Ch XLVIII, 274).

The same image is presented in *Dombey and Son* in which the wealthy Mr. Dombey is observed by his ignored daughter:

... she began to entertain ideas of him in his solitary state, as if he were a lone prisoner in a cell, or a strange apparition that was not to be accosted or understood (*Dombey and Son* Ch III, 33).

The idea of loneliness is often presented as boredom by the rich. "My Lady Dedlock's 'place' has been extremely dreary. . . [and] she has been 'bored to death'" (*Bleak House* Ch II, 19). Yet this image is really a cry of desperation. Lady Dedlock is isolated from her lover, who is below her station and cannot, therefore, share her life. But it was not only the wealthy in Dickens's writings who perceived the urban landscape of nineteenth-century London as a lonely place. This perception was also shared by those who migrated to the city in hopes of better opportunity:

It is strange with how little notice, good, bad, or indifferent, a man may live and die in London. He awakens no sympathy in the breast of any single person; his existence is a matter of interest to no one save himself; he cannot be said to be forgotten when he dies, for no one remembered him when he was alive. There is a numerous class of people in this great metropolis who seem not to possess a single friend, and whom nobody appears to care for. Urged by imperative necessity in the first instance, they have resorted to London in search of employment and the means of subsistence. It is hard, we know, to break the ties which bind us to our homes and friends, and harder still to efface the thousand recollections of happy days and old times, which have been slumbering in our bosoms for years, and only rush upon the mind to bring before it associations connected with the friends we have left, the scenes we have beheld too probably for the last time, and the hopes we once cherished, but may entertain no more. These men, however, happily for themselves, have long forgotten such thoughts. Old country friends have died or emigrated; former correspondents have become lost, like themselves, in the crowd and turmoil of some busy city; and they have gradually settled down into mere passive creatures of habit and endurance (*Sketches By Boz* "Characters" Ch I, 242).

What was once viewed as a landscape of hope and opportunity is now perceived to be lonely and hollow. Dreams gone, past forgotten, they now go through their days in a lonely sameness.

Perhaps the characters who view the landscape as the most lonely place are the thousands of homeless who lived in the city streets. Dickens became very familiar with the plight of these people on his solitary wanderings; he reflects on their feelings of the landscape in an essay entitled "Night Walks" where he writes:

Walking in the streets under the pattering rain, Houselessness, would walk and walk and walk, and seeing nothing but the interminable tangle of streets, save at a corner, here and there, two policemen in conversation, or the

sergeant or inspector looking after his men. . . . .  
 The wild moon and clouds were as restless as an evil conscience in a tumbled  
 bed, and the very shadow of the immensity of London seemed to lie  
 oppressively upon the river (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch XIII, 351-352).

The restlessness and hopeless wanderings of the homeless are presented in this essay to the thousands of Dickens's readers who had never walked the streets of London at night. For many, this may have been a new image of the city never before revealed. Essays such as this one demonstrate Dickens's attempt to use his writings to bring attention to the problems of the homeless. The passage from the 1823 gazetteer quoted in Chapter I of this study reports the numbers of homeless that could be found living in London's streets at that time, but it failed to link the feelings of these people to their environment. Dickens's "Night Walks" captures this relationship.

### Confusion

The city of London is sometimes perceived as a place of confusion. Because of the immensity of the urban area, even Dickens himself could not know every part of the great city. The very structure of the city, with its maze of streets and courts, added to the confusion. Since most of Dickens's characters moved about on foot or slow public transportation, their range of territory was small. Many were familiar with only the immediate neighborhood where they lived or the routes they traveled between locations. It is not surprising to find that they became confused and disoriented when they moved beyond familiar territory. Esther, the main character of *Bleak House*, relates this sense of confusion and disorientation as she travels through the streets of London in search of her mother. A number of passages show her attempt to orient herself in the strange neighborhood:

I was far from sure that I was not in a dream. We rattled with great rapidity through such a labyrinth of streets that I soon lost all idea where we were; except that we had crossed and recrossed the river, and still seemed to be traversing a low-lying, water-side, dense neighborhood of narrow thoroughfares, checkered by docks and basins, high piles of warehouses,

swing-bridges, and masts of ships. . . . .  
 The tide was coming in, as I judged from the sound it made; and I could hear it break at the end of the alley, with a little rush toward me. . . . .  
 We appeared to retrace the way we had come. Not that I had taken note of any particular objects in my perturbed state of mind, but judging from the general character of the streets. . . . .  
 After a while, I recognized the familiar way to Saint Albans (*Bleak House* Ch LVII, 411-413).

They leave London for the country and travel on the more familiar roads but soon realize that they must return to the city:

It was three o'clock in the morning when the houses outside London did at last begin to exclude the country, and to close us in with streets. . . . .  
 Where we drove, I neither knew then, nor have I ever known since; but 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. . . . .  
 Although I looked about me confusedly and hurriedly, as we crossed a street, I thought I knew the place. "Are we in Holborn?" I asked him.  
 "Yes," said Mr. Bucket. "Do you know this turning?"  
 "It looks like Chancery Lane" (*Bleak House* Ch LIX, 446-449).

Esther uses such elements as the sound of the tide coming in, the look of the buildings, and the topography of the landscape to make some sense of the confusing city. There is excitement in her voice as she finally recognizes where she is. Lady Dedlock experiences this same type of disorientation and confusion when she attempts to locate the paupers burial ground by herself, after having first been led there by Jo:

"I had been out on an errand, dear lady -- long after it was dark -- quite late; and when I came home, I found a common-looking person, all wet and muddy, looking up at our house. When she saw me coming in at the door, she called me back, and said did I live here? and I said yes, and she said she knew only one or two places about here, but had lost her way, and couldn't find them.  
 "She could not find those places," said I.  
 "No!" cried the girl, shaking her head. "No! Couldn't find them. And she was so faint, and lame, and miserable, oh, so wretched! that if you had seen her, Mr. Snagsby, you'd have given her half-a-crown, I know!"  
 "Well, Guster, my girl," said he, at first not knowing what to say. "I hope I should."  
 "And yet she was so well spoken," said the girl, looking at me with wide-open eyes, "that it made a person's heart bleed. And so she said to me, did I know the way to the burying-ground? And I asked her which burying-ground? And she said the poor burying-ground. And so I told her I had been a poor child myself, and it was according to parishes. But she said a poor burying-ground not very far from here, where there was an archway, and a step, and an iron gate."

"And did she go --?"

"Yes," cried the girl, anticipating the inquiry, "yes! she went the way I had shown her" (*Bleak House* Ch LIX, 457-459).

Landscapes are composed of varying combinations of material culture artifacts. Certain elements such as architectural features or street patterns help distinguish one location from another. Lady Dedlock remembers the archway and step and uses them as identification elements. Those architectural features set that place aside from others that appeared similar to her in the strange neighborhood. From passages like these, we see Dickens's interest in and knowledge of how people orient themselves in strange environments.

The city is, of course, confusing when characters move beyond their familiar locations. But even known surroundings can be confusing for those who are uneducated and cannot interpret word symbols. Take, for example, the street-crossing sweeper, Jo, who has managed to survive on the streets of London without parents or home. He has no formal education and has no comprehension of the world of the literate:

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 streets, and on the doors, and in the windows! To see people read, and to see people write, and to see the postman deliver 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? To be hustled, and jostled, and moved on; and really to feel that it would appear to be perfectly true that I have no business, here, or there, or anywhere; and yet to be perplexed by the consideration that I *am* here, somehow, too, and everybody overlooked me until I became the creature that I am! It must be a strange state, not merely to be told that I am scarcely human (as in the case of my offering myself for a witness), but to feel it of my own knowledge all my life! To see the horses, dogs, and cattle, go by me, and to know that in ignorance I belong to them, and not to the superior beings in my shape, whose delicacy I offend! Jo's idea of a Criminal Trial, or a Judge, or a Bishop, or a Government, or that inestimable jewel to him (if he only knew it) the Constitution, should be strange! His whole material and immaterial life is wonderfully strange; his death, the strangest thing of all (*Bleak House* Ch XVI, 269).

For Jo, the literate city is a complete mystery and the symbols of that city are confusing and incomprehensible. He passes through the streets of his familiar neighborhood, but is not totally



at ease because he is aware that his ignorance makes him a stranger to his surroundings. Like the thousands of other homeless that lived in the London streets in the nineteenth century, Jo has no place that is his own. To survive in the crowded city, he has to keep moving:

"Why, bless my heart!" says Mr. Snagsby, "what's the matter?"

"This boy," says the constable, "although he's repeatedly told to, won't move on --"

"I'm always a moving on, sir," cries the boy, wiping away his grimy tears with his arm. "I've always been a moving and a moving on ever since I was born. Where can I possible move to, sir, more nor I do move?"

"He won't move on," says the constable, calmly, with a slight professional hitch of his neck involving its better settlement in his stiff stock, "although he has been repeatedly cautioned, and therefore I am obliged to take him into custody. He's as obstinate a young gonoph as I know. He WON'T move on!"

"Oh, my eye! Where can I move to?" cries the boy, clutching quite desperately at his hair, and beating his bare feet upon the floor of Mr. Snagsby's passage.

"Don't you come none of that, or I shall make blessed short work of you!" says the constable, giving him a passionless shake. "My instructions are that you are to move on. I have told you so five hundred times."

"But where?" cries the boy.

"Well! Really, constable, you know," says Mr. Snagsby wistfully, and coughing behind his hand his cough of great perplexity and doubt; "really, that does seem a question. Where, you know?"

"My instructions don't go to that," replies the constable. "My instructions are that this boy is to move on."

Do you hear, Jo? It is nothing to you or to any one else that the great lights in the parliamentary sky have failed for some few years, in this business, to set you the example of moving on. The one grand recipe remains for you -- the profound philosophical prescription -- the be-all and the end-all of your strange existence upon earth. Move on! You are by no means to move off, Jo, for the great lights can't at all agree about that. Move on (*Bleak House* Ch XIX, 321-322)!

For Jo, the city is confusing without home, education, or friends. He questions where in that great, large city can he go. Where should he move on to? Where is his place in the city? This perception of the city as a place of confusion is a result of ignorance.

With limits on mobility, both physically and socially, London's inhabitants generally were familiar with only small portions of the city. Dickens himself focused on only those areas of the city which he was most familiar such as the City; the Inns of Court; the suburbs of Pentonville, Islington, and Somers and Camden Towns; the south bank of the Thames, particularly Lambeth, Southwark, and Deptford; and the poor east side of London, Limehouse and Whitechapel. Yet,

he recognized from his own wanderings in the city that unfamiliar landscapes are confusing; therefore, he set his stories in familiar locales for his own benefit but added these perceptual elements through his characters.

### London as a Landscape of Comfort

The dichotomy of the varying perceptions of Dickens's nineteenth-century London landscapes are based primarily on character/location relationships. The landscape is perceived as repulsive, fearful, lonely, or confusing when Dickens moves his characters into unfamiliar settings or when past experiences influence the characters' perceptions. Sometimes ignorance, as in Jo's case, inadequately prepares the character to interpret material objects. The prose of Dickens's writings swings back and forth between this perceptual dichotomy of London's landscapes so that at times the reader recognizes the hostility of the urban landscape as well as the comfort it offers.

### Refuge

The city of London is sometimes perceived as a place of refuge. London provided both large city anonymity as well as places to hide for those who wanted to escape from some horrible existence elsewhere. In *Oliver Twist*, the local beadle Mr. Bumble has been dispatched to find a suitable position for young Oliver, the workhouse boy. After several unsuccessful attempts to apprentice the boy, Mr. Bumble learns that Oliver has run away to London. On the road, Oliver reflects on his decision to flee and his perceptions of the great city, toward which he is heading:

The stone by which he was seated bore, in large characters, an intimation that it was just seventy miles from that spot to London. The name awakened a new train of ideas in the boy's mind. London! -- that great large place! -- nobody -- not even Mr. Bumble -- could ever find him there (*Oliver Twist* Ch VIII, 71)!

The city was thus perceived as large and therefore concealing, a safe place of refuge for the troubled boy. This same perception of London is expressed by Florence, the young daughter of Mr. Dombey in *Dombey and Son*. Her father cared only for his son; Florence was unloved and unwanted in her own home. When she finally accepts this realization, she decides to flee from her father's house:

Where to go? Still somewhere, anywhere! still going on; but where? She thought of the only other time she had been lost in the wide wilderness of London; -- though not lost now -- and went that way. . . . . Florence hurried away, in the advancing morning, and the strengthening sunshine, to the City. The roar soon grew more loud, the passengers more numerous, the shops more busy, until she was 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 (*Dombey and Son* Ch XLVIII, 255-256).

This passage accents the paradox of the city with its variety and contrasts between wealth and poverty, good and evil, prisons and churches. Life is flowing "indifferently" past varying landscapes, each with its own message to be read and interpreted. Yet, this stream of life has a destination and that is the message in Dickens's writings. Indifference cannot be tolerated.

Even the wretched street-sweeper, Jo, of *Bleak House*, finds refuge in the neighborhood of Tom-all-Alone's. While he has been told to "move on," Jo can find no place to go and in spite of threats, he returns to the only place that he knows:

"Wishermaydie if I seen Tom-all-Alone's til this blessed morning," replies Jo, hoarsely.

"Why have you come here now?"

Jo looks all around the confined court, looks at his questioner no higher than the knees, and finally answers:

"I don't know how to do nothink, and I can't get nothink to do. I'm wery poor and ill, and I thought I'd come back here when there weren't nobody about, and lay down and hide somewheres as I knows on till arter dark, and then go and beg a trifle of Mr. Snagsby. He wos allus willin' fur to give me sumthink he wos, though Mrs. Snagsby she was allus a chivying on me -- like everybody everywheres" (*Bleak House* Ch XLVI, 250).

The only place Jo has ever known is Tom-all-Alone's and when he is sick and fears that he is dying, he comes back to it as a place of refuge. In the vast city, a person could hide from the evils

that threatened him/her elsewhere. But it is not a peaceful refuge, only a temporary escape.

### Opportunity

Nineteenth-century London, like cities throughout history, offered the lure of opportunity and the promise of fame and fortune. Rural to urban migration and inter-urban migration make cities dynamic places with the hustle and bustle of activity. Problems can arise when too many people come to a city which has too few jobs and services. Throughout, Dickens mentions those who perceive the city as a place of opportunity, a place where they can find work, or where they can make a new life for themselves. Such is the case of a young man and his mother who move to London:

They had removed from some country place and settled in London; partly because it afforded better chances of employment for the boy, and partly, perhaps, with the natural desire to leave a place where they had been in better circumstances, and where their poverty was known. They were proud under their reverses, and above revealing their wants and privations to strangers (*Sketches By Boz "Our Parish" Ch VII, 58*).

With the city of London growing at such a rapid rate as it did in the nineteenth century, all sorts of skilled and semi-skilled craftsmen were needed. Dickens mentions brickmaking often as an occupation that was needed, or at least it was perceived as being needed. In the novel *Bleak House*, several scenes take place at Saint Albans, a small community outside of London, where brickmaking was the major occupation. The workers live in extreme poverty and often travel into the city in search of work. In the following passage, the wife of a brickmaker is found tired and footsore in the London streets and is given care by a kind physician:

"And so your husband is a brickmaker?"

"How do you know that, sir?" asked the woman, astonished.

"Why, I suppose so, from the color of the clay upon your bag and on your dress. And I know brickmakers go about working at piecework in different places (*Bleak House Ch XLVI, 245*).

So while the men travel back and forth between Saint Albans and London (Map 9), more often

than not, they come away without work and try to forget their disappointment in drink:

"And who have we got here tonight?" says Mr. Bucket, opening another door and glaring in with his bull's-eye. "Two drunken men, eh? And two women? The men are sound enough," turning back each sleeper's arm from his face to look at him. "Are these your good men, my dears?"

"Yes, sir," returns one of the women. "They are our husbands."

"Brickmakers, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"What are you doing here? You don't belong to London?"

"No, sir. We belong to Hertfordshire."

"Whereabouts in Hertfordshire?"

"Saint Albans."

"Come up on the tramp?"

"We walked up yesterday. There's no work down with us at present, but we have done no good by coming here, and shall do none, I expect" (*Bleak House* Ch XXII, 375-376).

The woman sounds as if it is a familiar pattern and she no longer believes that the great city can help them. Yet, her husband tries over and over again to find work in London in spite of his repeated failure. For him, London is the place of opportunity, and his perception never changes.

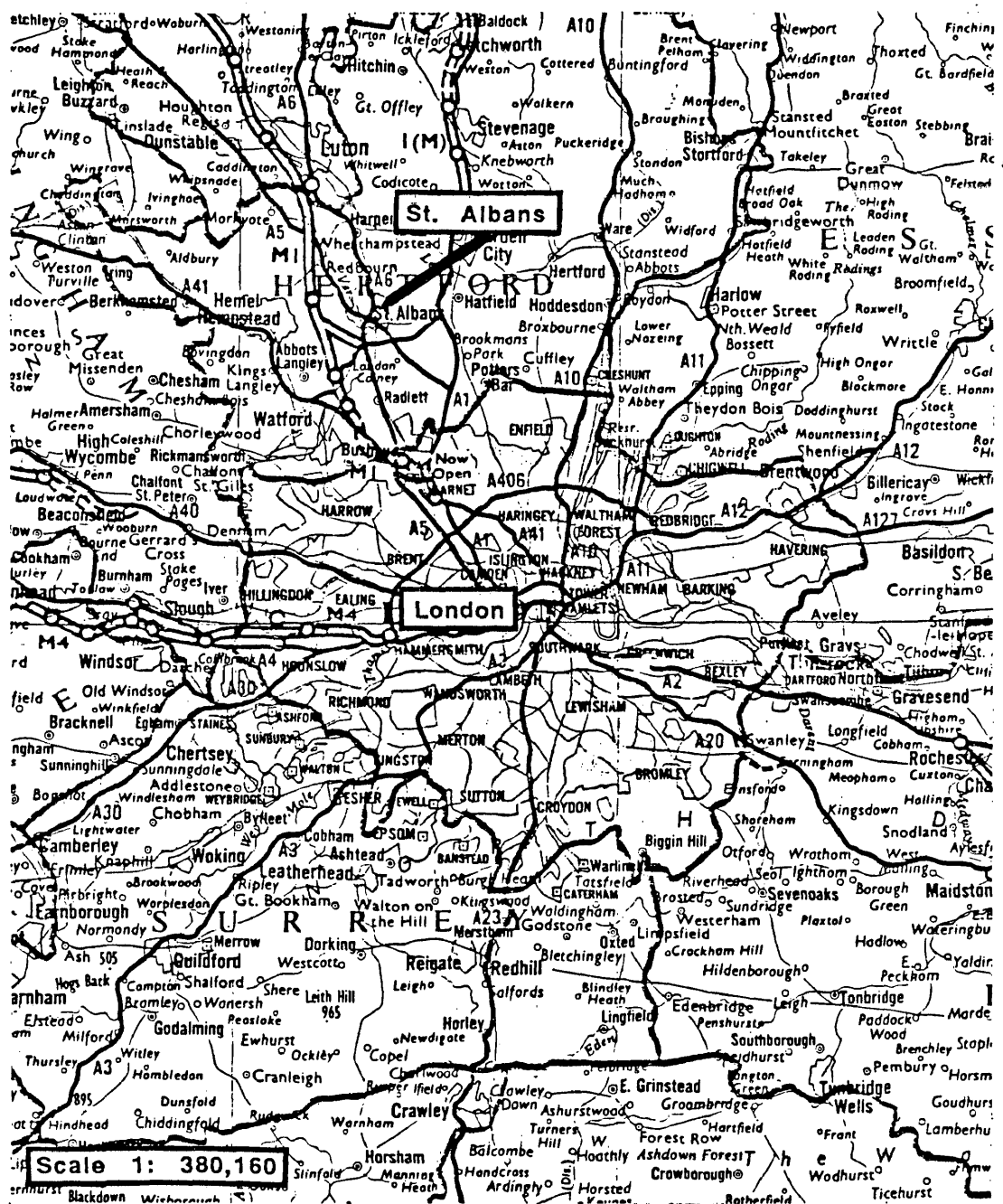
Sometimes specific locations in London appear to offer opportunity. In *Our Mutual*

*Friend*, a Mr. Silas Wegg sets up a stall on a street corner, where he sells a variety of items:

He had established his right to the corner by imperceptible prescription. He had never varied his ground an inch, but had in the beginning diffidently taken the corner upon which the side of the house gave. A howling corner in the winter time, a dusty corner in the summer time, an undesirable corner at the best of times. Shelterless fragments of straw and paper got up revolving storms there when the main street was at peace; and the water-cart, as if it were drunk or short-sighted, came blundering and jolting around it, making it muddy when all else was clean (*Our Mutual Friend* Book I Ch V, 56-57).

From Dickens's description of the location, it seems hardly to be a site that would afford the best opportunity for his business. It was not even on the main street and seemed vulnerable to all extremes of weather. Yet, Mr. Wegg believes it is the place of opportunity and returns to the same corner year after year. A similar view is taken by a lady who chooses to open a boarding house. The belief in her success is based on the house's location, which she advertises as being "within ten minutes' walk of -- everywhere" (*Sketches By Boz "Tales"* Ch I, 312). Knowing the size of the great city, no location could be so situated. Yet the woman perceives it to be so.

## ST. ALBANS



Map 9

Source: Base Map Adapted From *The Reader's Digest Complete Atlas of the British Isles*.  
(No Date). London: The Reader's Digest Association.

These last two examples demonstrate two fundamental elements in the study of location, site and situation. Mr. Wegg chooses that location because there are specific characteristics of that site that appeal to him. The boarding house is selected because of its situation, that is, its location in relation to other locations. Therefore, site and situation are locational elements that Dickens uses to convey people's feelings about place.

As the city grew and transportation improvements allowed people to travel longer distances to work, the suburbanization process began to bring about a change in the center city, which had always been the most desirable location. Dickens recognized that this change was difficult for some people to accept:

That he was an old bookkeeper, or an old trader who had kept his own books, and that he might be seen at the Bank of England about Dividend times, no doubt. That he had lived in the City all his ilfe [sic], and was distainful of other localities, no doubt. Why he looked at the door I never absolutely proved, but it is my belief that he lived in expectation of the time when the citizens would come back to live in the City, and its ancient glories would be renewed. He appeared to expect that this would occur on a Sunday, and that the wanderers would first appear in the deserted churches, penitent and humbled. Hence he looked at the door which they never darkened (*The Uncommercial Traveller* Ch IX, 308-309).

These feelings may be a reflection of the concern many people felt with the whole dynamic urbanization process. The centers of most western cities began to decline with the coming of the industrial revolution. London in the nineteenth-century was beginning to experience this decline as the suburbanization process created desirable residential locations on the edges of the city. This man saw the city changing and reflected on what he considered to be a better time.

Opportunity can be real or perceived. Cities have always acted as magnets to draw people to them, which is part of the dynamic process of urbanization. This process can often result in extreme problems if too many people move to an area that has too few jobs, facilities, and services. By writing about what it is like to experience these problems, or to demonstrate the ignorance of them that existed, Dickens hoped to outrage enough of his readers so they would join him in demanding reform. There is no way to measure the success of his writings in achieving

that goal, but there is little doubt that they did contribute significantly toward bringing attention to London's nineteenth-century environmental problems.

### London As Home

Finally, the landscape of nineteenth-century London is home to many of the characters in Dickens's writings. As Lowenthal and Prince have pointed out, English landscape tastes generally prefer the country over the urban (Lowenthal and Prince 1965, 187), but for those who know no other environment, the city is home:

"The country," says Mr. George, plying his knife and fork; "why, I suppose you never clapped your eyes on the country, Phil?"  
 "I see the marshes once," says Phil, contentedly eating his breakfast.  
 "What marshes?"  
 "The marshes, commander," returns Phil.  
 "Where are they?"  
 "I don't know where they are," says Phil; "but I see 'em, guv'ner. They was flat. And miste" . . . . .  
 "I was born in the country, Phil."  
 "Was you indeed, commander?"  
 "Yes, and bred there" . . . "So you never clapped your eyes upon the country -- marshes and dreams excepted. Eh?"  
 Phil shakes his head.  
 "Do you want to see it?"  
 "N-no, I don't know as I do, particular," says Phil.  
 "The town's enough for you, eh?"  
 "Why you see, commander," says Phil, "I ain't acquainted with anything else, and I doubt if I ain't a getting too old to take to novelties" (*Bleak House* Ch XXVI, 439-440).

Phil has heard about the beauty of the English countryside but his familiarity with London and his feelings of it as home have stifled his desire to go elsewhere. Dickens's writings are literally filled with scenes of home and hearth. It is perhaps the most recognizable perceptual landscape in his books:

In the larger and better kinds of streets, dining-parlor curtains are closely drawn, kitchen fires blaze brightly up, and savory steams of hot dinners salute the nostrils of the hungry wayfarer, as he plods wearily by . . . (*Sketches By Boz* "Scenes" Ch II, 66).



. . . Then all the Cratchit family drew around the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one; . . . while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and cracked noisily (*A Christmas Carol* Stave III, 58-59).

It can be argued that the home is a specific location within the broader landscape of the city, yet these people identify with London as "home." Mrs. Micawber, an immortal character in the novel *David Copperfield*, says "I am cut off from my home (I allude to lodgings in Pentonville) . . ." (*David Copperfield* Ch XVII, 312) when she is financially stranded in Kent, which shows her feelings toward that city. Home is not only her lodgings but the city.

Landscapes are composed of elements that can be seen, smelled, touched, heard, and tasted. They are also composed of the perceptions individuals have of the landscape, which are based on past experiences, education, values, and expectations. These perceptions influence behavior which results in change in the landscape. Just as the cultural geographer can "read" the landscape elements in the built environment, so can the literary geographer "read" the same elements in the works of fiction because creative writers are able to capture the human experience with the material landscape in their writings. Charles Dickens's image of nineteenth-century London has become the commonly held image of the city because of the popularity of his writings in his own time as well as today. His writings help us understand the complexity of the urban landscape and the values and feelings that were reflected in the material and perceptual fabric of the city. In so doing, we have a better understanding of how his writings contributed to environmental reform which Dickens saw as necessarily simultaneous with the moral reform of nineteenth-century London.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSION**

The goal of this study is to establish how literature may be used to recreate the material and perceptual images of a landscape as it existed in a certain time and as it was perceived and promoted by a popular writer of that time. The writings of Charles Dickens demonstrate his understanding of nineteenth-century London and how his image of the city was used for environmental reform. This final chapter will summarize what has been learned in the course of this research and will suggest areas of further study.

#### The Value of Literature For Geographic Research

One of the strengths of geography as a formal academic discipline is its integrative approach to the study of the world. Geographers are often accused of invading the academic "turf" of other disciplines because of the broad-based approach of their research. Yet many geographers believe that their major academic and applied role is to pull together research from other disciplines and to make some integrative sense out of often fragmented and conflicting studies (Holt-Jensen 1982, 4; James and Martin 1981, 8).

Geographers have been very creative in adapting new methods, tools, and techniques as well as philosophical and theoretical ideas in their attempt to understand the complexity of the physical and cultural world. The use of literature is just such an attempt to integrate the work of creative writers into our understanding of the world. While many geographers on the "scientific" end of the research spectrum may argue that the lack of a defined methodology makes such research unacceptable to the discipline, others would support the opposite view -- the subjective nature of human perceptions about place cannot be measured and evaluated by quantitative

techniques. This geographer believes the two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but in reality complement and reinforce one another. Notwithstanding, a number of conclusions can be made about the strength and value of the use of literature for geographic research.

First, geographic research has changed its philosophical approach and altered its methods and techniques over time. Certain eras or specific university departments have been dominated by "descriptive" geography or "quantitative" geography, or other approaches which ignored or purposely excluded feelings about place in their research. In contrast, creative writers seek to capture the "sense of place" in their books, poems, and essays. They record the feelings held for locations through their characters or narrative; therefore literature can add to the sense of place by supplementing factual data with "perceptual data", which may be missing from the works of professional geographers because of the philosophical approach of the era or the tradition of the school.

Second, creative writers usually approach the study of place from an "insider's" perspective, in contrast to many professional geographers, who are often "outsiders" looking in. The "outsider's" perspective is often reinforced by the data sources or methods that geographers use, such as census material or mathematical models, which are designed to be unemotional and detached. In other cases the "outsider's" perspective may be unintentional. In the modern world, most people are very mobile and have little opportunity to become intimately acquainted with the places where they live and work. Many professional geographers, as others, are often newcomers to an area, which they then research because of the practical aspect of available resources. Sometimes chosen areas are researched at a distance with often only limited time on location for field study. Therefore, in spite of their best intentions, much of the geographic research conducted by professionals is from an "outsider's" perspective. Although the creative writer is no less mobile than other people, he/she usually writes about places with which he/she is intimately acquainted because those intimate experiences are the source of creativity. Some geographers would argue that the "outsiders" perspective is required because it

ensures that the research is unbiased, therefore "scientific"; however both intentional philosophical approaches as well as unintentional lack of intimacy with place produce research that can be enhanced by the use of literature.

Finally, fictional writing often presents a more enduring image of place than does most geographic writing, for the simple reason that creative writers are specialists with words. The creative writer carefully selects and arranges words to convey the exact meaning or feeling he/she seeks to share with the reader. Unfortunately, geographers often lack the literary ability to make their writings "stick" with the reader. Many geographers feel that fictional writing can play an important role in teaching geographic concepts because of its ability to present vivid images of places and ideas about the world which students may remember far longer than they would if the same concepts were presented only in traditional textbooks.

Our libraries are filled with some of the best geographies available in the form of fictional writings. The range of topics, locations, and periods of writing is almost unlimited. Geographers have a wealth of information before them which can add significantly to their understanding of the world around them.

### The Value of Dickens's Writings As Geographies

The writings of Charles Dickens are especially valuable to geographers because they contain elements of both landscape description and landscape perception. A number of conclusions can be drawn about the use of Dickens's writings for geographic research.

First, Dickens's novels and essays can be used as contemporary studies to supplement professional geographic research of nineteenth-century London. In Britain, geographical research in the nineteenth century was dominated by accounts of exploration, which focused on descriptions of exotic and faraway places. There was also an emphasis on collecting and recording raw data. The description of London presented in Chapter I of this thesis, which was

taken from an 1823 gazetteer, is typical of most nineteenth-century British geographic research. As a course of study at the university level in the nineteenth century, geography was taught by geologists, who focused on physical geography, or historians, who presented geography as locations where historical events took place. The first professor of geography in a British university was not appointed until 1887 (James and Martin 1981, 201). Although few professional geographers in Dickens's time were recording perceptions and feelings about places, geographic research was going on. Writers, painters, and other creative people were interpreting geography all around them. Therefore, Dickens is just one of the many artists whose works can be used in conjunction with the descriptive geographic accounts of his day.

Second, this study has shown that the sociological novel can be used successfully as a source of geographic investigation. Because of the strong tradition in geography of studying regions, the regional novel has been particularly popular among literary geographers. However, the sociological novelists, such as Dickens, take an important approach to the study of place because of their focus on human-environment interactions. The sociological novel focuses on the nature, function, or effect of society on the characters and their environments in contrast to the regional novel, which is concerned with accurate representation of the habits, speech, manners, or beliefs of the characters as determined by their geographic location. The sociological novel explores questions of environmental problems or public policy, for example, to help the reader understand how and why landscapes develop the way they do. A review of the studies conducted in the area of literary geography indicates that the sociological novel has not been the choice of most geographers. It deserves more attention.

Finally, Dickens's novels seem to have changed over time from an earlier emphasis on locations to a later focus on characters. In his first published work, *Sketches By Boz*, described as "illustrative of every-day life and every-day people," he attempts to paint a picture of life in London. Another of his earlier works, *Pickwick Papers*, was originally commissioned as a collection of short sketches to describe the works of the famous sporting artist Robert Seymour.

The book was immensely popular and demonstrated Dickens's ability to convey the feelings people have toward places. In his later novels, he began to focus more and more on character development rather than landscape interpretation. *The Uncommercial Traveller*, a later collection of essays, has many of the same landscape elements as his earlier novels and essays but seems to be an exception among the later works; therefore, Dickens's earlier novels have more to offer the geographer than do his later ones. His essays seem to retain over time a consistent focus on the cultural landscape.

### Areas For Further Study

This thesis focused on one area of Charles Dickens's writings, his descriptions and perceptions of nineteenth-century London. The topic was limited in scope to allow an in-depth study of one area of Charles Dickens's literary landscapes; however, his writings contain a wealth of additional geographic information that is worthy of exploration.

First, while Dickens is considered mostly an urban writer and London was his most common urban landscape, he set stories and essays in other locations as well. One Dickens novel quoted often by geographers is *Hard Times*, which is set in the industrial midlands of England and focuses on the landscape degradation caused by the industrial revolution. In his London novels and essays, Dickens refers only casually to the relationship between the cities' industry and environmental pollution. The environmental problems of London seem to relate more to inadequate or missing public services such as sewer systems or clean water supplies resulting from the extreme crowding caused by the rapid growth of London's population in the nineteenth century. *Hard Times* presents a different picture of a nineteenth century English industrial city and reflects the direct effect of the industrial revolution on the landscape, while his London landscapes are indirectly affected by migration and population increase. The initial causes are the same, but the Midlands' problems are viewed in a simpler manner. This thesis

could be expanded to include a comparison between Dickens's London landscapes with those of other English cities, particularly those in the industrial Midlands region of England.

Second, Dickens presents a striking contrast in his perceptions of the English country-side and London. While he was the first to admit that he had little knowledge of rural life and landscape, his books are filled with country scenes. His perception of rural England is often described as "that of a Cockney on holiday" (Wilson 1970, 118), full of innocent joy and pastoral bliss. An area of further study would be an examination of Dickens's differing perceptions between the urban landscape of London and that of the rural countryside. Lowenthal and Prince's excellent studies, "The English Landscape" (1961) and "English Landscape Tastes" (1965), could serve as a basis of the comparison because many of the elements identified by their studies are ideas reflected in Dickens's perception of rural England.

In addition to contrasting Dickens's landscape perceptions of London with his image of other English cities and with the rural English countryside, further study could be developed by comparing his perceptions of London with those of non-English cities. His very controversial love-hate relationship with America could yield some interesting images of this country in the last century. In addition, several of his books, *Little Dorrit* and *A Tale of Two Cities* for example, give glimpses of Continental settings. The topic of familiarity and perception, which was touched upon briefly in Chapter V of this thesis, could be expanded to compare and contrast his perceptions of London with those of other cities with which he was less familiar.

This thesis and the suggestions for further research presented thus far have focused entirely on Dickens's literary landscapes. This was justified as an important topic of study in Chapter III of this thesis because of the tremendous influence his writings had on the readers of his day as well as today's reader. However, Dickens's image of nineteenth-century London could also be compared with those images of other writers of his day. Lloyd's excellent study of landscape imagery in the urban novel presents a methodology that could be used to achieve such a comparison. Lloyd used a large number of novels and a variety of authors to gain an over-all

image of nineteenth-century Boston. A similar study would provide a greater understanding of how the city of London was presented in the popular literature of its day and the effect that literature has in shaping the contemporary image of the city.

Finally, this thesis has referred briefly to the tourist landscapes of England that are associated with the writings of Charles Dickens. Some excellent studies have already demonstrated the role of literature in the development of tourist landscapes. R. W. Butler studied the tourist landscapes of R. L. Stevenson's Scotland (1986) and offered ideas on how to manage tourist landscapes as they pass through various cycles of evolution (1980); James R. Curtis has written about the tourist landscapes of Twain (1985) and Steinbeck (1981); and Rudi Hartmann has explored Steinbeck's "Cannery Row" as a tourist landscape (1986). The literary landscapes made famous by Dickens's writings have become extremely successful tourist landscapes in England. Research could be expanded to look at the development of the urban image of Dickens's London into a contemporary tourist landscape.



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