

**House to House:
Dickens and the Properties of Fiction**

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the idiosyncrasies of the nineteenth-century property market and the significance of rented spaces in the literary imagination, focusing on Charles Dickens's fiction and journalism.

The traditional understanding of the Victorian home has been challenged in recent criticism that points to the permeability of the public and private spheres, complicates the ways in which gender mapped onto these spheres, and highlights the difference between home and house, freehold and leasehold. This thesis contributes to the discussion by showing that domestic space was a more fractured concept than the middle-class ideal suggests. Versions of 'home' could be found in a multitude of unlikely and unstable places: in inns, hotels, lodging-houses, boarding-houses, and private houses subdivided into apartments for income. Drawing particular attention to London, I reveal tenancy – the commodification of space – to be a governing force in everyday life in the period.

The vast majority of the population had an immediate economic relationship with the rooms and houses they inhabited, and this basic fact had various social, psychological and imaginative corollaries. Dickens may have been read as an overwhelming proponent of domestic ideology, but as this thesis argues, rented spaces had an enduring hold upon him. Most significantly, for Dickens, to write about tenancy meant to write about writing. His tenancy narratives touch upon questions of genre, style, character, authorial self-consciousness and the literary marketplace – especially his dialogue with the writers working around him. I explain that the emerging prominence of rented spaces gave Dickens and his circle new narrative opportunities, offering them a tool with which to study the boundaries of different genres. Space, then, does not simply provide a backdrop for incident in the novel, but plays a direct part in determining which incidents take place.

Accordingly, the chapters in this thesis are principally divided by genre. The introduction lays out the historical, theoretical and geographical coordinates of the argument. The first chapter identifies some of the key features of Dickens's emerging urban style, situates his early work within an influential farce tradition, and brings the figure of the landlady to life. The second discusses spatial metaphors in the *Bildungsroman*; it ends with an argument about the 1851 window-tax repeal and its implications for literary lodging-houses. Chapter 3 considers the sudden growth of the hospitality industry during the Great Exhibition and its corresponding narratives, from comedy to sensation fiction. This is followed by a short interlude on seaside lodgings, where Dickens and his contemporaries modernised the pastoral for the nineteenth century. After charting contemporary debates surrounding 'low' lodging-houses, Chapter 4 demonstrates how these writers used rented spaces to make major contributions to the rise of the detective story. The fifth chapter, on living alone and living together, is largely dedicated to the multi-authored Christmas numbers of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*; these witty collections suggest that the dynamics of the lodging-house reflect the politics of Dickens's immediate circle. Finally, a coda contemplates the legacy of Dickens's tenancy narratives in the late nineteenth century and beyond.

For my parents

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Note on the Texts

Many of the novels and stories discussed here first appeared in serial form – either weekly, in magazines, or monthly, in parts. Dickens published articles by his contemporaries and his own journalism in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*.

In this thesis, I have cited the original publications; references to Dickens's early sketches come from the first collected edition, *Sketches by Boz* (1836-7), released in two series by John Macrone. To quote Dickens's fiction and journalism as they first circulated is to create a certain level of equality between him and those working around him; it acknowledges the sheer extent of the dialogue between writers in the period. As the following chapters are concerned with Dickens's immediate literary and historical context, it also makes sense to engage with each text in the form that it would have reached nineteenth-century readers.

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Introduction

Lodgings here! A charming place,
The Owner's such a lovely face
The Neighbours too seem very pretty
Lively, sprightly, gay, and witty
Of all the spots that I could find
This is the place to suit my mind.

Then I will say sans hesitation
This place shall be my habitation
This charming spot my home shall be
While dear "Maria" keeps the key,
I'll settle here, no more I'll roam
But make this place my happy home.

A great advantage too will be,
I shall keep such good company,
So good that I fear my composing
Will be considered very prosing
Still I'm most proud amongst these pickings
To rank the humblest name,— Charles Dickens.

(Dickens, 'Lodgings To Let', 1831)

'Lodgings To Let', written when Dickens was nineteen years old, was meant to woo Maria Beadnell, the daughter of a banker. It appears in Maria's album opposite an illustration by Henry Austin, a fellow suitor and friend of Dickens who later went on to marry Letitia Dickens. The poem is structured around a series of simple rhyming couplets that both present a settled mind and encourage a settled ear, falling back upon the security of familiar sounds; this is hardly surprising, given the vision of domestic, connubial bliss that inspired its composition. What is interesting, however, is that this comfort and acceptance is to be found in lodgings – not in a private house, but in rented space, overseen by a landlady, Maria. The poem reveals a blithe conviction that lodgings can morph into a 'happy home'. It is, Dickens suggests, a mere question of finding the right 'place to suit [one's] mind'.

At the heart of 'Lodgings To Let' lies a metatextual joke: as the speaker requests entry into lodgings, the poem makes the same request of an album already peopled with other offerings by the composer John Hullah, the Beadnells, and their friends. The lodging-house, Dickens discovers, is a playful space that promotes imaginative flights, canny humour, and textual self-reflexivity. Here, he affects humility and appreciation in the company of his fellow contributors – his is the 'humblest name', his poem sadly

‘prosing’ when read alongside the ‘lively, sprightly, gay, and witty’ pieces of his ‘Neighbours’. Henry Austin, in other words, may have been a rival in love, but he was also a rival in art. As Dickens considers where his own poem will fit, we realise it is as much about authorship as it is about tenancy, or, indeed, Maria. He is already revealing his interest in his literary network, his circle – the writers working with and around him.¹

‘Lodgings To Let’ may be Dickens’s first surviving word on tenancy, and a poetic word at that, but the subject preoccupied Dickens the novelist throughout his career. It kindled his imagination and shaped the form of his fiction. His landladies include Mrs Tibbs, Mrs Bardell, Mrs Raddle, Miss La Creevy, Mrs Todgers, Mrs Mac Stinger, Mrs Crupp, Mrs Whimple, Mrs Lirriper, Mrs Wilfer, Mrs Tope, and Mrs Billickin. There are lodgers lurking around the Inns of Court and Chancery, above Krook’s rag-and-bone shop, and in Bleeding-Heart Yard. Though single gentlemen and humble clerks make up a significant proportion of the ‘lodger world’, no stratum of society remains untouched by tenancy in Dickens’s fiction.² Lodging is the lot of the urban poor. Slightly further along the class ladder, Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness rent a cottage in Hampstead when they marry. Meanwhile, the upper echelons include freeholders and landlords – such as Miss Havisham – and venerable tenants such as Montague Tigg. After *Dombey* goes bankrupt, Polly Toodle deposits his keys at an agent’s office; ‘the great house’, we hear, is ‘dumb to all that ha[s] been suffered in it’, and ‘baulk[s] any nearer inquiries with the staring announcement that the lease of this desirable Family Mansion [is] to be disposed of’.³

Dickens’s fiction and journalism animate these characters, explore the spaces they inhabit, and reveal tenancy to be a governing force in everyday life. Dickens’s fascination with the idiosyncrasies of the property market and the more practical side of domesticity was enduring. He was sensitive to both the broad historical narrative of a transforming society, and more particular instances of change which clustered around the middle decades of the nineteenth century: his most productive and creative years.

¹ On ‘Lodgings To Let’, see Christine Alexander, ‘The Juvenilia of Charles Dickens: Romance and Reality’, *Dickens Quarterly*, 25 (2008), 3-22; Robert C. Hanna, ‘Before Boz: The Juvenilia and Early Writings of Charles Dickens, 1820-1833’, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 40 (2009), 231-364; A. de Suzannet, ‘Maria Beadnell’s Album’, *Dickensian*, 31 (1935), 161-168.

² Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (London: Chapman and Hall), vi, September 1870, p.170. Subsequent references appear in the text.

³ Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (London: Bradbury and Evans), xix/xx, April 1848, p.601. Subsequent references appear in the text.

But Dickens's fiction was not simply symptomatic of a wider context, responding to the growth of the cities, housing reforms, or movements in the economic and legal worlds. It was as formative as it is informative; Dickens played a central part in creating the 'nineteenth-century urban', interpreting reality and feeding his interpretations of renting back into contemporary culture.

Rented spaces came in many forms in this period. Types of 'home' could be found in a multitude of unlikely places: in hotels, inns, boarding-houses, or lodging-houses. Private houses could be rented by single families; these families could subdivide their houses into apartments for extra income. (According to the 1851 census, there were an average of 0.42 lodgers per middle-class household in York; Dickens's staff-writer Henry Morley, meanwhile, predicted that three-quarters of London houses practised 'lodging-letting [...] the black art of the nineteenth century').⁴ The lines between different types of rented space were blurred. Essentially, boarding-houses offered meals and lodging-houses did not. Boarders were counted as members of one household in the census; in official terms, lodgers constituted separate family units.⁵ *Boarding* and *lodging* – the renting of rooms from a landlord or landlady who continued to reside on the premises, and provided a negotiable number of domestic services – constituted a specific kind of *tenancy*: the leasing of real property in exchange for money. The provision of short-term accommodation for travellers, meanwhile, was certainly a preoccupation for Dickens and his contemporaries. Mrs Lirriper decries the 'hotels calling themselves Limited but called Unlimited by Major Jackman rising up everywhere'; 'give me a landlord or landlady's wholesome face when I come off a journey', she says. Successful railway hotels appear in *Dombey's* Staggs's Gardens and *Drood's* Aldersgate – evidence that, as the nation juddered towards modernity, the hospitality industry was transforming to meet changing demands and the number of options was multiplying. Writers, however, reserved their most sustained attention for lodgers trying to create credible homes in rented spaces – especially in London.⁶

⁴ John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1985* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), p.102; [Henry Morley], 'Houses in Flats', *Household Words*, 24 March 1855, 182-186 (p.183). Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁵ Leonore Davidoff, 'The Separation of Home and Work? Landladies and Lodgers in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century England', in *Fit Work for Women*, ed. Sandra Burman (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp.64-97.

⁶ [Dickens], 'Mrs Lirriper Relates How She Went On, and Went Over', *Mrs Lirriper's Legacy, All the Year Round*, 1 December 1864, pp.1-11 (p.1). See also [Dickens], 'The Uncommercial Traveller', *All the Year Round*, 24 March 1860, pp.512-516 (pp.515-516); [George Augustus Sala], 'The Great Hotel Question', *Household Words*, 16 February, 23 February and 1 March 1856, pp.97-103, pp.141-144,

Tenancy may have touched lives throughout the country, but London offers an especially potent series of examples about how the phenomenon worked and what behaviours it encouraged. Here, the property market was fast-moving, and the housing situation chaotic rather than fully planned; the city's growth followed its own set of conventions and rules. For example, ground-leases in London were usually granted for 99 years, in contrast to the 999 years typical elsewhere. Industrial cities and towns were intended to house the new proletariat and developed along different lines to London, partly thanks to the greater input capitalists and philanthropists had in the expansion.⁷ Though Gaskell's *North and South* (1854-5) contains evocative descriptions of the middle-class house-hunting process, and uses Margaret and Thornton's landlord/tenant relationship as a source of narrative and romantic tension, industrial fiction had another kind of space to worry about: the factory. For the nineteenth century's London writers, capturing the nature of rented spaces played into a wider desire to realise the modern metropolis.

Obviously, tenancy, space and the property market were of interest to other authors, both within and outside the period. A recent study by Charles Nicholl, for example, delves into Shakespeare's life as a lodger; Keats and Fanny Brawne's relationship, meanwhile, can be read as a tenancy narrative in Romantic Hampstead. In the twentieth century, single women planned their futures from Bloomsbury bedsits; a 'small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare [...] bestows one final patronising kiss' under Tiresias's gaze; in his 'hired box', the lodger Mr Bleaney learns that 'how we live measures our own nature'.⁸ Rented spaces played a major part in domestic life

pp.148-154. This was a response to Albert Smith's pamphlet, *The English Hotel Nuisance* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1855). In the 1850s, Sala attempted to get a large-scale hotel scheme off the ground in England but was persuaded against approaching joint-stock companies; see Sala, *The Life and Adventures of George Augustus Sala, Written by Himself*, 2 vols (London: Cassell and Co., 1895), I, pp.336-337.

⁷ Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1999), pp.109-110.

⁸ TS Eliot, *The Waste Land*, in *The Poems of TS Eliot*, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), pp.53-77 ('III. The Fire Sermon', ll.232-248); Philip Larkin, 'Mr Bleaney', in *The Complete Poems of Philip Larkin*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), p.50 (l.25, 27). For critical studies of lodging across the centuries, in literature and film, see Emily Cockayne, *Cheek by Jowl: A History of Neighbours* (London: Bodley Head, 2012); Gregory Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810-1840: Cockney Adventures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Wendy Gamber, *The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Marcus (1999); Terri Mullholland, 'The Literature of the Boarding House: Female Transient Space in the 1930s' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2011); Charles Nicholl, *The Lodger: Shakespeare on Silver Street* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); Michael Newton, 'Lodging', in *Restless Cities*, ed. Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart (London and New York: Verso, 2010), pp.173-190.

across both the Channel and, as Wendy Gamber has shown, the Atlantic; the ‘antiboardinghouse rhetoric’ of nineteenth-century American journalism helped to clarify the definition of the ‘home’.⁹ But London, the great metropolis, was unique, and the nineteenth century was something of a historical pivot; the prominence of lodging dwindled over the twentieth, the suburbs became a locus for domestic life, and owning and bequeathing real property was a genuine possibility for the middle classes. The Victorians witnessed a rise in the urgency of social and political debate, a change in momentum, and a new appraisal of tenancy as an imaginative resource. It saw the prominence of the ‘apartment-house plot’, which, in Sharon Marcus’s terms, involved ‘the conversions of strangers into kin’ and ‘took elements from comic and melodramatic modes – particularly random sexual encounters, cases of mistaken identity, and acts of voyeurism, eavesdropping and spying – and situated them within a single apartment house or in neighbouring and facing apartment buildings’.¹⁰ While authors as diverse as the Brontës, Trollope and Eliot brought their own stamp to the subject – Eliot’s fiction, for example, inspects rural tenancy and landownership through her customary realist prism – Dickens’s creative approach was distinctive in its extent and playfulness.¹¹ This thesis concentrates on Dickens’s engagement with the property market; it also compares him to a number of his immediate contemporaries. Taken together, Dickens and his circle had wide-ranging conversations about tenancy that addressed loneliness, gender, nationalism, and the definitions of the family, among other themes. They also used the language and imaginative implications of tenancy to write about writing – not least, to address some of the complexities of their own creative relationships.

As George Augustus Sala, one of the more prominent members of the circle, points out, Dickens was comfortable wherever he went. He was happy to slip away from the purlieu of the middle-class and ‘was at home in all lodging-houses’, ‘back-attics’, and ‘public-houses’.¹² It is about time we followed him there.

⁹ Gamber (2007), p.6; on France, see Marcus (1999) and Ann Gaylin, *Eavesdropping in the Novel from Austen to Proust* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Marcus (1999), pp.10-11.

¹¹ See, for example, Dermot Coleman, *George Eliot and Money: Economics, Ethics and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.151-153.

¹² Sala, *Charles Dickens* (London: George Routledge, 1870), pp.27-28.

Adventures of a Gentleman in Search of a Home: The Nineteenth-Century Property Market

‘It is universally known and admitted,’ the barrister Robert Sutton observed in 1803, ‘that three-fourths of the inhabitants of Great Britain are composed of Landlords, Tenants, and Lodgers; and that their relative duties and transactions comprehend a very important part of the concerns of human life’. Similar statements open other tenancy handbooks: ‘One of the most extensive and universal relations in the ordinary affairs of life is that of Landlord and Tenant’; ‘there is no one who is not more or less interested in the Laws of Landlord, Tenant, or Lodger’.¹³ The language is categorical, and indicates that the centrality of tenancy to everyday affairs is indisputable. The urban fiction of the nineteenth century acknowledges this centrality, weaving narrative incidents around recognisable characters and situations. Tenancy inspires story-telling; it also makes its presence felt in Dickens’s style.

Certain contemporary figures – most notoriously, John Ruskin and Sarah Ellis – endorsed and promulgated the ideology of ‘separate spheres’: a drive to maintain a division between the bustling, public, commercial and male sphere on the one hand, and the tranquil, private, domestic and female sphere on the other.¹⁴ According to this vision, the perfect home was defined by stasis and security. It was also owned rather than rented. Recent scholarship has put pressure on this ideology, revealing the many points at which it was vulnerable to fracture.¹⁵ The practicalities of the property market are one such fault line, and prove just how unreachable the middle-class ideal was for many individuals and families. Nineteenth-century lodgers and tenants experienced flux, uncertainty, and an inability to call a home their own; they revealed domestic

¹³ Robert Sutton, *A Complete Guide to Landlords, Tenants, and Lodgers*, 3rd edn (London: W. Stratford, 1803), n.p; Charles Copley, *A Plain and Practical Exposition of the Law of Landlord and Tenant* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, 1835), p.1; John Pater, *The Laws of Landlord, Tenant, and Lodger*, 2nd edn (London: Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, 1843), p.viii.

¹⁴ See, for example, Sarah Ellis, *The Wives of England* (1839) and John Ruskin, ‘Of Queen’s Gardens’ (1865).

¹⁵ On the complexities of separate-spheres ideology, see, for example, Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000); Moira Donald, ‘Tranquil Havens? Critiquing the Idea of Home as the Middle-Class Sanctuary’, in *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior*, ed. Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999); Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Marcus (1999); Jeff Nunokawa, *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

space to be a plural concept in this particular context. When the Single Gentleman in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1) sleeps for twenty-six solid hours over the musty Brass offices, or when Tom and Ruth Pinch take a proprietorial joy in their modest Islington lodgings in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-4), they make themselves ‘at home’ in the most unpromising places. For them, home is a capacious idea, a state of mind rather than a physical location with a clear-cut set of attributes defined by a dominant culture. Poll Sweedlepipe, Mrs Gamp’s landlord, is a bird-fancier, alongside several other occupations. His house is:

...one great bird’s nest. Game-cocks resided in the kitchen; pheasants wasted the brightness of their golden plumage on the garret; bantams roosted in the cellar; owls had possession of the bed-room.¹⁶

In describing each bird as if it were a lodger, Dickens literalises the image of the home as a nest, turning the cosy domestic ideal into a something of a joke.

One of Dickens’s first landladies, Mrs Tibbs, opens a boarding-house near the British Museum; Mrs Billickin, the last new character to spring from his imagination and onto the page, also lets lodgings in Bloomsbury. Great Coram Street, where Mrs Tibbs presides, belonged to the Foundling Estate; Southampton Street, home to the Billickin, was on the Duke of Bedford’s estate and was developed by Thomas Cubitt.¹⁷ When Mrs Raddle and Mrs Lirriper, two larger-than-life landladies, mention the landlords to whom they themselves are beholden, they draw attention to the huge machinery behind them; it is a system over which they have no control. These examples hint at an inescapable fact: the nineteenth-century home was at the mercy of market forces and the law. The fundamental unit in this economy was land. In 1873, four-fifths of the land in the country was owned by 7,000 landowners, and this figure would not have changed dramatically over the century. There were only 202 major freeholders in

¹⁶ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, xxv, 19 September 1840, pp.289-300 (p.292); *Martin Chuzzlewit* (London: Chapman and Hall), xiv, February 1844, p.433; and x, October 1843, p.314. Subsequent references appear in the text.

¹⁷ For a comprehensive survey of the neighbourhood, see Rosemary Ashton, *Victorian Bloomsbury* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012). The UCL Bloomsbury project includes histories of each street. See ‘Great Coram Street’ (London: UCL, 1999-2005), <www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/streets/great_coram_street.htm> [Accessed: 9 August 2016] and ‘Southampton Street’ (London: UCL, 1999-2005), <www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/streets/southampton_street.htm> [Accessed: 9 August 2016].

the country, who existed – along with their vast estates – at the top of a long chain.¹⁸ An intricate process of letting and subletting brought in property speculators and architects, who were responsible for various portions of a primary lease and often built terraces. When construction was complete, minor investors came along to oversee tenancies in a few of the houses. Houses could be rented to individual families; alternatively, the process could continue for a few more iterations, with humble landladies and their lodgers at the very bottom of the chain.¹⁹

Once the length of the primary lease was over, all of the structures on the estate became the property of the freeholder. An individual, therefore, could own the lease of a house, but almost never possessed the freehold. As Sharon Marcus explains, leases constituted personal, not real, property, and ‘because few leases ran longer than ninety-nine years, even the most stable tenant could at best bequeath only a portion of a long lease to his or her inheritors’. In the latter stages of the century, Octavia Hill, who made her reputation as a philanthropic landlord, herself remained a tenant: her leaseholds, due to last for fifty-six more years, cost her £750.²⁰ The same holds true of Hill’s fictional counterparts. When we hear that Miss Tox’s ‘dingy tenement’ in Princess’s Place is ‘her own’, we can only assume this means the lease – not the land (*Dombey and Son*, ii, November 1846, p.62).

Handbooks were published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to elucidate the laws of landlord and tenant. Among the most interesting chapters are those dedicated to general advice, warning prospective house-hunters against a long list of possible pitfalls during the search. If tenants and lodgers were not watchful before they signed agreements, these pitfalls could cause inconvenience at best, legal trouble at worst. These handbooks do not portray the process as much fun – the tone modulates between polite cautioning and theatrical scaremongering. For Alfred Cox, ‘change of residence’ was ‘amongst the most troublesome’ of life’s ‘chances and changes’. He writes:

The in-comer begins to discover that house-hunting is but poor sport – that it is rather tedious, troublesome, and expensive toil, attended by disheartening failures, irritating rebuffs, annoying contests with cupidity, exaggeration, and deception, and consequently followed by disparagement of the world in general, and landlords in particular.

¹⁸ These figures come from FML Thompson’s account of the New Domesday Survey in *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p.27. According to JT Emmet, writing in 1879, around 1,000 Londoners lived in freehold houses; see Marcus (1999), p.108.

¹⁹ Marcus (1999), pp.101-116; Burnett (1986), pp.19-29, 97-117.

²⁰ Marcus (1999), pp.249-250.

He concludes that ‘the *Adventures of a Gentleman in Search of a Home* might, in the hands of a popular novelist, be turned to exquisitely ludicrous account’.²¹ While Cox’s own ‘task here is with sober realities’, Dickens is a ‘popular novelist’ who does, indeed, chronicle these adventures, having experienced them first-hand. His letters are peppered with frustrated references to the lawyers responsible for securing his properties; his fiction, meanwhile, registers the aggravations of house-hunting but also reveals a much more complex range of responses.²²

A common feature of tenancy handbooks was an appendix of templates for leases, agreements and the like. Dickens presents the completion of this paperwork as an extravaganza of negotiation and intimidation, fleecing and wheedling. If the darker elements of legal procedure are exposed in *Bleak House* (1852-3) – the Court of Chancery was, after all, responsible for the administration of estates – *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) offer something of a comic corrective.²³ Mr Grewgious, the conveyancer and receiver of rents who takes Rosa Bud under his wing, ‘sketch[s] out a line or two of agreement’ for Rosa’s tenancy with the Billickin. While he pays the deposit, the Billickin breathlessly rattles through the number of servants (two), provision of coals (‘either *by* the fire, or *per* the scuttle’), pet policy (no dogs allowed), and cost (forty-five shillings per week by the month for the first and second floors; the house is in a mews) (vi, September 1870, pp.171-172). Sampson and Sally Brass, meanwhile, are lawyers as well as landlords. The Marchioness explains the terms for the lodgings above their office: they cost ‘eighteen shillings a week’, with ‘us finding plate and linen. Boots and clothes is extra,’ she recites, ‘and fires in winter-time is eightpence a day’ (xxiv, 12 September 1840, pp.277-288, p.236). When Dick Swiveller manages to let the room for an exorbitant rent, Sampson and Sally are both impressed at his ‘uncommon aptitude for business’ and annoyed that he has not squeezed the Single Gentleman harder (xxv, 19 September 1840, pp.289-300, p.289). As Sampson begins to burrow further into contractual arcana – what happens to the Single Gentleman’s property if something happens to him? Does it become Sampson’s?

²¹ Alfred Cox, *The Landlord and Tenant’s Guide* (London: the author, 1853), p.1, 5-6.

²² See Dickens to Henry Austin, 27 July 1851, and to WH Wills, 2 March 1856, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Graham Storey et al., 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-2002), VI, pp.445-446; VIII, pp.64-65.

²³ On Chancery, the political power of landed families, and the role played by lawyers in *Bleak House* (1852-3), see FS Schwarzbach, *Dickens and the City* (London: Athlone Press, 1979), pp.134-135.

– Dickens takes his argument to parodic heights. In these instances, he shows the extent to which Londoners are beholden to the legal world for their homes. The process of securing houseroom is stripped bare of any sentimentality.²⁴ Though they eschew the formality of a contract, these are still legal agreements. They also put a price on all of the individual components of dwelling, assigning monetary value to such things as comfort, privacy and respectability.

The vast majority of the population had an immediate economic relationship with the spaces they inhabited, and with the people who put rooms and houses on the market. Essentially, tenancy was founded on the commodification of space. A substantial body of research, sometimes grouped as the ‘new economic criticism’, explores the role played by money in literature.²⁵ However, as Aeron Hunt observes, most critics have tended to favour ‘broad conceptual categories or theoretical issues’ in their approaches, ‘at the expense of attention to the material, embodied, and socially embedded interactions that constitute much of economic life’. The very particular interactions between tenant, lodger and landlady encourages a turn to, in Hunt’s phrase, ‘the personal business of Victorian commercial culture’ and the ‘interpersonal networks and relationships through which commercial transactions and interactions occurred’.²⁶ Against an undeniably significant backdrop of large-scale transformation, industrialisation and ‘financialization’, alongside the development of modern economic theory and the slow shift in primacy from land to capital as a dominant marker of wealth, tenancy remained the one economic transaction that practically everyone had to perform.²⁷ This transaction had to be completed by the aristocrat, the everyman, and

²⁴ On the law and nineteenth-century literature, including the belief that the law was ‘ridiculed’ in fiction ‘for its legalese, for its callous failure to acknowledge that behind the language of rights, duties, and sanctions lies a seething world of emotional turmoil and physical experience which defies easy categorisation or description’, see, for example, Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature, and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.15.

²⁵ Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen’s *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics* (London: Routledge, 1999) is a good survey of, and introduction to, the field.

²⁶ Aeron Hunt, *Personal Business: Character and Commerce in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2014), p.3, 5. See also Margot C. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁷ Anna Kornbluh, *Realizing Capital: Financial and Psychic Economies in Victorian Form* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p.1. On nineteenth-century literature and high finance, see, for example, Patrick Brantlinger, *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996); Nancy Henry and Cannon Schmitt (eds.), *Victorian Investments: New Perspectives on Finance and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Francis O’Gorman (ed.), *Victorian Literature and Finance* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). On literature and the transformations in economic theory and discourse, see, for example, Gordon Bigelow, *Fiction, Famine, and the Rise of Economics in Victorian Britain and Ireland*

the virtual pauper. It had to be performed regularly – every day, week, month, or quarter – and undoubtedly fell into the category of ‘personal business’, not macroeconomics. Dickens’s fiction shows a preoccupation with the nature of this transaction and the human connections it both depended on and created.²⁸ Tenancy is, ultimately, a simple designation of worth to a place or space, but it actively encourages writing. As Simon James points out, though things like money, labour and possession cannot easily be narrated, ‘the transactions between the economic world and the self’ can. It is for this reason that tenancy, one example of ‘economics as experienced in the transactions of everyday life’, lends itself to the novel form – to meetings between characters, and to incidents woven together.²⁹

Throughout the period, activists pushed for legislative reform that would turn land into a product. As things stood, land passed from person to person through primogeniture, not the free market.³⁰ Even though land was not technically a commodity, space, specifically houseroom, functioned as one. The property market forced Londoners to be itinerant, to move from house to house, to relinquish one home even as they took possession of another. Jeff Nunokawa’s reading of nineteenth-century literature suggests that ‘everything taken will be taken away’: in an economic climate that decreed circulation over inalienability, ownership was unstable and property inevitably slipped into the status of commodity.³¹ Even if space is impossible to pick

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Regenia Gagnier, *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006); David Kaufmann, *The Business of Common Life: Novels and Classical Economics Between Revolution and Reform* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²⁸ Dickens has also been read in the context of high capitalism. Two recent full-length studies are Paul A. Jarvie, *Ready to Trample on All Human Law: Financial Capitalism in the Fiction of Charles Dickens* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005) and Boris Knezevic, *Figures of Finance Capitalism: Writing, Class, and Capital in the Age of Dickens* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

²⁹ Simon James, *Unsettled Accounts: Money and Narrative in the Novels of George Gissing* (London: Anthem Press, 2003), pp.13-18.

³⁰ Marcus (1999), pp.108-110, 250.

³¹ Nunokawa (2003), p.8. On the development of commodity culture, with discussions of the production and consumption of ‘things’, the Great Exhibition and *fin de siècle*, and case-studies of Gaskell, Thackeray and Trollope, see Christoph Lindner, *Fictions of Commodity Culture: From the Victorian to the Postmodern* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Andrew Miller, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens’s Household Words: The Social Life of Goods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). For an alternative approach to property that moves beyond the ‘alienable’ and ‘inalienable’, see Sara L. Maurer, *The Dispossessed State: Narratives of*

up in a shop or hold in one's hand, it is subject to 'production', in Henri Lefebvre's words; space was and is not passive or abstract, but created, packaged, advertised and consumed.³²

Compared to high-profile advertising campaigns for products such as soap, cigarettes and medicine, advertisements for properties were relatively unfussy.³³ Properties could be advertised through word of mouth, by issuing name-cards and establishing contacts, or simply by placing bills in parlour windows. Seeking a suitable 'furnished lodging' for Rosa, Mr Grewgious begins by gazing aimlessly at bills and putting his trust in serendipity, before remembering that he does, after all, have a respectable connection: the Billickin is his clerk's distant relative, and has 'once solicited his influence in the lodger world' (vi, September 1870, pp.169-170). Mrs Todgers, meanwhile, mortifies Mr Pecksniff by offering her card to a distinguished family in Camberwell (*Martin Chuzzlewit*, iv, April 1843, p.105). Mrs Todgers and Mr Grewgious rely upon the idea of the city, now full of strangers, as a community-in-waiting. Lodgings were also listed and sought in the newspapers by those who could afford the fee. Aunt Betsey sees a promising note when she is searching for accommodation for David:

In Buckingham Street in the Adelphi there was to be let, furnished, with a view of the river, a singularly desirable, and compact set of chambers, forming a genteel residence for a young gentleman, a member of one of the Inns of Court, or otherwise, with immediate possession. Terms moderate, and could be taken for a month only if required.³⁴

This maps onto real advertisements in *The Times*, appearing in the same month as the number of the novel. For example:

ADELPHI.—CHAMBERS, in the most desirable part of John-street, to be LET – two lofty and spacious rooms, on the first floor, with conveniences: suitable for a professional man or the residence of a Member of Parliament. [...] Address Mr. Shearman, 8, John-street, Adelphi.³⁵

Ownership in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Ireland (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

³² See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) and Andy Merrifield, 'Henri Lefebvre: A Socialist in Space', in *Thinking Space*, ed. Michael Crang and Nigel Thrift (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.167-182.

³³ Richards (1990). See also Jennifer Wicke, *Advertising Fictions: Literature, Advertisement and Social Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

³⁴ Dickens, *David Copperfield* (London: Bradbury and Evans), viii, December 1849, p.249. Subsequent references appear in the text.

³⁵ 'Board...', *The Times*, 17 December 1849, p.2.

Advertisements followed a rigid structure that promoted location, salubriousness and the respectability of the family or proprietor. There was, therefore, a specific language or rhetoric for describing space.

While William Blanchard Jerrold's 'Why People Let Lodgings' (1850) addresses the 'dishonesty' of such rhetoric, Sala's 'Houses To Let' (1850) is more playful. As Catherine Waters argues, Sala 'satiriz[es] the techniques of the advertisers in [a] comic catalogue of varying epithets' and 'clearly relishes their linguistic exuberance and invention'.³⁶ Speculating on the difference between 'a mansion, a noble mansion, a family mansion, a residence, a desirable residence, a family residence, [and] a bachelor's residence', he points out that 'we change, and swap, and barter, and give up, and take back, and get tired of, all and everything in life – why not of houses too?'³⁷ Dickens jokingly refers to Tavistock House as a 'commodious Family Mansion' in a letter to Mark Lemon, and his fiction parodies the same vernacular.³⁸ Mrs Tibbs, Miss Tox, Dick Swiveller, Mr Grewgious and Mrs Lirriper parrot similar details when they are talking about either their own properties or those they wish to rent: 'Perhaps, taken altogether, from top to bottom', Miss Tox's is 'the most inconvenient little house in England, and the crookedest; but then,' she says, 'what a situation! [...] Think of the situation!' (ii, November 1846, p.61). Simultaneously comic and unsettling, these examples suggest a discourse so prevalent that it has been internalised. They also complicate our understanding of 'felicitous space' or 'topophilia': the 'affective bond between people and place or setting'.³⁹ While Gaston Bachelard and Yi-Fu Tuan portray the love of place and space to be something deeply personal, even mystical, Dickens suggests that topophilia is also shaped by contemporary market forces.

Rather than having any intrinsic value, space belongs within its historical moment; it is rated according to the standards normalised by advertising. The rhetoric of advertisements, then, manufactures and prescribes a version of a 'desirable' space.

³⁶ Waters (2008), p.28, 30-31.

³⁷ [George Augustus Sala], 'Houses To Let', *Household Words*, 20 March 1850, pp.5-11 (p.6).

³⁸ Dickens to Mark Lemon, 27 April 1856, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VIII, p.100.

³⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), pp.xxxv-xxxvi, and Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p.4. Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei point out the 'unproblematic benignity of Bachelard's topophilia'; see 'Introduction', *The Domestic Space Reader*, ed. Briganti and Mezei (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp.3-15 (p.10). For various readings of topophilia, see Paul C. Adams, Steven D. Hoelscher and Karen E. Till (eds.), *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

This is, in turn, reflected in the rental cost. Morley gives a precise breakdown of what a lodger might expect to pay: sixteen shillings per week for a single man in a central neighbourhood and shabby front parlour (boots extra), forty-seven for an unfurnished drawing-room and bedroom in Camden Town (boots included), roughly the same for more space in an agreeable suburb, one-and-a-half guineas for two drawing-rooms and bedrooms in a 'leading thoroughfare near one of the parks', a pound for a pair of rooms in St John's Wood, and a guinea for rooms in a Notting Hill cottage. Ultimately, however, there is 'no rule whatever as to the proportion between price and quality [...]' The price and quality of apartments depend much less on the size and situation of the house than on the character and circumstances of its owner'. It is 'arbitrary', rendering the consumer strangely powerless.⁴⁰ The formation of the 'consumer' in the nineteenth century amounted to a new framework for constructing identity. The consumer 'represents an idealized and schematized model of human subjectivity', while the commodity 'forms a perfect representation of the consumer's desire'.⁴¹ People become defined by what they want or choose. Dickens's consumers of space, who are offered and seem to want the same thing, appear passive: perusing the property notices in the newspapers, Tom Pinch is sent into a 'brown study' by the homogeneous, unthinking patter, all the 'quiet, cheerful famil[ies]' and ladies with 'moderate independence[s]', the 'airy bedroom[s]' with 'occasional use of a parlour', 'rural situation[s]' and 'bracing atmosphere[s]', 'within five minutes' walk of the Royal Exchange' (*Martin Chuzzlewit*, xiv, February 1844, pp.425-426). In an act of voluntary pigeonholing, people fit themselves and their properties into the bounds of what is generally supposed to be desirable without truly articulating what they desire as individuals. When Dick Datchery insists that he is looking for a 'venerable, architectural, and inconvenient' lodging in Cloisterham, he consciously refuses to subscribe to the tenets perpetuated by estate agents, landlords, and unquestioning consumers (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, v, August 1870, p.140).

Consumers found themselves beholden to the professionals of the housing industry – the cogs in the machine. Unsurprisingly, Alfred Cox has kind words for his own profession. Estate agents, he writes, are benevolent and indispensable; after all,

⁴⁰ [Morley], 'Apartments, Furnished', *Household Words*, 16 July 1853, pp.457-463 (p.459). Subsequent references appear in the text. For more stable tenancies, it was recommended that Londoners spent one-tenth to one-eighth of their earnings on rent; see Burnett (1986), pp.100-101.

⁴¹ Bigelow (2003), p.2. On the consumer and *homo economicus*, see also Lindner (2003), p.1; Richards (1990), p.7; Woodmansee and Osteen (1999), pp.32-33.

‘by the doctrine of “Division of Labour,” any general occupation requiring experience is more economically discharged by persons specially devoted to that occupation than by occasional labourers’.⁴² Appropriating the language of economic theorists such as Adam Smith, he places house-hunting squarely in the context of the developing industrial nation.⁴³ In doing so, he works against a broad compulsion to be suspicious of agents, architects, conveyancers, stewards, rent-collectors, brokers, and auctioneers, who all had a stake in the market and appear in numerous guises in contemporary culture. An *All the Year Round* article published soon after Dickens’s death suggested that agents were especially unctuous, but the roots of Dickens’s own engagement with these kinds of professionals went much further back.⁴⁴ There is the sympathetic, observant broker’s man in *Sketches by Boz* (1833-6), the reference to the exuberant George Henry Robins – a real-life auctioneer – in ‘The Boarding-House’, and Thomas Sapsea in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.⁴⁵ An auctioneer and estate agent, Sapsea’s promotion to Mayor of Cloisterham is ominous, given his tendency to favour bluster over substance and monetary worth over other forms of value. His antithesis can be found in the mild-mannered Grewgious, conveyancer and receiver of rents. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the demonic Quilp ‘collect[s] rents of whole colonies of filthy streets and alleys by the waterside’ (viii, 23 May 1840, pp.85-96, p.90); in *Little Dorrit* (1855-7), Pancks collects rents for Casby, who is both an exploitative landlord in his own right and Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle’s town agent. Pancks, however, is an amateur detective, not a villain like Quilp. Towards the end of the century, Octavia Hill and Beatrice Webb experimented with the idea that female rent-collectors could encourage moral reform among impoverished tenants, but women had always been central to this industry: the small-time landlady is, perhaps, the most prevalent figure of all.⁴⁶ Together, these examples emphasise the extent to which one’s home was far from being a truly personal space. It passed through many hands and was touched by many people. At the best of times, this led to genuine human connection in a huge and labyrinthine

⁴² Cox (1853), p.7.

⁴³ See, for example, Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776).

⁴⁴ See ‘A Desirable Tenant’, *All The Year Round*, 22 April 1871, 485-488.

⁴⁵ In a strange twist of fate, Robins owned Tavistock House. See Dickens, ‘The Broker’s Man’, in *Sketches by Boz: First Series*, 2 vols (London: John Macrone, 1836), I, pp.48-66; and ‘The Boarding-House: Chapter II’, in *Sketches: First Series*, I, pp.181-223 (pp.222-223). Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁴⁶ See Ruth Livesey, ‘Women Rent Collectors and the Rewriting of Space, Class and Gender in East London, 1870-1900’, in *Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870-1950*, ed. Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), pp.87-105.

city. At the worst of times, the home was the site of complex power struggles that left tenants vulnerable to exploitation.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a strand of nineteenth-century literature – and even more prominently, its corresponding scholarship – comes to overt moral judgements about the workings of tenancy.⁴⁷ For Dickens, it undeniably induced anxiety; when it led to the abuse of the poor, it was a cause of explosive outrage. Sometimes, it produced comic scenarios: Dickens called the process of writing up a tenancy agreement for his parents ‘one of the richest scraps of genuine drollery [he] ever saw in all [his] days’.⁴⁸ Ultimately, tenancy was a fact of life, a social and economic reality that could lead the creative thinker down interesting paths. Dickens is making the best of an ambivalent situation, and using literary experimentation to do so.⁴⁹ When he hears that Mr Feeder has ‘made arrangements to board with two old maiden ladies at Peckham’, little Paul Dombey judges him a ‘slashing person’, ‘the hero of some book of travels or wild adventure’ (v, February 1847, p.133); Mr Grewgious, meanwhile, steadies himself and Rosa as they ‘set out in in quest of adventures, and look for a furnished lodging’ (vi, September 1870, p.169). If seeking lodgings is an adventure for Dickens’s characters, sending them there is a writerly adventure for Dickens: one that involves conscious innovation, adaptability, self-awareness, a heightened sensitivity to those publishing around him, and a fair bit of courage. Warning readers against forming impossible expectations for their dream homes, Alfred Cox writes, ‘the house-hunter will generally find that his imagination will be best kept – in his pocket’.⁵⁰ Yet Dickens, delving for stories in houses, never kept his imagination in his pocket. Instead, he saw limitless

⁴⁷ This forms the crux of Paul Delany’s study of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; see *Literature, Money and the Market: From Trollope to Amis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002). John Vernon acknowledges that money can be ‘chimerical’ and ‘romantic’ in *Money and Fiction: Literary Realism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.18. O’Gorman (2007) and Henry and Schmitt (2009) draw attention to the tension within literary studies about how, morally, to think about the market. Both conclude that we need not necessarily subscribe to the polemics of either camp – ‘Marxist criticism’, or ‘capitalist criticism’. O’Gorman’s book ‘is neither in love with the market, nor hostile to it’; see ‘Introduction’, pp.2-16 (p.9).

⁴⁸ Dickens to John Forster, 5 March 1839, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), I, pp.518-521 (p.519).

⁴⁹ A body of criticism on economics and literature explicitly concerns realist fiction: see, for example, Kornbluh (2014); James (2003); and Vernon (1984). Notable exceptions include Henry, “‘Rushing into Eternity’: Suicide and Finance in Victorian Fiction”, in Henry and Schmitt (2009), pp.161-181, which discusses the sensational, melodramatic and gothic ‘discourses’ used by ‘realist novelists’ writing about the trope of the financier’s suicide; Gail Turley Houston, *From Dickens to Dracula: Gothic, Economics, and Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Jane Moody, ‘The Drama of Capital: Risk, Belief, and Liability on the Victorian Stage’, in O’Gorman (2007), pp.91-109. A 2005 issue of the *Victorian Review*, devoted to literature and money, looks at ghost stories and sensation fiction.

⁵⁰ Cox (1853), p.7.

potential for laughter and tragedy, romance and mystery, tales exploring an individual's personal and psychological development or those celebrating friendship and mutual dependence – all within four ordinary walls.

The 'Ecstatic Restlessness' of Dickens and His Circle

In a letter to Forster, Dickens described his hopes for buying the remainder of a fourteen-year lease on Devonshire Terrace: 'A house of great promise (and great premium), "undeniable" situation, and excessive splendour, is in view'. Thomas Mitton, his solicitor and childhood friend, is 'in treaty,' he says, 'and I am in ecstatic restlessness'.⁵¹ Given the instability of the property market, it was not the only occasion on which he was restless in this way. At the same time, his restlessness was a cause for ecstasy, because it powered his creativity. The popular image of Dickens's 'domestic nature' first took hold during his own lifetime and immediately after his death.⁵² However, the image of Dickens as a lover of the middle-class home and proponent of domestic ideology exists alongside an alternative, equally powerful narrative: he was a tenant for much of his life, and considered tenancy to be a reality worthy of serious exploration.

Dickens was a tenant of various kinds up until the purchase of Gad's Hill, his 'little Kentish freehold', from Eliza Lynn Linton, whose literary output included contributions to *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*.⁵³ Though he had been looking for freeholds from fairly early on – and vowed, in 1850, never to rent again – he repeatedly found himself embroiled in the workings of the property market.⁵⁴ He rented chambers and houses, put in bids for properties he ultimately lost, bought portions of some leases, bought other leases outright, fretted about fixtures and

⁵¹ Dickens to Forster, 7 November 1839, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), I, p.598.

⁵² John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 2 vols (London: Dent, 1969), II, p.395; 'The Death of Mr Dickens', *Saturday Review*, 11 June 1870, pp.760-761; AW Ward, *Charles Dickens: A Lecture*, in *The Critical Heritage*, ed. Philip Collins (London: Routledge, 1986), pp.547-550. See, to varying levels, Frances Armstrong, *Dickens and the Concept of Home* (Ann Arbor and London: UMI Research Press, 1990); Julia Prewitt Brown, *The Bourgeois Interior* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008), pp.60-83; Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995); Julian Wolfreys, *Literature, in Theory: Tropes, Subjectivities, Responses and Responsibilities* (London: Continuum, 2010); Alexander Welsh, *The City of Dickens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp.141-163.

⁵³ On the 'Kentish freehold', see, among many, Dickens to Thomas Beard, 17 May 1857, and to Frederic Ouvry, 1 March 1862, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VIII, pp.326-327; X, p.43.

⁵⁴ On this vow, see Dickens to Thomas Mitton, 6 July 1850, and to Mrs Tagart, 26 March 1851, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VI, pp.125-126, 335.

inventories, and arranged tenancies for family members.⁵⁵ He also turned landlord on certain occasions and actively attempted to play the property market, especially when he vacated his houses to go abroad.⁵⁶ Perhaps surprisingly, his initial plan for Gad's Hill was to use it as an investment and rent it out. He explained his desire to increase 'the value of [his] existing freehold' as a 'marketable thing', to 'furnish it in the most comfortable and cosey manner, and let it by the month'.⁵⁷

Lodging, meanwhile, plays a central role in the lore surrounding his youth. The Dickens family's tenancies often ended in evictions, and Charles found himself bundled into back garrets and rooms on Little College Street and Lant Street in times of particular difficulty. Mrs Roylance, one of his landladies, morphs into Mrs Pipchin in *Dombey and Son* (1846-8), while Lant Street, labelled 'a Paradise' by Dickens, is the site of Mrs Raddle's lodging-house in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-7); its kind landlord and landlady are reincarnated as the Garlands in *The Old Curiosity Shop*.⁵⁸ Arguably his most significant early experience of the 'lodger world', however, involved James Lamert. A cousin by marriage, Lamert lodged with the Dickens family, instilled an enduring love of theatre in young Charles, and later facilitated his entry to Warren's Blacking. In doing so, he was almost single-handedly responsible for one of the defining moments in Dickens's personal narrative. Just as one lodger opened the door to professional downfall, another offered the chance of professional redemption: Dickens's great-aunt Charlton ran a boarding-house on Berners Street, and one of her lodgers, the solicitor Edward Blackmore, offered Dickens a job.⁵⁹ Lodgers created crucial narrative junctures in the *Bildungsroman* Dickens was living.

As Rosemarie Bodenheimer has comprehensively shown, his wanderings also had a rich textual life. His letters brim with details about his house-hunting expeditions,

⁵⁵ On Dickens taking charge of other people's houses and tenancies, see Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p.165.

⁵⁶ See, among many, the following letters on Dickens turning landlord: to Edwin Landseer, 27 May 1844, and to Hans Christian Andersen, 30 August 1847, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), IV, p.131; V, pp.152-153.

⁵⁷ Dickens to Angela Burdett Coutts, 9 February 1856, and to Frederic Ouvry, 11 March 1862, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VIII, pp.50-51; X, p.50.

⁵⁸ These suggestions come from Percy Fitzgerald, *The Life of Charles Dickens as Revealed in His Writings*, 2 vols (London: Chatto and Windus, 1905), I, p.60; and Dickens's autobiographical fragment, published in Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, I, pp.23-4, 26-7.

⁵⁹ On Dickens's tenancies, see, for example, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 2011); Ruth Richardson, *Dickens and the Workhouse: Oliver Twist and the London Poor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens: A Life Defined by Writing* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009); Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life* (London: Viking, 2011).

negotiations, transactions, removals and renovations. He was not content simply to pack up, leave, and settle in; an essential part of the process was the act of narrativising it, turning his ‘ecstatic restlessness’ into the stuff of comedy or complaint.⁶⁰ His stories and observations about being a tenant were frequently offered up to his correspondents, serving to bring him ever closer to them until they began to enter the vocabulary of friendship. He needed substantial help throughout the entire process, from the initial enquiries to the final renovation; for example, Edward Chapman proved to be a ‘genius in houses’ who made, of all things, ‘a suggestion relative to the Water closet’ in Devonshire Terrace.⁶¹ More important, still, were Henry Austin and Thomas Mitton. Austin, who courted Maria Beadnell before becoming Dickens’s ever-patient brother-in-law, was an architect, and Dickens was happy to seek his professional advice on countless occasions.⁶² Mitton, his solicitor, was also obliging, drawing up notices to quit, executing leases, answering questions about fixtures and inventories, taking in receipts and fire insurance policies, and arranging cosmetic renovations in Devonshire Terrace. He had grown up with a personal closeness to rented space, as his father had been the landlord of a public-house.⁶³

As Dickens’s regular correspondents, Austin and Mitton allowed him to bounce ideas off them. This is simply one example of the way in which he worked at large; he wrote not alone, but within a specific literary context that he chose for himself. Discussions of his circle or network have tended to focus on a number of key authors and journalists, often collectively called his ‘young men’: they include Wilkie Collins, Edmund Yates, Percy Fitzgerald, George Augustus Sala, William Blanchard Jerrold and WH Wills. This bias partially derives from the memoirs of the ‘young men’ themselves, in which claims of personal and professional closeness to Dickens abound, alongside gossip about jealousies and squabbles. These internal politics have doomed Mitton and Mark Lemon, for example, to relative obscurity.⁶⁴ Here, a sense of belonging to Dickens’s circle seems based on the exclusion of rivals. Since JWT Ley’s *The Dickens Circle* (1919), critical emphasis has fallen on combativeness in the circle,

⁶⁰ See Bodenheimer (2007), pp.126-169.

⁶¹ See, for example, Dickens to Forster, 1 November 1839, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), I, p.605.

⁶² See, among many, Dickens to Austin, 21 September 1851, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VI, pp.486-487.

⁶³ See, among many, Dickens to Mitton, 8 September 1847, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), V, p.162.

⁶⁴ On these intrigues, see Fitzgerald, *The Life of Charles Dickens as Revealed in His Writings*, I, p.72; and *Memories of Charles Dickens* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1913), pp.119-120; Sala, *Things I Have Seen and People I Have Known*, 2 vols (London: Cassell and Co., 1894), I, p.62; Edmund Yates, *His Recollections and Experiences* (London: Richard Bentley, 1885), pp.208-209.

on Dickens's tyranny and the subversions effected by Collins, Gaskell or Sala.⁶⁵ Recently, Mary Shannon has taken a different approach, turning away from straightforward rivalry to posit the idea of a 'print network' based on collaboration and immediate physical proximity on Wellington Street.⁶⁶ The circle, then, was not really a circle; not everyone close to Dickens was a 'young man'; literary influence did not simply work in one direction, the Inimitable generating lesser imitations by those around him. He was mentored and directly influenced by older authors, by dramatists, by women; he shared arguments, vocabularies and cultural interests with authors he did not know intimately; his work showcases the relationship between personal enmity and imaginative mutuality. *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* existed in creative conversations with rival periodicals. To study tenancy is to learn how these textual exchanges occurred and were conceived by their participants.

Tenancy was crucial in shaping the way these authors wrote and thought about themselves. Sala, for example, credited his tenancy on Wellington Street as the most important 'turning point' in his career. Having locked himself out of the house in which he had a workshop and a bedroom, but no lodgers – 'I could not afford to buy any more furniture, and [...] I did not want lodgers' – he spent a night walking around London. He submitted an account of his adventure, 'The Key to the Street', to the *Household Words* offices nearby, and never looked back.⁶⁷ And although Forster's *Life* attempted to perpetuate the image of Dickens as a happy custodian of the middle-class hearth, Percy Fitzgerald's equally detailed memoirs offer an alternative reading.⁶⁸ Each of his Dickensian volumes brims with references to Pickwickian inns, the Inns of Court and Chancery, Lant Street and Goswell Street, and – in a particularly bizarre series of passages – to Mrs Craddock's lodgings in Bath.

⁶⁵ See Peter Blake, 'Charles Dickens, George Augustus Sala and *Household Words*', *Dickens Quarterly*, 26 (2009), 24-40; Peter Edwards, *Dickens's 'Young Men': George Augustus Sala, Edmund Yates, and the World of Victorian Journalism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997); JWT Ley, *The Dickens Circle: A Narrative of the Novelist's Friendships* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1919); Jerome Meckier, *Hidden Rivalries in Victorian Fiction: Dickens, Realism, and Revaluation* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987); Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002); Hilary Schor, *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁶⁶ Mary L. Shannon, *Dickens, Reynolds, and Mayhew on Wellington Street: The Print Culture of a Victorian Street* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

⁶⁷ Sala, *Things I Have Seen*, I, pp.64-68.

⁶⁸ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, II, p.395.

Mrs Craddock's is the setting for a short farcical episode in *Pickwick*. Mrs Craddock herself is an extremely minor character, but Fitzgerald latches onto her, making inferences from tiny textual details and 'slender materials', surmising she is 'a careless, indifferent landlady, perhaps a slattern [...] a meddling, foolish, busybodyish sort of person'. Mrs Craddock is a 'fitting name'; 'the service was bad, we may be sure'; 'the woman had no tact'. The passage is peppered with references to what she 'ought' to have done. For Fitzgerald, Mrs Craddock is an actual person rather than a textual construct, and she attracts an extraordinary degree of his personal vitriol. Dickens's characters 'perforce behave like living creatures; we can even perceive possibilities of what they will do under other circumstances. As we grow more and more familiar with them', Fitzgerald realises, 'we find out gradually new and unexpected phases in their characters, just as we would in those of our acquaintances'.⁶⁹ In getting so carried away, he inadvertently starts to write a brand new story for Mrs Craddock, blurring the boundaries between his imaginative life and Dickens's, between the Dickensian world and the real world.

'The Plural Fiction': Space, Narrative and Play in the Nineteenth-Century Novel

Dickens was highly sensitive to the spaces he found himself in. House-hunting, moving and refurbishment caused inevitable delays in his creative output; he even felt compelled to rearrange the furniture in hotel-rooms as soon as he arrived. *Oliver Twist* (1837-9), *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), *Dombey and Son*, *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5) were all affected by these troubles.⁷⁰ But if the practicalities of being a tenant were a distracting nuisance in the short term, they had a more complex long-term impact: tenancy informed his narrative and stylistic choices, and rented spaces had a stubborn, enduring hold upon his imagination.⁷¹ Bachelard claims that 'the house allows one to dream in peace'; 'its interior space', Isobel Armstrong parses, 'guarantees the space of interiority itself. The house is therefore a secretion of dreams, memory,

⁶⁹ Fitzgerald, *Life of Charles Dickens as Revealed in His Writings*, II, pp.14-16.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Dickens to Richard Bentley, 20 April 1837; to the Duke of Devonshire, 28 September 1851; and to WWF de Cerjat, 16 March 1862, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), I, p.249; VI, pp.248-249; X, pp.52-55.

⁷¹ One of John Hughes's central concerns is how a writer is subject to 'the physical or emotional determinants of mind', and whether 'individuality [...] remain[s] itself in the actual quotidian nuances and shifts of a literary sensibility across a lifetime'. See *Affective Worlds: Writing, Feeling and Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), pp.1-2.

reverie, a protected, oneiric space, as well as a material space'. Bachelard's arguments often appear in literary-geographical studies, but it is important to remember that his vision of home is situated within particular geographical, historical and class contexts.⁷² The idea that a house 'allows one to dream in peace', for example, contains implicit assumptions about the house in question: presumably, Bachelard's house is quiet and private. What if there is little peace to be found in the house? If Dickens, his circle, and his characters are tenants – sharing rooms, hearing noises, parrying landladies – can they indulge in these dreams? Ultimately, it is the chaos of the nineteenth-century home, not its stillness, which encourages Dickens's flights of imagination.

According to Robert Tally, the shift to postmodernity created a corresponding 'spatial turn' in cultural studies.⁷³ The following chapters are positioned to provide some torque. Because space is, itself, an ineffable concept – it is everywhere, simultaneously concrete and intangible – its corresponding theoretical approaches are various and, at times, irreconcilable. Dickens and his circle were engaged in embryonic thought-experiments rather than sustained philosophical practice; this means that at different points, a range of frameworks for reading urban, domestic and rented space become relevant, as formulated by Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, and Franco Moretti, for instance. Gareth Cordery has suggested that gin-shops and public-houses became increasingly controlled spaces over the course of the period, with a move towards surveillance, supervision and discipline.⁷⁴ While a similarly Foucauldian model could be used to discuss lodging-houses, this would ultimately elide the many kinds of playfulness generated in rented spaces – a playfulness Dickens celebrates and perpetuates.

⁷² Bachelard (1994), p.6; Isobel Armstrong, 'Theories of Space and the Nineteenth-Century Novel', *19*, 17 (2003), 1-21 (p.15), <19.bbk.ac.uk>. For literary criticism that incorporates Bachelardian ideas, see Judith Fryer, *Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p.295; Liana F. Piehler, *Spatial Dynamics and Female Development in Victorian Art and Novels: Creating a Woman's Space* (New York and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003); Wolfreys (2010), pp.22-23. For readings that point out some of Bachelard's blind-spots, see Rachel Bowlby, 'Domestication', in *Feminism Beside Itself*, ed. Dian Elam and Robyn Wiegman (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp.71-91 (pp.76-77); Josephine McDonagh, 'Space, Mobility, and the Novel: "The Spirit of Place is a Great Reality"', in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp.50-67 (p.51); Joe Moran, 'Houses, Habit and Memory', in *Our House: The Representation of Space in Modern Culture*, ed. Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft (New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp.27-42; Anna Snaith and Michael H. Whitworth, 'Introduction', in *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place*, ed. Snaith and Whitworth (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.1-28.

⁷³ Robert T. Tally Jr., *Spatiality* (London: Routledge, 2013), p.11-43.

⁷⁴ See Gareth Cordery, 'Public Houses: Spatial Instabilities in *Sketches by Boz* and *Oliver Twist* (Parts I and II)', *Dickens Quarterly*, 20 (2003), 3-13; 81-92.

Michel de Certeau offers up an alternative paradigm. The spatial practices of individuals in the city, he argues, effectively subvert the totalising vision of the ‘space planner urbanist, city planner or cartographer’. Though de Certeau’s main focus is on the lived experience of pedestrians, his argument can also be applied to houses. No matter what ground-plans are sketched out or what architecture is put in place, no matter what formal covenants and informal rules are set out by landlords, space is really created by those who dwell in it – the people who fill the husk of a building and animate the blueprint. Tenants undermine the power of the landlord simply by rearranging the furniture, eavesdropping, holding raucous housewarming parties, or by thinking and using their imaginations in the space. They are also itinerants, and their unique patterns of movement from house to house serve to bring the city to life. Finally, the entire city qualifies as a rented space in a more abstract way. If ‘to walk is to lack a place’, the city becomes ‘an immense social experience of lacking a place’, a ‘universe of rented spaces haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed-of places’. With its lodgings and boarding-houses, Dickens’s London is truly a ‘universe of rented spaces’.⁷⁵

As Peter Conrad has articulated, ‘tragedy and comedy bump into each other’ in London’s ‘congested streets’, going some way to confirm the ‘false purity of genre’.⁷⁶ Dickens’s ‘universe of rented spaces’ inspires a similar conclusion. The emerging prominence of these living arrangements gave authors new opportunities to be inventive, offering them a tool with which to study the components, elasticity and boundaries of different genres. Literary critics have embraced geography in myriad ways, but Dickens’s work clarifies an essential relationship between setting and the possibilities it opens for narrative.⁷⁷ In particular, the following chapters are

⁷⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1988), p.93, 103. It is important to note Mary McLeod’s criticism of de Certeau, namely that he does not address gender; women are central in Dickens’s ‘universe of rented spaces’. See McLeod, ‘Everyday and “Other” Spaces’, in *Architecture and Feminism*, ed. Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze and Carol Henderson (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pp.1-37. For related work on the modern property market that takes inspiration from de Certeau, see Moran, *Reading the Everyday* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁷⁶ Peter Conrad, *The Victorian Treasure-House* (London: Collins, 1978), p.10, 47.

⁷⁷ It would be impossible to outline these approaches exhaustively, so what follows here is a representative sample. On the ‘sense of place’ and the relationship between real locations and literature, including the proliferation of guidebooks, see William E. Mallory and Paul Simpson-Housley (eds.), *Geography and Literature: A Meeting of the Disciplines* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987). For a reading of eighteenth-century authors that uncovers the specific features of Georgian houses, see Karen Lipsedge, *Domestic Space in Eighteenth-Century British Novels* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). On literature and geography as a discipline, see Jean-Paul Forster, *Eighteenth-Century Geography and Representations of Space in English Fiction and Poetry* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012); and Jon Heggund, *World Views: Metageographies of Modernist Fiction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). For perspectives on literary modernism through the lens of twentieth-century

underpinned by one of Franco Moretti's strands of argument in *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (1998): that 'geography is not an inert container, is not a box where cultural history 'happens', but an active force, that pervades the literary field and shapes it in depth'. Moretti argues that 'each genre possesses its own space [...] and each space its own genre'.⁷⁸

Because this is one of Moretti's first forays into 'distant reading', he is concerned with the data of literature, with patterns rather than the nuances of individual texts. Thanks to the 'extreme semantic reduction that mapping à la Moretti entails', place 'remains a pure location, understood not through its rhetorical shadings [...] but as a sheer function of plot'; his rendering of space, meanwhile, is 'devoid of any differentiation into mental, physical, genderized, and social spaces'.⁷⁹ However, Moretti's 'refreshingly wry and wildly creative thought experiment' easily lends itself to an interpretation of Dickens's equally wry and creative use of space.⁸⁰ 'Each space encourages, or at least determines, its own kind of story', Moretti contends, and as far as story is concerned, there is something particularly fertile about rented spaces.⁸¹ Lodgings, hotels and inns brim with narrative possibilities and have a unique capaciousness, lending themselves to any number of moods, tones and genres. As Dickens and his circle began to detail the vicissitudes of the property market, it became an imaginative stimulus and encouraged conscious experiments in genre, pushing their fiction in various directions. Like 'Lodgings To Let', these moments are canny in their own inventiveness. Barbara Hardy's observation on the *Sketches* captures the underlying tenor of all of Dickens's tenancy narratives: 'Dickens's self-analysis and reflexive awareness are so laid back, so jokey and so embedded in particulars that the

spatial theory, see Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); and Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (eds.), *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2005). For responses to Virginia Woolf and space, see Snaith and Whitworth (2007). On fiction and mapping, see Robert T. Tally Jr. (ed.), *Literary Cartographies: Spatiality, Representation, and Narrative* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); and Tally, *Melville, Mapping, and Globalization: Literary Cartography in the American Baroque Writer* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009).

⁷⁸ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p.3, 35.

⁷⁹ Derek Schilling, 'On and Off the Map: Literary Narrative as Critique of Cartographic Reason', in Tally (2014), pp.216-228 (pp.224-225); and Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, 'How the Mule Got its Tale: Moretti's Darwinian Bricolage', *Diacritics*, 29 (1999), 18-40 (p.19, 22). Other nuanced discussions may be found in Denis Donoghue, 'Here, There, Everywhere: *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*', *New Republic*, 25 January 1999; Josephine M. Guy, 'Review', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 54 (1999), 401-404; Richard Maxwell, 'Review', *Modern Philology*, 98 (2001), 695-699; Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. Tally (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁸⁰ Schilling (2014), p.217.

⁸¹ Moretti (2007), p.70.

terms “analysis” and “reflexive” are too abstract and heavy, but the conceptual implications of his unconceptual writing are crystal clear and by no means naïve’.⁸² Dickens may write about tenancy, but tenancy also provides a way for him to think about writing. To foray into Dickensian lodgings is to consider questions of genre, style, character, authorial self-consciousness, and the literary marketplace: in particular, his dialogue with other writers.

What exactly makes rented spaces so appealing to storytellers? They are uniquely positioned to enclose, concentrate, and generate narratives. At one extreme, they play host to nested narratives: interpolated tales unconnected with central plots, such as ‘The True Legend of Prince Bladud’, which is found in a drawer in Mrs Craddock’s lodgings. (Fitzgerald uses this detail to continue his vendetta against Mrs Craddock; it is ‘another symptom of her carelessness [...] It must have been the book of some preceding lodger who had forgotten it and left it behind. Now, the careful housewife would have gone round and cleared everything out, and either used the paper for spills or posted it to her tenant’.)⁸³ At the other extreme, these spaces and the interaction they encourage have the power to instigate the principal action of a novel. Long accustomed to watching Miss Tox from the window of his lodgings in Princess’s Place, Major Bagstock begins to perceive a change in her after she meets the Dombey’s. He becomes jealous of her new connection, mistaking mere proximity for genuine intimacy, believing that Miss Tox, his neighbour, owes him something more than courtesy. And so he decides to meddle in Dombey’s affairs, eventually introducing him to Edith in an act of ‘comic Mephistophelean power’.⁸⁴ This plot becomes possible because of lodging; Bagstock, a ‘single gentleman’, is renting rooms from a retired butler and housekeeper, spying on the spinster next door. Here, we see an interesting smudging of boundaries between plot and subplot, minor character and protagonist; indeed, the following chapters are populated by Dickens’s peripheral characters and follow some subsidiary narrative strands. Landladies and their ilk complicate our

⁸² Barbara Hardy, *Dickens and Creativity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), p.32, 34. On metatextuality with reference to the nineteenth century, see Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); J. Jeffrey Franklin, *Serious Play: The Cultural Form of the Nineteenth-Century Realist Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Robert Kiely, *Reverse Tradition: Postmodern Fictions and the Nineteenth Century Novel* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1993); Jeffrey Williams, *Theory and the Novel: Narrative Reflexivity in the British Tradition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁸³ Fitzgerald, *Life of Charles Dickens as Revealed in His Writings*, II, p.16.

⁸⁴ Dickens to HK Browne, 10 March 1847, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), V, pp.33-35 (p.34).

understanding of literary marginality and centrality because of their sheer ubiquity in Dickens's fiction: they may be a part of the backdrop, but that backdrop is a constant, and their very pervasiveness makes them central for Dickens.⁸⁵

According to Rosa Mucignat, nineteenth-century realist narratives uncovered three attributes of space that had been passed over by earlier cultures: 'visibility', 'depth' and 'movement', which came together to 'actively [determine] what happens, to whom and how'.⁸⁶ While Mucignat keeps her canvas broad, there are two mechanisms at work in rented spaces more specifically: one that hinges upon temporality, and the other, spatiality. On the one hand, lodging-houses allow narratives to renew themselves endlessly over time. This is Mucignat's idea of depth taken to an extreme; in other words, 'the space we are moving in may peel off its outer skin and reveal another face [...] Space is multi-layered'.⁸⁷ As tenants come and go in cycles, they bring and participate in their own stories. 'The places people live in,' says de Certeau, 'are like the presences of diverse absences'.⁸⁸ Plots and genres overwrite those which have earlier played out, turning the physical place of a room or building into a palimpsest.

This concept provides the basis for three of Dickens's *Sketches* as well as *A House To Let*, the 1858 Christmas number for *Household Words*. *A House To Let* is structured around the stories of successive tenants; 'Shops and Their Tenants' (1834) relates the gradual decline of a building, each tenant markedly poorer than the last, subletting and splintering the space. 'Our Next-Door Neighbours' (1836) undergoes dramatic shifts in tone as a landlord's first floor is taken by three very different sets of lodgers: a rowdy bachelor, a thief who feigns piety, and a mother and son newly arrived from the countryside and struggling to make ends meet. This short piece, which starts on a comic note, ends with the death of the son. The two parts of 'The Boarding-House' (1834) follow the escapades of different cycles of lodgers, reflecting the simple fact that lodgings exist because people come and go. Thus, they have a potential for narrative that never exhausts itself – the potential is always replenished. Dickens's twelve sketches in *Bell's Life in London* were signed 'Tibbs', after the landlord in 'The

⁸⁵ The role of the minor character, in Dickens and others, has been elegantly theorised by Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁸⁶ Rosa Mucignat, *Realism and Space in the Novel, 1795-1869: Imagined Geographies* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), p.2, 5-46.

⁸⁷ Mucignat (2013), p.19, 22.

⁸⁸ de Certeau (1988), p.108.

Boarding-House'. Mr Tibbs is never able to finish telling the one anecdote he has. The signature, according to Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, 'was an in-joke designed to alert [Dickens's] readers to the fact that his stories, like Tibbs's, were still going'.⁸⁹

In the longer fiction, Florence, entombed in the Dombey house, takes to watching the progress of the house to let opposite. These two houses are skewed mirrors of each other, participating in simultaneous life cycles. The Dombey house is full of wealth before the spectacular fall of its tenants forces it into the property market, its furniture auctioned off, its windows papered with advertising and its key handed to the agent. The house opposite starts empty and dirty, but is eventually 'repaired and newly painted' and filled with 'rosy children' (i, October 1846, p.17; vi, March 1847, p.170, 172, 176, 183; vii, April 1847, p.224; viii, May 1847, p.243; x, July 1847, p.298). As *The Pickwick Papers* closes, we hear that Mrs Bardell has gone on to 'let lodgings to many conversable single gentlemen with great profit'; this promises more scrapes, though no more lawsuits, we are told.⁹⁰ *Martin Chuzzlewit*'s Todgers's is 'coated with a century's mud' and smells 'as if the concentrated essence of all the dinners that had been cooked in the kitchen since the house was built, lingered at the top of the kitchen stairs to that hour' (iv, April 1843, p. 94, 99). The ghostly presence of departed tenants is similarly felt in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9), when Ralph's attention is caught by a 'distorted fir-tree, planted by some former tenant in a tub that had once been green, and left there years before, to rot away piecemeal'.⁹¹ These images, flitting between the grim and the humorous, evoke the psychogeographic layering of the lodging-house; the past lurks here, manifesting itself in the most unusual ways.

The second mechanism concerns space and the sheer number of narratives taking place simultaneously. In Dickens's assiduous identification of two-pair backs, first-floor fronts, front parlours and back garrets, he presents a domestic landscape with verticality and depth. Houses, we are constantly reminded, are not mere façades, but exist in three dimensions. The urban novelist need only look laterally to have his or her imaginative resources replenished by a different story – and such stories are not hard to find, because a physical nearness between people results in a corresponding nearness

⁸⁹ Douglas-Fairhurst (2011) explains that the boarding-house is 'the perfect model for his early fiction'; see pp.132-133.

⁹⁰ Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (London: Chapman and Hall), xix/xx, October 1837, p.608. Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁹¹ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (London: Chapman and Hall), i, March 1838, p.7. Subsequent references appear in the text.

between plots. The only secrets that cannot be unlocked at Todgers's are to do with the cellarge, 'the freehold property of somebody else'. It has 'no connexion with the house' and, though it is 'reported to be full of wealth', the lodgers at Todgers view it with 'profound uncertainty and supreme indifference' (iv, April 1843, p.99). It is freehold – no one cares about it.

In *Pendennis* (1848-50), Thackeray introduces Sibwright and Bangham, who live in an Inn of Court: 'It must be confessed that these two gentlemen have nothing to do with our history, will never appear in it again probably, but we cannot help glancing through their doors as they happen to be open to us, and as we pass to Pen's rooms'.⁹² Dickens's tenancy narratives, similarly, include fleeting references to other lodgers we never quite get a chance to meet. As Pickwick and Mrs Bardell become embroiled in one another's affairs, Dickens informs us that a second 'single gentleman' has been living in the house all along: this 'large man [is] always home precisely at ten o'clock at night, at which hour he regularly condense[s] himself into the limits of a dwarfish French bedstead in the back parlour' (v, July 1836, p.115). When the 'large man' crushes himself into his 'dwarfish' bed, Dickens make a metafictional comment about the need to squeeze him out of the novel – there simply is not enough space for him here. There is also Mr Jinks, who 'retire[s] within himself' – 'the only retirement he ha[s], except the sofa-bedstead in the small parlour which [is] occupied by his landlady's family in the day-time' (ix, November 1836, p.250). Jane Wackles practices flirting with a 'feeble old gentleman who lodge[s] in the parlour' of the family home (*The Old Curiosity Shop*, xi, 13 June 1840, pp.121-128, p.127). While Sol and Walter occupy the shop, parlour and garret behind the Midshipman, there are lodgers in the other rooms of the building – close enough to Walter, in both spatial and emotional terms, that he takes leave of them before going to sea. The lodgers are gone by the end of the novel (*Dombey and Son*, i, October 1846, p.25; vi, March 1847, p.190; xviii, March 1848, p.564). Indeed, for every lodger that Dickens and his readers follow, there is one or more we must ignore; we get the sense of limitless potential, of straining narratives waiting to be activated. And where do landladies fit in? They are the facilitators of plots, forming micro-societies, bringing disparate people into close contact, and dipping in and out of their lives. They are the ultimate proto-novelists.

⁹² WM Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis*, 2 vols (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1849-1850), II, p.135. Subsequent references appear in the text.

Dick Swiveller lodges in a cramped room above a tobacconist's shop, and refuses to acknowledge that there is nothing to his living arrangements apart from this one room. Having answered the tobacconist's advertisement for "apartments" for a single gentleman', Dick 'never fail[s] to speak of it as his rooms, his lodgings, or his chambers, conveying to his hearers a notion of indefinite space'; in his nutshell, he is indeed, like Hamlet, the king of infinite space (x, 6 June 1840, pp.109-120, p.116). These 'apartments' are Dick's 'plural fiction' (xxxvii, 12 December 1840, pp.121-132, p.123). And what about Dickens's 'plural fiction'? No matter how constricted and humble rented spaces are, they made this fiction possible: they offered him a plurality of literary options. If one of the objectives of nineteenth-century literary culture was to expose the many narratives nesting in the ordinary house, Dickens suggests that rented spaces were especially positioned to create these narratives.

House to House, Room to Room, Chapter to Chapter

The following chapters are roughly divided by genre, where genre is understood as a mood or tone rather than a set of prescribed narrative elements. Chapter 1 is about historical change in one of its most overt manifestations: the growth of the cities and the mobility of the population. It identifies some of the key features of Dickens's emerging urban style and situates his early work within an influential farce tradition. It focuses particularly on the character of the landlady as a social reality, a significant figure in women's history, and a literary trope.

Contemplating the competition between Dickens and Thackeray, Fitzgerald speculates about a reference to Goswell Street in *Vanity Fair* (1847-8): the site of Mrs Bardell's lodgings. Fitzgerald reads this as an inside joke, a homage to *Pickwick* and an acknowledgement of Dickens's comic mastery.⁹³ Thackeray and Dickens were built up as literary rivals and had a rocky personal relationship, largely thanks to an incident involving Edmund Yates at the Garrick Club in 1858. The second chapter, about spatial metaphors in the *Bildungsroman*, begins with a discussion of melodrama before placing Dickens alongside Thackeray and the silver-fork novelist, Catherine Gore. It juxtaposes the rural landowners and tenants of one tradition with the essentially urban, middle-class protagonists of the other. This chapter's historical argument centres around the

⁹³ Fitzgerald, *Bozland: Dickens' Places and People* (London: Downey, 1895), pp.178-179.

repeal of the window tax in 1851, which had an impact on the function of the lodging-house window in contemporary literature.

Chapter 3, on the demand for accommodation during the Great Exhibition, points out the close connection between the *Household Words* and *Punch* offices. Mark Lemon, the editor of *Punch*, was a close friend of Dickens and took part in many of his amateur theatricals; they only became estranged when Lemon tried to mediate during the collapse of the Dickens marriage. While Henry Mayhew saw the sudden growth of the hospitality industry as an opportunity to write a comic novel, Dickens and Wilkie Collins responded to the Exhibition with tales of sensation and Continental intrigue in rented spaces.

In the summer of 1851, Dickens decamped to Broadstairs to avoid the Exhibition. The Interlude of this thesis takes a similar break from London to focus on the hotels, boarding-houses and lodgings in seaside towns, which grew in size and number throughout the period. Here, Dickens, Thackeray and various dramatists relocated the narratives of a traditional genre – the pastoral – and modernised them for the nineteenth century.

Chapter 4, on the mystery plots in rented spaces, begins with a discussion of ‘low’ lodging-houses and the attention they attracted from legislators in 1851. This chapter demonstrates how Dickens and his circle made major contributions to the rise of the detective story, drawing examples from Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868) and ‘The Diary of Anne Rodway’ (1856) and Charles Warren Adams’s *The Notting Hill Mystery* (1862-3). ‘Anne Rodway’ is a particularly important milestone in the Dickens/Collins relationship; it impressed Dickens so much that he conceived of the idea of writing collaboratively with Collins and offered him a permanent contract on his staff. *The Notting Hill Mystery*, meanwhile, was published in *Once a Week*, a direct rival to *All the Year Round* established by Bradbury and Evans following their acrimonious split with Dickens. Though Dickens scoffed at *Once a Week*, he ultimately had to contend with the divided loyalties of his own contributors.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Phiz provided some of the illustrations for *Once a Week*, and Percy Fitzgerald, Harriet Martineau, Marguerite Power and Charles Reade published pieces. Eliza Lynn Linton seems to have fended off a request for contributions, preferring to remain with *All the Year Round*, and Charles Lever decided to serialise *A Day’s Ride* (1860) in *All the Year Round* in spite of solicitations from Bradbury and Evans, identifying his ‘personal regard’ for Dickens as his main motivation. Fitzgerald’s implicit betrayal prompted a waspish letter from Dickens. Writing to Samuel Lucas, the editor of *Once a Week*, Thomas Hughes suggested that the fiasco reflected badly on Dickens’s entire circle: ‘I shd be very glad to help you, for I am disgusted with Dickens and his set & think he & they have behaved like snobs as they are.’

According to Roland Barthes, ‘almost all novels contain bits and pieces of material pertaining to Living-Together (or Living-Alone)’.⁹⁵ The final chapter sees the Dickens circle weigh up the relative merits of distinct modes of urban dwelling: living alone, and living with others. It introduces Marmion Savage, an author who was only marginally connected to Dickens but shared his vocabulary, before concluding with an analysis of the Christmas numbers of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. The stories in these multi-authored issues are by Gaskell, Adelaide Anne Procter, Charles Allston Collins, and many others. They are wittily metafictional and suggest that the dynamics of the lodging-house closely reflect the politics of Dickens’s immediate circle. In this way, cohabitation encapsulates the essentially collaborative nature of creative writing.

*

A passage from one of Dickens’s early pieces, ‘The Great Winglebury Duel’ (1836), describes the internal architecture of a country inn. The Winglebury Arms has:

...Galleries of bedrooms, and labyrinths of sitting-rooms, denominated ‘private’, where you may enjoy yourself as privately as you can in any place, where some bewildered being or other walks into your room every five minutes by mistake, and then walks out again, to open all the doors along the gallery till he finds his own.⁹⁶

We can read the ‘bewildered being’ as a rather more purposeful figure than he first appears. He is the novelist, who can unlock every door in rented accommodation to release its many-sided stories. The following chapters set out to wedge those doors open.

See Dickens to Wills, 30 June 1859; to Charles Lever, 2 January 1860; and to Fitzgerald, 9 March 1870, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), IX, pp.86-88, 87n., pp.190-191, 190n.; XII, pp.486-487.

⁹⁵ Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together*, trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p.13.

⁹⁶ Dickens, ‘The Great Winglebury Duel’, in *Sketches: First Series*, II, pp.209-243 (p.211).

Chapter 1

Building a Career: From *Sketches* to *Dombey*

When Thomas Barrow, Elizabeth Dickens's brother, broke his leg, the young Dickens began to keep him company in his home on Gerrard Street. Decades later, Dickens placed Jaggers on the same street in Soho, but Uncle Barrow's home was of a different sort to Jaggers's: Uncle Barrow lodged in the rooms over a bookshop. 'Attracted by the look of the lad as he went upstairs', Uncle Barrow's landlady – the bookseller's widow – 'lent [Dickens] books to amuse him'. One such book was *Broad Grins* (1802) by George Colman the Younger. This collection of comic poems, originally published at the end of the eighteenth century as *My Night Gown and Slippers*, 'seized his fancy very much'. A description of Covent Garden in 'The Elder Brother' was particularly beguiling; it 'so impressed' Dickens that he 'stole down to the market by himself to compare it with the book'. Here, he 'snuffed up the flavour of the faded cabbage-leaves as if it were the very breath of comic fiction'.¹ A number of his own characters lodge in this redolent neighbourhood, from the Uncommercial Traveller to Arthur Clennam to Pip, who tosses and turns in the Hummums Hotel.

However, 'The Elder Brother' was not simply about Covent Garden – nor did its comedy solely derive from cabbage-leaves. A narrative poem written in iambic pentameter, it tells the tale of Isaac Shove, the heir-apparent to a rich maiden aunt. Shove lodges in the house of a hairdresser and wig-maker. The first-floor lodger, Doctor Crow, is an obstetrician, whose patients – unmarried women – lodge in a nearby tenement, 'as thick [...] as rabbits in a warren'.² After a midnight confusion involving street-door bells and knocks on the door, Isaac realises that Doctor Crow is secretly delivering the baby of his very own maiden aunt. (Decades later, Mrs Gamp, a midwife lodging over a hairdresser's shop, became one of Dickens's most celebrated comic characters.) But this was not Colman's only word on lodgers: also appearing in *Broad Grins* is 'Lodgings for Single Gentlemen', in which the fat Will Waddle, 'whose temper

¹ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, I, p.15. Slater (2009) briefly touches upon this episode; pp.16-18.

² George Colman the Younger, 'The Elder Brother', in *Broad Grins* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1802), pp.107-125 (ll.60-62).

[is] studious and lonely', 'hire[s] lodgings that [take] Single Gentlemen only'. He spends many sleepless nights sweating feverishly and losing weight, until he realises that his bed is placed directly above his landlord's oven. The landlord is a baker.

'Lodgings for Single Gentlemen' opens with the following observation:

Who has e'er been in London, that overgrown place,
Has seen '*Lodgings to Let*' stare him full in the face:
Some are good, and let dearly; while some, 'tis well known,
Are so dear, and so bad, they are best let alone.³

It was and is almost a truism that London was becoming an 'overgrown place'. During the course of the nineteenth century, its population grew from around 960,000 to more than six and a half million, with a minimum growth rate of 17% per decade.⁴ The domestic landscape splintered and shifted to make room for these freshly-minted Londoners, who had little idea where they were going, what they were doing, or how long they were staying. The Dickenses were among the countless migrants who found themselves moving from house to house, lodging to lodging, each space a vessel of their fervent hopes and anxieties. According to Peter Conrad, the most striking aspect of the adult Dickens's London is its emphasis on modes of dwelling: his 'city falls apart into a multitude of homes' and is 'made up of interiors, not of public places'.⁵

If Dickens began experiencing the social reality of tenancy from an early age, then Uncle Barrow's landlady introduced him to a new perspective on this reality – the fact that lodging also existed within a literary tradition. Though the humour of 'The Elder Brother' and 'Lodgings for Single Gentlemen' has evaporated with the years, the collection firmly places lodgers in a world of singsong, slapstick comedy. Colman wrote farces as well as poetry, and farces set in rented spaces were performed throughout the nineteenth century. As this chapter shows, Dickens's writing on tenancy engages with the theatrical farce tradition; a number of dramatists wrote plays centred around domestic space in general, or rented space in particular. Some, such as Douglas Jerrold and John Maddison Morton, have not quite disappeared from critical attention, while other names may be more unfamiliar today: Samuel Beazley, William Brough, James Bruton, J. Stirling Coyne, Henry Thornton Craven, Mark Lemon, WT Moncrieff,

³ Colman, 'Lodgings for Single Gentlemen', in *Broad Grins* (1802), pp.35-39 (ll.5-6, 1-4).

⁴ See Burnett (1986), pp.3-29; Douglas-Fairhurst (2011), p.167; Schwarzbach (1979), p.8; Anthony S. Wohl, *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p.1, 21.

⁵ Conrad (1978), p.67, 71.

Thomas Morton, Walley Chamberlain Oulton, RB Peake, John Poole, Tyrone Power, Edward Stirling, Tom Taylor and Thomas Egerton Wilks. Henry Mayhew tried his hand at farce, writing *But However—* (1838) and *A Troublesome Lodger* (1839) with Henry Baylis, and Dickens himself adapted ‘The Great Winglebury Duel’ for the stage: originally a sketch based in a rural inn, it was renamed *The Strange Gentleman* (1836) and declared ‘irresistibly laughable’ by one reviewer.⁶ He also acted in RB Peake’s *Comfortable Lodgings* (1827) for a benefit at Miss Kelly’s theatre in Soho Square, while Mamie Dickens’s Pomeranian puppy, Mrs Bouncer, was named after the bubbly landlady in Morton’s *Box and Cox* (1847).⁷

The influence of the theatre, whether melodrama, pantomime or farce, can be found everywhere in Dickens’s prose.⁸ Using farce as a touchstone for his tenancy narratives had a number of implications beyond simply producing laughs. First, ‘farce’ means ‘force-meat’. ‘Short and episodic in structure’, farces were ‘by nature suited to this role of “filling”’, Jessica Milner Davis argues, because they were really only there to pad out an evening at the theatre. While a melodrama would be the main event, a farce would be performed as a curtain-raiser, interlude or afterpiece, by way of ‘counterbalance’.⁹ In aligning himself so resolutely with an ephemeral, nominally insignificant dramatic form, Dickens encourages his readers to re-evaluate the line between the trivial and the substantial, and to think again about what farce might have to offer. Given farce’s traditional role as theatrical wadding material, the proliferation of lodging-house farces turned rented spaces into filler spaces or spaces of secondary concern; they were not sites of earth-shattering dramas. In fact, a large number of comedies took place in an immediately recognisable domestic environment. The most famous example was *Paul Pry* (1825), written by John Poole and plagiarised by Douglas Jerrold, who relocated the action to a Dover inn ‘in deference to a less fashionable audience’ at the Royal Coburg.¹⁰ As David Vincent explains:

⁶ ‘The Drama’, *Bells Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 2 October 1836, n.p. *John Bull* was appreciative, but less effusive; ‘The Theatres’, *John Bull*, 3 October 1836, p.327.

⁷ The performance of *Comfortable Lodgings* took place on 3 January 1846. The comic lodging-house keeper, Madame Pelagie, was played by Miss Bew; Mark Lemon, Frank Stone, George Cruikshank, John Forster, WH Wills and Augustus Dickens also performed. Dickens was Hippington Miff. See Dickens to Miss Kelly, 7 December 1845, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), IV, pp.448-449, 448n.

⁸ On theatre’s centrality to Dickens’s work, see, for example, Edwin M. Eigner, *The Dickens Pantomime* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1989), p.8.

⁹ Jessica Milner Davis, *Farce* (London: Methuen, 1978), p.7, 18.

¹⁰ David Vincent, *‘I Hope I Don’t Intrude’: Privacy and its Dilemmas in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.9. Vincent explores *Paul Pry* and its afterlives. On Poole and Dickens’s personal and professional relationship, see pp.16-17.

The corpus of late-Georgian and Victorian popular theatre contains a particularly rich if indirect archive of the pleasures and dilemmas of the private lives of those who paid to watch it [...] The most enclosed and concealed of practices were consumed collectively and in public, supplying some kind of social release from the stressed arenas to which the playgoers would return at the end of the evening.¹¹

Domestic farces, including lodging-house farces, brought the daily tensions of the home out into the open.

Farce audiences in the nineteenth century predominantly belonged to the working and lower-middle classes. This directly informed the kinds of stories staged: the characters in *Box and Cox*, for example, are a printer, a hatter and a landlady, and reflected the social milieu present at the Lyceum Theatre.¹² When he makes allusions to lodging-house farces, then, Dickens rewards a particular kind of cultural knowledge; he situates himself within a popular readership and viewership. In 'A Curious Dance Around a Curious Tree' (1852), he muses on the appeal of this often violent genre to its specific audiences. 'Every one', he writes, 'is so superior to all the accidents of life, though encountering them at every turn, that I suspect this to be the secret [...] of the general enjoyment which an audience of vulnerable spectators, liable to pain and sorrow, find in this class of entertainment'.¹³ 'The characters in farce', Stuart Baker agrees, 'are always bouncing back from situations that would destroy real people'.¹⁴ The genre, then, performs a social function among its intended audiences: it acts as a palliative. Finally, farces may be violent and anarchic, but they ultimately pit 'rebellion' against the 'traditional patterns of balance', 'apparent chaos' against 'underlying logic', a 'sense of madness' against 'geometric precision', the ebullience of play against the rules of the game.¹⁵ Farce rewards an actor's meticulousness and a playwright's attention to structure above everything else. Transplanting the lodging-house from the stage to the page, Dickens suggests that it is an ostensibly frenzied but simultaneously predictable universe – one that may yield laughs but few real surprises.

¹¹ See Vincent (2015), p.24.

¹² See Michael R. Booth, 'Early Victorian Farce: Dionysus Domesticated', in *Essays on Nineteenth Century British Theatre*, ed. Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson (London: Methuen, 1971), pp.95-110 (p.96, 103-105); Davis (1978), pp.19-20; Alan Fischler, 'Drama', in *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), pp.364-380 (p.376).

¹³ [Dickens], 'A Curious Dance Around a Curious Tree', *Household Words*, 17 January 1852, pp.385-389 (p.386).

¹⁴ Stuart E. Baker, *Georges Feydeau and the Aesthetics of Farce* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), pp.6-7.

¹⁵ See Baker (1981), p.9; Davis (1978), pp.23-24.

This chapter does not aim to offer a teleological narrative of Dickens's career, or suggest that the early work laid stable foundations for everything that came subsequently. Instead, the early work saw Dickens testing the ground. Here, he starts coming to terms with a changing city – a built environment under construction, dwelling practices being adapted for the times – and with a literary culture racing to keep up. These are the decades during which he balances questions of homage to his predecessors and contemporaries with his own desire to experiment and innovate. The chapter begins with a general discussion of the experience of lodging in the London context, and the next two sections engage with literary character; they explore the models of character to be found in lodgings and bring the figure of the urban landlady to life. The final section reveals the extent to which Dickens used images from the 'lodger world' to describe his conceptions of authorship.

'The Still Life of the Street': London, Lodging, and the Attraction of Repulsion

Lant Street, the site of a farcical interlude involving a raucous lodger and a cantankerous landlady in *The Pickwick Papers*, captured Percy Fitzgerald's imagination. Apart from the ineffable 'tone of the place', a 'quaintness' and 'tragedy' that inspires 'affectionate sympathy', its main appeal for Fitzgerald was its importance to Dickens's own life: this was where Dickens lodged during his father's imprisonment. 'The "actuality" and vivid, overpowering force of Mrs Raddle the landlady,' Fitzgerald contends, 'is altogether too animated and real not to have had an original. The boy must have had numerous experiences of irascible, unpaid landladies'.¹⁶ Perhaps so. There is also something unmistakably theatrical about Mrs Raddle, disrupting Bob Sawyer's dinner to demand an immediate rent payment and 'plant[ing] herself firmly on a purple cauliflower in the Kidderminster carpet', which makes a mix of autobiographical experience and literary borrowing seem more likely.

Before the furiously animated Mrs Raddle is introduced, however, Dickens takes pains to paint 'the still life of the street': because so many inhabitants 'direct their energies to the letting of furnished apartments', he notes, Lant Street's façade is dominated by 'green shutters, lodging-bills, brass door-plates, and bell-handles' (xi, January 1837, p.328). A still-life is meant to be an accurate rendering of an everyday

¹⁶ Fitzgerald, *Life of Charles Dickens as Revealed in His Writings*, I, p.60, 64-65.

scene, which places it within the broad parameters of the realist project. Accordingly, when he leads us to this shabby lodging district, Dickens is attempting to be true to what he sees and to bring us closer to the heart of the city – even if Lant Street’s plots are transplanted from the comic stage. One of the objectives of his early work is to identify and capture the salient characteristics of London life: to distil the ever-increasing chaos of the environment into a series of viable theories and models, coherent arguments and recognisable patterns.¹⁷ The nineteenth century has been seen as the age of the *flâneur* – indeed, the Dickensian *flâneur* – but these texts suggest that the reality of urban experience can be rather less mystical. Indeed, perhaps the lonely single gentleman in lodgings, listening through thin walls to the sounds of life in neighbouring rooms, is a truer representation of what it means to be urban.¹⁸ Perhaps urban experience is as much about dwelling as it is about walking. This lodger is the *flâneur*’s unglamorous cousin, an alternative incarnation of the spirit of the metropolis. According to this vision, lodging is constitutive of ‘the urban’; exploring its nature, then, is part of Dickens’s wider enterprise of understanding London.

If to lodge is to be urban in some intrinsic way, what is the precise relationship between the lodging-house and its urban context? The interlude in Lant Street suggests that a lodger exists in denial of the universe around him. ‘If a man wished to abstract himself from the world’, we are told, ‘to place himself beyond the possibility of any inducement to look out of the window, we should recommend him by all means to go to Lant Street’ (xi, January 1837, p.328). Because the street is so ugly, life here turns in on itself and in on the world of the lodging-house, where there is plenty of drama to keep one occupied. The opposite is true of Todgers’s, the boarding-house for commercial gentlemen in *Martin Chuzzlewit*:

Surely London [...] was worthy of Todgers’s, and qualified to be on terms of close relationship and alliance with hundreds and thousands of the odd family to which Todgers’s belonged.
(iv, April 1843, p.97)

¹⁷ On Dickens’s city writing, see, for example, Schwarzbach (1979); Sambudha Sen, *London, Radical Culture, and the Making of the Dickensian Aesthetic* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012); Jeremy Tambling (ed.), *Dickens and the City* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

¹⁸ On the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, see, for example, Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

Todgers's, with its unparalleled view of the roofs of London, acts as the city in miniature, and is a kind of doll's house for the urban novelist. As Steven Marcus has lyrically explained, Todgers's 'embod[ies] the essence of certain qualities of urban civilization, and of society itself [...] It is, one keeps forgetting, a boarding-house, a city within a city, a kind of encapsulated citadel of human society wherein is to be found the secret life of the metropolis'. It is 'congested, shabby, haphazard, impenetrable, irrational, and withal utterly humanized, the visible and palpable presence of a complex civilization and its history, eccentric, elaborate, thick, various, outlandish, absurd'.¹⁹ Maybe 'one keeps forgetting' Todgers's is a boarding-house because its symbolic value overshadows its actual characteristics. It makes the city comprehensible by crystallising some of its most fundamental currents and impulses: change; the relentless coming and going of people; extreme physical proximity and the strange conviviality this brings; a reliance on first or partial impressions; the fact that money structures this society, though we might not realise it at first; an insidious hierarchy, in spite of the promise of a utopian democracy within its four walls.

All of these are wider urban concerns – in making an argument about Todgers's, Dickens is making an argument about the city. Thus, the boarding- or lodging-house can be read as a representative space. Just as Todgers's is almost impossible to find – Dickens devotes a number of extravagantly descriptive paragraphs to its inaccessibility – so, too, is the insight it offers about urban life as a whole. Nevertheless, the insight is there, waiting for anyone who is tenacious enough to seek it.²⁰ But although tenancy is just one facet of London life, one of the many symptoms of a growing city, it deserves to be singled out for particular attention; it should not merely be conflated with other urban phenomena. For Dickens, its uniqueness lies in its complete annihilation of the division between public and private, in its establishment of women in positions of informal power, in its ability to generate and concentrate narrative possibilities, and in its way of compelling Dickens the novelist to look inwards.

Lodgings and the act of lodging are central to Dickens's vision of London. His fiction is a sustained attempt to do justice to its centrality, to shed light on its everyday details and to understand its wider psychological resonances. Londoners, however, had

¹⁹ Steven Marcus, *Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p.256. On Todgers's as 'a microcosm of the city in which it is nestled', see also Schwarzbach (1979), p.92.

²⁰ See Wolfreys, *Dickens's London: Perception, Subjectivity and Phenomenal Urban Multiplicity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p.153, 157.

a mixed relationship with this aspect of their lives. Bearing this in mind, Dickens's early writing on tenancy works at two levels. First, it acknowledges a range of negative assumptions about lodging: its links to poverty, dirt, noise, and a lack of space and respect for either privacy or personal property. At the same time, it finds ways of showing up this stigma and reducing suspicion of so fundamental a feature of urban life, often using comedy to do so. In one sketch, for example, 'bred up as she ha[s] been', Mrs Bloss knows 'no mode of living so agreeable as a boarding-house' ('The Boarding-House', II, pp.188-189). Dickens is clearly ventriloquising a sneer here, an implication that a rented home, especially one that includes a live-in landlady, is a mere second-rate version of a more private and permanent ideal; someone who finds this 'agreeable' must be rather uncouth. Dickens's own ventriloquism, a temporary nestling in other voices, sees him use the concept of rootlessness as a model for literary tone or style. For Watkins Tottle, a quietly dissatisfied soul whose 'fancy transform[s] his small parlour in Cecil-street, into a neat house in the suburbs', lodging feels like a purgatory before the stuff of real life can begin.²¹ This is a position Dickens and his circle interrogated and overturned during the course of four decades. Lodging was, itself, the stuff of a real, rich and interesting life, and those who dismissed it as a vulgarity were perhaps protesting too much – masking hypocrisies of their own.

The most obvious problem with lodging was its link to poverty, and, by extension, what being a lodger might have said about one's social position. People became defined by the properties and spaces they could afford. In some cases, they came into lodgings if they had experienced a reversal in fortune; this is true of a copier and his mother in 'Our Next-Door Neighbours', who experience a steady decline in London after their fall from grace in the country.²² While lower middle-class lodgers may have made ends meet, just about, Dickens's early work is full of brief references to the darker side of lodging: the existence of low lodging-houses, which accommodated the poorest of London's poor. The discussion of poor housing in both the *Sketches* and the novels is fragmentary. Sam and Pickwick, for example, engage in a type of Socratic dialogue on the theme of Sam's 'unfurnished lodgin's' (a euphemism for the 'dry arches of Waterloo Bridge') and the 'twopenny rope' (a 'cheap

²¹ Dickens, 'Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle: Chapter the First', in *Sketches: First Series*, II, pp.1-29 (p.2).

²² Dickens, 'Our Next-Door Neighbours', in *Sketches by Boz: Second Series* (London: John Macrone, 1837), pp.113-130. Subsequent references appear in the text.

lodgin'house, vere the beds is twopence a night', and where 'the lady and gen'lm'n as keeps the Hot-el [...] has two ropes' for lodgers to drape themselves between). Pickwick can only muster a feeble 'well' in response to Sam's revelations, and the conversation comes to an abrupt end when they reach Bury Saint Edmunds. The social issue remains packaged in Sam's whimsy; in describing his homelessness, he parodies the language of property advertising, describing Waterloo Bridge as 'vithin ten minutes' walk of all the public offices' but with a 'sitivation' that is '*rayther* too airy' (vi, August 1836, pp.159-160). It is too sobering a point for Dickens even to try to deal with; only later in his career does he begin to address it with real conviction.

Todgers's, meanwhile, is linked to poverty in more graphic ways. In its dark and smelly environment, the 'gruff old giant of a clock' seems to gain symbolic weight: it is as if Dickens is describing a Dutch *vanitas* painting (iii, March 1843, p.95).²³ Though lodgings are not always squalid – Mrs Bardell and Mrs Tibbs's establishments are impeccably clean and neat – there is something visceral about the description of Todgers's. The same holds true of Dick Swiveller's pungent lodgings above a tobacconist's shop; he can 'procure a refreshing sneeze at any time by merely stepping out upon the staircase' (x, 6 June 1840, pp.109-120, p.116). If, as in Mary Douglas's celebrated analysis, dirt is 'matter out of place', what does that say about lodgers, who are people 'out of place'? These spaces may disgust characters and readers alike. However, though squalor can indicate neglected space, this is the squalor of space that is so well and truly lived-in that the mop cannot quite keep up. Lodging-house life amounts to a strange celebration of materiality over sterility – it is as if, for Dickens, ideas can only really grow in compost.²⁴

Because rented space is shared space, portioned out haphazardly, the interiors of literary lodgings are cramped. A number of lodging-house farces centre around extreme scenarios. JM Morton's *The Double-Bedded Room* (1843) and William Brough's *Number One, Round the Corner* (1854) feature characters coming to terms with the most outrageous forms of cohabitation, and turn shared space into the stuff of raucous comedy: 'Do you [...] intend to make my room your home?', one lodger wails

²³ On Dickens and *pronkstilleven*, including the contemporary accusation that he was prone to literary 'rhyparography', see Deborah Wynne, *Women and Personal Property in the Victorian Novel* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp.77-81.

²⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966). See also Sabine Schuelting, *Dirt in Victorian Literature and Culture: Writing Materiality* (London: Routledge, 2016); and David Trotter, *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

to another.²⁵ The most famous example derives from Morton's *Box and Cox*, in which Mrs Bouncer lets the same room to two separate lodgers. They do not realise this, because one works through the night and the other, through the day; the farce takes place on the occasion that they meet, quite by accident. They must find a way to share the space until Mrs Bouncer finishes readying her back second-floor room for one of them. Resentment changes to friendship, they admit they are 'rather partial to this house', 'begin to feel quite at home in it', and 'agree that [it] is big enough to hold [them] both'.²⁶

The theme of shared space is especially popular in farce because of the demands of the stage itself; if all the action takes place in one room, there is no need to change the scene. This, in turn, creates manic energy: as Norman Shapiro explains of Feydeau's *Hotel Paradiso*, the 'very limitations of space impart a focus and an intensity [...] A thousand things happen in a Feydeau play. Much of their comic strength lies precisely in the fact that, on stage, they all have to happen in the same place'.²⁷ But even if these plots are originally shaped by practical concerns, they nonetheless give rise to arguments about cohabitation and conviviality, revealing the potential flimsiness and insipidness of the middle-class domestic ideal. A lack of personal space in lodgings forces people into contact with slapstick results. This transfers seamlessly from stage to page in *Nicholas Nickleby*, where the finiteness of space in the Kenwigses' house brings them closer to their fellow lodgers. The first time we meet the Kenwigses, they are throwing a party for their wedding anniversary. Their guest-list has been largely determined by the question of space: because they need to use extra rooms in the house for the party, the lodgers in those rooms are automatically invited (iv, June 1838, pp.120-128). In lodgings, inch by inch, private spaces and occasions become public.

These rooms are full of people and pieces of portable property that barely fit around each other. Dickens's description of Mrs Gamp's lodgings in Kingsgate Street includes a striking level of detail; the passage is as crammed as the room.²⁸ Luckily, Mrs Gamp has a reliable strategy for dealing with such unpromising quarters: though

²⁵ William Brough, *Number One, Round the Corner* (London: Lacy, 1854), p.16. Subsequent references appear in the text.

²⁶ John Maddison Morton, *Box and Cox* (London: Duncombe, 1847), pp.23-24. Subsequent references appear in the text.

²⁷ See Baker (1981), p.11; and Bert States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1985), pp.66-73.

²⁸ Edward Said's reading of *Mansfield Park* proposes that 'the fineness of Austen's detail' in the Portsmouth scenes emphasises the smallness of the space. See *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp.105-106.

her apartment is ‘not a spacious one’, ‘to a contented mind a closet is a palace; and the front-floor front at Mr. Sweedlepipe’s may [be] [...] in the imagination of Mrs. Gamp, a stately pile’ (xviii, June 1844, p.558). Dwelling, then, becomes a question of imagination or perspective, a state of mind. Dick Swiveller never fails to describe his tiny room as a whole suite of ‘apartments’ – even though he is forced to sleep in a turn-up bed, like many lodgers in Dickens’s fiction.²⁹ He refuses to acknowledge the truth about his ‘deceptive piece of furniture, in reality a bedstead, but in semblance a bookcase’. ‘Implicit faith in the deception [is] the first article of his creed’; he has a ‘blind belief in the bookcase’ (x, 6 June 1840, pp.109-120, p.116). What is crucial is that the inconvenient conditions in lodgings free Dick’s imagination. His need to improvise, a coping mechanism in urban space, transforms his bed into the most liberating and accommodating piece of furniture one can own: a bookcase.

However, portable property is often under threat in lodgings. In unfurnished rooms, furniture is brought in by the lodger, hired, perhaps, from a broker; in furnished rooms, it belongs to the landlord; in one morbid case, the furniture in David Copperfield’s lodgings has been left behind by a past occupant, now dead (viii, December 1849, pp.249-50).³⁰ Not owning land inevitably increases a lodger’s attachment to his or her portable property, but even this ownership is fraught: according to the law, a lodger’s property could be removed by creditors to cover their landlord’s bankruptcy.³¹ In fiction, it is constantly coveted by light-fingered landladies, servants and neighbours. Petty theft between lodgers forms a key element of *Number One, Round the Corner*, just as *Nicholas Nickleby*’s Crawl, living in the second garret at the Kenwigses’, helps himself to Newman Noggs’s provisions; the ‘very epitome of selfishness’, he takes everything from coals to cold meat (iv, June 1838, p.121). Meanwhile, a recurring joke in Dickens’s tenancy narratives is the ‘scarcity of tumblers’ available to lodgers and their guests: it is a ‘very common occurrence in this sort of places, but a very embarrassing one notwithstanding [...] There never was a lodging-house yet, that was not short of glasses’ (*The Old Curiosity Shop*, x, 6 June 1840, pp.109-120, p.116; *The Pickwick Papers*, xi, January 1837, p.334). This ‘very

²⁹ For a full study of turn-up beds in Dickens’s writing, see Joel J. Brattin, ‘Dick Swiveller’s Bed’, *Dickens Quarterly*, 26 (2009), 165-174.

³⁰ Nicholas hires from a broker; v, July 1838, p.139.

³¹ See the following legal handbooks: Copley (1835), pp.5-6; Cox (1853), p.196; Pater (1843), p.89; Sutton (1803), p.18. This almost happens to Mr and Mrs Batkinson in Morley’s ‘Apartments, Furnished’, p.463.

common occurrence' leads Bob Sawyer and Dick Swiveller to share, improvise, juggle, and cajole servants into a choreographed system of sourcing and washing crockery: a simple tumbler becomes, by necessity, a loving cup. This sense of contained chaos and almost acrobatic physicality in lodgings brings laughter and, in turn, diffuses some of the stigma against this way of life.



Figure 1: Phiz, 'Mr Swiveller playing the flute', *The Old Curiosity Shop*, xxxvii, 12 December 1840, pp.121-132 (p.124). British Library, C.144.c.8

One of the most striking features of lodging, according to Dickens's vision, is its ability to generate noise. Samuel Beazley's *The Boarding-House* (1811) and Dickens's own adaptation of 'The Great Winglebury Duel' both open raucously. Noise has a simple aesthetic effect here; there is nothing like it to get an audience into the mood for an evening of unpretentious entertainment. The level of noise indoors is also a direct corollary of the proximity between occupants and the poor quality of construction; it becomes impossible to equate the street with sound and the home with silence when a house is full of echoes, footsteps, creaking floorboards, ringing bells, slamming doors, knocks for admittance, muffled conversations, and blazing arguments between lodgers and landladies.³² In *Number One, Round the Corner*, Flipper is so irritated to hear the 'infernal fellow in the next room' constantly coughing, shouting at

³² On the poor construction values adopted by 'jerry-builders', see Burnett (1987), pp.20-22. On the disturbance generated by street-noise, see John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.41-81.

the servants, and ‘quarrelling with his landlady’ that he asks in exasperation, ‘who would live in a lodging house – nothing but rows from morning till night’ (p.4). He anonymously sends this neighbour bowls of gruel to stop him from coughing. Dick Swiveller is handed his notice after keeping his neighbours and landlady awake for an entire night, playing the flute to mourn the marriage of Sophy Wackles (Figure 1).

The only reason that Mr Morfin escapes a similar fate is that his landlady is deaf, and cannot hear him playing the violincello; she simply registers ‘a sensation of something rumbling in her bones’ (*Dombey and Son*, xix/x, April 1848, p.580). Dick embarks on his spontaneous recital both for catharsis and to ‘awaken a fellow-feeling in the bosoms of his neighbours’ (xxxvii, 12 December 1840, pp.121-132, pp.123-124). This therapeutic exercise backfires spectacularly, but Captain Cuttle has more luck: when he bursts into song in Number Nine, Brig Place, he is heard and joined by an ‘ardent skipper not quite sober’ lodging in the opposite house (*Dombey and Son*, v, February 1847, p.150). This cameo complete, the skipper closes his window and drops out of the novel as noisily as he came. Music has brought lonely lodgers closer together. It is too easy, then, to say that noise is merely annoying; lodging-houses and their narratives foreground hearing in productive ways.

Ann Gaylin offers an alternative reading of Morfin. Because his landlady is deaf, he is ‘blessed with an exceptional aural inviolability’; she is unable to eavesdrop. ‘The only good landlady or concierge,’ it follows, ‘is a deaf one’. Gaylin argues for the primacy of the aural in nineteenth-century literary culture, noting the peculiar proliferation of scenes of eavesdropping in contemporary novels. These scenes bring together a wealth of wider issues, including the unprecedented proximity of strangers in the modern city, the (dys)function of walls, the fallacy that is the private sphere, and ‘the ways in which identity is shaped by forces of rumor, innuendo, suggestion, and discussion’. Eavesdropping also offers insights into epistemology and narrative. If it ‘dramatizes a primal human curiosity to know’, it only provides ‘partial, incomplete, imperfect’ scraps of information, ‘figur[ing] the everyday experience of knowledge acquisition’. Given the piecemeal nature of its spoils, it is an ‘act of interpretation’ that ‘requires a greater hermeneutic effort than ordinary communication’. As a ‘constructive act’, it turns listeners into storymakers and storytellers, and thus ‘represents a version of narrative’s origin, a point where curiosity takes hold and from which story springs’. At a more fundamental level, it offers an insight into the way nineteenth-century novels work. The omniscient realist narrator is a ‘sanctioned eavesdropper’, and

eavesdropping ‘gives concrete form to readerly desire’ – that is, a borderline prurient desire to crack private lives open.³³

Gaylin’s readings of *Le Père Goriot* (1835), *La Cousine Bette* (1846) and *Le Cousin Pons* (1847) centre around the *pension de famille* and the *portière*. Madame Cibot is a masterful spy and a threat to her male, middle-class patrons, while the community in Maman Vaquer’s boarding-house is a perversion of the middle-class family, run on petty gossip, surveillance, and a pathological urge to dig out secrets; sounds are precious commodities in the micro-society of the lodging-house. Dickens’s response to eavesdropping is rather less paranoid. It is a convenient mechanism in farce, where the audience is always the ultimate eavesdropper, because it uses the spoken word as a ready-made prop to push comedy forward. Dickens turns instances of eavesdropping and spying to similarly comic effect in *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *The Pickwick Papers*; ‘I would scorn the haction’ of eavesdropping, Mrs Cluppins insists, ‘the voices was very loud [...] and forced themselves upon my ear’ (*The Pickwick Papers*, xii, February 1837, p.361; *Nicholas Nickleby*, iv, June 1838, p.128; *The Old Curiosity Shop*, xxv, 19 September 1840, pp.289-300, p.296). Eavesdropping is also a springboard for narrative: in lodgings, listeners must engage in constant speculation to grasp what is going on around them, weaving sense and stories out of fragments, transforming words into a form of currency. Fuelled by hearsay, this world rewards attentiveness and guesswork. It is a world in which the novelist feels at home.

It has long been observed that Dickens’s work reveals and revels in ‘the attraction of repulsion’: hence his interest in the dark, the disgusting and the shabby, which repeatedly draw him in, working magnetically on his imagination.³⁴ The phrase also encapsulates his approach to lodging. With its dirt, smells, crowdedness, and noise, rented space is space experienced through all five senses (Figure 2). As the next section shows, it also creates a particular model for understanding ‘character’.

³³ Gaylin (2002), pp.4-24, 65-111.

³⁴ On the ‘attraction of repulsion’, see, for example, Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, I, p.14.



Figure 2: Phiz, 'Emotion of Mr Kenwigs on hearing the family news from Nicholas', *Nicholas Nickleby*, xi, January 1839, pp.321-352. British Library, C.144.b.4

'I'm a Slave to First Impressions': Lodging and the Construction of Urban Characters

In the preface to his 1813 farce, *The Hole in the Wall*, John Poole begins by anticipating the words of his naysayers: 'Psha! that won't do; – to be serious about a farce! – 'tis absolutely impossible'. Farces, he claims, do not aspire to be anything other than ephemeral; indeed, 'no one ever sat down to write a farce with a thought in his head about a discriminating and a just posterity'.³⁵ But it is possible and helpful to be serious about farce, and to examine its significant contribution to Dickens's style – a contribution that renders it anything but ephemeral. Rather, it belongs within a wider discussion about perception, cognition and the construction of character in the city. *Bamboozling* (1842), a farce set in a country hotel, expresses it best: one character's catchphrase, 'I'm a slave to first impressions', perfectly encapsulates a central feature

³⁵ John Poole, *The Hole in the Wall* (London: Richardson, 1813), p.v.

of farce as a genre.³⁶ Farce's tendency to elevate the first impression to the only possible impression, and to populate the world with hyperbolic, two-dimensional, easily recognisable figures, finds immediate parallels among Dickens's lodgers. Dickens uses farce conventions to explore the kinds of people lodging-houses attract, the kinds of behaviour lodging-houses generate, and what lodging-houses do to the way Londoners read one another.

To begin with, Dickens's engagement with farce manifests itself at the most basic, immediately identifiable level: that of plot. Courtship and happy endings are key elements of the farce plot, all prefaced by a string of misadventures and miscommunications that resolve themselves after much quick-fire slapstick humour.³⁷ Fitzgerald enumerates the many 'farcical situations' in *The Pickwick Papers*; they include 'the double-bedded room at Ipswich' and 'Mr Pickwick's scene with Mrs Bardell, where the equivoque is exceedingly happy' (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Phiz, 'The middle-aged lady in the double-bedded room', *The Pickwick Papers*, viii, October 1836, pp.224-236 (p.233). British Library, C.59.c.23

³⁶ Thomas Egerton Wilks, *Bamboozling* (London: Duncombe, 1842), p.5. Dickens thought Wilks's version of the *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi* was 'redolent of twaddle', and rewrote it in 1838. See Douglas-Fairhurst (2011), pp.300-303.

³⁷ For a breakdown of 'common farcical techniques', see Booth (1971), p.97. On the characters in farce and the Continental roots of nineteenth-century English farce, see Davis (1978), pp.14-17, 24.

‘It may be said’, Fitzgerald concludes, ‘that these situations are far superior to [Dickens’s] official farces’.³⁸ A number of Dickens’s early plots in lodgings seem to have undergone the literary equivalent of rehousing, taken from the theatre and reworked into prose. ‘The Tuggs’s at Ramsgate’ (1836), for example, ends with a farcical tableau in seaside lodgings, and the two parts of ‘The Boarding-House’ feature illicit romances, mistaken identities, scheming, a fateful decision to eavesdrop, a fainting landlady, and a servant referred to as ‘Columbine’ – a pantomime character, technically, but still an allusion to the wider world of comic theatre (II, p.190). It is particularly easy to map comic romances or romantic comedies onto this kind of space, given the nature of the lodging population: both Mrs Tibbs and Mrs Todgers accommodate ‘commercial’ or ‘single’ gentlemen, whose worlds are shaken up by the unexpected arrival of single ladies (Figure 4). Unsurprisingly, the course of lodging-house love never runs smooth.

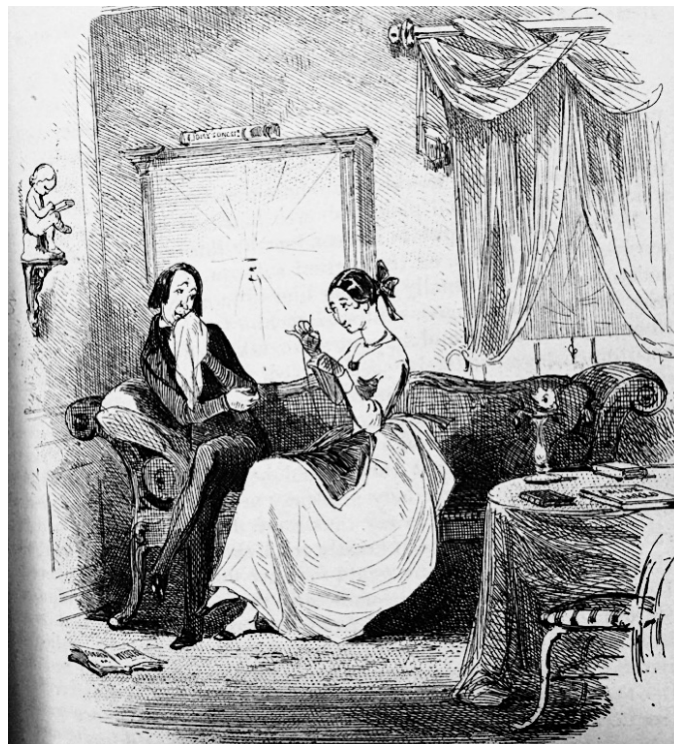


Figure 4: Phiz, ‘Mr Moddle is both particular and peculiar in his attentions’, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, xiii, January 1844, pp.380-384 (p.384). British Library, C.117.d.3

³⁸ Fitzgerald, *Life of Charles Dickens as Revealed in His Writings*, II, pp.185-186. Marcus is quicker to ascribe these moments to the picaresque tradition: Pickwick’s mistaken entry into Miss Witherfield’s bedroom at the Great White Horse in Ipswich, he argues, derives from *Tom Jones* (1749), and Winkle’s misadventures outside Mrs Craddock’s lodgings in Bath, from *Humphrey Clinker* (1771). See Marcus (1965), p.23.

In spite of its use of farce conventions, ‘The Boarding-House’ ultimately has a muted, even savage ending. When Mrs Tibbs and Mr Evanson are discovered together in the dead of night – in reality, eavesdropping, but assumed to be meeting for a liaison – Dickens steps away from the action. ‘We must leave the scene that ensued to the reader’s imagination’, he says. ‘We could tell how Mrs. Tibbs forthwith fainted away [...] We repeat that we *could* tell all this, but we love to exercise our self-denial, and we therefore prefer leaving it to be imagined’ (II, pp.220-221). By using paralipsis here, Dickens acknowledges but ultimately shunts aside the farcical swoon, fast-forwarding the action to a point beyond the anticipated fall of the curtain.³⁹ In life, there is no obliging stagehand poised to drop this curtain. Accordingly, ‘The Boarding-House’ ends with Mrs Tibbs’s ruin, her separation from her husband, the dissolution of the boarding-house, and an auction of all its furniture. Dickens, then, pays homage to farce plots, but already takes pleasure in subverting his reader’s generic expectations.

Farce does not simply offer templates or ingredients for plot; it also offers a very particular model for presenting character, and this is where Dickens’s literary style intersects most significantly with the demands of the theatre. Critics from the nineteenth century to the present have rooted elements of Dickens’s style in the farce universe, often with a measure of disapproval. For instance:

Many of his *portraits* are exaggerations and caricatures. Indeed, he depicts what used to be called “humours” rather than persons [...] Fielding’s landlords and landladies might be found in the average inns of his time; a similar character in Dickens would be dressed in *his* livery...⁴⁰

Dickens constructs the ‘single gentleman’ as a stock character, an identifiable subset of the lodging class that comprises clerks, medical and veterinary students, commercial gentlemen and former military men.⁴¹ Grandfather Trent’s younger brother is simply called ‘the single gentleman’ or ‘the lodger’ throughout *The Old Curiosity Shop*,

³⁹ On paralipsis as a rhetorical technique used in oration, see Matthew Bevis, *The Art of Eloquence: Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.22, 89.

⁴⁰ See James Hannay, *Course of English Literature* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1866), pp.321-323; Thomas Henry Lister on the early works, *Edinburgh Review*, October 1838, pp.75-97; Mrs Oliphant, ‘Charles Dickens’, *Blackwood’s Magazine*, April 1855, pp.451-466; Unsigned article, *National Review*, July 1861, pp.134-50; Unsigned review, *Westminster Review*, October 1854, pp.604-608; and, more recently, EM Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold, 1927).

⁴¹ For example, there are clerks lodging in ‘A Dinner at Poplar Walk’ (1833), ‘Thoughts About People’ (1835), ‘The Boarding-House’, and *Dombey and Son*; commercial gentlemen in *Martin Chuzzlewit*; and students in *The Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield*.

making him the most conspicuous example of this type. Dickens consciously draws attention to the choice of moniker: he calls him ‘the younger brother, or the single gentleman, for that designation is more familiar’, as if the narrator cannot quite wean himself off one established title in favour of another (xlv, 6 February 1841, pp.217-228, p.221). The novel normalises the single gentleman, turning him into an official urban character, and concluding a process that begins in the world of advertising; protagonists as distinct as Dick Swiveller and Mr Pickwick answer window-notices for ‘apartments for single gentlemen’, tacitly accepting a version of themselves that has been constructed by the property market. These single gentlemen find their counterparts in single ladies. Before Nicholas’s father is married, for example, he boards in the same house as a widow and her daughter. Given what happens to other single gentlemen and single ladies, especially in ‘The Boarding-House’, we are left with the unsettling thought that he might have married either of these women (vii, September 1838, p.198). In opting out of a lodging-house farce, he has made the narrative of *Nicholas Nickleby* possible.

Dickens is explicit in his use of theatrical conventions when he describes the kinds of characters to be found at Todgers’s:

Then the presentations took place. They included a gentleman of a sporting turn [...] and they included a gentleman of a theatrical turn [...] and they included a gentleman of a debating turn [...] and a gentleman of a literary turn, who wrote squibs upon the rest, and knew the weak side of everybody’s character but his own. [...] Every man comes out freely in his own character.

Among the other ‘turns’ represented at Todgers’s are the ‘vocal’, ‘smoking’, ‘convivial’, ‘fashionable’ and ‘witty’ (iv, April 1843, pp.109-110, 112). A ‘turn’ is a constitutive element of character, but also a performance; as each lodger reveals ‘his own character’, the lodging-house becomes a stage, placing Todgers’s firmly within the world of comedy. The passage also sets up some wider arguments about character in the city. If each lodger at Todgers’s is defined by one unique attribute, then lodgings must attract and create caricatures rather than fully rounded people. They encourage theatrical behaviour, even the use of a mask. ‘At such moments’, John Bowen argues, ‘[*Martin Chuzzlewit*] seems to glimpse the possibility that all social life is a matter of prosopopoeia, tropes, and turns’.⁴² If, as Deborah Vlock proposes, the Victorians showed a ‘willingness to broaden the very concept of performance to include that which

⁴² John Bowen, *Other Dickens: Pickwick to Chuzzlewit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.210.

happens in social interaction', to survey 'the larger and looser act of living for traces of the performative', the lodging-house provided both evidence and opportunity.⁴³

Bowen notes that 'singular' is a 'favourite adjective' of *The Pickwick Papers*, as if it was inevitable that a *single* gentleman would also be a *singular* gentleman.⁴⁴ Dickens's lodgers are eccentrics: Mr Morfin talks to himself; Mrs Bloss and Mr Gobler are hypochondriacs; the Single Gentleman has a 'very plentiful stock' of 'peculiarities' (xxvi, 26 September 1840, pp.301-306, p.301). Following one uncharacteristically mellow meeting, Dick is 'relieved to find him in such a good humour', because 'it [is] clear that he [is] a choleric'; Dickens's reference to Renaissance methods of logging character encourages us to seek similar shorthands and shortcuts in lodgings (xxv, 19 September 1840, pp.289-300, p.294).⁴⁵ In such an environment, identity becomes distilled or pared down; at the same time, it exaggerates itself. Perhaps lodging-houses seem to be citadels of hyperbolic behaviour because they attract alienated, chronically unglamorous characters, who have found themselves close to being swallowed by London. The tiny communities in which they dwell offer them a final chance. Here, they must remind everyone, especially themselves, that they exist. Dickens, then, does not simply flatten his lodging-house characters for laughs; instead, he uses conventions common to farce to make some poignant suggestions about urban behaviour. Loneliness creates idiosyncrasy, and so does the desperate competition for attention in noisy, overcrowded quarters.

Literary lodgers are also defined by the external signals they unwittingly emit. This synecdochic rendering of selfhood, a belief in a lucid 'semiotics of theatre and social life', offers flashes of insight to anyone who can interpret each signal.⁴⁶ For example, from their occasional encounters on the stairs of Mrs Bouncer's, Box is struck by Cox's impressive wardrobe of hats: because 'there's nothing particularly remarkable about him, except his hats', Cox is the sum of his clothing choices (p.8). Sam Weller, similarly, can make wild but accurate extrapolations about guests at the White Hart Inn

⁴³ Deborah Vlock, *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.13. On the permeability between theatre and prose fiction, and the contemporary reading public's total familiarity with theatrical conventions and references, see p.5, 10, 12.

⁴⁴ See Bowen (2000), p.63.

⁴⁵ Dickens and his friends gave various charity performances of Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) from 1845. See, for example, Dickens to Clarkson Stanfield, 15 July 1845, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), IV, pp.332-333. See also Northrop Frye, 'Dickens and the Comedy of Humors', in *Experience in the Novel*, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968), pp.49-81.

⁴⁶ See Vlock (1998), pp.22-26, 28.

simply by seeing their shoes, and Dick and the Brasses are fixated by the Single Gentleman's 'very obstinate-looking' boots outside his door (*The Pickwick Papers*, iv, June 1836 p.96; *The Old Curiosity Shop*, xxv, 19 September 1840, pp.289-300, p.292; Figures 5 and 6). Dickens's early writing is rife with allusions to two signals in particular – distinctive footsteps, and distinctive knocks on the door – which assert and establish character traits in domestic spaces. In his description of footsteps on the urban streets, Michel de Certeau explains that 'each unit has a qualitative character [...] Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities', and the same is true of footsteps in the lodging-house: the sickly narrator of Collins's 'Laid Up in Two Lodgings' (1856), writing in Paris and then in London, wonders about the 'matutinal stamping and creaking of boots' in the attic and makes it a basis for a character-study.⁴⁷ The strength and quality of someone's double-knock on the door, meanwhile, becomes a guaranteed index of their character; it is expected that we know exactly what kind of person Mrs Bloss will be when we hear she is 'a single lady with a double knock, in a pelisse the colour of the interior of a damson pie', and is 'very fat and red-faced' ('The Boarding-House', II, p.183). For Londoners as disparate as the Single Gentleman, Mr Lillyvick, Newman Noggs and Mr Tibbs, the double-knock is an explicit expression and extension of identity. Ruth and Tom Pinch seem particularly sensitive to this signal, perhaps because they are new to the city and are still trying to learn its language (xiv, February 1844, p.423; xviii, June 1844, p.546). Tellingly, John Poole's story regarding the origins of *Paul Pry* centres around the very same concept: the idea for the play apparently came to him because of a 'bed-bound elderly lady in a London street who could tell precisely the business of each of her neighbours by the sound of the knocks made on their doors'.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ de Certeau (1988), p.97; and [Wilkie Collins], 'Laid Up in Two Lodgings: Second, My London Lodging', *Household Words*, 14 June 1856, pp.517-523 (p.519). Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁴⁸ Vincent (2015), pp.17-18.

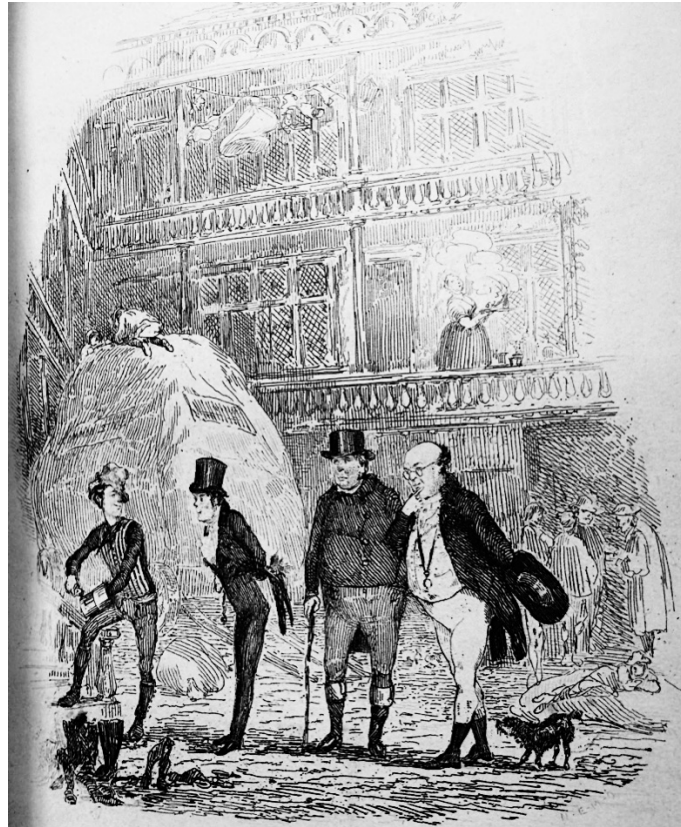


Figure 5: Phiz, 'First appearance of Mr Samuel Weller', *The Pickwick Papers*, iv, June 1836, pp.90-100 (p.94). British Library, C.59.c.23



Figure 6: Phiz, 'Mr Brass at the keyhole', *The Old Curiosity Shop*, xxv, 9 September 1840, pp.289-300 (p.293). British Library, C.144.c.8

Lodgings train people to look at one another in a curiously flattening way. Raymond Williams's seminal reading of Dickens suggests that 'the experience of the city is the fictional method; or the fictional method is the experience of the city'; in the

nineteenth-century metropolis, there is ‘a new way of seeing men in what is experienced as a new kind of society’, one that is ‘overcom[e] and replace[d] by a procession of images’. This is essential for Dickensian characterisation: his is ‘a way of seeing men and women that belongs to the street’.⁴⁹ Like the street, the lodging-house is a space that renders selfhood as a mere ‘procession of images’. Here, understanding is gleaned piecemeal, rather than through genuine and sustained relationships. The relationships that do materialise in lodgings are forged on the basis of rapid character assessments. If the modes of perception and cognition in the city are impressionistic, then Dickens’s lodging-house caricatures weave the city into the very textures of his fiction. Defending his friend’s aesthetic decisions, John Forster maintains that ‘we see nobody minutely in real life [...] men touch and interfere with one another by the contact of their extremes’.⁵⁰ In this strange new world, farce is not one of the antitheses of urban realism – in a fundamental way, it *is* a type of urban realism.

While a *flâneur* is, by definition, blasé about taking in impressions of his fellow citizens, there is an extra sense of urgency surrounding the rapid character assessments made at the lodging-house door. A landlord or landlady must police the threshold and make decisions about the suitability of each applicant for houseroom; these decisions are crucial to the micro-societies they are trying to create. All they can do is make informed readings of the hints offered to them, becoming hyper-sensitive to cues and clues, ascribing a categorical moral significance to every action and facial feature. The landlord in ‘Our Next-Door Neighbours’ gets it wrong not once, but twice. The first time, he is taken in by the appearance of a single gentleman, who is ‘stout’, ‘good-humoured looking’ and ‘about five-and-thirty’. These are simple adjectives, superficial attributes. Only once the gentleman gains admittance does ‘his real character [come] out’: he turns out to be so rowdy that he drives the neighbourhood to distraction. The second lodger, who seems to be ‘of a very different character’ from the first, steals from the landlord and absconds (p.121, 124). (Anxieties over the possibility of ‘moonlight flits’ were widespread, and Dickens and Collins mention it at various points; indeed, the police were empowered to stop any carriage that was moving furniture at night.⁵¹)

A formal mechanism was in place in the nineteenth century to avoid these situations. As Alfred Cox explains in his tenancy guide:

⁴⁹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.151, 154-155.

⁵⁰ [Forster], ‘*Bleak House*’, *Examiner*, 8 October 1853, pp.643-645 (p.644).

⁵¹ Pater (1843), p.135.

It is expedient that each party give the other references to two or three persons who, from personal knowledge, can satisfy him of the integrity and solvency of the former [...] Inquiries should never be regarded as merely formal, and therefore omitted to save trouble [...] Neither do mere external appearances of respectability render them superfluous.⁵²

Though not demanded formally by law, the provision of a ‘character’, both by the proprietor and the prospective lodger, was a standard part of the agreement between them; Sampson expresses consternation when the Single Gentleman cannot offer any references, Rokesmith refuses to provide one to the Wilfers, but Mrs Tibbs, Mrs Bloss, Mrs Tope and Dick Datchery do manage to fulfil this responsibility. In each case it accompanies their financial transaction, suggesting that they are investing in a personality, rendering character an element of a wider economic structure. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this concept of ‘transactional character’ was a well-established part of the economic and legal world. As Aeron Hunt and Margot Finn show, character was a ‘historically specific formation, produced by and transformed within the changing conditions of capitalism’, and thus an ‘essential form of social capital’.⁵³ Submitting a reference became a way of advertising the self and involved its own kind of rhetoric: when Dickens made an offer for a house in 1837, he asked Richard Bentley to provide a character for him, ‘to testify to [his] being “sober and honest” &c – to testify in short to [his] being Boz’.⁵⁴ He was asking to be flattened to two rather bland adjectives, accepting flatness as a contractual obligation. Thus, though Dickens’s characters would later be accused of being flat, there were some occasions on which a degree of flatness was required.

In *Dombey and Son* – a novel that often resorts to tagging adjectives and epithets onto characters – Susan Nipper articulates her mistrust of Mr Carker. ‘If ever he wants a character’, she warns, ‘don’t let him come to me whatever he does, that’s all I tell him’ (xiv, November 1847, p.429). As a servant, Susan has had to provide a character to get her job, and in her disparagement of Carker she emphasises that a reference depends on the goodwill of other people.⁵⁵ It is a relational definition of selfhood; one

⁵² Cox (1853), p.15.

⁵³ On ‘transactional character’, see Hunt (2014), pp.3-20. On ‘consumers’ efforts at self-fashioning’, see Finn (2003), p.10. On the need for and nature of references, see also Finn (2003), pp.10-21; Hunt (2014), p.4, 8; Tim Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender 1660-1750: Life and Work in the London Household* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), pp.51-65; Schramm (2000), p.70.

⁵⁴ Dickens to Richard Bentley, 24 February 1837, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), I, p.238.

⁵⁵ Susan is also directly placed within the world of melodramatic theatre: Dickens repeatedly refers to her as the ‘black-eyed’, alluding to Douglas Jerrold’s *Black-Ey’d Susan* (1829). On the implications of

person's respectability is assured if another respectable person is willing to vouch for them. It requires prospective lodgers to reach out to their acquaintances and prove their membership of a network: Tom and Ruth Pinch, for example, are only able to secure their lodgings because they have named 'John Westlock, Esquire, Furnival's Inn, High Holborn' as their referee (xiv, February 1844, p.433). Tenancy, then, rewards people who have already established human relationships. It fosters a flattened understanding of individuals, structured around pithy adjectives, synecdoche, and first or partial impressions. The next section offers a case study of the key figure making these judgements: the landlady. The centre of the lodging-house universe, she is, herself, frequently subject to caricature in nineteenth-century literary culture.

'What a Foolish Creature I Must Seem to You': The Figure of the Landlady

The contrast between the two sets of successful capitalists in *Nicholas Nickleby* – Ralph Nickleby, and the Cheerybles – seems at its starkest when we realise they share the status of landlord.



Figure 7: Phiz, 'Newman Noggs leaves the ladies in the empty house', *Nicholas Nickleby*, iv, June 1838, pp.97-128. British Library, C.144.b.4

this allusion, see Matthew PM Kerr, 'With Many Voices: The Sea in Victorian Fiction' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2013), pp.162-165, 186.

While Ralph grudgingly allows Mrs Nickleby and Kate to stay in a dank and empty house he owns until he finds a paying tenant, the Cheerybles are infinitely more generous in their offer of a cottage in Bow (Figure 7). Dickens meticulously details their dialogue about the arrangements for the tenancy: Ned wishes to give the Nicklebys the house gratis, saying that, given their wealth, he and his brother ‘should be ashamed to touch the rent under such circumstances as these’. Charles agrees in principle, but is sensitive to the family’s pride. In order to ‘preserve habits of frugality’ and ‘remove any painful sense of overwhelming obligations’, he suggests a nominal rent of fifteen or twenty pounds – ‘something under the usual rent’ – and a series of small loans, including for furniture. Immediately after this discussion, the scene switches to the cottage itself, now full of Nicklebys. A site of ‘discoveries and surprises’, ‘hope, bustle, and light-heartedness’, it concentrates all of the very best effects of moving house (xi, January 1839, pp.345-346). The Nicklebys luxuriate in their new home under the auspices of their benevolent landlords.

While Ralph and the Cheerybles belong within a debate about capitalism and paternalism, Dickens’s early fiction is more consistently interested in small-time enterprise – in the humble landlady, as opposed to the towering and distant landlord.⁵⁶ Readers going through Dickens’s work chronologically may wonder if the portrayal of women can get any worse after *Pickwick*’s ‘shrewish, predatory’ landladies.⁵⁷ However, in spite of the grotesqueness of Mrs Bardell, Mrs Raddle and Mrs Mac Stinger, Saskia Lettmaier is too categorical when she argues that ‘Dickens, Victorian par excellence, could not introduce a landlady into his fiction without putting on record his hostility towards the breed’.⁵⁸ His landladies, even within the bounds of his early writings, make for a more complex study of gender relations. Landladies are not propertied women, but, as purveyors of houseroom, they have considerable power over the properties they superintend. They are credible, successful businesswomen who complicate visions of middle-class domesticity, so magnetic in character that they hold our attention long after their scenes have ended. Thus, the figure of the landlady is an

⁵⁶ On the Cheerybles as paternalist capitalists, see Jarvie (2005), pp.31-48. On the practical and connotative difference between a landlord and a landlady, see Alison C. Kay, *Foundations of Female Entrepreneurship: Enterprise, Home and Household in London, c.1800-1870* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009), p.110.

⁵⁷ See Bowen (2000), p.62; Marcus (1965), pp.40-41.

⁵⁸ Saskia Lettmaier, *Broken Engagements: The Action for Breach of Promise of Marriage and the Feminine Ideal, 1800-1940* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.108, 113.

important addition to discussions about Dickens, women and (anti-)feminism. When Benjamin Allen calls Mrs Raddle a ‘woman’, she takes it as a grievous insult; a tearful Miss La Creevy says to Newman that she must seem a ‘foolish creature’ to him (*The Pickwick Papers*, xi, January 1837, p.331; *Nicholas Nickleby*, x, December 1838, p.304). But neither of these suggestions tells the full story of Dickens’s landladies: throughout his early writings, he fluctuates, simultaneously exploring a social reality, shedding light on an important element of women’s history, and adapting and interrogating a comic literary trope.⁵⁹

In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens declares that ‘to tell of half the queer old taverns that had a drowsy and secret existence near Todgers’s, would fill a goodly book’ (iv, April 1843, p.98). This thesis is not that book, but it is worth noting that Dickens recognises the inn’s place as a trope, making explicit allusions to its cultural history from *The Pickwick Papers* to *The Holly-Tree Inn* (1855). The landlord and landlady are the lynchpins of inn mythology. Though historically speaking, women were at the height of their influence in rural and urban inn culture during the eighteenth century, they seem to be comfortably established in the milieu Dickens describes.⁶⁰ The ‘broad, buxom, comfortable, and good-looking’ Mrs Lupin, the ‘beaming hostess of the Blue Dragon’, is, ‘in outward appearance’, ‘just what a landlady should be’ (i, January 1843, p.21; Figure 8). In other words, she lives up to everyone’s expectations, cliché building upon cliché.

⁵⁹ On Dickens’s approaches to gender, including his depiction of subversive women, see, for example, Brenda Ayres, *Dissenting Women in Dickens’ Novels: The Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1998); Patricia Ingham, *Dickens, Women and Language* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992); Langland (1995); Slater, *Dickens and Women* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983). On eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women’s relationship to property, see Tim Dolin, *Mistress of the House: Women of Property in the Victorian Novel* (Aldershot and Brookfield: Ashgate, 1997); Susan Glover, *Engendering Legitimacy: Law, Property, and Early Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006); Wynne (2010). For historical accounts of landladies, their relationships with lodgers, and the ways in which they rewrote the ideology of public and private spheres, see Kay (2009); Davidoff (1979); Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchison, 1987).

⁶⁰ On Dickens’s buxom women, including tavern landladies, see Ayres (1998), pp.35-36. On the barmaid as nineteenth-century cultural trope, including the ‘parasexuality’ of these depictions and the move away from old-fashioned alehouses, see Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.151-174; Davidoff and Hall (1987), pp.299-301; Kay (2009), pp.71-72.



Figure 8: Phiz, ‘Martin Chuzzlewit suspects the landlady without any reason’, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, i, December 1842, pp.19-32 (p.24). British Library, C.117.d.3

Mrs Lupin exists in a diptych with Mrs Todgers, her metropolitan counterpart. In both the inn and the lodging-house, Dickens plays with the idea that landladies have predictable sets of shared attributes. An anonymous landlady contributed an article to *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1854 and acknowledged what must have been a strange case of double consciousness. As a landlady, she was not only herself but an archetype, repeatedly confronted with versions of herself in the literature she read:

There are a number of stock subjects, which writers of fiction, concoctors of articles for journals and magazines, and delineators of society as it is, or as they imagine it to be, have in a manner seized for their peculiar property [...] Among these not the least remarkable [...] is the Lodging-house-keeper.⁶¹

Dickens, simultaneously a ‘writer of fiction’, a ‘concoctor of articles’ and a ‘delineator of society’, borrowed landladies from the real world and from the world of farce; he then turned them into his own ‘peculiar property’.

Mrs Bardell, Mrs Raddle, Mrs Craddock, Sally Brass, Mrs Todgers, Miss La Creevy, Mrs Mac Stinger – these are essentially comic names that indicate something fundamental about the narrative role they are supposed to fulfil. They fit comfortably alongside the landladies familiar to farce audiences: Mrs Grampus, Mrs Winks, Mrs

⁶¹ ‘Letting Lodgings: A Widow’s Tale’, *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, June 1854, pp.346-349 (p.346).

Bouncer, Spigot, Mrs Topheavy and Mrs Prattle.⁶² They dress distinctively and look odd. They ‘bounce’, ‘bustle’, ‘dart’ and ‘trot’, infusing their narratives with physical comedy, bringing energy and movement to stage and page (*Nicholas Nickleby*, vi, August 1838, p.184; xii, February 1839, p.368). They match this momentum with the speed of their speech: Dickens takes conscious delight in describing the quirks of Mrs Mac Stinger’s language. She uses the nonsense phrase ‘guzzlings and muzzlings’ simply ‘for the joint sake of alliteration and aggravation, rather than for the expression of any idea’ (xiii, October 1847, p.394). To employ Patricia Ingham’s term, landladies are ‘verbal tyrants’ who quickly impose themselves on their texts, with a brand of discursive control that has its roots in comic theatrical ‘patter’.⁶³ Volubility is one symptom of an excitable nature, and Dickens’s early work consistently portrays the landlady as excessive in emotion: Mrs Bardell’s fateful swoon is an emotional display that changes the entire course of *Pickwick*’s narrative, but Mrs Raddle and Mrs Mac Stinger are equally happy to faint, cry and shriek at every opportunity (Figures 9, 10, 11, 12).

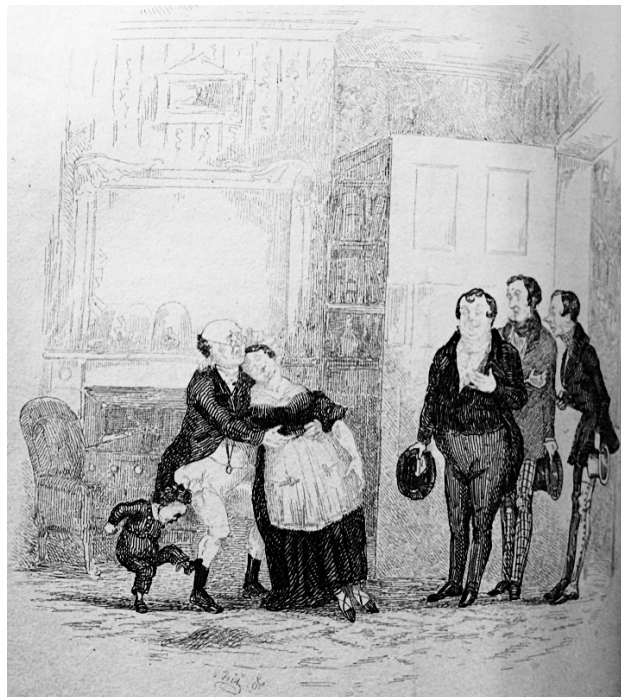


Figure 9: Phiz, ‘Mrs Bardell faints in Mr Pickwick’s arms’, *The Pickwick Papers*, v, July 1836, pp.115-119 (p.117). British Library, C.59.c.23

⁶² These characters respectively appear in Brough’s *Number One, Round the Corner*; Craven’s *Done Brown* (1845); Morton’s *Box and Cox*, *The Double-Bedded Room* (1843) and *My Wife’s Second Floor* (1843); and Poole’s *Lodgings for Single Gentlemen* (1829).

⁶³ See Ingham (1992), pp.72-79. On the ‘patter’ of middle- or lower middle-class spinsters in the theatre, see Vlock (1998), p.40.



Figure 10: Phiz, 'Kate Nickleby sitting to Miss La Creevy', *Nicholas Nickleby*, iii, May 1838, pp.65-96. British Library, C.144.b.4



Figure 11: Phiz, 'Mr Ralph Nickleby's "honest" composure', *Nicholas Nickleby*, vi, August 1838, pp.161-192. British Library, C.144.b.4



Figure 12: Phiz, ‘M. Todgers and the Pecksniffs, call upon Miss Pinch’, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, iv, April 1843, pp.97-117 (p.103). British Library, C.117.d.3

Miss La Creevy adds a crucial layer of complexity to the issue. She not only experiences emotions with ‘violence and intensity’, but is conscious of and reflexive about them (x, December 1838, p.305). At key moments, she is so overcome that she does not know how to feel:

The good soul fell to crying afresh, and, endeavouring to recover herself, tried to laugh. The laugh and the cry meeting each other thus abruptly had a struggle for the mastery, and the result was that it was a drawn battle, and Miss La Creevy went into hysterics.

(xix/x, September 1839, p.597)

Her ‘comical mixture of jest and earnest’ parallels Dickens’s treatment of her (xvi, June 1839, p.486). In spite of her gloriously funny characteristics, Miss La Creevy proves that farce as a mode and mood does not do full justice to the landlady’s story. The farcical interludes during which Dickens’s landladies appear may feel like self-contained, light-hearted set-pieces, mimicking their original function in theatre, but Dickens’s comedy is ultimately built upon the foundations of a sober social reality.

This reality is governed by money. William Blanchard Jerrold reads ‘painful instances of domestic suffering’ in the ‘modest autobiographies’ behind each property

advertisement, which are full of euphemisms.⁶⁴ Miss La Creevy is a portrait-painter first, and a landlady second; her income from the lodgings supplements her original small enterprise, which does not pay enough.⁶⁵ In her desire to maintain an aura of gentility – ‘the upper part of the house belonged to her, and as she had no necessity for the second-floor rooms just then, she was in the habit of letting them’ – she reveals exactly where the cracks in her life are (i, March 1838, p.16). Other lower middle-class professionals who let lodgings over their business premises include Dick Swiveller’s landlord, a tobacconist; Mrs Gamp’s landlord, Poll Sweedlepipe; the lawyers Sampson and Sally Brass; and the various failing shopkeepers in ‘Shops and Their Tenants’. Once a private house, the shop at the heart of this sketch is taken by a succession of small businesspeople – a linen-draper and haberdasher, a fancy stationer, a bonnet-shape maker, another tobacconist, a greengrocer, a theatrical hair-dresser, a tailor – who decide to let the first floor to lodgers as soon as money becomes tight. Running alongside the fates of these modest tenants is the fate of their own struggling landlord, who becomes harsher and harder after his first tenant runs away without settling the rent. All go down with the sinking ship.⁶⁶

When compared with other kinds of female enterprise, being a landlady was one of the less financially risky options.⁶⁷ Contemporary fiction, however, does not match this picture. Instead, it presents letting as a form of business with an ever-present undercurrent of uncertainty. None of the three lodgers in *Number One, Round the Corner* is capable of paying the landlady, and Mrs Grampus must resort to imprisoning them in the house until they can. Mrs Todgers has competitors on all sides – a situation Dickens later explores more fully, when depicting Mrs Lirriper’s rivalry with Miss Wozenham in the Christmas numbers of *All the Year Round*. After Pickwick’s supposed betrayal of Mrs Bardell, Sergeant Buzfuz’s statement to the court paints a sorry picture: ‘It is no figure of speech to say that her occupation is gone indeed’ (xii, February 1837, p.360). The allusion to *Othello* is apposite; not only does the play marry a narrative of supposed sexual betrayal with one of professional downfall, but it slots together some of the individual elements of farce to create a tragedy. Miss La Creevy, who never manages to sell enough portraits, is also terrified of theft at the hands of maids, lodgers,

⁶⁴ [William Blanchard Jerrold], ‘Why People Let Lodgings’, *Household Words*, 9 November 1850, pp.167-168.

⁶⁵ On letting as ‘a strategy [...] to supplement other business activities’, see Kay (2009), pp.106-107.

⁶⁶ Dickens, ‘Shops and Their Tenants’, in *Sketches: First Series*, I, pp.88-96.

⁶⁷ See Kay (2009), p.30.

or outsiders, and does not leave her house without hiding the tea-caddy and its key (vi, August 1838, p.187; xii, February 1839, p.367). Years later, in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), young Jerry Cruncher is able to follow his father on a secret grave-robbing expedition because their house is ‘full of lodgers, and the door [stands] ajar all night’.⁶⁸ These moments highlight the fact that the lodging-house is not the kind of impregnable domestic space craved by the middle classes; it must leave its doors open to strangers and is thus at constant risk of being breached.

Compounding these endemic anxieties are the landlady’s smaller, everyday duties, which are likely to leave her even more exhausted.⁶⁹ Mrs Todgers directly links her grotesque appearance with the stress of her occupation: specifically, ‘the gravy alone, is enough to add twenty years to one’s age’ (iv, April 1843, p.100). Dickens’s landladies must juggle a multiplicity of banal tasks to ensure the smooth running of their households. These begin with renovation and repairs and carry through to dusting and washing: Mrs Tibbs gives out ‘towels and soap’ to new lodgers, ‘like a head nurse in a hospital’, and Mrs Mac Stinger takes such ferocious delight in washing-day that it seems more like a rite of purification.⁷⁰ There is something paradoxically disgusting about her missions, which create an ‘artificial fog’ that ‘cover[s] the bannisters with a clammy perspiration’ (iii, December 1846, p.85). Manservants and maids-of-all-work assist in behind-the-scenes labour, but are most often shown to cause altercations. Even if her tenants are not boarders, a landlady still has some obligation to arrange their meals; Mrs Tibbs and Mrs Todgers, who do run boarding-houses, superintend activity in the kitchens. As Bailey the manservant gleefully reveals, Mrs Todgers usually cuts corners – diluting soup with water, buying skinny fowls and substandard fish – but the dinner held in the Pecksniffs’ honour is different (iv, April 1843, pp.107-108). It begins inauspiciously, with Mrs Todgers’s stress seeping off the page, as she ‘slip[s] in and out, at least twenty times to see about it; always coming back as though she had no such thing upon her mind, and hadn’t been out at all’. Happily, the evening has a ‘Bacchanalian character’ in the end, and provides ample opportunities for gossip and laughter (iv, April 1843, pp.110-111). This encapsulates the boarding-house keeper’s other responsibility: she must orchestrate conversation and sexual intrigue at the dinner

⁶⁸ Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities, All the Year Round*, 23 July 1859, pp.289-293 (p.291). Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁶⁹ On the landlady’s daily labours in nineteenth-century America, see Gamber (2007), pp.60-65.

⁷⁰ Dickens, ‘The Boarding-House: Chapter I’, in *Sketches: First Series*, I, pp.147-180 (pp.152-153). Subsequent references appear in the text.

table, because, according to Mrs Tibbs, ‘a little flirtation [...] might keep her house full’ (‘The Boarding-House’, I, p.158). It is an allusion to the fragility of the communities that landladies painstakingly build and oversee: ‘I must preserve peace among them’, Mrs Todgers, a skilled negotiator, admits, ‘and keep my connection together’, because ‘the profit is very small’ (iv, April 1843, p.128).

And yet in spite of these risks and hardships, Dickens’s landladies are not downtrodden. They are irrepressible. More importantly, they occupy a genuinely subversive position in nineteenth-century culture. Alison Kay has pointed out that being a landlady was a serious and empowering business enterprise that shattered the vision of separate and gendered spheres.⁷¹ Mrs Tibbs matter-of-factly believes that:

The best thing she could do with a legacy of 700 *l.*, would be to take, and furnish a tolerable house, somewhere in that partially-explored tract of country which lies between the British Museum, and a remote village called Somers Town, for the reception of boarders. Great Coram-street was the spot pitched upon. The house had been furnished accordingly; two female servants and a boy engaged, and an advertisement inserted in the morning papers.

(I, p.149)

It may seem like a respectable business for women to partake in, an extension of their nurturing role: Mrs Winks, reproaching her roving lodger in *Done Brown* (1845), comes across as an awkward combination of servant and mother when she catalogues everything she has done for him. ‘Haven’t I sewn buttons on your linen’, she asks, ‘and when you had a cold, didn’t I put your feet in warm water, and gruel you?’⁷² However, a radical counterargument ultimately holds true: landladies open their doors to strangers and make a living by turning their homes into commodities – practically an act of simony. Though Mrs Tibbs is, ‘beyond all dispute, the most tidy, fidgetty, thrifty, little personage that ever inhaled the smoke of London’ – though she is like an early Bella Wilfer, ‘white-washing, and hearth-stoning, and scrubbing and rubbing’ – she is also a property investor, whose neatness is not an end in itself (I, p.147). The fact that she is found lurking in the shadows with Mr Evanson, a capitalist landlord whose independent income ‘aris[es] chiefly from various houses he own[s] in different suburbs’, has symbolic weight (II, p.194). Morton’s Mrs Bouncer is the supreme example of a resourceful landlady who is completely in control, and we, the audience, are completely on her side. Mrs Bouncer hurries around the stage, rearranging the position of things in

⁷¹ See Kay (2009), pp.1-6, 17-19, 101-19.

⁷² Henry Thornton Craven, *Done Brown* (London: Duncombe, 1845), p.14. Subsequent references appear in the text.

the room every twelve hours, complaining that ‘people’s tastes do differ so’. She pats herself on the back for maintaining the game for so long: ‘It was a capital idea of mine’, she says, to rent the same room to both Box and Cox (p.7). The pun on ‘capital’ is obvious.

Landladies make for assertive proprietors, confident in their claims upon the soil; they are hardly ever freeholders, but ‘to a certain extent, property is,’ Deborah Wynne argues, ‘what we *think* we own’.⁷³ Sitting in the Blue Dragon, Mrs Lupin ‘glance[s] occasionally, with all the pride of ownership, around the room’ (i, January 1843, p.21). Mrs Mac Stinger is just as territorial as Mrs Lupin: ‘it’s *my* house,’ she shouts, ‘and when I let the upper floor to Cap’en Cuttle, oh I do a thankless thing, and cast pearls before swine!’ (viii, May 1847, p.233). When Walter comes in to see Captain Cuttle without asking her permission, she ‘immediately demand[s] whether an Englishwoman’s house [is] her castle or not’ (iii, December 1846, p.85). In altering the mantra ‘an Englishman’s home is his castle’ – literalised, most notably, by Wemmick in *Great Expectations* (1860-1) – she draws attention to the many idiosyncrasies of her position. First, by taking a lodger, she is actively rejecting the privacy, security, and freedom from the marketplace promised in the phrase. This is encapsulated in her almost imperceptible slip from the emotionally-charged ‘home’ to the more dispassionate ‘house’. And of course, she is not an ‘Englishman’, but an ‘Englishwoman’. Though male lodgers in Poole’s *Lodgings for Single Gentlemen* (1829) and Morton’s *My Wife’s Second Floor* (1843) also use the phrase, attempting to claim autonomy over their rooms, they are fighting a losing battle against their landladies.⁷⁴

What, then, is the relationship between landlady and lodger? With any contractual relationship comes a complex power dynamic and a sense of mutual dependence. Neither partner in this relationship can claim to be inherently more powerful, and thus the nature of their interaction is fluid. Their obligation to one another, the ever-present question of money, and all of the everyday stresses that cohabitation brings may come together in a toxic compound. There are myriad examples of overtly antagonistic relationships between landladies and lodgers in

⁷³ Wynne (2010), pp.17-18.

⁷⁴ On the impossibility of this autonomy, see [William Moy Thomas], ‘An Englishman’s Castle’, *Household Words*, 27 December 1851, pp.321-324; and [Morley], ‘Houses in Flats’, p.183: ‘The house of the Londoner is not his castle [...] but the ring in which landlord, or landlady, spars with lodger from sunrise until after sunset.’

Dickens's early fiction, which are wholly played for humour. At Mrs Raddle's and Mrs Mac Stinger's, it is the landlady who has the upper hand, tyrannising her lodger. Cuttle finally runs away – ensuring that he does it fairly, by paying a quarter's advance rent and leaving eighteen pence for each Mac Stinger child – and takes refuge in the Midshipman (viii, May 1847, p.255). Yet he remains crippled by paranoia that Mrs Mac Stinger will hunt him down, even dreaming about her. His fear has a lasting impact on his behaviour (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Phiz, 'The Midshipman is boarded by the enemy', *Dombey and Son*, xiii, October 1847, pp.385-416. British Library, C.144.b.6

Dickens may call Mrs Mac Stinger 'exemplary', but neither she nor Mrs Raddle are necessarily 'exemplary' in the sense of being archetypal (viii, May 1847, p.236). This is because, in other cases, the relationship between landlady and lodger revolves around mutual aggrandisement rather than mutual aggravation. Both Mrs Bardell and the Brass siblings see the presence of their lodgers as something that can raise their own 'credit', 'distinction' and 'consequence' (*The Pickwick Papers*, xvi, July 1837, p.496; *The Old Curiosity Shop*, xxv, 19 September 1840, pp.289-300, p.296). It is a way for landlords and landladies to become vicariously interesting, or even vicariously genteel. The lodgers themselves are aware of their relative importance. When Dickens describes Mrs Rodgers, who replaces Pickwick at Mrs Bardell's, as speaking 'graciously', he feels the need to explain his choice of adverb: 'She was the lodger, and her servant was

in waiting, so she was more gracious than intimate in right of her position' (xvi, July 1837, p.494). Mrs Todgers, Miss La Creevy and their lodgers, however, find themselves in positions of genuine camaraderie. Mrs Todgers acts as a surrogate mother and agony aunt. Merry's flights to her side inspire a full-fledged paean, which teeters between sentimentality, seriousness and comedy:

When boarding-house accounts are balanced with all other ledgers, and the books of the Recording Angel are made up for ever, perhaps there may be seen an entry to thy credit, lean Mrs. Todgers, which shall make thee beautiful! She was growing beautiful so rapidly in Tom's eyes; for he saw that she was poor, and that this good had sprung up in her from among the sordid strivings of her life; that she might have been a very Venus in a minute more.

(xiv, February 1844, p.439)

Channelled through Tom Pinch's gaze, this is an instance where Dickens's characters pause to look properly at landladies. It is as if we, as readers, have to be convinced of the fact that they are worth appreciating: it is not enough for the narrator to tell us.

Miss La Creevy's support of the Nicklebys is matched by their positive impact upon her own life, because they offer her a new family. If being a lodger is deeply connected with being lonely in some of Dickens's fiction, Miss La Creevy represents the other side of the same coin: as a landlady, she also exposes a brand of loneliness that seems unique to the city. Long estranged from her blood relations for reasons that are less cruel than heartbreakingly humdrum – her brother, who does not physically appear in the novel, has simply forgotten about her in the wake of his marriage – Miss La Creevy is forced to forge a community for herself. Though she and her brother reconcile, it is the Nicklebys who adopt her as one of their own:

The little bustling, active, cheerful creature, existed entirely within herself, talked to herself, made a confidant of herself [...] One of the many to whom, from straitened circumstances, a consequent inability to form the associations they would wish, and a disinclination to mix with the society they could obtain, London is as complete a solitude as the plains of Syria, the humble artist had pursued her lonely, but contented way for many years; and, until the peculiar misfortunes of the Nickleby family attracted her attention, had made no friends, though brimfull of the friendliest feelings to all mankind. There are many warm hearts in the same solitary guise as poor Miss La Creevy's. However, that's neither here nor there, just now.

(vi, August 1838, p.185)

The final line of this passage sees Dickens acknowledging the extent of his digression. It is a gruff line, a moment when he finds that he has moved himself in spite of himself. Like Mrs Todgers, Miss La Creevy starts off as a curious and comic urban type, but she too has a history and motivations. Viewed in this light, her physical littleness gains new

meaning. It serves to emphasise the vastness of the city that engulfs her, and also reminds us that, for Dickens, a character's size does not indicate his or her significance.

In an episode reminiscent of farce, Nicholas flirts with and kisses Miss La Creevy, and she jokingly slaps him (vi, August 1838, p.185). The scene reminds readers that landladies may become embroiled in rather more saucy intimacies than those between friends; Dickens's early fiction contains several squeamish references to the potentially threatening sexuality of landladies. Miss La Creevy and Tim Linkinwater are expected to marry on the same day as Kate and Frank, Nicholas and Madeline, which raises them – two lonely Londoners, who find redemption in each other – to the level of romantic hero and heroine. A 'comfortable' couple, there is something snug and sexless about them; after all, Miss La Creevy is introduced as a 'mincing young lady of fifty' who escapes spinsterhood by the skin of her teeth (i, March 1838, p.16; xix/xx, September 1839, p.614, 623). Mrs Tibbs and Mrs Raddle, whose name connotes a badly-rouged face, bully their wispy husbands.⁷⁵ The disgraced Mr Tibbs is forced to sleep in a turn-up bedstead in the kitchen, a lodger in his own home, making advances on the maid until he and his wife eventually separate (I, p.180, II, p.192).

The largest number of landladies in Dickens's fiction – far more than statistical evidence about the period could corroborate – are widows or, in Mrs Todgers's case, have been abandoned by their husbands.⁷⁶ Mrs Bardell, Mrs Mac Stinger, Mrs Lupin and Mrs Todgers presumably enter the hospitality business because they no longer have the financial security that marriage affords. Their predicament is satirised in *The Pickwick Papers*'s courtroom scene. As Sergeant Buzfuz recounts, Mrs Bardell's husband has been killed in an accident in a tavern, brained by a quart-pot; the ale-pot, and the kinds of marks it leaves, is a recurring motif throughout the novels discussed in this thesis. Having 'shrunk from the world', Mrs Bardell 'court[s] the retirement and tranquillity of Goswell-street', offering 'Apartments furnished for a single gentleman':

'Mr. Bardell was once a single gentleman himself; to single gentlemen I look for protection, for assistance, for comfort, and for consolation – in single gentlemen I shall perpetually see something to remind me of what Mr. Bardell was [...] to a single gentleman, then, shall my lodgings be let'.

⁷⁵ 'raddled', adj.², in the *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <www.oed.com/view/Entry/238995> [Accessed: 9 August 2016].

⁷⁶ Kay (2009), p.113.

With ever-increasing flourish, Buzfuz polishes off the tale: ‘Actuated by this beautiful and touching impulse [...] the lonely and desolate widow dried her tears, furnished her first floor, caught her innocent boy to her maternal bosom, and put the bill up in her parlour window’ (xii, February 1837, p.357). Any pathos intrinsic to this story of loss and dread quickly dissolves in the manner of its narration.

The alternative reading, of course, is that Mrs Bardell is predatory. Widows have been cast as threatening through centuries of comic literature because they are seen to combine sexual knowledge and forwardness, a certain number of dependents, and either financial desperation or a tempting inheritance. In *Done Brown*, the widowed Mrs Winks is eligible because she is independently wealthy. Wooed by Fitzlang in increasingly ridiculous terms (he calls her everything from a ‘seraphic lodging-house keeper’ to a ‘cherubimic house holder’, ‘sympathetic ratepayer’, and ‘angelic parishioner’), she faints in his arms after her lodger Monsieur Leclef reveals himself as a mercenary lover: ‘I have make love to you ven I have been behind vid my rent’ (pp.11-12). In *Number One, Round the Corner*, Nobbler declares that ‘landladies never fall in love with lodgers that don’t pay!’ (p.7). One of the very last chapters of *Dombey and Son* is dedicated to Mrs Mac Stinger’s marriage to Captain Bunsby, who, like Cuttle himself, has been ‘cruelly treated by his landlady’ (viii, May 1847, p.236). Though few of the threatened landlady/lodger romances actually comes to pass, confined to the world of what might have been, there is an uneasy sort of humour here. It emphasises a latent anxiety about the untenable class dynamic such liaisons might represent.

In spite of all this mockery, Dickens’s landladies are sometimes the only women to appear in a single gentleman’s life with any regularity. As their male lodgers begin to invoke them on all matters of womanhood, they become unexpected symbols of the female condition at large. In ‘The Bloomsbury Christening’ (1834), Mr Dumps puts his landlady to just such an end. Following Mrs Kitterbell’s pregnancy, he relates an ominous anecdote: ‘Distressing cases frequently occur during the first two or three days of a child’s life [...] Yes; my landlady was confined – let me see – last Tuesday; an uncommonly fine boy [...] Suddenly he became black in the face [...] The child died’. Dumps has, ‘of course’, ‘invented the whole story’. A callous story to invent, one might feel, it reveals that Dumps’s landlady is the first and only woman he can think of. Even Boz sees the landlady as a unique trove of information: the sketch ends with the remark that Dumps’s landlady, who sleeps ‘in the next room, has offered to make oath that she heard him laugh, in his peculiar manner, after he had locked his door.’ ‘The assertion’,

Boz continues, ‘is so improbable, and bears on the face of it, such strong evidence of untruth, that it has never obtained credence to this hour’.⁷⁷ It is clear that he believes the landlady entirely. She is a witness to behaviour, ready to provide an official testimony on urban life, an authority figure and crucial resource for any author hoping to understand the more elusive and reticent members of the population – indeed, a convincing version of the novelist, herself. In its original periodical edition, ‘Watkins Tottle’ ended with a few extra words about the aftermath of Tottle’s death: he leaves ‘a variety of papers in the hands of his landlady – the materials collected in his wanderings among different classes of society – which that lady has determined to publish, to defray the unpaid expenses of his board and lodging. They will be carefully arranged, and presented to the public from time to time, with all due humility, by BOZ’.⁷⁸ If this turns the story into an interesting hint about the private life of the *flâneur*, then Tottle’s landlady is an archivist, a literary executor, and a businesswoman, one who is canny enough to approach Boz to do justice to her dead lodger’s memory. She is a far cry from the pointlessly chattering Mrs Prattle.

Troublesome Guests, Well-Meaning Hosts: Models of Authorship

Playful self-consciousness is embedded into the structure of nineteenth-century farces. In the final lines, a character invariably turns to the audience to request applause, recommendations and a lengthy run. Farces set in rented spaces are no exception in their frequent ruptures of the fourth wall. There are similar metatextual moments in Dickens’s tenancy narratives, which, when brought together, contribute to wider discussions about what authorship means for him. He draws models for authorship from the ‘lodger world’, revealing its significance to his own self-fashioning. These models suggest that authorship is a fundamentally public, rather than private, endeavour. Of course, Dickens is far from being the only author to use these sorts of metaphors. The relationship between authorship, architecture and dwelling also appears in Henry James’s ‘house of fiction’, in his observations about Gabriele D’Annunzio’s style and ‘the boots and shoes that we see, in the corridors of promiscuous hotels, standing, often in double pairs, at the doors of rooms’, and in a corresponding cartoon by Max

⁷⁷ Dickens, ‘The Bloomsbury Christening’, in *Sketches: First Series*, I, pp.242-275 (pp.246-247, 274).

⁷⁸ Dickens, ‘Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle’, *Monthly Magazine*, 19 February 1835, p.37.

Beerbohm. Similarly, it is to be found in Alice Munro's belief that 'a story is not like a road to follow' but 'more like a house', and in Zadie Smith's references to re-readers 'squatting in the houses of beloved novels' or writers 'moving the furniture' and 'dismantling the scaffolding'.⁷⁹ Nor are these the only metaphors Dickens uses to discuss authorship; the role of the author was being debated throughout the period, leading to a range of analogies.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, they raise important questions about the author's association with his readers, and crucially, situate him within the world of the city.

Perhaps the most frequently cited model of the author in Dickens's early work is to be found in *Dombey and Son*, where the narrator yearns for a 'good spirit who would take the house-tops off [...] and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes' (xv, December 1847, p.460). This good spirit is the opposite of a roofer or brick-layer, who would be responsible for putting house-tops on; the dismantler of houses peels off the tiles and walks through the walls, making hermetically-sealed worlds – that is to say, individual homes – permeable. According to this vision, the author is omniscient, a public figure with a public function; it is his project to stir fellow-feeling among his readers. Dickens consciously and confidently situates himself in this position later in his career, with the inception of *Household Words*. As the title of the journal suggests, its contributors and its editor are welcome visitors at the reader's hearth. In this interpretation of the relationship between the author and his readers, the author is an intimate guest enjoying his readers' hospitality. His work fosters domestic ideology and reinforces the family circle: with Dickens's emphasis on the 'private, confidential, domestic' and 'sympathetic friendship' between author and reader, Bradley Deane observes, 'no other writer had so relentlessly or successfully positioned himself at the center of the Victorian home'.⁸¹ But the Preface

⁷⁹ Henry James, 'Preface', in *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.3-17 (pp.7-9); and 'Art.III.—Gabriele D'Annunzio', *Quarterly Review*, April 1904, pp.383-419 (pp.418-419); Alice Munro, 'Introduction', in *Selected Stories* (New York: Vintage, 1997), pp.xiii-xxi and 'What is Real?', in *Making it New: Contemporary Canadian Stories*, ed. John Metcalf (Toronto: Methuen, 1982), pp.223-226 (p.224); Zadie Smith, 'Rereading Barthes and Nabokov' and 'That Crafty Feeling', in *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009), pp.41-56 (p.41); pp.99-110 (p.100, 105-106).

⁸⁰ On the affinity between the inventor and the author, see Clare Pettitt, *Patent Inventions: Intellectual Property and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁸¹ Bradley Deane, *The Making of the Victorian Novelist: Anxieties of Authorship in the Mass Market* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p.28, 114. On the family activity of reading by the hearth, see also Sue Lonoff de Cuevas, *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers: A Study in the Rhetoric of Authorship* (New York: AMS Press, 1982), pp.8-9.

to *Martin Chuzzlewit* casts Dickens as another sort of guest, a ‘troublesome guest’, who ‘lingers in the Hall after he has taken leave’. He ‘cannot help loitering on the threshold of [his] book’ though he knows he must edge away, holding the door open for the reader (n.p.). There is a sense of meekness here, later crystallised in Thackeray’s allusion to ‘Genius and his great landlord, the Public’ (*Pendennis*, I, p.328).

This conception of a less assured figure is reinforced by Dickens’s multiple references to the cultural trope of the author lodging in the garret. The trope had roots in everyday reality, given that the garret invariably would have been the cheapest room to rent. The tradition of the struggling writer, artist or student in the garret is a long one: notable examples in painting include works by William Hogarth (‘The Distrest Poet’, 1739), JMW Turner (‘The Garreteer’s Petition’, 1809) and Carl Spitzweg (‘The Poor Poet’, 1839; ‘The Intercepted Love Letter’, 1860). Perhaps the most famous is Henry Wallis’s ‘Chatterton’, completed in 1856, purchased by Augustus Egg, and described by Dickens as ‘a painful picture of a great deal of merit’ (Figures 14, 15).⁸²



Figure 14: JMW Turner, ‘The Garreteer’s Petition’, 1809, N00482. © Tate, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported), www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-the-garreteers-petition-n00482

⁸² Dickens to Georgina Hogarth, 5 May 1856, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VIII, pp.109-111 (p.111); see also Dickens to WC Macready, 11 March 1841, II, pp.229-230. Dickens bought Thomas Hill’s copy of Chatterton’s *Works* in auction and offered John Hollingshead copious suggestions for his farce, ‘The Birthplace of Podgers’ (1858); ‘Podgers’ was, in turn, inspired by an article on the location of Chatterton’s final lodgings by William Moy Thomas (1857). On Chatterton and his landlady, see Cockayne (2012), p.39. See also Julie Crane, “Wandering between Two Worlds”: The Victorian Afterlife of Thomas Chatterton’, in *Romantic Echoes in the Victorian Era*, ed. Andrew Radford and Mark Sandy (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), pp.27-37.

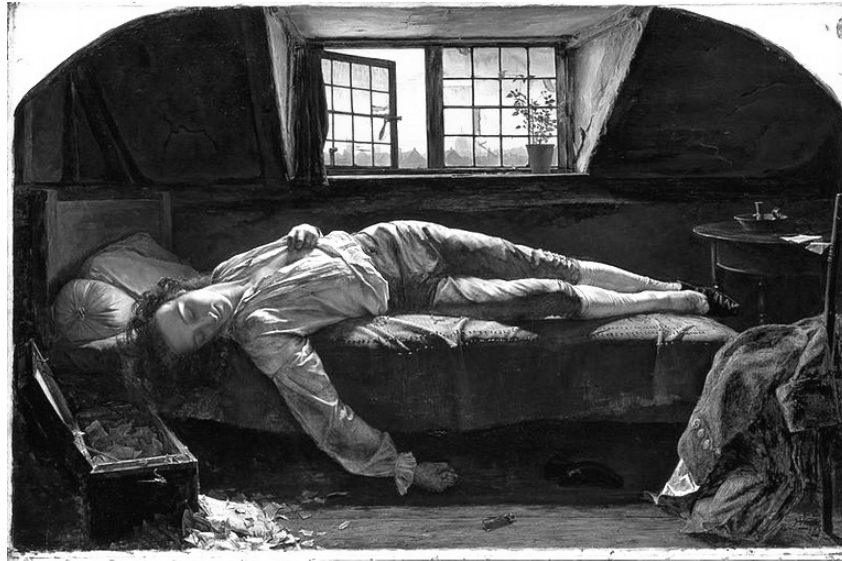


Figure 15: Henry Wallis, 'Chatterton', 1856, N01685. © Tate, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported), www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wallis-chatterton-n01685

But it is not solely a tragic trope – similar figures pop up in lodging-house farces. In *My Wife's Second Floor*, the artist Mr Toddle sublets Mrs Topheavy's rooms because he is too 'ashamed' to woo his model in his own garret. His desire to 'receive [his] dear Fanny in a genteel second floor, instead of a miserable attic' leads to romantic miscommunications and cases of mistaken identity.⁸³ In *Done Brown*, Monsieur Leclef is a French musician living in a garret, described in the cast list as a 'Gallic Apollo, dwelling adjacent to the heavens', whose affections transfer from Mrs Winks to his young and equally wealthy student next door – incidentally, the daughter of a retired publican.

Such is the richness of the culture, both serious and silly, to which Dickens actively contributes. In a low lodging-house in Seven Dials, lodgers are mere 'edition[s]' of one another, apart for 'a shabby-genteel man in the back attic'. He 'is an object of some mystery, but as he leads a life of seclusion, and never was known to buy anything beyond an occasional pen, except half-pints of coffee, penny loaves, and ha'porths of ink, his fellow-lodgers very naturally suppose him to be an author; and rumours are current in the Dials, that he writes poems for Mr Warren'.⁸⁴ Writing poems for Warren's Blacking, this writer is himself an 'edition' of what Dickens may have become.⁸⁵ The ridiculous Septimus Hicks lives in Mrs Tibbs's front attic and is 'fond

⁸³ Morton, *My Wife's Second Floor* (London: Duncombe, 1843), p.9.

⁸⁴ Dickens, 'Seven Dials', in *Sketches: Second Series*, pp.143-156 (pp.154-155).

⁸⁵ On Dickens and counterfactuals, see Douglas-Fairhurst (2011).

of “lugging” into conversation all sorts of quotations from Don Juan’; the view from the roof of Todgers’s reveals a man ‘mending a pen at an upper window over the way’, who becomes ‘of paramount importance in the scene’ (‘The Boarding-House’, I, p.153; *Martin Chuzzlewit*, iv, April 1843, p.99).⁸⁶ He is of ‘paramount importance’ because he is an author. As grounded as the garret trope is in financial reality, it also has loftier implications. Here, in the cerebral part of the house, a lodger can come closer to having his head in the clouds and build castles in the air. Sequestered in an urban turret, the author appears to be a forgotten, marginal figure, surviving on a pittance, craning over parapets, looking out over the expanse of the city, exposed to the elements, bouncing ideas around dark rooms with slanted ceilings and odd corners.

Grasping for a credible frame for *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Dickens lighted on the idea of revealing that the narrator, Master Humphrey, was the unnamed Single Gentleman. Ultimately, this was a haphazard attempt to control a novel that had outgrown its tidy limits; nevertheless, it suggests an interesting relationship between storytelling and lodging. There is something about the dwelling practice that drives a lodger towards narrative, that gives him a particular aptitude for or urge towards authorship: he wants to be heard. Loneliness, Dickens shows, can work to make people grandiloquent; the tic-ridden, choleric Single Gentleman has a desire to confess himself to willing listeners, and sets great store by storytelling, because this is a way of creating community. He speaks about the desire to tell and about the stress of keeping his identity secret: ‘To conceal anything from those to whom I am attached, is not in my nature. I can never close my lips where I have opened my heart’. Once he has revealed himself, he describes the ‘true gratification’ he has ‘derived from the sympathy and kindness’ of his friends and finds that ‘living through the past again, and communicating to others the lesson it ha[s] helped to teach [him],’ has turned him into ‘a happier man’ (xlv, 6 February 1841, pp.217-228, pp.224-225).

However, a chapter-long digression in *Nicholas Nickleby* offers an alternative view of the author-lodger. When Nicholas answers an employment advertisement from an MP, he finds himself in Manchester Buildings, a ‘street of gloomy lodging-houses’ that ‘swarm[s] with legislators’. Even politicians become lodgers when Parliament is in session: ‘There are legislators in the parlours, in the first floor, in the second, in the third, in the garrets; the small apartments reek with the breath of deputations and

⁸⁶ On this writer in the window, see Bowen (2000), pp.192-193; and Wolfreys (2012), p.171.

delegates' (v, July 1838, p.143). As legislators practice their speeches in their rooms, the lodging-house becomes an analogue of the House – or vice versa. One of these legislators is Mr Gregsbury, who seeks to hire Nicholas. Describing the controversy surrounding copyright and plagiarism, a kind of literary borrowing that enraged Dickens, Gregsbury declares:

If any preposterous bill were brought forward for giving poor grubbing devils of authors a right to their own property, I should like to say, that I for one would never consent to opposing an insurmountable bar to the diffusion of literature among *the people* [...] you must always bear in mind [...] to put it very strong about the people, because it comes out very well at election-time; and you could be as funny as you liked about the authors; because I believe the greater part of them live in lodgings, and are not voters.

(v, July 1838, p.149)

The joke is on Gregsbury. Though lodgers were not entitled to vote – after the Reform Act of 1832, only freeholders and a certain band of copy- and leaseholders were enfranchised – the socio-political power of authors was nevertheless formidable.⁸⁷ It was print culture, after all, that created imagined communities within the nation; in fashioning and mobilising a reading public, authors attempted to achieve change in ways that often bypassed Parliament.⁸⁸ If politicians could be as 'funny' as they liked about the authors, authors would be just as 'funny' as they liked about the politicians. In this passage, the author is an everyman – a lodger who takes up the pen in order to act as a more genuine mouthpiece for the public than a parliamentarian ever could. The lodger comes back to haunt the freeholder.

In other cases in Dickens's writing, the author is placed in a more overt position of power than that of lodger or guest: he finds his rightful counterpart in the figure of the landlord or landlady. The Preface to *The Old Curiosity Shop* cites Henry Fielding's suggestion that an author is 'one who keeps a public ordinary, at which all persons are welcome for their money'. Given that customers, and readers, are fee-paying, 'it hath been usual with the honest and well-meaning host to provide a bill of fare' to tell them what to expect. Dickens refuses to do so, but simply 'drinks to his guests in a loving cup, and bids them a hearty welcome'. His readers are under the benevolent care of an author-landlord – hardly surprising, given that rural landlords and landladies are, as a

⁸⁷ On reform, the middle-class franchise and the landed interest, see, for example, Chris Vanden Bossche, *Reform Acts: Chartism, Social Agency, and the Victorian Novel, 1832-1867* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp.75-76.

⁸⁸ The seminal text is Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

trope, enthusiasts of other people's stories and eager storytellers in their own right, serving drinks and letting rooms upstairs. Urban figures make for equally fitting analogues: Watkins Tottle's landlady, for example, or Miss La Creevy, the landlady who is first and foremost a popular artist, attempting to make a living out of observing people and turning them into 'characters' – navy-men, soldiers, romantic heroines, scholars.⁸⁹ Like novelists, Dickens's landladies are profoundly concerned with the concept of character. They are social arbiters, wielding the power to welcome and eject members of their communities, creating tiny worlds of their own from nothing. (Abbey Potterson of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters is the best example of this sense of deft control.) They notice, spy, judge, chatter, vilify and sympathise. So do authors.

It is by no means an unproblematic model of authorship, and two later landladies explicitly draw attention to their narrative inadequacy. In 'Sea-Side Lodgers' (1861), the appropriately-named Mrs Bee-flat, who 'divide[s] [her] lodgers into eight classes [...] the Neat lodgers, and the Muddling lodgers; the Severe lodgers, and the Easy lodgers; the Respectable lodgers, and the Scampish lodgers; finally, the Sociable lodgers, and the Secluded lodgers', must enlist the help of one, 'a literary gentleman', to take down her 'words, and [put] them into shape'. Dickens's Mrs Lirriper needs her most trusted lodger to assemble the collection of stories that comprise the Christmas number because she is, herself, illiterate. When Mrs Bee-flat is forced to 'stop sudden' in her narrative, without giving it a 'proper ending', she acknowledges that it is imperfect.⁹⁰ Aligning himself with unpolished writers but natural storytellers, Dickens highlights his own populism.

These models also illuminate the nature of the creative process. Both Dickens, and to a greater extent, Collins, conceived of their narratives as architectural structures. Writing to Miss Coutts during a tumultuous period of house-moving, Dickens expressed the hope that she would 'approve, both the tangible house and the less substantial Edifice'.⁹¹ Collins's architectural metaphors are more sustained; he repeatedly speaks of his writing in terms of laying foundations, constructing

⁸⁹ On Miss La Creevy as an explicitly popular artist, see Juliet John, *Dickens's Villains: Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.151. See also Marcus (1965), p.115.

⁹⁰ 'Sea-Side Lodgers', *All the Year Round*, 17 August 1861, pp.496-501 (p.496, 501). A 'B flat' is also a bedbug.

⁹¹ Dickens to Angela Burdett-Coutts, 9 October 1851, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VI, p.513.

frameworks, putting up scaffolding, ‘poles tumbl[ing] about [his] ears’.⁹² The suitability of such metaphors is apparent in the painstaking, almost mathematical way in which his plots come together. Orwell picks up on this idea when he pronounces Dickens’s work ‘all fragments, all details – rotten architecture, but wonderful gargoyles’, implying that it is not structurally sound.⁹³ Another letter, this time sent to JP Harley, is rather more interesting: in confessing that he can ‘admit no “other lodger” into [his] brain at this moment’, Dickens suggests that the author’s mind is a lodging-house in which ideas are lodgers.⁹⁴ It is a teeming, noisy place; ideas encroach upon one another and are transient. In making this comparison, Dickens draws attention to his own restlessness.

For Michel de Certeau, all reading is a form of renting. ‘A different world (the reader’s) slips into the author’s place. This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It transforms another person’s property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient [...] The procedures of contemporary consumption appear to constitute a subtle art of “renters” who know how to insinuate their countless differences into the dominant text’. Readers ‘rent’ the author’s text; ‘renters make [...] changes in an apartment they furnish with their acts and memories’.⁹⁵ It is a stylish way of figuring the theory of reader response. Dickens’s readers were, more often than not, literal renters as well. Forster recounts the story of an old and illiterate charwoman who helped the family when Charley Dickens was taken ill; upon learning that Charley was the great author’s son, she exclaimed that ‘she never thought there was a man that *could* have put together *Dombey*’. Though she was illiterate, she still had access to the novel:

It turned out that she lodged at a snuff-shop kept by a person named Douglas, where there were several other lodgers; and that on the first Monday of every month there was a Tea, and the landlord read the month’s number of *Dombey*, though only of the lodgers who subscribed to the tea partaking of that luxury, but all having the benefit of the reading; and the impression produced on the old charwoman revealed itself in the remark with which she closed her account of it. “Lawk ma’am! I thought that three or four men must have put together *Dombey*!”. Dickens thought there was something of a compliment in this, and was not ungrateful.⁹⁶

⁹² These letters are from 4 June 1861 and 8 and 14 January 1864; see Lonoff de Cuevas (1982), p.14, 34, 108.

⁹³ George Orwell, ‘Charles Dickens’, in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940), pp.9-85 (p.75).

⁹⁴ Dickens to JP Harley, 21 January 1837, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), I, p.226.

⁹⁵ de Certeau (1988), pp.xxi-xxii.

⁹⁶ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, I, pp.453-454.

Dombey and Son – like all of Dickens’s work – certainly contains the ideas of more than one man, because it is partly the sum of its influences. And the reading of *Dombey* brought together some of London’s poorest lodgers, drawing them out of their individual rooms and their loneliness, reinforcing the congenial bonds in their tiny community. Listening to their landlord do Mrs Mac Stinger’s voice and, like Dick Swiveller, confronted by the constant tang of tobacco, they connected with an author who was trying to understand the way they lived.

*

An 1862 letter from Dickens to Collins sounds like a tall tale: ‘I saw Poole (for my sins) last Saturday. And he *was* a sight [...] He was continually beset with a notion that his landlady was listening outside the door, and was continually getting up from a kind of ironing-board at which he sat, with the intention of darting at the door, but invariably missed his aim, and brought himself up by the forehead against blind corners of walls’.⁹⁷ As Dickens sees it, John Poole has stepped into one of his own early farces, complete with an eavesdropping landlady and slapstick accidents. A story of life imitating popular art, it highlights the pervasiveness of the comic theatrical tradition and its tropes. Dickens complicates the theatrical material he borrows even as he incorporates it in his fiction.

In 1850, Dickens opened the door on the middle stage of his career when he became the editor of *Household Words*. Under his auspices, his ‘young men’ published a steady stream of articles on lodgings. Predominantly narrated in the first person by male lodgers at various stages of life, these articles are almost unanimous in their negative portrayal of the experience: indeed, ‘there is a something to canker joy in every lodging’ (Morley, ‘Apartments, Furnished’, p.460).⁹⁸ According to Morley, Collins, Jerrold and James Payn, the shabbiness and discomfort of rented spaces make them unbearable. The doors of lodgings are ‘commonly infested with pewter pots’, while beer pots are ‘established pieces of hall furniture’ (‘Apartments, Furnished’, p.458).

⁹⁷ Dickens to Collins, 8 October 1862, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), X, pp.137-138 (p.138).

⁹⁸ See also [Browne and Morley], ‘Perfectly Contented’, *Household Words*, 13 September 1856, pp.213-216.

(The same pots appear on the railings of the Kenwigses'.) If rooms come furnished, everything inside is old, tatty and mismatched. The kitchens are filthy and, given the thinness of the walls, lodgers hear 'the most horrible secrets concerning [their] dinners'.⁹⁹

Landladies bear the brunt of these authors' ill will. Payn identifies two subclasses of 'the genus lodging-letter': the 'shiny unctuous party' and the 'stormy, arm-a-kimbo individual', usually a widow ('Lodgings', p.356). The greatest number of column inches are dedicated to describing landladies' sins against cooking and cleanliness, their cruelty to their maids-of-all-work, and their tendency to cheat their lodgers – whether by stealing from tea-caddies, pilfering port, pomatum, sugar, crockery and bread and butter, using adulterated ingredients, or overcharging in the weekly bills. Mrs Caddypick, Mrs Tetherby, Mrs Panther, Mrs Vamper, Mrs Spidaweb and Mrs Glutch are 'guerilla chieftains', 'heard every day rumbling underground like an earthquake'; their lodgers are 'enslaved', and their 'instinct' is to 'skin and feed upon you' ('Apartments, Furnished', p.457; 'Lodgings', p.357). Mrs Glutch, from 'Laid Up in Two Lodgings', is so awful that she is also magnetic. Collins's narrative keeps swerving back to her: 'I am a sick man with only one topic to talk of [...] my landlady [...] I am going to begin with her – I shall go on with her – I shall try to wander away from her – I shall get back to her – I shall end with her. She will mix herself up with everything I have to say' (p.518).

Batkinson, the narrator of 'Apartments, Furnished', opens his story with an abortive call to arms:

If this were a more revolutionary country than it is, and if I were more of a poet than I am, I would write a Marseillaise against the lodging-house-keepers, the tyrants by whom we are made to bleed [...] I should like to be known as Batkinson the lodger poet, he who led his brother lodgers on to freedom, or in a milder way, as the poet of lodgings.

(p.457)

Dickens was a 'lodger poet', a 'poet of lodgings', but his burden was not a Marseillaise; indeed, the tone of the *Household Words* articles is strangely one-note in the light of Dickens's own commitment to variation. When Batkinson closes, explaining that his is 'too much of a moving tale' and asking the 'noble army of householders' to 'receive'

⁹⁹ [James Payn], 'Lodgings', *Household Words*, 10 November 1855, pp.356-360 (p.358). Subsequent references appear in the text.

him, he shuts the door on a way of life that would continue to intrigue Dickens (p.463). For Dickens, this 'moving tale' – both a story about itinerance, and one that stirred an emotional response – was 'moving' in another sense. It was the kind of story that had legs. It was constantly going forward.

Chapter 2

Housing the *Bildungsroman*: The ‘Rising Generation’ and the Spatial Imagination

In the 1840s, John Leech produced a series of caricatures for *Punch* entitled ‘The Rising Generation’. These images, which depicted boys acting well above their age, earned Dickens’s praise in an 1848 review for the *Examiner*. Dickens’s review was published soon after the serialisation of *Dombey and Son* came to an end; *David Copperfield* (1849-50) and Thackeray’s *Pendennis* began their runs a few months later. All three novels take the precocity and earnestness of the ‘rising generation’ as central themes. An 1859 letter to Catherine Gore, the prolific silver-fork novelist, proves how consciously and consistently Dickens was writing for, and about, youth:

I hope I have done my part to make the rising generation ‘more childish’, in rendering them a little more imaginative, a little more gentle, and a little less conceited and hard, than they would have been without me.¹

He did this by bringing them centre stage, especially in his novels of personal development, and Gore did the same. In their experiments with the *Bildungsroman*, both writers broke the ‘rising generation’ into subsets: the young landlord, coming into his estate, and the lodger, moving restlessly from one place to another, existed in a diptych. These two sides of the ‘rising generation’ had different expectations and responsibilities, and experienced different worlds, but Dickens, Gore and Thackeray were committed to revealing their shared capacity for imagination. *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, *Pendennis* and Gore’s *Castles in the Air* (1847) explore the tenor of their fantasies, hopes, and means of logging the world. This persistent focus on the inner life is enough to render any young reader ‘a little more imaginative’.

The profusion of rented spaces in the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* is, perhaps, unsurprising. In many cases, the novel of development follows the movements of a boy, progressing from childhood to adulthood and securing his position in the

¹ Dickens to Catherine Gore, 3 January 1859, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), IX, p.1.

middle class.² Though Thackeray points out that ‘temptation [...] has no objection to the country, and we know that it takes up lodgings in hermitages as well as in cities’, the city is where these young men go (I, p.275). To stay in the village is to stagnate; to escape is to fulfil their potential. The greenhorn, lured by the promise of new opportunities, travels from the countryside to the great metropolis, from snug local inns to the Inns of Court, his stagecoach making a few stops along the way. Wrenched from the family circle, he finds himself under the wing of an urban landlady, who is belligerent and benevolent by turns. Frequenting London’s buzzing taverns, he might get drawn into Bohemia. Rented spaces, then, tend to appear because the genre is the product of a certain historical moment; it reflects the experience of a certain class, and centres on a certain way of life.

Space also performs implicit ideological work in the genre. The *Bildungsroman* equates literal and social mobility, turning itinerance into a rite of passage for the central character. It would be unspeakable to become someone like Batkinson, the ‘lodger poet’, or the narrator of ‘Lodgings’, who remain in lodgings even after they marry; these kinds of characters are perpetually moving on in a geographical or lateral sense, but never move upwards. Both Martin Chuzzlewit and Arthur Pendennis are explicit about just how abhorrent this idea is: ‘It would never do’, says Martin, ‘for me to be plunging myself into poverty and shabbiness and love in one room up three pair of stairs, and all that sort of thing’ (iii, March 1843, p.74), while Pen does not ‘much fancy [...] taking [his] wife into lodgings to be waited upon by the servant-of-all-work’ (II, pp.52-53). They stand in contrast to Mr Guppy, who, deciding that Esther’s ‘image’ is still ‘imprinted on [his] art’, paints a vivid picture of a future for them:

I have therefore taken a ouse in [Lambeth], which, in the opinion of my friends, is a hollow bargain (taxes ridiculous, and use of fixtures included in the rent) [...] It’s a six roomer, exclusive of kitchens [...] and in the opinion of my friends, a commodious tenement [...] My friend Jobling [...] will live in the ouse [...] My mother will likewise live in the ouse, when her present quarter in the Old Street Road shall have ceased and expired.³

² On historical change in the nineteenth century and the ‘symbolic shift’ towards youth, see Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 2000). See also Moretti (2007), pp.64-69; and Thomas L. Jeffers, *Apprenticeships: The Bildungsroman from Goethe to Santayana* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

³ [Dickens], *Bleak House* (London: Bradbury and Evans), xix/xx, September 1853, pp.611-612. Subsequent references appear in the text.

The hero of the *Bildungsroman* may move into a private house when he finds himself and his place in society. For his aspiration, he is rewarded with a stable home, suggesting that the genre proselytises for a certain kind of domestic ideology. This is the ideology quietly underlying John Dickens's fabled conversation with his son, explaining that he can live in a place like Gad's Hill if he works hard enough, and Charles Dickens's later triumphant purchase of his 'little Kentish freehold'. It underlies both Nicholas Nickleby's decision to buy his father's old house and Tommy and Sophy Traddles's ambitions as they 'stroll into the squares, and great streets, and see a house to let [...] look up at it, and say, how would *that* do, if [Tommy] was made a judge?' (*Nicholas Nickleby*, xix/xx, September 1839, p.623; *David Copperfield*, xix/xx, November 1850, p.602). Quite simply, young pretenders find themselves living in urban lodgings until they become men with a proper source of income.

Thus, to some extent, the genre demands rented spaces at the basic level of plot and politics.⁴ A topographical survey of these novels leaves little room for doubt. David is noticeably possessive of his spaces – he has his own rooms waiting for him in Yarmouth, Dover and Canterbury. There is a sense that these rooms allow him to access his past self whenever he returns, no matter how much he grows up. But even his snuggest homes are ultimately subjected to the property market. Aunt Betsey must let her cottage when she is ruined financially, and the Peggottys' boat-house is rented, rather than owned outright: it belongs to a 'mast-maker up town', whose occupation renders him a manufacturer of ships' nests, and, before it blows down, Mr Peggotty hopes that it will find new tenants (xvii, September 1850, p.524). The narrative is also dotted with more overtly unstable geographical markers, from public-houses to lodgings. Moving through various neighbourhoods with the Micawbers, who are struggling to pay their own rent, David becomes a surrogate member of the family: Mrs Micawber 'make[s] the most heart-rending confidences' to him, resulting in 'a curious equality of friendship' between landlady, landlord and child-lodger. 'You have never been a lodger', Mrs Micawber says; 'you have been a friend' (iv, August 1849, p.117,

⁴ Of course, this does not define each and every novel grouped by critics into the genre. On the function of interior and physical space in *Jane Eyre*, and the role they play in the female *Bildungsroman*, see Sharon Locy, 'Travel and Space in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 37 (2002), 105-121; and Karen Chase, *Eros and Psyche: The Representation of Personality in Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot* (New York: Methuen, 1984), pp.41-91. On Jane and Lucy Snowe as 'rising character[s]', as described by Lucy herself, see Chase, pp.76-77.

125).⁵ The *Bildungsroman* becomes a sustained first-hand account of what one of Dickens's urban theories, about the relationship between physical and emotional closeness, might feel like when it is lived out in practice. Another phase of David's life takes place in Mrs Crupp's lodgings in the Adelphi, Buckingham Street. When Aunt Betsey finds an encouraging notice in the newspapers, David cannot wait to experience the 'dignity of living in chambers'; he is ready to transform himself into the 'young gentleman' described in the advert, establishing himself in a 'noble residence'. 'It's not a bad situation', he tells Steerforth and his friends on the day of his housewarming party, 'and the rooms are really commodious' (viii, December 1849, pp.249-250, 253). It is as if he has swallowed a property advertiser – a gaucheness poor Guppy never quite grows out of.

Pen and Pip enjoy a similar thrill of independence in Holborn's Inns. In *Great Expectations*, a novel driven by the desire for property, tenancy proves to be a stubborn spectre, especially after Magwitch appears on Pip's doorstep: Pip uses all his ingenuity to push his benefactor from lodging to lodging, from the second-floor of a 'respectable' establishment on Essex Street to kindly Mrs Whimple's house on Mill Pond Bank, where the Barleys live.⁶ Meanwhile, Pip spends unsettled nights at the Hummums Hotel and a smugglers' tavern near Gravesend. Effectively navigating such spaces, and forming functioning relationships with landlords and landladies, is part and parcel of becoming a mature adult. Crucially, this is not something that David and Pip experience in isolation. David's narrative includes references to other lodgers who try to make lives for themselves in the metropolis: there is Traddles, for example, who moves steadily through Camden Town and Holborn, the 'young gentleman' who dies at Mrs Crupp's before David arrives, and all of the nameless lodgers whose details are listed in Mrs Micawber's archive (viii, December 1849, pp.249-50; xvi, August 1850, p.497). These young men skirt around the edges of our heroes' stories, reminding us that the *Bildungsroman* simultaneously speaks for an individual and an entire social condition or type.⁷

⁵ On the ways in which the hero's social and family circle is far more prescribed in the countryside, see Moretti (2000), p.4.

⁶ Dickens, *Great Expectations*, *All the Year Round*, 18 May 1861, pp.169-174 (p.172); 8 June 1861, pp.241-246 (p.244). Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁷ On Dickens's autobiographical reasons for choosing these neighbourhoods, see Rosemarie Bodenheimer, 'Copperfield's Geographies', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 42 (2011), 177-191. On the *Bildungsroman* hero as both a study in individual psychology and a representative of the age, see Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981), p.71, 75.

The experiences and perspectives offered in the urban *Bildungsroman* are rooted in a particular class. Both *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* make only the most fleeting of references to places frequented by the truly, desperately itinerant members of society; David passes houses labelled ‘Lodgings for Travellers’ on his way to Dover, and Magwitch is taught to read in a Travellers’ Rest (*David Copperfield*, v, September 1849, p.131; *Great Expectations*, 25 May 1861, pp.193-198, p.195). In its discussion of Dickens, Gore and Thackeray, this chapter scrutinises the rural landlord and, in its later sections, the middle-class lodger.⁸ At one level, the centrality of rented spaces in the *Bildungsroman* is dictated by the mechanics of plot; David’s landlords and landladies also provide the novel with the majority of its comic energy. Ultimately, however, tenancy and architecture permeate the very textures of Dickens’s language, working at the level of metaphor and providing his readers with serious and credible models for growing up. But metaphor is, itself, subject to the movements of history: the final part of the chapter takes one symbolically-charged site, the window, and situates the *Bildungsroman* within the contemporary window-tax debate.

‘Quite a Little Landed Estate’: How the Other Half Lives

In the early years of *Bentley’s Miscellany*, a number of Gore’s articles appeared under her pseudonym, ‘Albany Poyntz’. As Dickens worked on *Master Humphrey’s Clock* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, introducing the Single Gentleman and Mrs Todgers to the reading public, Gore offered up two of her own pieces on rented space: ‘Secrets of the Blue Chamber’ (1841) and ‘The London Hotel-Keeper’ (1844). Dickens’s attention was focused on the lodgings of the humbler classes; Gore, meanwhile, revealed the ways in which tenancy worked in aristocratic circles. Gore, Thackeray and Dickens have been read together in the context of class, gentlemanliness and dandyism, with Thackeray explicitly acknowledging his admiration of Gore; though Gore is often read within the silver-fork tradition, it makes sense to expand our critical scope.⁹ These three

On the *Bildungsroman*’s conflict between ‘individuality’ and ‘self-determination’ on the one hand, ‘normality’ and ‘socialization’ on the other, see Moretti (2000), pp.15-16.

⁸ On class in the *Bildungsroman*, see Moretti (2000), pp.viii-x.

⁹ Sarah C. Alexander fruitfully situates Gore within the contemporary political and social debates of the 1830s to 1850s and the wider literary culture of this period. See Alexander, ‘A Tale of Two Dandies: Gore, Dickens and the “Social-Fork” Novel’, *Women’s Writing*, 16 (2009), 283-300; Gilmour (1981), pp.55-57; Claire Nicolay, ‘Delightful Coxcombs to Industrious Men: Fashionable Politics in *Cecil* and *Pendennis*’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 30 (2002), 289-304. These critics use Gore’s *Cecil* novels as points of focus.

authors shared a common interest in the development of the individual and the ways in which growing up could be mapped in rural and urban space.

‘Secrets of the Blue Chamber’ casts Albany as an implicit colleague of Boz, a ‘human naturalist, intent upon pushing his discoveries into the idiosyncrasy of man’.¹⁰ Albany, however, is not a *flâneur*. Instead, he is the ‘Hermit of the Blue Chamber’, a rich old writer in a pretty painted garret. From his study in Hanover Square he ‘pass[es] [his] merry life in laughing over the antics of the fashionable world below’ (p.399). Albany sets great store by his elevation and distance from his surroundings: ‘The artist must be a man of the world, yet, “dolphin-like, show above the element he moves in”’ (p.399).¹¹ He is a ‘commentator’ rather than a participant, and though he feels an acute sympathy for the neighbours he observes, he knows he has no power to truly interact with them or change their fates: ‘My interest in him was as warm as it was unjustifiable [...] But how from the aerial eminence of my Blue Chamber was I to whisper this in the ear of the joyous young man?’ (pp.401-402). In other words, Albany is grappling with the same disjunctions between physical nearness and emotional investment that Dickens explores so thoroughly. Albany’s neighbours are landed proprietors with tenancies in London town-houses, and the piece is peppered with references to the value of various rent-rolls – this is the social class with which Gore is concerned. Nevertheless, a number of the urban experiences and behaviours Gore describes would seem familiar to readers of Dickens; rented spaces function in fundamentally similar ways, no matter the wealth of the tenant. The Hermit, for example, tries to interpret the knocks at his ne’er-do-well neighbour’s door. The ne’er-do-well in his ‘modest two-windowed lodgings’ is longingly watched by an heiress in the opposite house: ‘It is no fault of the old General’s that his opposite neighbour has seen fit to let lodgings, and a handsome young spendthrift thought proper to engage them season after season’ (p.404). In what is, ultimately, an accident of geography, the heiress has fallen in love with the imaginative equivalent of the boy next door.

¹⁰ [Catherine Gore], ‘Secrets of the Blue Chamber’, *Bentley’s Miscellany*, 1 January 1841, pp.399-412 (p.399). Subsequent references appear in the text.

¹¹ The allusion is to *Antony and Cleopatra*, V.ii.



Figure 16: Phiz, 'Nicholas attracted by the mention of his Sister's name in the coffee-room', *Nicholas Nickleby*, x, December 1838, pp.289-320. British Library, C.144.b.4

Then there is the hotel culture. As presented by Dickens and Gore, rich visitors to London stay in the Hummums.¹² In 'The London Hotel-Keeper', Gore laments the loss of traditional tavern hospitality and depicts modern hotel-keepers as mercenaries, eager to fleece their fashionable patrons. They are usually waiters made good, married to chambermaids or housekeepers, reinvesting their earnings in new ventures. Their hotels are decked in gaudy but poor-quality furnishings and serve dubious food: 'a starveling cat roasted rabbitwise' would not be out-of-place at the Todgers table.¹³ A hotel-keeper is a 'shifty individual who stands wheezing over you, with an eye to his bill and an ear to what gossip he can pick up from your table-talk' (p.54). A spy and eavesdropper, he also has a network of apprentices, who clear dishes and scoop up scraps of scandal in the dining room. The rumours they collect and peddle is of the aristocratic variety, involving solicitors, money-lenders, colonels and rich widows. In fact, everything is everyone's business in an expensive London hotel: 'Thanks to the thinness of partitions and a common staircase', a visitor 'soon becomes painfully and reluctantly participant' in the 'family secrets' of other lodgers (p.54). 'A sympathy is inevitably begotten' – not only because their meals and towels are recycled, but because they unwittingly share their arguments and love dramas (p.54). Though Dickens's

¹² On this hotel, see Cory MacLauchlin, 'The Hummums: Bath, Brothel and Holy Shrine of Literary London', *Literary London*, 6 (2008), < www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/march2008/macLauchlin.html > [Accessed: 9 August 2016]; and Daniel Tyler, *A Guide to Dickens' London* (London: Hesperus, 2012), pp.58-60.

¹³ [Gore], 'The London Hotel-Keeper', *Bentley's Miscellany*, 1 January 1844, pp.52-57 (p.53). Subsequent references appear in the text.

references to hotel culture are fairly limited – Nicholas enters a ‘handsome hotel’ near Park Lane and overhears Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Frederick Verisopht insulting his sister – what Gore is describing is, essentially, a very recognisable lodging-house dynamic (x, December 1838, p.309; Figure 16).¹⁴

The division of land into freehold and leasehold was fundamental to British life; it was especially discernible in the countryside, among landlords and tenant farmers, but its political ramifications were felt far away in Parliament. This situation generated a rich literary response; for example, Douglas Jerrold, one of Dickens’s mentors, drew upon a tradition of ballads lamenting the cruelty of rural landlords in his theatrical melodrama, *The Rent-Day* (1832).¹⁵ Though *Black-Ey’d Susan* (1829) also incorporates an abusive landlord/tenant relationship – Doggrass bullies his niece, Susan, who is renting a cottage from him – *The Rent-Day* takes this relationship as its central focus. A tenant farmer, Martin Heywood, is unable to pay his annual rent; eviction and the seizure of his family’s goods seem inevitable. The landlord is absent; the steward is conniving. The situation becomes even more cataclysmic on the stage, because an auction of goods means that the entire set is dismantled before our eyes, leaving a dark and empty space. At the end of the play, Martin is given the freehold of his farm, because the elevation from tenant to yeoman is the ultimate reward. According to melodrama’s ‘uncomplicated moral reading of the universe’, systemic evil is concentrated in one or two individual characters, whose eventual comeuppance acts as a quick fix to a much more embedded injustice. In rural melodrama, these villainous individuals are the landlord and his steward – the ultimate figures of authority.¹⁶

¹⁴ On the London topographies of the silver-fork genre, see Edward Copeland, *The Silver Fork Novel: Fashionable Fiction in the Age of Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.128-145; and Moretti (2007), pp.79-86.

¹⁵ See, for example, the following ballads on tenure in both England and Ireland, with approximate printing dates where available: ‘The Old Man’s Complaint of his Landlord’ (c.1867); ‘The Landlord’s Song’ (n.d.); ‘A New Song Between the Tenant and Landlord’ (n.d.); ‘The Farmer’s Downfall’ (1814-1850); ‘The Tenant Farmers’ Wail and Woe to their Landlords’ (1878); ‘The Farmer Relieved by his Landlord’ (n.d.); ‘The Fashionable Farmer and the Landlord’s Dinner’ (n.d.); ‘The Way to Live Rent Free’ (n.d.); and ‘The Rent Day’ (1840-1866). These can be found at ‘Broadside Ballads Online’ (Oxford: Bodleian Libraries), <ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/> [Accessed: 9 August 2016]. See also Michael Slater, *Douglas Jerrold: 1803-1857* (London: Duckworth, 2002).

¹⁶ On the worldview and conception of morality presented in nineteenth-century melodrama, see Christopher Prendergast, *Balzac: Fiction and Melodrama* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), p.8; Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). On the melodramatic villain as a type rather than a character, see John (2001), pp.48-49. On Doggrass as a melodramatic property owner, see Victor Emeljanow, *Victorian Popular Dramatists* (Boston: GK Hall, 1987), p.29; Fischler (2014), p.370. On *The Rent-Day*, the paintings on which it was based, and the role played by the landlord in ‘domestic melodrama’, see Emeljanow (1987), pp.37-39; Fischler (2014), p.370; John (2001), pp.61-65. The rural

This model is complicated in the novels of Dickens's circle. Firstly, *Pendennis* and Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851-3) include scenes where domestic servants become landlords or landladies, often of their erstwhile employers' properties. The Claverings' servants leave service to take up as landlord and landlady of the Clavering Arms (II, p.268, 272, 354); Janet, long discouraged to marry by Aunt Betsey, exits *David Copperfield* as the wife of a 'thriving tavern-keeper' (xix/x, November 1850, p.594). These are positions of power, from which local lore is regulated. When Miss Matty is ruined in *Cranford*, her servant, Martha, offers to take her as a lodger.¹⁷ Morgan, Major Pendennis's valet, scoffs at the thought of buying a public-house with his savings (II, p.245). Instead, he goes rogue in the final stages of the novel; his grand plans for blackmailing aristocrats seem to pale in comparison to his crimes against property, this time, in an urban milieu. Having quietly hoarded vast sums – 'my servant's a capitalist, begad' – he buys the lease of the Bury Street house in which the Major is a lodger (II, p.297). Making himself obscenely at home, he bullies the elderly landlady and bankrupts her, demanding huge amounts of interest on an old loan and laying claim to her furniture and sentimental effects: 'Mrs Brixham,' we hear, 'was Morgan's slave [...] He was his landlady's landlord' (II, p.294; Figure 17).



Figure 17: WM Thackeray, 'Mr Morgan at his ease', *Pendennis*, 1848-50, II, pp.289-299. British Library, 12601.v.16

landlord played a similar role in William Bayle Bernard's *The Farmer's Story* (1836). On the ways in which the themes of melodrama were chosen to chime with working-class audiences, see Emeljanow (1987), p.21; John (2001), pp.8-9.

¹⁷ [Elizabeth Gaskell], 'Friends in Need, at Cranford', *Household Words*, 7 May 1853, pp.220-227 (pp.222-223).

It is the ultimate act of insubordination, stealthily arranged. The Major settles his account, gives Mrs Brixham some grudging financial assistance, and leaves the lodgings, orchestrating a successful revenge from the Jermyn Street Hotel nearby (II, pp.300-307). Andrew Miller compares Gaskell and Thackeray's scenes, contrasting the perceived 'generosity [...] submission, and [...] loyalty' of Martha's actions with the 'domestic insurrection and individual rapacity' of Morgan's, Thackeray 'register[ing] only menace'. Though *Cranford* 'never mentions the landowners to whom rent is due', taken together, these examples point to a latent instability in the status quo as far as class and landownership are concerned.¹⁸

Dickens's perspective on the power dynamics of landed estates is, again, more ambivalent than Jerrold's. In his fiction, proprietors are shadowy figures whose work is performed by mild-mannered deputies. Though Agnes stops with Wickfield's agent in Ely Place, a neighbourhood associated with exploitative landlord/tenant relationships in *Little Dorrit*, Wickfield himself is a harmless and malleable steward; he has charge of 'the estates of a rich gentleman' in Kent (v, September 1849, p.157). Hiram Grewgious in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, meanwhile, is a 'professional Receiver of rents'. Having failed at conveyancing, a branch of the law that involves the drawing up and transferring of property rights, Grewgious becomes an agent to 'two rich estates' (ii, May 1870, p.62; iii, June 1870, p.76). This occupation, he acknowledges, makes him unpopular, but Grewgious is not the spark that kindles melodramatic situations. Instead, Dickens shows him at his fireside, contemplating his own quiet pleasures and melancholies and helping his young charges find their way. He is a qualified expert in itinerance and stagnation, and this academic interest renders him more sensitive than most to the spaces around him. Given the responsibility of allocating spaces to people and people to spaces, he determines the trajectory of their lives. For example, he receives rent from a Norfolk farmer, presumably a tenant on a large estate – but instead of browbeating or exploiting him, Grewgious accepts gifts of turkeys and the care of his son. Bazzard comes to Grewgious with his father's rent and discloses his secret ambition to be a writer of tragic plays, and Grewgious employs him as his clerk so that he can pursue these aspirations (v, August 1870, pp.158-159). How does the person responsible for the way other people dwell, dwell himself? With his boxes full of other

¹⁸ Miller (1995), p.116.

people's domestic arrangements, he lives largely by proxy. Stewards, for Dickens, are typically lonely, thoughtful and self-effacing old men, with a benevolent interest in youth.

The Mystery of Edwin Drood is a novel about young men being cut down in their prime, getting lost, and just starting to find their feet. If Edwin accounts for the first of these, and Neville Landless the second, then the third most fully describes Captain Tartar: Grewgious's neighbour, a returned sailor, enthusiastic gardener and newly-minted landlord. Tartar's runners and pot-plants bring life to the rooftops of central London, and his overt likeness to Jack in the beanstalk story casts him as a fairy-tale character – a man with a castle in the air.¹⁹ He is also re-investing in English soil after many years at sea.²⁰ This erstwhile itinerant, a 'tartar', has forgotten what it means to have roots and be at home, and so he makes a conscious decision to become a tenant at Staple Inn and start an urban garden. His decision stems from his inheritance of his uncle's estate:

I chose this place, because, having served last in a little Corvette, I knew I should feel more at home where I had a constant opportunity of knocking my head against the ceiling. Besides; it would never do for a man who had been aboard ship from his boyhood to turn luxurious all at once. Besides, again: having been accustomed to a very short allowance of land all my life, I thought I'd feel my way to the command of a landed estate, by beginning in boxes.

(v, August 1870, p.139)

He is taking this opportunity to practice land management. Tartar's rented rooms in Staple Inn represent his estate in miniature; each flowerpot is filled with the same English mud his tenants will till. He has to learn how to fit into a national, political, social and economic structure that gains much of its meaning from land. From owning nothing, this member of the 'rising generation' comes of age and takes a stake in the soil, becoming the custodian of his plot until the next heir comes by. He will not be 'knocking [his] head against the ceiling' for long.²¹

¹⁹ On Dickens's use of 'Jack and the Beanstalk', see Charles Forsyte, 'Drood and the Beanstalk', *Dickensian*, 80 (1984), 74-88; Elaine Ostry, *Social Dreaming: Dickens and the Fairy Tale* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002); Harry Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Novel-Making* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

²⁰ Sea-going colonisers were sustained on their travels by fantasies of the English pastoral retirement they could enjoy on their return: 'This brief vision of landed aristocracy, a sanctuary from the activity of capitalized exchange, was case as the reward for a career in the east'. See Nunokawa (2003), pp.41-42; and Williams (2011), pp.281-282.

²¹ For a comprehensive discussion of the nineteenth-century landed classes, including the idea of the landlord as temporary custodian, see Thompson (1963). On 'gentlemanliness' as a feature of middle-class and landed society and its importance for the Victorian sense of identity, social structure and

Tartar may be unorthodox and whimsical, but his oddities have a serious purpose: to ground the drifter and to prepare him for his upcoming responsibility as a rural landlord. *Pendennis* touches upon these ideas without being sentimental about them. Pen's father, an apothecary, saves enough money to purchase a house and modest estate; when Pen inherits the property, his acquaintances either misguidedly or teasingly make more of it than it actually is. 'Fairoaks Park' or 'Fairoaks Castle' is, really, just Fairoaks: a peaceful, cottage-like home that Pen decides to rent out with no second thought once his mother dies (I, p.57; II, p.61, etc.). Pen procrastinates about visiting his new tenants, a military man and his young family; the visit itself brings pangs of nostalgia and a realisation that 'our place knows us not' (II, p.285). Notwithstanding this moment of wistfulness, Thackeray ultimately shows that landed estates are shifting entities, slivers of which are passed backwards and forwards through the rental market, shaped by practical concerns: disregarding the advice of his old-fashioned uncle, Pen decides to sell three of his fields for the development of the Chatteris railway at the end of the novel even as he and Laura return to Clavering (II, p.356).

The central character of Gore's *Castles in the Air* is a young man coming to terms with an unexpected inheritance. Harry Powerscourt is brought up in the monotony of a nondescript village by his bullying mother and sisters. His mother 'hire[s] what the house-agents call "a small, compact residence in an excellent neighbourhood, fit for the immediate occupation of a genteel family"': in common parlance, a place where nothing happens, and where Harry's own little room is his one refuge.²² After the death of his estranged godfather, he finds himself the heir of an immense fortune and a country estate in Yorkshire, with a rent-roll of twenty-thousand pounds a year. He makes a series of errors of judgement and, during his coming-of-age festivities, Wrottesley Hall is badly damaged in a fire. Harry retreats to the French coast, where he slowly reconnects with his mother and sisters and becomes a devoted gardener. He returns to Wrottesley after many years and, at the end of the novel, is in the process of building the hall up again. The novel emphasises the store that aristocrats set by the concept of freehold. Caroline Roxborough, from the neighbouring estate, chooses to die in an inn because the Roxborough Elms has recently been leased; 'the Elms being

civilisation, see Gilmour (1981). Trollope was particularly concerned with the nature of the landed order and the country squire's responsibilities; see pp.149-181.

²² Gore, *Castles in the Air*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1847), I, p.4. Subsequent references appear in the text.

let to strangers, she did not wish [...] to be carried to a place which could scarce be called a home' (III, p.144). More than anything, however, *Castles in the Air* deals with the surprising rise of a young man. Harry must learn how to be a hospitable neighbour, a credible Member of Parliament and a good landlord to his tenants. The novel itself, published after the decline of the silver-fork novel and yet incorporating some of the genre's tropes and concerns, is hard to define.²³ It makes sophisticated points about socialisation, mental development and life-writing that are not out of place in a *Bildungsroman*; Harry even opens his narration in a similar way to David, stating 'it requires some nerve to present oneself before the fastidious eye of the public, in the character of a hero of romance' (I, p.1). This tale of a spoilt and floundering young landlord once again pushes past the bounds of melodrama.

Gore's central conceit and most notable preoccupation is the act of castle-building: a metaphor for a certain process of thinking, drawn from the world of architecture.²⁴ The concept of building 'castles in the air' or 'castles in Spain' goes back to the 1400s.²⁵ Harry's early consumption of modern romances renders him especially prone to this habit; entombed in a dull village, surrounded by sisters and novels and with very little to do, his only escape is in reverie (I p.94). As he comes into his inheritance his 'use of the aërial trowel' becomes increasingly pronounced, and his castles increasingly elaborate (I, p.246). He builds castles about his career, wealth and property; the way he is going to use his wealth to help his friends; his travels and future political power; most often, about love. His castle-building shapes all of the decisions he makes; references to these structures usually appear at the ends of chapters, creating a clear sense that they are pushing the plot forward. But Harry's decisions do not lead anywhere good, and he is left 'broken in health, fortune, and reputation,— after witnessing the utter downfall of [his] successive Castles in the Air' (III, p.268). Gore's novel suggests that castle-building is the hobby of the rural rich, a certain class of privileged young man. Harry is an idler who does not know what to do with his money, and who cannot decide how to fashion himself. In the final pages of his narrative, he swaps one kind of castle-building for another: to 'lay the foundation of a substantial

²³ The silver-folk genre had its heyday between 1825 and 1841; see Copeland (2012), p.2.

²⁴ On architectural allegory in medieval texts, including a chapter on castles, see Christiania Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind: A Study of Medieval Architectural Allegory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003). Such allegories were often used for pedagogical purposes.

²⁵ 'castle', n.II.11., in the *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <www.oed.com/view/Entry/28581> [Accessed: 9 August 2016].

dwelling-house' over the ruins of Wrotesley Hall (III, p.334). Harry vows 'to build no Castles but such as can be put together with mortar and a trowel' (III, p.335). The new Hall promises to be the modest seat of an equally modest, but prosperous, freehold.

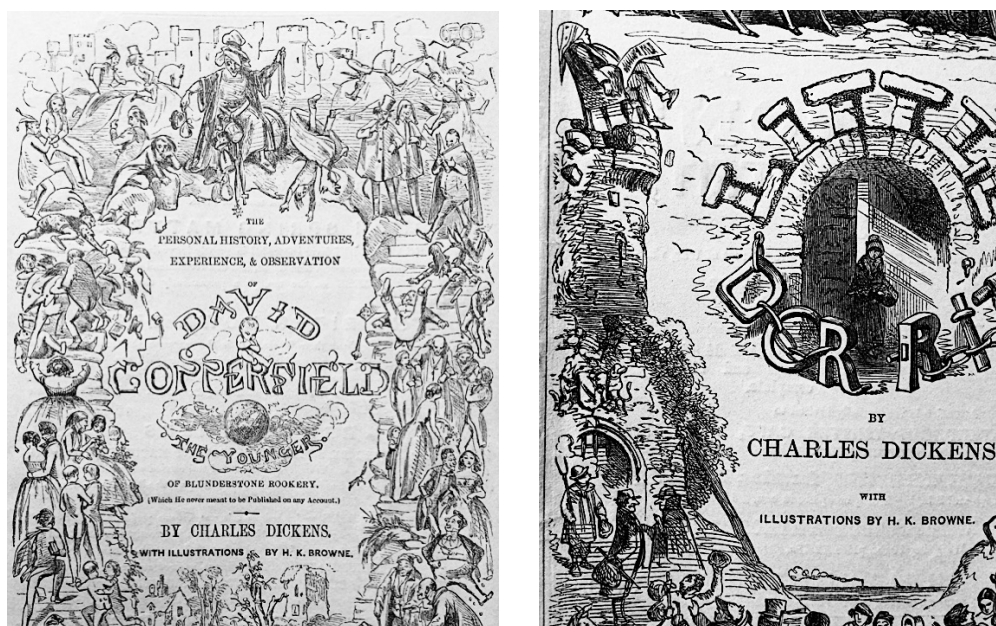
In *David Copperfield*, David, who cuts a very different figure to Harry, is moved into a luxurious room at the Golden Cross inn. It has a bed that 'is quite a little landed estate' (vii, November 1849, p.204). Later, when Steerforth sees David's apartments at Mrs Crupp's for the first time, he threatens to turn the humble lodging into a seat of the nobility: 'I shall make quite a town-house of this place, unless you give me notice to quit' (viii, December 1849, p.252). David – the lodger – is supremely aware of how the other half of the 'rising generation' – the landlord – lives. He also participates in the same mental process of castle-building. The next section of this chapter expands upon the motif of castle-building in the *Bildungsroman*, before exploring some of the other architectural and spatial metaphors that appear in the genre.

'Drawd Too Architectooralooral': The *Bildungsroman* and the Turn to Metaphor

Maria Beadnell, the young addressee of 'Lodgings To Let', contacted Dickens again in 1855. His ensuing correspondence with her describes how he 'fl[ies] away to the house in Lombard Street which is pulled down, as if it were necessary that the very bricks and mortar should go the way of [his] airy castles'.²⁶ He saw a certain poetry, a straightforward symbolism, in the fact that the old Beadnell house had been demolished. This maps onto the final chapters of *Great Expectations*, when Satis House has its furniture and effects auctioned off and its very bricks and mortar 'sold as old building materials and pulled down'. It has been Pip's castle throughout the novel, its freehold owned by two equally life-changing women who have guided his speculative building: Miss Havisham and Estella. When Pip returns from Egypt, Estella reveals that this freehold is 'the only possession [she has] not relinquished', and that the desolate ground will be built upon at last (3 August 1861, pp.433-437, p.433, 437). Estella does not give any details about the kind of development she has sanctioned, but as this plan emerges, and as the old bricks are dispersed to lay new foundations, we come to a moment of simultaneous closure, renewal and continuity – because new dreams will undoubtedly cluster around each new edifice, marked with a trace of Satis House. A

²⁶ Dickens to Maria Winter, 22 February 1855, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VII, pp.543-545 (p.544).

marriage between Pip and Estella, a resolution not quite delivered by the end of the novel, would add an extra layer of complexity; according to the laws of coverture, women had no control over their real property following marriage until the Married Women's Property Acts were introduced in 1870 and 1882. Thus, were Estella to become a *femme covert*, the freehold would be Pip's to all extents and purposes.²⁷



Figures 18, 19: Phiz, monthly wrappers for *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit*, depicting castles in the air, British Library, C.144.c.1, C.144.c.3

Dickens's castle-builders are not misguided young aristocrats, like Gore's Harry Powerscourt. Quite the opposite. They include the Nicklebys, Master Humphrey, Captain Cuttle, Sol Gills, Mr Dorrit, and John Jasper, who uses the phrase to describe his own blasted hopes for Edwin's future. These are a mixture of romantics, elderly eccentrics, bona fide lunatics, naïve rural folk, and well-meaning but wrong-headed young men – Richard Carstone, Martin Chuzzlewit, Pecksniff's other architecture students – whose schemes of the heart seem just as doomed as their career ambitions (Figures 18, 19).²⁸ Lodgers are castle-builders, too; the lonely narrator of 'The Poor

²⁷ On coverture and women's property rights, see, for example, Wynne (2010), pp.6-7, 34-35. On Dickens's deeply ambivalent portrayal of 'forceful women of property', whose real estate is 'vulnerable to loss or destruction', see p.58. On the way Satis House is 'dismantled and converted into moveable property', see pp.84-85.

²⁸ On castle-building as a recurring conceit in Dickens's representation of Mr Dorrit's psychological state in Venice, see Peter Orford, 'An Italian Dream and a Castle in the Air: The Significance of Venice in *Little Dorrit*', in Tambling (2012), pp.463-471 (p.471). On castle-building in *Chuzzlewit*, see Schwarzbach (1979), p.82.

Relation's Story' (1853) lives in a back room on Clapham Road, is expected to keep out of the premises all day, and is not allowed to light a fire at night. Disappointed in every aspect of his life, he rewrites these wrongs in his tale, telling his small audience that his real residence is a Castle peopled with friends and family and 'quite a picture of Home'. In the last couple of lines of the story, it is revealed to be a 'Castle in the Air!'.²⁹

Dickens's most productive builder is also self-diagnosed: he is none other than David Copperfield, who describes his lodgings at Mrs Crupp's as a 'lofty castle'. Here he can act like Robinson Crusoe, 'when he had got into his fortification, and pulled his ladder up after him' (viii, December 1849, p.251). To some extent, these are allusions to the adage that an Englishman's home is his castle, but David's apartments also constitute his castle in the air, the place where he can enjoy his independence and conjure dreams for himself and his future. Pen, who exists somewhere between Harry and David in the class structure, also builds castles (I, pp.271-272, 317). According to this vision, castle-building is a middle-class and largely male pursuit, clearly as appealing to lodgers as landlords. The metaphor casts the self as an architect, since anyone can create these structures. It is a deeply private, even solipsistic practice: as a joke in the periodical *Moonshine* put it, the 'great advantage' of castle-building is that 'there is no ground-rent to pay'.³⁰ When authors draw attention to castle-builders, they are turning their focus inwards and signalling their interest in the mind.

Nineteenth-century writers and thinkers from a range of disciplines were preoccupied with shedding light on the process of castle-building. With what seems to be a new sense of urgency, they explored the ways in which it exercised the imagination, discussing its health benefits, dangers, and implications for literature. Contemporary psychological treatises pathologised it; while some argued that it was a crucial restorative and a 'spiritual game', 'invigorating' those ground down by narrow and intense intellectual work, others warned against the dangers of allowing fantasies to guide decision-making in the real world.³¹ Castle-building became associated with impulsiveness and irresponsibility in adults; in taking their capacity for hope to harmful extremes, castle-builders committed an 'abuse of the application of this fundamental

²⁹ [Dickens], 'The Poor Relation's Story', *A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire, Household Words*, 26 February 1853, pp.1-5 (p.5).

³⁰ 'There's one great advantage...', *Moonshine*, 14 March 1891, p.130.

³¹ [Cyrus Redding], 'Castle Builders', *New Monthly Magazine*, January 1824, pp.77-83 (p.79). Subsequent references are included in the text.

power'.³² It was considered most hazardous, however, in children, who were already prone to conjuring imaginary lands for themselves. Towards the end of the century, an influential essay by James Crichton Browne explicitly associated castle-building with juvenile monomania: a dangerous obsession with a particular thing that purportedly carried through into adulthood. Browne argued that the mental health of the child had a lasting impact on that of the mature adult; this, in turn, shaped the health of whole communities.³³ Thus, the nineteenth century saw an uncomfortable tension developing around this overdetermined metaphor.

Without our castles in the air, a contributor to *New Monthly Magazine* argues, we have 'no buoyancy' and are 'mere ponderous clods'; thus, we should take pride in the uniqueness of our imaginations and our capacity for invention (p.77). Given the synonymy between castle-building and creativity, it is hardly surprising that it should preoccupy self-reflexive writers, who used the metaphor to get closer to their own practices. The literary interest in castle-building spanned the Atlantic, inspiring poems by Elizabeth Akers Allen, William Cullen Bryant, Thomas Dunn English, Richard Henry Stoddard, Carlos Wilcox, and, in Dickens's own circle of acquaintance, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. At home, Frederick Locker-Lampson, Charles Mackay, Thomas Love Peacock and Adelaide Anne Procter, most of whom had close personal connections to Dickens, added their own voices to the conversation.³⁴

Peacock's short, simple 'Castles in the Air' is charged with regret, and reveals a speaker lost in counterfactual time. It most accurately reflects the tone of the *Bildungsroman*:

³² Johann Spurzheim, 'Lectures on Phrenology', *Lancet*, 25 June 1825, pp.353-364 (p.353).

³³ Sally Shuttleworth has discussed Browne's essay; see *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.61; and *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.51-56.

³⁴ See Elizabeth Akers Allen, 'An Air-Castle' (1886); William Cullen Bryant, 'Castles in the Air' (1862); Thomas Dunn English, 'The Castle in Air' (1894); Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 'The Castle-Builder' (1867) and 'Castles in Spain' (1877); Richard Henry Stoddard, 'The Castle in the Air' (1880). In Britain, see Frederick Locker-Lampson, 'The Castle in the Air' (1857); Charles Mackay, 'Castles in the Air' (1856); Thomas Love Peacock, 'Castles in the Air' (n.d.); Adelaide Anne Procter, 'A Castle in the Air' (1862).

My thoughts by night are often filled
With visions false as fair:
For in the past alone I build
My castles in the air.

I dwell not now on what may be:
Night shadows o'er the scene:
But still my fancy wanders free
Through that which might have been.³⁵

With *Castles in the Air*, *Pendennis* and *David Copperfield*, Gore, Thackeray and Dickens are able to inhabit the mind of the builder in a sustained way. They follow their builders from childhood to adult experience, from fantasy to disillusionment. Be it a positive or negative psychological activity, they ultimately suggest it is necessary for their art, because it is one of the driving forces behind their conception of the genre. Both David and Harry imply that they would not have been moved, or able, to write their memoirs had they not had this propensity; it is intrinsic to the literary temperament. David's powers of reverie – evident from an early age, when he 'picture[s] to [himself] what the insides of the houses were like, and what the inhabitants were about' – culminate in his professional success as a novelist (ii, June 1849, p.52). He is not unlike Master Humphrey, who 'speculate[s] on the characters and occupations of those who fill the streets', preferring to do so by night because the 'full revelation' of daylight 'too often destroys an air-built castle at the moment of its completion, without the smallest ceremony or remorse' (iv, 25 April 1840, pp.37-47, p.37).

When David visits his mother's grave, he reflects on 'the figure [he is] to make in life, and the distinguished things [he is] to do [...] as if [he has] come home to build [his] castles in the air at a living mother's side' (viii, December 1849, p.225). In self-imposed exile and processing another death – this time Dora's – he comes, 'by imperceptible degrees', to a 'hopeless consciousness of all that [he] had lost – love, friendship, interest; of all that had been shattered – [his] first trust, [his] first affection, the whole airy castle of [his] life; of all that remained – a ruined blank and waste, lying wide around [him], unbroken, to the dark horizon' (xix/xx, November 1850, p.577). The older David is forced to confront his desire to be 'distinguished', the brazenness of his ambitions in both the personal and professional spheres, and the fact that everything

³⁵ Peacock, 'Castles in the Air', in *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. Henry Cole, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1875), III, p.265.

has been destroyed. Somehow, he must start again from the beginning once he makes his homecoming. The most important thing to note is that castles in the air exist only to be razed to the ground; they signify schemes that are bound to be disappointed, rather than realistic plans. In bringing this metaphor to the fore, Dickens and Gore turn misplaced priorities and pipe dreams into the very cornerstones of fictional autobiography. Prone to identify the habit in themselves, Harry, David and Pen begin to see it in others: in Harry's sister and his legal guardian, in Major Pendennis, and in Traddles, who lives 'behind the parapet of a house in Castle Street' (*David Copperfield*, xii, April 1850, p.372; *Pendennis*, II, p.318). (It is suggestive that the real Castle Street ran by Furnival's Inn, where Dickens constructed his own castles as a young man.) Everyone seems to indulge in 'preposterous aspirings' (*Castles in the Air*, III, p.238).

Thus, the self, Gore, Thackeray and Dickens suggest, is the sum of its hollow, unrealised aspirations and bad decisions, its restlessness and boredom, its vivid alternative lives, disappointments, false starts and renewals. As Harry points out, 'it is the enviable privilege of Castle Builders that [...] they are as ready to recommence the unprofitable toil as a child its house of cards': castles are constructed successively, a new one always ready to replace the old until the moment of truth violently arrives (III, p.119). Gore and Dickens seem to be offering a different way of conceiving of selfhood and articulating a life, illuminating the way these are structured. In their hands, the *Bildungsroman* is less about optimism or a Smilesian belief in self-improvement; instead, it reveals the fervency and ultimate wrongheadedness of youth and the fragility of dreams. It is an unexpectedly sad and sobering thought: the dreaded personage 'But', Pen tells Laura, will inevitably catch up with anyone occupied in the 'building of air-castles' (II, p.325). Taken together, these ideas force us to reconsider the lines between hope and ambition, naïveté and idiocy.³⁶

With castle-building, Gore, Thackeray and Dickens appropriate a long-established architectural metaphor to put across their ideas about personal development, charging it with new meaning. The sentimental Miss Mills, who acts as David and Dora's intermediary, is much taken with the idea of 'poetical affinity', and provides extracts from her journal for David to read: 'Much alarmed. Fainting of [Dora] and glass of water from public-house. (Poetical affinity. Chequered sign on door-post;

³⁶ On hope and despondency in *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, *Little Dorrit* and other nineteenth-century fiction, see Tyler, 'Victorian Hopes: Future-Directed Attitudes in Nineteenth-Century Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2010).

chequered human life. Alas! J. M.)' (xiii, May 1850, p.396). Miss Mills is undoubtedly silly, but Dickens draws 'poetical affinities' throughout his own career, using metaphors from the built environment and the 'lodger world' to describe life's major events. He uses them to put forward certain arguments about his conception of selfhood, and to weigh up different models against one another. Robert Alter suggests that Dickens's metaphors 'give the impression of having been struck off in the white heat of improvisation'. When he uses unifying or extended metaphors, Alter argues, Dickens does not necessarily plan them – instead, he finds himself 'carried along by the powerful momentum of his integrative imagination'.³⁷ The same might hold true of his architectural and spatial metaphors, but they appear across several novels, deployed and redeployed as if Dickens is testing the possibility of a consistent vision and vocabulary.

At the most fundamental level, lodging provides a shorthand for talking about life, death, and eternity. When Mrs Bloss marries Mr Gobler in 'The Boarding-House', she moves with him to Newington Butts, 'far removed from the noisy strife of that great boarding-house, the world' (II, pp.221-222). *The Pickwick Papers*'s Gabriel Grub gleefully describes the grave as 'brave lodgings for one' (x, December 1836, p.300). In a novel that celebrates the bachelor's lifestyle, Grub reminds readers that death will bring an enforced solitude. Pecksniff uses one of his characteristic rhetorical flourishes to liken life to a stagecoach journey. 'Virtue', he fancies, 'is the drag. We start from The Mother's Arms,' a tavern, 'and we run to The Dust Shovel' (iii, March 1843, p.89); in *A Tale of Two Cities*, similarly, the Old Bailey is compared to a 'deadly inn-yard, from which pale travellers set out continually [...] on a violent passage into the other world' (28 May 1859, pp.97-102, p.100). It is an unsurprising analogy to make, particularly deep-rooted in religious discourse, because it emphasises the transience of the physical world in the face of the next – Shakespeare's Sonnet 146, for instance, compares the body to a 'fading mansion' for the soul with 'so short a lease'. Marcus Waithe identifies 'notable examples' from John Donne, Walter Raleigh and Thomas Browne, comparing 'the world, and by extension the body [...] to mere stopping places, or hostelries, for the soul'. In 1856, Ruskin published the third volume of *Modern Painters*, in which he states: 'We look upon the world too much as our own, too much as if we had possessed it and should possess it for ever, and forget that it is a mere

³⁷ Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p.48.

hostelry, of which we occupy the apartments for a time, which others better than we have sojourned in before'.³⁸ The same sentiment is echoed in FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1859). Though many of these examples make a religious point, Dickens's emphasis is slightly different, as there is nothing in his images about looking forward to heaven's eternal joys. Instead, he is talking about mortality; the metaphor is a morbidly humorous reminder that life is short, a *memento mori* that also functions as a mandate to seize the day.

Nineteenth-century scientists, novelists and poets alike attempted both to understand what the mind was, and to formulate a vocabulary appropriate to its processes; as Karen Chase reminds us, 'we tend to forget that these novelists did not inherit a supple and illuminating picture of the mind, but that they had to construct it for themselves'.³⁹ This burgeoning discourse was liberal in its use of metaphor.⁴⁰ Architectural and spatial metaphors were a significant subset: in Sam Weller's unique mental compendium of idioms, to have 'bought houses' is 'delicate English for goin' mad', and to '[take] to buildin'' is 'a medical term for bein' incurable' (xv, June 1837, p.470). Lauren Cameron argues that Dickens was drawn to the notion of the mind as a room and, more specifically, the memory as an attic or warehouse. She identifies this as a prevailing and 'intuitive' metaphor in nineteenth-century literature and psychology, citing examples from Gaskell, Arthur Conan Doyle, Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and the scientists Oliver Wendell Holmes and William Carpenter.⁴¹ Cameron's focus is on *Hard Times* (1854), but Dickens also hints at the

³⁸ These examples are drawn from Marcus Waithe, *William Morris's Utopia of Strangers: Victorian Medievalism and the Ideal of Hospitality* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2006), p.10, 22. On the established use of architectural metaphors to describe society, especially in the eighteenth century, see Schwarzbach (1979), p.83.

³⁹ See Chase (1984), pp.54-55. On the 'openness' and 'fertility' of Victorian psychology as a discourse and discipline, attracting 'economists, imaginative writers, philosophers, clerics, literary critics, policy-makers, as well as biomedical students', see Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁰ The most comprehensive work on this theme is Michael S. Kearns, *Metaphors of Mind in Fiction and Psychology* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987). On spatial figurations of the female psyche and other metaphors dealing with the mind in *Jane Eyre*, see Shuttleworth (1996), pp.154-160 and Chase (1984), pp.41-91; on Eliot's 'physical language' of the mind and self, see Michael Davis, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); on Emily Dickinson and the 'mind as tangible space', with a specific emphasis on gender and the poet's craft and examples taken from architecture, geography, domestic space and cosmic space, see Suzanne Juhasz, *The Undiscovered Continent: Emily Dickinson and the Space of the Mind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

⁴¹ Lauren Cameron, 'Interiors and Interiorities: Architectural Understandings of the Mind in *Hard Times*', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 35 (2013), 65-79 (p.66). In 1796, Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* listed the 'Garret, or Upper Story, the head. His garret, or upper story, is empty, or

idea during a fleeting, evocative scene in *Little Dorrit*, when Arthur Clennam returns from China. Stepping into his ‘large garret bed-room’, he finds that it has been used for storage in his absence. It is now ‘the place of banishment for the worn out furniture’, from ‘ugly old chairs with worn out seats’ to ‘ugly old chairs without any seats’, ‘a maimed table, a crippled wardrobe, a lean set of fire-irons like the skeleton of a set deceased’, and a ‘bedstead with four bare atomies of posts, each terminating in a spike, as if for the dismal accommodation of lodgers who might prefer to impale themselves’.⁴² With its repeated words and grammatical structures, the passage reflects Arthur’s own spinning mind. It is as if he has entered his memory, made all the more obvious by the fact that this is a garret at the top of the house. In confronting piles of broken, anthropomorphised furniture, he must also confront something infinitely more damaged: this room is a visible manifestation of both his childhood trauma and his wasted hopes.

Although this scene represents a moment of midlife crisis, Dickens’s tales of the young are equally steeped in such images, especially at moments of transition. Dickens uses metaphors from the ‘lodger world’ when he is capturing the ‘rising generation’ in all its variety. Left abandoned at Dr Blimber’s, Paul Dombey ‘[sits] as if he had taken life unfurnished, and the upholsterer were never coming’ (iv, January 1847, p.107). He has invested in empty apartments, but without furniture or portable property they remain uncomfortable and deindividualised, a shell that cannot be used, full of echoing noises that emphasise his own isolation. Paul himself would be too young to understand this simile, heightening his aura of premature agedness. This frustrated and defeated child has the shape of a life, but nothing to fill it with. Sam, meanwhile, wields such images of his own accord, accepting Pickwick’s offer of work by exclaiming, ‘take the bill down [...] I’m let to a single gentleman, and the terms is agreed upon’ (v, July 1836, p.119). He compares himself to an apartment to let because he houses successive selves and relationships; his identity is not a permanent entity, and so he never feels lived-in. He is the ultimate urban scrapper, happy to play host to whichever whim seems most profitable at the time. His statement constitutes a spontaneous moment of self-reflection.

unfurnished; i.e. he has no brains, he is a fool’. See ‘garret’, n.¹, 3.a., b., in the *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <www.oed.com/view/Entry/76861> [Accessed: 9 August 2016].

⁴² Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (London: Bradbury and Evans), i, December 1855, p.28. Subsequent references appear in the text.

Neither *The Pickwick Papers* nor *Dombey and Son* is a *Bildungsroman*, of course, but these are strands, in Dickens's knotted, densely plotted novels, about how we grow up. The *Bildungsroman* takes those themes – self-reflection, transition, the 'rising generation' – and brings them front and centre. In *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, Dickens uses architectural and spatial metaphors to explore various models for personal development. The first of these is the idea of the foundation; it could be argued that 'having foundations' has been reduced to a dead metaphor, but in the *Bildungsroman*, it has some semblance of its meaning restored.⁴³ Do people and societies have unshakeable foundations? Do lives have cornerstones and keystones? Both novels suggest the contrary. Mr Dick, who never changes and seems to exist out of time, 'appear[s] to have settled into his original foundation, like a building', and David 'confess[es] that his faith in [Dick's] ever moving, was not much greater than if he had been a building' (xv, July 1850, p.461). Dick is David's negative image – no member of the 'rising generation'. Though Dr Strong reassures David that he should not worry about his career prospects – he has 'laid a foundation that any edifice may be raised upon' – things are less fixed outside his professional life (xii, April 1850, p.369). Miss Lavinia questions whether David and Dora's love can 'have any real foundation', and, in the cottage they are renting in Highgate, David is disconcerted by the amount of butter his wife is ordering: 'It appeared to me,' he confesses, 'as if we might have kept the basement story paved with butter, such was the extensive scale of our consumption of that article' (xiv, June 1850, p.422; xv, July 1850, p.454). In speaking about these buttery foundations, he is voicing his wider insecurity about the slipperiness of his home and marriage. Dickens argues for the impossibility of laying down a truly reliable foundation on which subsequently to build one's entire life. Lives and selves cannot be constructed painstakingly and lovingly, brick by brick. This makes the conviction of Pip's words to Estella all the more arresting: 'The stones of which the strongest London buildings are made, are not more real, or more impossible to be displaced by your hands, than your presence and influence have been to me, there and everywhere, and will be. Estella, to the last hour of my life, you cannot choose but remain part of my character' (June 1 1861, pp.217-221, p.221).

⁴³ 'THEORIES (AND ARGUMENTS) ARE BUILDINGS' is just one of the countless metaphors that 'partially structure our everyday concepts [...] this structure is reflected in our literal language'. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p.46, 52-55.

Pip deploys a similar, albeit stranger, image later in his narrative. In his delirium after Magwitch's capture, he 'confound[s] impossible existences with [his] own identity', hallucinating that he is a 'brick in the house-wall, and yet entreating to be released from the giddy place where the builders [have] set him' (27 July 1861, pp.409-413, p.409). Fixed in place alongside countless other identical bricks, he begs to be set loose from the edifice that constitutes his society. He pushes against the pressures and expectations placed on him by those he neither respects nor feels beholden to. He uses another image – that of the ground-plan or survey – to emphasise his antipathy towards this scrutiny. Remembering the eve of his change in fortune, he describes being fitted for clothes: 'Mr Trabb measured and calculated me [...] as if I were an estate and he the finest species of surveyor' (16 February 1861, pp.433-438, p.435). Pumblechook 'sit[s] supervising [him] with a depreciatory eye, like the architect of [his] fortunes who thought himself engaged on a very unremunerative job' (19 January 1861, pp.337-342, p.338). Edwin Drood, whose rise is cut short, reveals a comparable resentment for those who wish to plot out his life. When talking to Jasper about his engagement to Rosa, he bursts out:

Yes, Jack, it's all very well for *you* [...] *Your* life is not laid down to scale, and lined and dotted out for you, like a surveyor's plan. *You* have no uncomfortable suspicion that you are forced upon anybody, nor has anybody an uncomfortable suspicion that she is forced upon you, or that you are forced upon her. *You* can choose for yourself. Life, for *you*, is a plum with the natural bloom on; it hasn't been over-carefully wiped off for you–

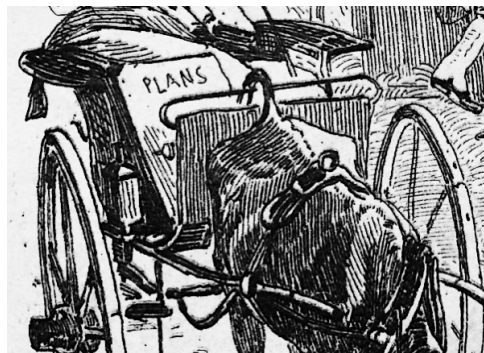
(I, April 1870, p.9)

As Edwin moves from one metaphor to another, setting up his future against Jasper's, Jasper cuts him off. For Edwin and Pip, a ground-plan means claustrophobia and stultifying predictability.

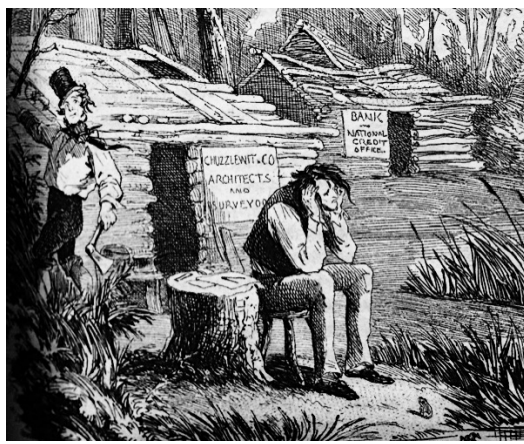
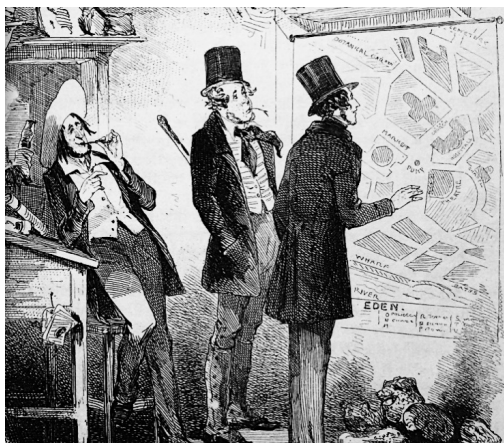
But some members of the 'rising generation' are surveyors themselves, and make ground-plans of their own. The Artful Dodger 'proceed[s] to amuse himself by sketching a ground-plan of Newgate on the table with [a] piece of chalk [...] whistling meantime with peculiar shrillness'.⁴⁴ This doodle, made in an idle moment, may actually be a more sententious flash of self-consciousness; the Dodger is mapping out a certain fate for himself, confronting it and consigning himself to it. Further up the class ladder and in a novel explicitly about architects, Martin Chuzzlewit must

⁴⁴ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, *Bentley's Miscellany*, January 1838, pp.106-120 (p.116). Subsequent references appear in the text.

eventually learn that identity is not about building or envisioning lasting edifices. No matter how many promises he makes ('I'd build [your fortune] up, Tom [...] on such a strong foundation, that it should last your life – aye, and your children's lives too'), no matter how many ground-plans he perfects, or how many pristine renderings of Eden he sees on American walls, his own life cannot be drawn using a pair of compasses (v, May 1843, p.145; Figures 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25).⁴⁵



⁴⁵ For readings of architecture in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, see, for example, Nancy Aycock Metz, 'Dickens and "The Quack Architectural"', *Dickens Quarterly*, 11 (1994), 59-68; and Tambling, 'Martin Chuzzlewit: Dickens and Architecture', *English*, 48 (1999), 147-168.



Figures 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25: Phiz, ‘Martin is much gratified by an imposing ceremony’ (detail), xiii, January 1844, pp.411-416 (p.415), Frontispiece (detail), Title page (detail), ‘Mr Pinch and the new pupil, on a social occasion’, iii, March 1843, pp.65-76 (p.70), ‘The thriving city of Eden as it appeared on paper’, ix, September 1843, pp.257-273 (p.268), ‘The thriving city of Eden as it appeared in fact’, ix, September 1843, pp.281-288 (p.288), *Martin Chuzzlewit*. British Library, C.117.d.3

The most sustained use comes, yet again, in *David Copperfield*, originally entitled ‘The Copperfield Survey of the World as it Rolled’.⁴⁶ David reaches for the image whenever he describes his love for Dora. His mind drifting in Traddles’s company, his ‘selfish thoughts’ make ‘a ground-plan of Mr. Spewlow’s house and garden at the same moment’. Ironically, Traddles himself is doing a similar thing during this conversation, showing David the prospect of a Devonshire church on an inkstand, where Sophy’s father is curate; he is ‘tracing his finger along the inkstand’ to indicate the location of

⁴⁶ Dickens to Forster, 26 February 1849, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), V, p.502.

her house (ix, January 1850, p.285). David is finally able to put together his ground-plans on a real page, rather than in his mind. Sitting with Dora, he draws ‘a picture of [their] frugal home, made independent by [his] labour – sketching-in the little house [he] had seen at Highgate’ (xii, April 1850, p.382). Ground-plans are a neat way to bring expectations, aspirations and realities into contact. They are visionary spaces, empty and unpeopled, full of potential but little tangible matter. These young men, who are trying to make sense of their futures, ultimately must learn a severe lesson: that their lives cannot be mapped.

If these concepts from architecture – laying foundations, sketching ground-plans – are ultimately found wanting when figuring the development of the middle-class self, then perhaps Sam Weller’s approach is more authentic to the experience of growing and being. David uses images from the ‘lodger world’ to describe both his early love for Little Emily and his impression of the odd, closed Rosa Dartle, who loves an unavailable man. Returning from Yarmouth as a child, David promises to write to Emily: ‘I redeemed that promise afterwards’, the adult David recalls, ‘in characters larger than those in which apartments are usually announced in manuscript, as being to let’ (I, May 1849, pp.30-31). Rosa, meanwhile, is unwanted and waiting, ‘a little dilapidated – like a house – with having been so long to let’ (vii, November 1849, p.207). Unlike Pip, who thinks of his love for Estella as a kind of existential foundation, David sees love as something that comes and goes. Human relationships – infatuations, passions, friendships – are fleeting. People move on. Thackeray makes the point in a particularly striking way. When Pen’s first, totally unsuitable love, an actress, leaves the neighbourhood, Pen charges over to her old lodgings:

They were gone indeed. A card of ‘Lodgings to let’ was placed in the dear little familiar window. He rushed up into the room and viewed it over [...] He walked, with a sort of terror, into her little empty bedroom. It was swept out and prepared for new comers. The glass which had reflected her fair face was shining ready for her successor. The curtains lay square folded on the little bed: he flung himself down and buried his head on the vacant pillow.

(I, p.159)

A mirror’s very function is to inspire moments of self-reflection. In a rented apartment like this one, a bedroom mirror will take in dozens of faces over the years, the faces of people passing through. It will not reflect or absorb the traces of one person’s slow, steady aging process. As Pen looks into Emily’s old mirror, it signals that there will be

other loves. 'It is pleasant, perhaps', the narrator muses later, 'but it is humiliating to own that you love no more' (II, p.140).

David proves himself to be a narrator and writer who, sitting in the comfort of his home with Agnes, is still using rented space as a point of reference. Even if, in Beth Herst's words, 'finding his rightful home [...] is David's life project', and this home is 'both the refuge and the source of selfhood', he is susceptible to the memory of lodging and of seeking accommodation.⁴⁷ The older David reveals the extent to which his past pulls upon him, and shows that the experience of tenancy has a truth and vividness to it. It is not simply something he has done, a mere purgatory he has endured before settling into a home of his own, but is something that has created him and informed the way he thinks. After all, the metaphors we use say something about the kinds of immediate, involuntary associations our minds make. The *Bildungsroman* presents its metaphors as the products of one mind, rather than as spontaneous bursts of Dickensian inventiveness. Dickens is commenting on individual modes of logging the world, on the structures of individual memories, and, crucially, on individual methods of expression – *David Copperfield* is a *Künstlerroman*.⁴⁸ David, a professional writer, is engaged in converting his lived experience into a logical memoir; he has a degree of control over and awareness of his craft, and so, he exercises his language consciously. He uses these metaphors to make himself understood and to engage with an audience.

What, then, is Dickens saying about tenancy here? Architectural language and the language of tenancy are used to make sense of the self. These languages are also used to clarify abstract and ineffable concepts, rendering death, love, disappointment, ruin and transition both accessible and slightly bathetic, defined against an essentially economic relationship. This assumes that tenancy belongs to the comprehensible world, one that author, narrator, character and reader can safely be expected to share. As the vehicle for metaphor, it is painted as one of the most fundamental facts of everyday experience that unites everyone, no matter their age, standing, or moral tendencies. (Pecksniff is as innovative, linguistically, as Sam; their language-use and the bent of their imaginations align them in ways we might not initially expect.) At the same time,

⁴⁷ Beth F. Herst, *The Dickens Hero: Selfhood and Alienation in the Dickens World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), pp.53-54.

⁴⁸ On *David Copperfield* as *Künstlerroman*, see Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp.89-125; Irène Simon, 'David Copperfield: A Künstlerroman?', *RES*, 43 (1992), 40-56; Gail Turley Houston, 'Gender Construction and the *Künstlerroman*: *David Copperfield* and *Aurora Leigh*', *Philological Quarterly*, 72 (1993), 213-236.

tenancy is malleable enough to describe a huge range of situations, and is somehow equally appropriate to all of them. Therein lies the paradox: as an idea, tenancy is simultaneously concrete and capacious. Everyone understands what it means, but it can also mean almost anything.

Passing Warren's Blacking, which played a crucial part in Dickens's own coming-of-age story, Joe Gargery is disappointed to find that the appearance of the building falls far short of the picture on the posters. The picture, he remarks, has been 'drawd too architectooralooral' – grander and more ornate than it actually is. There is a reproach in his words, a suggestion that people make more of buildings than they should (23 March 1861, pp.553-558, p.554). Dickens's own fiction is also 'drawd architectooralooral', embellished with metaphors taken from the built environment and from domestic space; however, his use of metaphors amounts to far more than a simple act of indulgent prettification. Rather, it is vital to his conceptions of selfhood, and reveals something both about his narrative vision and his profoundly spatial imagination. He sees great value in using 'architectooralooral' metaphors to describe life's most serious events. By using these metaphors at moments of reflection and transition, he gives us a vocabulary for talking about growing up.

'No Man Knew What a Window Was': The Changing Nature of the Threshold

The previous section explained how concepts from space and architecture, which had broad traction in the nineteenth century, were appropriated by novelists to explore abstract mental and ontological processes. This section looks more closely at one element of architectural history, and suggests that the symbolic potential of a particular image changed drastically during Dickens's own career. The threshold is a charged site, imaginatively speaking; crossing a threshold has long been a metaphor for making a personal transition.⁴⁹ Like other spaces, though, it does not simply exist in abstraction, somehow out of time; its meaning is partly determined by historical circumstances. In the 1840s and 1850s, parliamentary debates about taxation encouraged Dickens to direct his attention to one kind of threshold space in particular: the window. Katherine

⁴⁹ For wide-ranging theories concerning this site, see, for example, Subha Mukherji (ed.), *Thinking on Thresholds: The Poetics of Transitive Spaces* (New York: Anthem Press, 2011). On Dickens specifically, see Ben Moore, "'When I Went to Lunnon Town Sirs': Transformation and the Threshold in the Dickensian City', *Dickens Quarterly*, 29 (2012), 336-349.

Williams's reading of windows in *Bleak House* situates the novel squarely within these parliamentary debates, but does not acknowledge how Dickens's previous novel – *David Copperfield* – was formed by the same context.⁵⁰ In *David Copperfield*, he asks himself what a window is and what it enables.

In 1851, after a century and a half of administration and a decade of acrimonious debate, a small element of the country's economic policy changed: the window tax was repealed. Like the duties on dogs, horses, carriages and servants, this was an assessed tax, and required certain members of the population to pay a varying charge per window on their homes.⁵¹ Established during William III's reign as a manner of property tax – the more windows one's house had, the larger one's house, and so, presumably, the greater one's wealth – a number of stipulations were in place by the 1840s. If a house had eight or more windows, a tax was levied on each window. The rate of payment increased steadily until a certain number windows were met; then, the scale slid again. Every six months, the tax was assessed and collected by a third party on behalf of the government; if taxpayers were not forthcoming, the assessor could distrain for arrears, and even had the right to confiscate items belonging to innocent lodgers.⁵² Exemptions were granted to all public offices, shops, factories, warehouses, counting-houses, religious buildings, hospitals, charity-schools, farms with an annual rent below £200, labelled cheese-rooms and dairies, Irish properties, Oxford and Cambridge colleges, and Inns of Court. In fact, it transpired that relatively few houses were affected at all: in 1849, out of around 3,500,000 houses in Great Britain, fewer than 500,000 were charged ('House of Commons', 25 February 1848, p.2; 'House of Commons', 10 April 1850, p.3, 6).

As *The Times* pointed out, 'architectural antiquaries four or five centuries from hence will describe the domestic architecture of 1800-1850 as the monument of a ruinous war': the war with France.⁵³ The architectural features of one's home had an

⁵⁰ On *Bleak House*, the window tax, the trade in plate glass, and the literary implications of transparency and opacity, see Katherine Williams, 'Glass Windows: The View from *Bleak House*', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 33 (2003), 55-85. Williams's piece includes a brief history of the window tax debate and of Dickens's role within it. See also Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination, 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵¹ On the window tax and assessed taxes, see 'Among the multitude of experimental sciences...', *The Times*, 17 May 1850, p.6. Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁵² See 'House of Commons', *The Times*, 25 February 1848, pp.2-4; 'House of Commons', *The Times*, 10 April 1850, pp.3-4; 'There was never a stronger case...', *The Times*, 10 April 1850, p.5. Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁵³ 'The very large amount raised...', *The Times*, 17 January 1851, p.4. Subsequent references appear in the text.

unexpected and direct impact on foreign policy; the domestic sphere was being enlisted to subsidise British activities on a global stage. In 1851, the tax was reported to have raised more than £1,900,000.⁵⁴ In spite of this, complaints came from many quarters.⁵⁵ For one thing, it was easy to evade. Lord Duncan explained that the seemingly negligible number of houses charged masked a more sinister truth: first, that people were blocking up the windows of pre-existing houses, and second, that architects and builders were deliberately constructing new houses with fewer windows. The tax visibly depressed the glass trade and was seen to stultify architectural innovation. It also ‘check[ed] the glow of health’, because, as a ‘tax on light and air’, it had a marked impact on the sanitary conditions of the poor (‘House of Commons’, 10 April 1850, p.3; Humberstone, p.21). The lack of ventilation in the tenements of the lower classes encouraged the spread of disease, and the lack of light was thought to hinder both physical and moral growth: according to Charles Cowan, among many others, ‘there was an intimate connexion between suffering and sin’. While the lower and middle classes were made to suffer the effects of the tax in this way, the elite faced no such pressure. The bias in favour of the rich was blatant, because, after a house reached a certain number of windows, the rate of payment per window fell steadily. Statistics on the ground were suggestive at best, damning at worst. For his 20-window home in Lancaster Court, a plasterer paid £6 3s. 5d. in tax, or 19¾ percent of his rental, while the Duke of Newcastle in Portman Square paid £21 17s. 6d. for 62 windows – 3 percent of his rental. Two streets in Soho, Berwick and Poland, paid £898 in window tax for houses that rated at an average of around £50 per year. Meanwhile, St James’s and Berkeley Squares, where most houses were rated at between £500 and £1000 per year, paid £1381.⁵⁶

Finally, the law was structured around ambiguities and technicalities that often caught individuals out. For example, the opponents of the tax were particularly infuriated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s lack of clarity on an obvious detail: at no point did Charles Wood, or, indeed, his predecessors, properly define a ‘window’. Lord Duncan had a number of ludicrous examples at his disposal, which earned the

⁵⁴ On the amount raised in this year, see ‘House of Commons’, *The Times*, 18 February 1851, pp.3-4.

⁵⁵ See, for example, M. Humberstone, ‘The Absurdity and Injustice of the Window Tax’ (London: WS Orr, 1841). Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁵⁶ See ‘House of Commons’, 25 February 1848; ‘House of Commons’, 10 April 1850; ‘Among the multitude of experimental sciences...’, 17 May 1850; ‘House of Lords’, *The Times*, 20 May 1851, p.2; and *Report of the Committee of Delegates* (London: W. Davy, 1845), p.5, 8. Subsequent references appear in the text.

laughter of the Commons. A man was taxed for a hole through which coal was delivered; another, for perforated plates of zinc. Cellar windows and skylights – like Todgers’s – were chargeable. Even ‘if a brick should fall out of the wall of a house so that the light came through,’ Duncan exclaimed, ‘the owner might be put down for an additional window’ (‘House of Commons’, 25 February 1848, p.2). ‘No man,’ he said, ‘knew what a window was’ (‘House of Commons’, 10 April 1850, p.3). In 1851, these grievances reached new levels of intensity for two main reasons. Firstly, the need for immediate sanitary reform was becoming apparent to members of the public and Parliament alike, and urban housing was declared a major area of concern. Secondly, consumption taxes on building materials were abolished and encouraged wide-scale development, especially in the cities. Though glass, timber and bricks became cheaper, the window tax remained, and restricted builders.⁵⁷ When Lord Duncan brought the motion back to Parliament, he succeeded; given the relatively healthy state of the country’s finances and a predicted £2,000,000 boost from the Great Exhibition, the tax was replaced by one on inhabited houses.⁵⁸ The circumstances surrounding the repeal of the window tax emphasise the extent to which the domestic sphere was governed by macrocosmic concerns. There were visible shifts in the architectural landscape because of changes to legislation: as an editorial in *The Times* eloquently put it, ‘every house that is built [...] bears the impress of the tax on its front and back, from its cellars to its very roof [...] from its general plan to its most casual appendages’ (‘London’, 29 April 1850).

‘Every house’ may have been affected, but the lodging-house industry was hit particularly hard. To begin with, politicians and journalists constructed a diptych between the Inns of Court and the model lodging-houses of the labouring and artisanal classes. The Inns were exempt from the tax because chambers were counted as separate apartments, which meant they did not meet the eight-window threshold.⁵⁹ However, there was a clear double standard involved in applying different rules to model lodging-houses, such as the Metropolitan Buildings in King’s Cross and the Streatham Street lodging-house in Bloomsbury: made up of separate apartments in practice, they were nonetheless assessed as complete buildings. Sets in the Metropolitan Buildings were

⁵⁷ See ‘London’, *The Times*, 29 April 1850, p.4. Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁵⁸ On the anticipated boost, see ‘The Window Duties’, *The Times*, 28 January 1851, p.8. Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁵⁹ See ‘London’, *The Times*, 10 April 1850, p.5.

charged 7 ¼ d. per week out of a rental from 13l. to 16l. per year. Meanwhile, sets in the Albany, Piccadilly's most fashionable address for single gentlemen, were only charged 1 ¾ d. per week out of a rental from 80l. to 100l. per year. It became difficult to experiment with apartment dwelling. As Lord Ashley explained to the Commons, the tax acted as a dampener on private philanthropy: it discouraged investors from channelling their funds into model lodgings, and drove artisans to dwell in cellars. Exploitative landlords – a 'low and unscrupulous class of hucksters' – blocked up the windows of common lodging-houses to avoid paying the tax, which contributed to the spread of disease. 'The Englishman's house', it transpired, was 'a pigsty', not a castle.⁶⁰

Who, then, was responsible for paying the tax: lodgers, their landlords and landladies, or the owners of the original freehold? Tenancy handbooks explained that the payment of parliamentary and parochial taxes was not a formal matter of law; instead, it depended on the particular covenant between two parties. Generally speaking, the occupant of a property paid the land tax on behalf of his or her landlord, who deducted this charge from the rent at a later date. However, parliamentary taxes, including the window tax, were paid by the occupant without recompense. The division of taxes was easy enough when there was an entire house to consider: the current tenant was charged for the windows. Lodgers, however, caused complications. On Streatham Street, the SICLC was the overall tenant, but raised the rents for individual families to cover the extra cost; they only achieved an exemption after appealing to the judges.⁶¹ The editors of *The Times* shed some light on the tax procedures for lodgers at middle-class establishments, because they seemed to take the plight of humble landladies to heart. In the leader for 29 April 1850, letting was defined as a trade that blurred the line between private and commercial space. As such, the editors argued, lodgings should be exempt from the window tax: 'Something too must be said for private houses let in lodgings, the keeping of such houses being a species of trade, and the number of windows in them being out of proportion with their value or class' ('London', 29 April 1850). A pamphleteer had already identified this issue in 1841: 'Shops, warehouses, and counting-houses [...] are exempt from this tax, as an encouragement to trade; whilst poor lodging and boarding-house keepers, who are as much a portion of the industrious

⁶⁰ See 'London', 29 April 1850; 'The Window Duties'; 'The very large amount raised...'; 'London', *The Times*, 25 February 1848, p.4; and 'The three chief temporal wants...', *The Times*, 9 April 1851, p.5.

⁶¹ Henry Roberts, *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes, Their Arrangements and Construction* (London: Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes, 1853), p.11. Subsequent references appear in the text.

classes as any other, cannot claim so much as an inch of light for the due performance of *their* business without being taxed for it' (Humberstone, p.17). Landladies found themselves in a unique and problematic position. A leader from 17 January 1851 introduced a common narrative – that of the widow who was forced to let rooms to survive. Modern readers can find a prototype of Mrs Lirriper or Mrs Billickin in these lines:

Lodging-houses and some hotels have strong claims on the public consideration, but the window-tax is levied on both without the least mitigation or remorse. The poor widow who stakes the last remnant of her fortunes in opening a boarding-house may be sadly disappointed in her expectation of boarders, but one visitor she will certainly have, – the inexorable man who for her 30 windows, door-lights, sky-lights, cellar-lights, and air-holes, demands no less a sum than 10l. 15s. 10d. [...] Why is a shop exempted and not a lodging-house?
(‘The very large amount raised...’)

The tax put undue pressure on landladies, who were ultimately responsible for paying the ‘inexorable’ taxman. A landlady might ask higher rents from her lodgers to ease some of this pressure, but the measure would earn her no immediate profit. In seaside resorts, the burgeoning hospitality industry was similarly affected. Brighton, it transpired, was the fourth-largest contributor of tax, paying £18,000 in one year; ‘if the householders were relieved from this burden’, George Pechell, the MP for Brighton, argued, ‘they would be able to afford cheaper and better accommodation to the numerous visitors of the town’ (‘House of Commons’, 10 April 1850). This is not a surprising figure, since houses by the seaside were deliberately constructed with many windows to facilitate the recuperation of invalids. What was particularly bizarre was the fact that lodgings let for the season, and empty for the rest of the year, were still chargeable for the entire year.⁶²

From these fragments, a picture arises of an industry in some trouble. Model lodgings, low lodgings, seaside lodgings and private houses with lodgers were all affected. Twenty years before the debate was resolved once and for all, a pamphleteer took a step back to discuss the wider picture. Were the house and window taxes to be abolished:

⁶² See Pater (1843), p.56.

...Thousands now pent up in lodgings would immediately take houses, and by so doing, lessen all parochial rates. Each of such fresh occupants of houses now empty and untenanted, must be purchasers to some extent of articles of British manufacture and industry, which would have remained uncalled for if they had continued lodgers; the beneficial and salutary effects caused by the removal of these oppressive imposts would speedily be visible in increased employment – diminution of poor rates – and in a general diffusion of satisfaction and contentment amongst the most useful members of the community – in fact, in a cheering feeling of renovation and strength throughout the entire social system.⁶³

In this admittedly odd utopia, no taxes meant no lodgers at all: it was a world in which lodging itself amounted to an economic and national drain.

Dickens was well-informed about the minutiae of this particular branch of government policy, and watched the issue unfold with acute interest. He contributed his own disgusted views privately, in letters, and publicly, joining deputations that raised the question of taxation with government officials, arguing that the window tax was an even worse imposition on society than the paper tax.⁶⁴ But Dickens did not stop at deputations. A handful of articles in *Household Words* brought the window tax to the public consciousness, adding to the patchwork of pamphlets, periodicals and political speeches that did the same work. Dickens and WH Wills wrote pieces condemning the bureaucracy behind the tax, the bizarre and unjust nature of its rates of payment, and, above all, its devastating effect on the public health of the poor. Though none of the material in *Household Words* offers anything new, the periodical's official stance is clear; using its distinctive blend of anger, satire and whimsy, it took the government to task and ensured that its audience was well-versed in the major arguments against the tax.⁶⁵

David Copperfield and *Castles in the Air*, written and published at the height of the debate, include direct allusions to the tax. Both Dickens and Gore use the tax as a prism for making wider comments about class. Wrottesley Hall has double the number of windows of all of the houses in Hentsfield, and when Harry shows it off to his family, his sister, 'who has the eye of a tax-gatherer, declares that there are half as many windows again, as in the frontage of Ashridge!' (II, p.29, 31). The number of windows in the Hall is a matter of pride, because it is an unequivocal marker of the wealth of the estate and the landlord. Though the Hall's previous owner has been a 'waller-up of

⁶³ *Facts Illustrative of the Great Inequality of the Taxes on Houses and Windows* (London: Parishes of Westminster, 1833), p.34.

⁶⁴ See Dickens to Henry Austin, 23 January and 30 January 1851; and to Charles Knight, 8 February 1850 and 28 January 1851, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VI, pp.32-33, 265, 269-270, 272-273.

⁶⁵ See, for example, [Dickens and Wills], 'Red Tape', *Household Words*, 15 February 1851, pp.481-484; and [Wills], 'Health by Act of Parliament', *Household Words*, 10 August 1850, pp.460-463.

windows', Harry's plans for renovation include unblocking the windows of this 'window-suppressing house'; with new blood come new visions, and more expenditure (I, p.46, 50, 52). Though he tells us that the windows of Satis House are 'blocked', Dickens is, unsurprisingly, more interested in the opposite end of the spectrum (30 March 1861, pp.1-6, p.1). Part of the reason why the tax pressed so heavily on the poorer classes stemmed from the nature of urban degeneration:

TIME has worked a complete revolution in the state and value of houses, and made the large houses that *were*, the poor houses that *are* [...] many a poor old house in a state of dilapidation, the ancient residence, perhaps, of some person of quality, and thickly studded with windows, after the old fashion, [is] now the residence of labouring people.

(Humberstone, pp. 8-9)

Martha and Emily, both fallen women, lodge in just such an 'ancient residence' near Golden Square, where 'several of the back windows on the staircase [have] been darkened or wholly blocked up' (*David Copperfield*, xvi, August 1850, p.508). Dickens's social commentary is straightforward – explaining that the blocked and broken windows make the air in the building fester, bringing illness among its inmates, he rehearses the argument in 'Red Tape' (1851).

As a comprehensive catalogue of examples compiled by Edwin Eigner proves, windows are everywhere in *David Copperfield*.⁶⁶ They serve many functions, but most importantly, they enable vision. It follows that characters who are unsatisfied, unhappy or on the make are drawn to them. For Mr Micawber, scrabbling his way towards the middle class, windows play a central part in his conception of a social rise; on several occasions, he mentions his desire to '[throw] out a bow-window' as soon as he has any ready money (iv, August 1849, p.117; x, February 1850, p.297). Throwing out a bow-window amounts to a manageable pet project, a symbol of his family's inch-by-inch progress. It is a luxury, but one that he is willing to invest in when he can afford it. Windows exert an equally magnetic pull on Uriah, Annie Strong and Rosa Dartle, whose face 'pass[es] from window to window, like a wandering light' (x, February 1850, p.304).

It is this sense of vision that charges windows with significance in the *Bildungsroman*. Karen Chase's reading of *Jane Eyre*, which argues that 'in Brontë the

⁶⁶ For examples, see Edwin M. Eigner, 'The Lunatic at the Window: Magic Casements of *David Copperfield*', *Dickens Quarterly*, 2 (1985), 18-21. Eigner concludes that 'nowhere in Dickens [...] is a motif of windows more carefully or more suggestively developed than in *David Copperfield*', but does not suggest a reason for, or organising principle behind, this profusion of references; p.21.

self has emotions, faculties, and dispositions only because it also has a geography', draws particular attention to the notion of the 'prospect': the view from a removed site, often a window. 'Moving through space is less important for Jane than witnessing an expanse', because, in 'assum[ing] positions that allow her to gaze into the distance', she is 'permit[ted] an escape from painful exigencies' in restricting interiors and 'grant[ed] [...] an enlarged sense of life's possibilities'. 'The prospect', Chase explains, 'becomes a figure of the balanced self: secure (but not confined), open (but not exposed)'.⁶⁷ In *Jane Eyre*, this is intrinsically intertwined with gender; in *David Copperfield*, too, Dickens 'locate[s] David's own story on heights or hills with a view from above'. 'Such perspectives', Rosemarie Bodenheimer asserts, 'allow him safely to look down and back'.⁶⁸ On the day he moves into the tiny second-floor back in the Kenwigses' building, in a neighbourhood full of dirt and doleful chickens, Nicholas Nickleby '[sits] himself down to ruminate upon his prospects, which, like that outside his window, [are] sufficiently confined and dingy'; he feels so oppressed that he goes for a walk, swapping lodgings for street, dwelling for *flânerie*, attempting and failing to 'dislodge' his anxiety 'by speculating on the situations and prospects of the people who [surround] him' (v, July 1838, p.139). David, Pip and Harry are equally preoccupied with 'prospects', professional, romantic and literal; the pun seems almost too easy.

From the moment David finds his mother remarried and becomes aware of the 'flaws in the window-glass making ripples and dimples on the prospect', there is a wealth of examples to draw upon (ii, June 1849, p.33). In his outburst to Estella, Pip tells her that she has 'been in every prospect [he has] ever seen' (1 June 1861, pp.217-221, p.221). David's own romances are defined by blindness and clarity of vision: he and Agnes stand in a window when they finally articulate their feelings for each other, and Agnes herself is like a 'stained glass window in a church' (v, September 1849, p.159). (Churches were one of the only types of edifice that did not have to pay the window tax.) When we historicise these references, placing them within the context of the repeal debate, we begin to perceive extra layers of complication to the question of vision. David and Pip's personal and professional prospects are linked with physical prospects, emphasising that windows allow characters to dream, see the world, and

⁶⁷ Chase (1984), pp.85-91.

⁶⁸ Bodenheimer (2011), p.180.

imagine a place for themselves in the landscape.⁶⁹ They are thresholds, a film between the exterior and interior, public and private, society and home. Crucially, however, there is always a figure who has to pay for this privilege to see, and not everyone can afford the price. Mrs Crupp, the farcical and cantankerous landlady, foots the bill for David's windows; Aunt Betsey presumably cover a part of the charge in the rent she pays for the rooms. When Uriah stays in Buckingham Street for a night, David 'charge[s] Mrs. Crupp with particular directions to leave the windows open, that [his] sitting-room might be aired, and purged of his presence' (ix, January 1850, p.270). In reality, Mrs Crupp has left his windows open in more ways than one: she has left them unblocked. This elevates the role of the landlady in the *Bildungsroman*, because she becomes a kind of facilitator for the 'rising generation'. Thanks to the tax, prospects and dreams become precious commodities in lodgings.

The taxes from David's privilege to dream are used to finance the national interest, and this pins the individual dreamer within a complex social and political matrix. At moments of deeply personal, even solipsistic reverie at his window, he is an unwitting part of something bigger. Pip does not belong to the same matrix, because, like churches, the Inns of Court and Chancery were exempt from the charge. As he sits and waits for Herbert to arrive, he 'nearly madden[s] [himself] with looking out for half an hour', and writes his 'name with [his] finger several times in the dirt of every pane in the window' (23 February 1861, pp.457-462, p.461). This motion, though unconscious and mechanical, nonetheless asserts that the window – and what it has to offer – are wholly his property. He does not have to pay extra for his views; they are free for him to enjoy. But then again, he explains that he does not enjoy much of a view at all, lingering on and returning to the image of the dirty windows in Barnard's Inn. Almost beheaded when he opens a staircase window – 'for the lines [have] rotted away, and it [comes] down like the guillotine' – he settles for 'tak[ing] a foggy view of the Inn through the window's encrusting dirt'. Both the dirt and the view persuade him that 'London [is] decidedly overrated', a surprisingly grey prospect for the greenhorn, freshly minted as a gentleman. Having arrived at Barnard's Inn to the depressing sight of 'To Let To Let To Let, glar[ing] at [him] from empty rooms', he must eventually put his own 'To Let' bills in the windows of his chambers: a bankrupt and a failed

⁶⁹ Conversely, the members of the working classes experience 'a youth *without the right to dream*'. See Moretti (2000), p.x.

experiment in social rising, he must make way for the next young pretender (23 February 1861, pp.457-462, p.461; 27 July 1861, pp.409-413, p.409). If *Great Expectations* is, as Daniel Tyler maintains, a novel in which ‘an individual is no longer able to lay imaginative hold of the future’, then its windows neatly capture this theme.⁷⁰ They may offer untaxed views, but Pip reveals a continuous mistrust or ambivalence about what he sees.

The window tax, then, places a monetary and imaginative cost upon the visions that ‘rising’ individuals form for themselves – a cost that is ultimately paid by their landlords. It places these individuals squarely in the wider world, where taxes, and the individual privilege to see and dream, finance governmental policy. But the tax has as indelible an impact on culture as it has on politics. Windows, Dickens and David explain, are indispensable for writers, since looking out and looking in are vital in stimulating creativity. Returning to Canterbury, David says:

I stood in a window, and looked across the ancient street at the opposite houses, recalling how I had watched them on wet afternoons, when I first came there; and how I had used to speculate about the people who appeared at any of the windows, and had followed them with my eyes up and down stairs...

(xix/x, November 1850, p.596)

These glimpses of people in their homes are enough to set David off on flights of fancy. Much later, returning to Dover after his exile, he completes his novel while sitting in his old window. Though he is notoriously silent about the ‘aspirations, the delights, anxieties, and triumphs, of [his] art’, making *David Copperfield* a rather furtive *Künstlerroman*, we can be sure that the spaces in which he finds himself and the windows he looks through are crucial in driving his artistic development forward (xix/x, November 1850, p.600). With more windows and more glimpses, with views provided on the house, we can expect there to be more stories – and, perhaps, more storytellers.

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When Pip visits an ‘inn of minor reputation’ in his village, the landlord parrots Pumblechook’s version of events to him: that Pumblechook is the ‘man who made’ Pip (29 June 1861, pp.313-318, p.317). Pip vehemently rejects this interpretation of his life,

⁷⁰ See Tyler (2010), pp.104-105.

but his disgust masks its fundamental truth. The story is put forward in sarcastic tones by Mrs Joe:

Isn't it just barely possible that Uncle Pumblechook may be a tenant of [Miss Havisham's], and that he may sometimes – we won't say quarterly or half yearly, for that would be requiring too much of you – but sometimes – go down there to pay his rent? And couldn't she then ask Uncle Pumblechook if he knew of a boy to go and play there?

(22 December 1860, pp.241-245, p.245)

Pumblechook never actually sees his landlord; she only deigns to speak to him through a door. Renting his premises from Miss Havisham, it is particularly fitting that Pumblechook is a corn-chandler and seedsman by profession, because of the way he sows the seeds of Pip's narrative – his 'long chain [...] of thorns or flowers' (5 January 1861, pp.289-294, p.291). This idea has its roots in a much earlier novel. In the opening scenes of *Oliver Twist*, another depiction of a child's progress through the world, Oliver teeters on the verge of becoming a chimney sweep: a very different kind of climbing boy, forced to clamber through the tracheae of other people's houses until his own lungs are irremediably blocked. 'It chanced one morning', we hear, 'that Mr. Gamfield, chimney-sweeper, was wending his way adown the High-street, deeply cogitating in his mind, his ways and means of paying certain arrears of rent, for which his landlord had become rather pressing' (January 1837, pp.218-230, p.219). Taking Oliver on as an apprentice, Gamfield realises, would cover his five-pound debt to his landlord. At the last minute, Oliver is spared and Gamfield exits the narrative, presumably still grasping to make his rent. We are left with the sense that both Oliver and Pip's fates depend on a third party, an adult's relationship with his landlord. Their lives are not in their own small hands – the 'coarse hands' of which Pip becomes so ashamed (29 December 1860, pp.265-269, pp.267-269).

Dickens's protagonists, both children at this stage, find themselves embroiled in tenancy agreements that are not theirs, and which they do not necessarily understand. These two pivotal moments encapsulate the unexpected interactions and external forces – economic and spatial, in this case – that can alter the shape of a future. It is a sobering caveat to wider social narratives that celebrate individual agency, or *Bildungsromane* that feature solipsistic, castle-building individuals. These members of the 'rising generation' have lives that are governed by land. As they grow older, they become lodgers, tenants, or even landlords in their own right, internalising their experiences of the built environment until it starts to conjure up metaphors which have particular

resonances in the nineteenth-century context, and which help them make sense of their lives.

Mrs Joe's tirade, directed at both Pip and Joe, includes a significant aside: 'we won't say quarterly or half yearly [...] but sometimes – [Pumblechook must] go down there to pay his rent'. She accuses them of not understanding how time divides. Marking rent- or quarter-days is a neat method of structuring and organising a year. Traditionally, quarter-days were fixed dates – Lady Day, Midsummer Day, Michaelmas and Christmas – on which a tenant had to pay his dues to a higher power with a claim over him. He had to take stock of what he did and did not have, of which obligations he could and could not fulfil. He needed to have his affairs in order at this point. The huge weight of this occasion is clearly articulated in a *Household Words* article by Theodore Buckley, 'Quarter-Day' (1852). Its predominant tone is meditative:

Quarter-day comes round, and finds thousands, and tens of thousands of people, no richer, wiser, or better than they were last Quarter-day. Quarter-day finds people equally bigotted or stupid [...] Quarter-day cuts up the year into small pieces, and is a quieter informant as to the progress of time than New-Year's-Day. Yet, three months is a long time to think of [...] To how many does the three months run round, and present a barren account of nothing done? [...] each passing Quarter-day cuts off something of fair fame and profit from their future life.⁷¹

Quarter-days offer clear stages and temporal targets for progress. It is impossible for David, Pip or Harry to wrestle their lives towards targets like these; quarter-life crisis is, after all, a rather more recent phenomenon, or at least a phenomenon that has only recently been given a name. But in 'that great boarding-house, the world', perhaps writing one's memoirs – a deliberate effort to reflect upon one's first quarter – is a form of paying one's arrears.

⁷¹ [Theodore Buckley], 'Quarter-Day', *Household Words*, 26 June 1852, pp.342-345 (p.344). The words gain an added poignancy because Buckley died when he was just over thirty, four years after publishing the article.

Chapter 3

‘The Property of 1851’: The Great Exhibition and the Business of Hospitality

The Great Exhibition of 1851 was primarily organised as an industrial spectacle, but it also contained halls full of works of art; this was where Dickens’s contribution to British culture was memorialised in the form of sculptures of Oliver Twist and Little Nell by Robert Ball Hughes (Figure 26). For these two homeless children – Oliver is taken in by Fagin, a ‘spectable old genelman’ who offers him ‘lodgings for nothink’, and Nell and her grandfather wander from inn to inn – the Crystal Palace was just one other temporary structure in which to rest (January 1837, pp.430-441, p.439). The presence of Nell and Oliver also hinted at what was happening outside the Crystal Palace itself.



Figure 26: Robert Ball Hughes, *Oliver Twist*, 1842, John Tallis, *Tallis’s History and Description of the Crystal Palace*, 1852, II, p.38. Bodleian Library, 2 DELTA 1069

Their homelessness neatly reflected a wider concern in 1851: the Exhibition renewed the nineteenth-century preoccupation with domestic space, because it required accommodation to be made available for vast numbers of visitors to London. Over six million people entered the Crystal Palace.¹ Before and during the Exhibition year, commentators were concerned with the logistics of hosting such an event and scrutinised the growth of the hospitality industry, which was spurred into activity to meet new demand. The keepers of hotels, boarding-houses and private lodgings expected a sudden increase in business. Londoners, then, made preparations throughout the city, contemplating how they could both make visitors feel welcome and materially gain from their presence.

Such questions about the nature of hospitality were nothing new – Marcus Waithe, for example, has discussed how the Victorians often idealised medieval hospitality. Condemning the commercialisation of something that was once an ideal, Ruskin longed for the ‘archaic’ welcome offered to guests in the village inn, explicitly naming Mark Tapley, Mrs Lupin, and even Mrs Lirriper in his writing – though Mrs Lirriper’s establishment is on the Strand.² During the Exhibition, the locus of hospitality shifted away from the village and into London. John Tallis’s *History and Description of the Crystal Palace* (1852) is gushing: ‘London [...] received into her cordial embrace all these kindreds of people, and would have done so, had even twice the number demanded her hospitality; aye, and given food and shelter to them all’.³ This concerted, city-wide effort to house strangers, with an eye towards profits that partially undercut Tallis’s effusions, had far-reaching implications. The question of where people would stay forced Londoners to reassess the urban environment and their place within it. Unexpected neighbourhoods, particularly Leicester Square, were raised to prominence alongside the Exhibition site in Hyde Park; domestic spaces were transformed; unlikely members of the population presented themselves in a new light. At the same time, the influx of foreign visitors destabilised accepted ideas of national identity, culture and language. These visitors clustered in certain parts of the city, joining their countrymen and women and sometimes remaining beyond 1851. The number of foreigners coming in was not especially high in real terms – estimates hovered around 60,000 – but the

¹ Henry Cole, *Fifty Years of Public Work of Sir Henry Cole, KCB*, 2 vols (London: George Bell, 1884), I, pp.203-204.

² Waithe (2006), pp.26-31.

³ John Tallis, *Tallis’s History and Description of the Crystal Palace, and the Exhibition of the World’s Industry in 1851*, 3 vols (London: the author, 1852), I, p.27. Subsequent references appear in the text.

journalism and fiction of the period suggest otherwise.⁴ With their disproportionately large casts of foreign characters, texts about the Exhibition ultimately maintain that it is not enough to ask where visitors come from; it is equally crucial to know where in London they will go. As Waithe explains, strangers are seen as inherently causing disruption, but while this disruption was often thought to be dangerous in the case of the Exhibition, it was also recognised to be enriching.⁵

Critical readings of *Bleak House*, in particular, have discussed the Exhibition and Foucault, materialism, narratives of progress, and intellectual property, among other topics.⁶ This chapter argues that the business of hospitality – its growth, literal and conceptual messiness, and socio-political implications – also stimulated Dickens, both in and beyond *Bleak House*. Texts by Wilkie Collins, Henry Mayhew and George Augustus Sala show similar tendencies. A peripheral effect of the Exhibition, the expansion of the hospitality industry was recalibrated in literature and became a central focus for imaginative engagement. It offered various opportunities for the novelist, not least the opportunity to complicate established genres and test the strength of nascent ones: in the first case, farce, and in the second, the literature of sensation. When Henry Morley writes that the Exhibition ‘is the property of 1851, and must be history in 1852’, he was not aware that its effects would be felt long after its closure.⁷ Meanwhile, the physical ‘property of 1851’, the rented spaces that constituted the setting of the hospitality industry, ensured the Exhibition had a social and cultural significance far beyond Hyde Park. This chapter begins with a discussion of Prince Albert’s model houses for working-class families, exhibited at the Crystal Palace, before moving onto tales of chaos and cosmopolitanism in the prime lodging districts of 1851.

⁴ Jeffrey Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp.185-186.

⁵ Waithe (2006), pp.ix-xiii, 1-22.

⁶ See, for example, John Butt, ‘*Bleak House* in the Context of 1851’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 10 (1955), 1-21; Emily Heady, ‘The Polis’s Different Voices: Narrating England’s Progress in Dickens’s *Bleak House*’, *Texas Studies in English Literature*, 48 (2006), 312-339; Philip Landon, ‘Great Exhibitions: Representations of the Crystal Palace in Mayhew, Dickens, and Dostoevsky’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 20 (1997), 27-59; Pettitt, “‘A Dark Exhibition’: The Crystal Palace, *Bleak House*, and Intellectual Property”, in *Victorian Prism: Refractions of the Crystal Palace*, ed. James Buzard, Joseph W. Childers, and Eileen Gillooly (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), pp. 250-269.

⁷ [Morley], ‘What is Not Clear about the Crystal Palace’, *Household Words*, 19 July 1851, pp.400-402 (p.402). Subsequent references appear in the text.

Prince Albert, Henry Roberts, and the Model Houses for Families

In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens expresses disgust at the victories of Christopher Casby, town-agent to Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle and devious landlord of Bleeding-Heart Yard. Highlighting his benevolent appearance and the trust he earns, Dickens writes, ‘so, in the great social Exhibition, accessories are often accepted in lieu of the internal character’. At the Great Exhibition, he suggests, the ‘internal character’ of the nation is supposed to be legible through its fripperies and spectacles: a dependence on external signs that recalls his own urban aesthetic. If society functions along these lines, Dickens argues, we should carefully scrutinise the Casbys of the world. Casby is ‘a mere Inn signpost without any Inn – an invitation to rest and be thankful, when there [is] no place to put up at, and nothing whatever to be thankful for’ (iv, March 1856, p.107). Using yet another metaphor from the world of tenancy, Dickens paints Casby as a traditional emblem of hospitality that turns out to be treacherous. As Deborah Vlock puts it, Dickens’s is ‘a semiotic universe, where people are signs – the best of them true, connected, they and their speech, to some external reality; the worst of them disconnected, deceptive like mountebanks, *poseurs*, performers’. Casby ‘is one of the latter’.⁸ A first-person narrative in *Household Words* introduces a direct precedent for Casby: Bendigo Buster, the landlord of working-class accommodation in Church Lane, St. Giles’s, takes grotesque pride in the fact that ‘lanes and allies yield a profit’.⁹ Written in July 1851, the article follows Buster and his wife as they tour one of the exhibits in Hyde Park, a building of four model houses for working-class families, designed by Henry Roberts and commissioned by Prince Albert for the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes. This display was very popular, had no entry fee, and 250,000 people are said to have visited.¹⁰

‘Mr Bendigo Buster on the Model Cottages’ succeeds on two levels: it mocks Buster, condemning his cruelty as a landlord, and at the same time provides practical information about Albert’s project. Speaking to Buster, a representative in the office describes how the houses are revolutionary in construction and economically viable for investors. There are ‘a lot of plans laid out on the shutter’: pamphlets are available in the office for contractors who wish to imitate Roberts’s design (p.339). Indeed, one of

⁸ Vlock (1998), p.182.

⁹ [Morley], ‘Mr Bendigo Buster on the Model Cottages’, *Household Words*, 5 July 1851, pp.337-341 (p.339). Subsequent references appear in the text.

¹⁰ See Auerbach (1999), p.111.

these plans is replicated in *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes*, published in 1853 by Roberts himself (Figure 27). The ground-plan is wondrous in its simplicity – tidy and well-proportioned – and Roberts’s language (‘an opportunity is afforded for the exercise of parental watchfulness’, ‘in case of sickness’, ‘the building is thus rendered fire-proof’) suggests that he can perfectly predict the patterns of everyday life in this house, pre-empting any and all undesirable eventualities (p.57). If ground-plans in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* symbolise blithe and unrealistic visions for an individual’s future, something similar holds true here – only in this case, the ground-plan pertains to a collective *Bildungsroman*, the upward trajectory of an entire class.

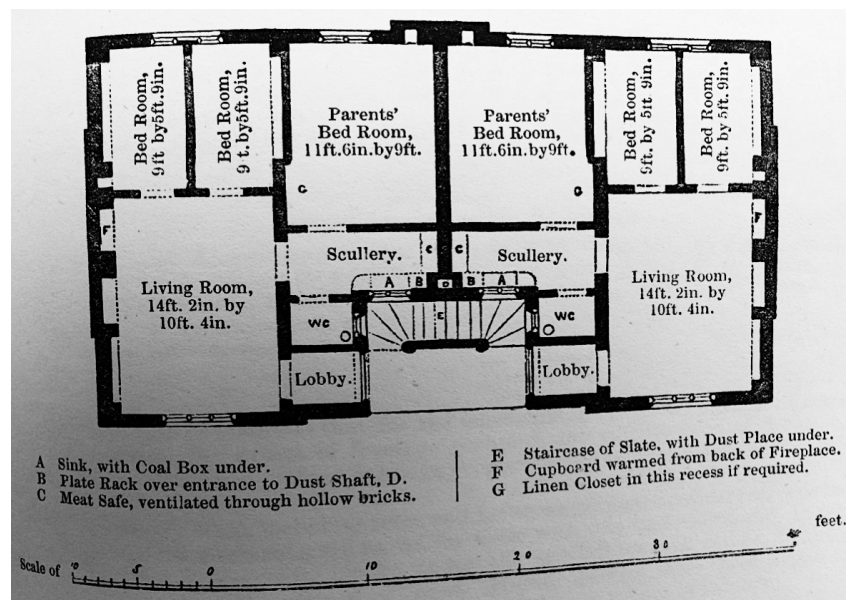


Figure 27: Henry Roberts, ‘Model houses for four families’, *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes*, 3rd edn, 1853, p.58. Bodleian Library, 2 DELTA 929

One of the main objectives of these initiatives was directly to counteract unscrupulous landlords like Casby and Buster. During the Exhibition year, there was a sense that the activities and habits of the artisanal classes could be controlled, and that model housing would eliminate a range of urban problems. Tallis, for example, suggested that re-housing labourers would automatically nudge them towards middle-class domesticity: the houses are ‘small’, ‘neat’ and ‘cheerful-looking’, affording ‘simple comfort’ to their inhabitants (p.207). This kind of happy domesticity is an unattainable ideal even at the best of times; it belongs to the discourse of marketing rather than realistic description. As Buster walks through the rooms, we realise there

are no people inside. He repeatedly draws attention to the artificiality of the set-up, noting its 'model living-room' and 'model grate'. He implies that the venture will only work if the house is populated by 'model children', and there is some truth in these words (p.338). He is basically walking through a ground-plan.

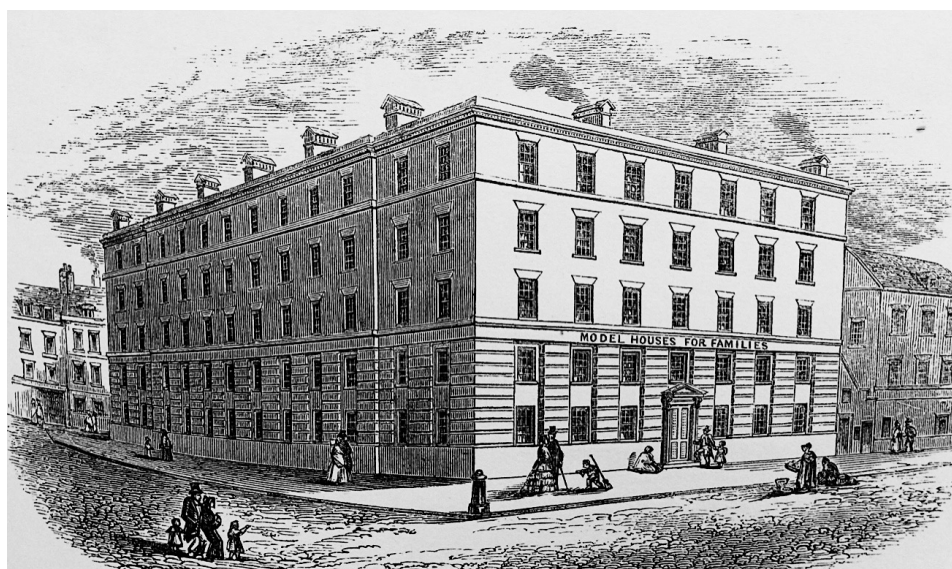


Figure 28: Henry Roberts, 'The model houses for families, in Streatham Street, Bloomsbury', *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes*, 3rd edn, 1853, p.49. Bodleian Library, 2 DELTA 929

Albert's model houses were moved to Kennington Park, and the SICLC built accommodation throughout the city. An image of Streatham Street in Bloomsbury depicts yet another dream house. In the image, the model lodging-house is surrounded by well-ordered groups of people, and everything down to the angle of the chimney smoke is symmetrical (Figure 28).¹¹ The SICLC opened further establishments in Bloomsbury, Pentonville, Hatton Garden and Drury Lane, but was not the only philanthropic organisation to build housing. For example, there were also establishments in Leicester Square, the neighbourhood around which this chapter revolves. Later in the century, John Hollingshead observed that 'two curved lines of tall and repulsive model lodging-houses give a tone of respectable poverty and dulness to the street'.¹² These probably refer to the Newport Dwellings and Sandringham

¹¹ For basement-storey accommodation, tenants paid two to four shillings a week; see Roberts (1853), p.11.

¹² John Hollingshead, *The Story of Leicester Square* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1892), p.43. Subsequent references appear in the text.

Buildings, constructed by the Metropolitan Board of Works in 1882 to re-house tenants after the development of Charing Cross Road and Shaftesbury Avenue.¹³

Of immediate concern to developers and tenants, these issues also drew the interest of writers. From the office of *Household Words* in May 1851, Dickens wrote to Mark Lemon: 'I have to meet Chadwick at the Laborers Model Cottages of the Exposition at 11 – shall leave here, at ½ past 10. Can we, by that time, effect an appointment?'¹⁴ Before inspecting the model houses with Edwin Chadwick, the illustrious social and health reformer, Dickens was eager to meet Lemon, a friend, farceur, fellow member of the Guild of Literature and Art, and editor of *Punch*.¹⁵ As Richard Altick and Richard Pearson have shown, *Punch* continually engaged with the progress of the Exhibition and even coined the name 'Crystal Palace'. Meanwhile, Patrick Leary explains that many of the decisions about *Punch* were made communally in public-houses.¹⁶ Before his literary career began in earnest, Lemon was the tavern-keeper at the Shakespeare's Head, Strand.¹⁷ This sense of easy conversation permeates the pages of the journal.

The long-established importance of the hospitality industry to the production of *Punch* made itself particularly felt in its coverage of the Exhibition. In 1850 and 1851, one of Lemon's key preoccupations was the provision of housing for Exhibition visitors. It is therefore possible to read *Punch* alongside *Household Words*: they were both published by Bradbury and Evans, their editors were close friends until Dickens's marriage collapsed, and their contributors addressed similar questions about the Exhibition, both within and beyond the pages of the journals. Moving away from the what they perceived as the imposed regimentation and utopian aims of the model

¹³ FHW Sheppard, 'Newport Market Area: Newport Estate', in *Survey of London*, ed. Sheppard et al., 48 vols (London: Greater London Council, 1900-2012), XXXIII-XXXIV: 'St Anne Soho' (1966), pp.360-379.

¹⁴ Dickens to Mark Lemon, 27 May 1851, in *The Unpublished Letters of Charles Dickens to Mark Lemon*, ed. Walter Dexter (London: Halton & Truscott Smith, 1927), p.104.

¹⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton was the Guild's President. One of its initiatives in the 1860s involved the construction of houses for struggling writers. Demonstrating his love of interior decoration, Dickens raised the issue of carpeting. The initiative failed, and the houses were eventually remodelled as 'ordinary residences'. See Dexter (1927), pp.87-88.

¹⁶ See Richard D. Altick, *Punch: The Lively Youth of a British Institution, 1841-1851* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), pp.613-633; Patrick Leary, *The Punch Brotherhood: Table Talk and Print Culture in Mid-Victorian London* (London: The British Library, 2010), pp.10-24; Richard Pearson, 'Thackeray and *Punch* at the Great Exhibition: Authority and Ambivalence in Verbal and Visual Caricatures', in *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Louise Purbrick (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp.179-205.

¹⁷ See Dexter (1927), p.1.

lodging-house, these writers found themselves most at home in messier spaces: in private lodgings, grimy hotels, and shadowy garrets.

From Hyde Park to Leicester Square: London in 1851

Punch drew attention to the bad grace of some Londoners, especially those living around Hyde Park, in the months before the Exhibition. ‘Open House at the Crystal Palace’ directly links this bad grace with a lack of hospitality, since an ‘open house’ is a space where all guests are equally welcome. In the article, ‘Young Mob’ is forced to plead his case, promises to respect Paxton as his host, and assures him that he shall not ‘become a brute and a savage when under [his] roof’.¹⁸ Had the piece been real, it would have failed to assuage lingering anxieties in the neighbourhood. In the summer of 1850, following heated discussions in Parliament, Hyde Park became the most likely venue. Journalists responded by suggesting that its use would amount to an act of ‘appropriation’, of ‘parcelling out the public property’ – in other words, the site was being turned into the organisers’ private property against the collective will of well-heeled West Londoners.¹⁹ Whether its immediate neighbours liked it or not, Hyde Park had primacy bestowed upon it almost overnight. It became the social centre of the city, a starting-point for walking tours – as in *Kelly’s Exhibition Guide Through London* (1851) – and a magnet for millions of visitors.

However, hospitality did not begin and end at Hyde Park. Other Londoners rose enthusiastically to the occasion, and showed an urge to display the place they called home; their house pride elevated their local neighbourhoods. In his novel *1851: or, the Adventures of Mr and Mrs Sandboys and Family, Who Came Up to London to ‘Enjoy Themselves’, and to See the Great Exhibition* (1851), illustrated by George Cruikshank, Henry Mayhew is struck by the ‘newly-painted’ shops dotted throughout the city.²⁰ Tallis explains:

¹⁸ ‘Open House at the Crystal Palace’, *Punch*, 1 February 1851, p.43. See also [William Makepeace Thackeray], ‘Multiple Classified Advertisements’, *Punch*, 19 April 1851, p.157; ‘Eastward Hoe for the Aristocracy’, *Punch*, 26 April 1851, p.184.

¹⁹ ‘The Case Against the Appropriation of Hyde Park’, *The Times*, 27 June 1850, p.5; [RH Horne], ‘The Wonders of 1851’, *Household Words*, 20 July 1850, pp.388-392 (p.392). For an exhaustive account of the debate surrounding potential venues and designs for the Exhibition building, see Auerbach (1999), pp.42-47.

²⁰ Henry Mayhew, *1851: or, the Adventures of Mr and Mrs Sandboys and Family, Who Came Up to London to ‘Enjoy Themselves’, and to See the Great Exhibition* (London: David Bogue, 1851), p.132. Subsequent references appear in the text.

All London was to be 'repaired and beautiful' [...] for the peculiar edification of foreigners; lest they should become bewildered among the mazes of Leicester-square, or the more aristocratic, [...] dreadfully monotonous, and coldly genteel straight lines of Hyde Park Gardens.

Tallis's London is full of shop-fronts, public-houses and hotels being made over, though the Sablonière Hotel in Leicester Square seems 'inwardly resolved not to give a new coat of paint to anything' (II, pp.17-18). In a piece eventually collected in *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens describes an old lady's cosy home; her neighbour, 'a bit of a Jack of all trades', is fond of 'experimentaliz[ing] on the old lady's property'. When the old lady is at the seaside, he 'completely efface[s] the name from her brass door-plate, in his attempts to polish it with aqua fortis'.²¹ A well-meaning effort to render a property more presentable backfires, and becomes a surprising comment on the fragility of identity in the city: an individual Londoner's mark is here today, gone tomorrow. In the Exhibition year, however, the situation was entirely different. Polishing and painting were part of a coordinated effort to redeem the identities of dingy neighbourhoods, and to make London appear hospitable.

Bachelard suggests that the process of polishing domestic objects reacquaints us with our houses, as 'we experience a sort of consciousness of constructing the house, in the very pains we take to keep it alive, to give it all its essential clarity'. Cleaning is a 'creative activity' that manages to vivify both the objects themselves, and our minds. At the same time, it is an act of appropriation: 'a human being can devote himself to things and make them his own by perfecting their beauty'.²² Bachelard's argument cannot, of course, be applied convincingly to Bella Wilfer, a reluctant housewife, or Jo the crossing-sweeper, an exploited drudge. Most significantly, Bachelard does not engage with questions of historical context or economics – a clear problem when discussing an unprecedented historical event (the Exhibition) and the redecoration of predominantly commercial properties (shops, hotels, taverns). With its sudden call to hospitality, the Exhibition created the conditions for his principles to work in very non-Bachelardian spaces. Londoners implemented small-scale regeneration projects both because they were proud of their city, and because they hoped to attract new customers to their businesses. As they did this, they found themselves reassessing the potential of structures and surroundings they had long taken for granted. People became open to the

²¹ Dickens, 'Curate – Old Lady – Captain', in *Sketches: First Series*, I, pp.12-23 (pp.21-22).

²² Bachelard (1994), pp.67-71.

magnetism of neighbourhoods only tangentially related to the Exhibition. Forgotten areas of London were demystified for the benefit of strangers, but ultimately this process of vivification had wider ramifications, especially for imaginative writers.

One of these neighbourhoods was Leicester Square, which, along with its immediate environs, became an alternative centre of London in 1851. The area, roughly bounded by Leicester, Soho and Golden Squares, was both a geographical place and an overdetermined literary space, layered with voices. Attempts to regenerate it physically were matched by frequent attempts to represent it textually, and the results were soon apparent: in its chaos, it became a necessary complement to the Crystal Palace, giving meaning to the Exhibition's categories and orderliness by virtue of being its direct opposite. *Punch* twice mentions attempts to salvage the area in the lead-up to the Exhibition. First, it is recommended that the statue in the square 'put as bold a face upon the visitors as possible' with a fresh coat of Dutch metal. Later, we learn of plans to fill this 'waste land' with a brand new, subsidiary exhibition: an enormous globe, constructed by James Wyld.²³ In Mayhew's *1851*, Major Oldschool, a fellow lodger at Mrs Fokesell's establishment, proposes that he and the Sandboys family 'drive to Leicester-square, and have a turn round the Great Globe', then 'step across to M. Cantelo's Incubator, and see the process of hatching chickens' (pp.236-237).²⁴ Leicester Square had countless strange amusements on offer, and, for Oldschool, these sights are just as worthy of attention at the Crystal Palace itself.

Mayhew mentions Leicester Square in the very first pages of *1851*: 'He [...] whose eye has rested upon no spot more green than the enclosure of Leicester Square [...] can form no image of the peace [...] that hallows the seclusion about and around the Lake of Buttermere' (pp.3-4).²⁵ Here, Leicester Square serves as an immediate point of contrast to the village of Buttermere, where the Sandboys family lives; for Mayhew, it is a place that is fundamentally and enduringly definitive of London. It began to enthrall the period's London writers, including the *Household Words* circle. (Though Mayhew did not contribute to *Household Words* himself, he was connected to the circle through the Jerrolds and also co-founded *Punch*). *Household Words* began publication

²³ 'A Billet-Doux from Queen Anne', *Punch*, 15 February 1851, p.63; 'A Hope for Leicester Square', *Punch*, 22 February 1851, p.74.

²⁴ On Cantelo's incubator for chicken eggs, see Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1978), pp.371-372.

²⁵ 'Enclosure' is a charged word for Mayhew to use, given the controversy surrounding the enclosure of common fields by landowners. On the Enclosure Acts, see GE Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosures in England: An Introduction to its Causes, Incidence and Impact, 1750-1850* (London: Longman, 1997).

in the year leading up to the Exhibition, and Deborah Wynne and Sabine Clemm have traced responses to the event in the journal.²⁶ However, its *flâneurs*, led by George Augustus Sala and Henry Morley, devoted more attention to the crowded streets of Leicester Square. In 1851, the square became a distorted analogue of the Exhibition, fed, in part, by the influx of visitors to the metropolis.

While Morley concentrated on depicting Wyld's Great Globe, emphasising initial plans to house it within the Crystal Palace itself, Sala went further.²⁷ His 1853 article, 'Leicester Square', reappropriates the rhetoric of the Exhibition: by referring to the square as the 'liver of London, often spoken of but little known', Sala mimics Lord Brougham, who had earlier described Hyde Park as the lung of the city.²⁸ What does it mean to be the 'liver of London'? The liver processes toxins; in classical physiology, it concentrates the passions; the myth of Prometheus ascribes to it an extraordinary capacity for regeneration. All of this reflects the character of Sala's Leicester Square. He begins by listing the plethora of entertainments in Savile House, a seventeenth-century mansion on the west side of the square that housed the likes of Lord Carmarthen and George Savile, before re-emerging as a weird and wonderful exhibition venue in the nineteenth century.²⁹ 'In the enlarged cosmopolitanthropy of that mansion,' Sala writes, 'it has thrown open its arms to the universe of exhibitions. One touch of showmanship makes the whole world kin' (p.65). Here, Sala encourages readers to contemplate the aims of the Exhibition; Leicester Square inadvertently fulfils many of these aims. For Sala, the Crystal Palace, meticulously designed to foster a dialogue between disparate groups of people, has a rival in Savile House, which achieved the same objectives through disorder and cacophony, competition and grandstanding. Sala has no doubt as to which version is more stimulating.

Sala's first article about Leicester Square was published in the Exhibition year itself. 'The Foreign Invasion' (1851) mentions the concentration of visitors from abroad in the neighbourhood, who have all arrived to see the Crystal Palace. Sala goes from restaurant to hotel – the Sablonière, the Dubourg – identifying new visitors and

²⁶ See Wynne, 'Responses to the 1851 Great Exhibition in *Household Words*', *Dickensian*, 97 (2001), 228-234; Sabine Clemm, *Dickens, Journalism, and Nationhood: Mapping the World in Household Words* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp.16-47.

²⁷ [Morley], 'The Globe in a Square', *Household Words*, 12 July 1851, pp.370-372.

²⁸ [Sala], 'Leicester Square', *Household Words*, 19 March 1853, pp.63-67 (p.63); 'Parliamentary Intelligence', *The Times*, 20 March 1850, p.2. Subsequent references appear in the text.

²⁹ On the history of Savile House, see Sheppard, 'Leicester Square, North Side, and Lisle Street Area', in Sheppard et al. (1900-2012), XXXIII-XXXIV: 'St Anne Soho' (1966), pp.441-472.

encountering familiar ones ('I had seen the same fat alien, with no waistcoat on, smoking, in the first-floor of the *Hôtel de l'Europe*, every day since I was a little child').³⁰ 'Perfidious Patmos' (1853) eloquently describes the 'maze of sorry thoroughfares' between Soho, Leicester Square, Lincoln's Inn Fields and Golden Square.³¹ The neighbourhood has become home to political refugees from the Continent, whose lodgings are marked out by 'a plurality of little brass name-plates' (p.26). If the door-plate in *Sketches by Boz* concentrates ideas about the vulnerability of urban identity, here it is a visible marker of the sheer number and proximity of refugees in London, desperate to etch out a place for themselves in a new city.

In two articles about foreign travel, 'Cities in Plain Clothes' (1852) and 'The Great Hotel Question' (1856), Sala names Leicester Square in passing. Constantinople boasts 'ramshackle hotels, claiming decided kindred [...] with the fifteenth-rate foreign houses in the back settlements of Leicester Square'; the hotelier of Florence's Casa Borbonica, meanwhile, has learnt his trade in this 'cosmopolitan but unsavoury locality' of London.³² By this point, then, Leicester Square had become a form of automatic shorthand for a certain kind of urban experience. It was disorganised, squalid, and difficult to navigate; it was increasingly cosmopolitan; it was full of peculiar entertainments, theatres and small businesses. Crucially, a disproportionately large number of these businesses belonged to the hospitality industry. They included hotels, boarding-houses, and cheap lodgings to let, which forced residents to negotiate different degrees of transience on a regular basis. More generally, it is clear that the neighbourhood was everything Hyde Park was not – and yet, perhaps because of this very difference, it was connected to Hyde Park in the literary imagination, and would not have flourished without the Exhibition.

The legacy of these pieces from the 1850s is immediately apparent. Long after the events in Hyde Park came to an end, Dickens's circle were still talking about Leicester Square, spurred on by Sala's early effort. Tom Taylor, who edited *Punch* from 1874, wrote *Leicester Square; Its Associations and Its Worthies* in the same year. John Hollingshead, one of the staff writers for *Household Words*, became the stage manager

³⁰ [Sala], 'The Foreign Invasion', *Household Words*, 11 October 1851, pp.60-64 (pp.62-63). Subsequent references appear in the text.

³¹ [Sala], 'Perfidious Patmos', *Household Words*, 12 March 1853, pp.25-29 (p.28). Subsequent references appear in the text.

³² [Sala], 'Cities in Plain Clothes', *Household Words*, 17 July 1852, pp.417-422 (p.419); 'The Great Hotel Question: Chapter the Third', *Household Words*, 1 March 1856, pp.148-154 (p.149). See also [Sala], 'Things Departed', *Household Words*, 17 January 1852, pp.397-401.

at the Alhambra Theatre in 1865 and published *The Story of Leicester Square* in 1892. Both Taylor and Hollingshead echo Sala's observations about the neighbourhood's remarkable propensity to remake itself. All three writers explain that the northern half of the Sablonière Hotel was once William Hogarth's private house. Similarly, Hollingshead points out that the Hôtel de Versailles used to be Charles Dibdin's Sans Souci Theatre (p.67). For Taylor, this illustrates a wider trend in the neighbourhood:

It is true that the vicissitudes of a London quarter usually follow a downward road. [...] It may resign itself to come down from mansion houses to hotels, as Covent Garden Piazza has done: or may fall still lower, as Golden Square has fallen, to lodging and boarding-houses of the cheaper and more cosmopolitan kind: or may become frankly industrial, like Soho Square.³³

Even hotels and boarding-houses, which are thought to represent the final step in the degeneration of a building, have a rich and often literary history in Leicester Square. It provides real-world examples for the process described by Dickens in 'Shops and Their Tenants', and confirms the ability of transforming neighbourhoods to generate an ongoing narrative engagement. It is their very unpredictability that sustains a walker's – and reader's – interest.

Dibdin and Hogarth were just two of the 'worthies' associated with the neighbourhood. Other 'distinguished lodgers and visitors' included Isaac Newton, Jonathan Swift, Joshua Reynolds, and various royal figures and foreign ambassadors, who either visited Leicester House or rented it directly (Taylor, p.163). It is interesting to note the connotative contradiction in terms between 'distinguished' and 'lodger'. By the time Taylor and Hollingshead were writing, to lodge in Leicester Square was to have very little money or reputation, but in some oblique way these shabby nineteenth-century lodgers were connected to the exalted figures who came before them. For Hollingshead, the area's rich genealogy rendered it the 'most central and most interesting spot in London': a centrality that was imaginative rather than geographical (p.5). As disparate sources came together, forming a complex cultural map of the neighbourhood, we begin to appreciate just how accommodating Leicester Square was. Novelists – Mayhew, Collins, Dickens himself – both drew upon and contributed to this hybrid discourse, turning the neighbourhood into a rich setting for fiction. From 1851 onwards, Leicester Square concentrated vast levels of energy, acting as a rival to Hyde Park. Most of Mayhew's *1851* takes place far away from the Crystal Palace; instead,

³³ Tom Taylor, *Leicester Square; Its Associations and its Worthies* (London: Bickers, 1874), p.4. Subsequent references appear in the text.

the Sandboys family finds itself in Cumberland, in Wimbledon, and on Craven Street, Strand. Cursty Sandboys does not even see the Exhibition. Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859-60) follows similar patterns of movement; it is set in 1850 and 1851, and characters are drawn away from Cumberland to lodgings in London. The Exhibition is mentioned a couple of times, and Walter Hartright escapes from Percival's spies in familiar territory: 'I [...] told the man to drive rapidly towards Hyde Park [...] I crossed Hyde Park, and made sure, on the open ground, that I was free'.³⁴ Hyde Park is a mere detour for Walter, a place where he instinctively knows that he will lose his pursuers. It remains a blank and 'open ground' without topography. Thus, Collins and Mayhew displace the main site of action in their Exhibition fiction.

Leicester Square, however, is shown in greater detail. Laura is smuggled into a building in an unidentified neighbourhood:

They never left the streets, and they never passed any gardens or trees. When the carriage stopped, it stopped in a small street, behind a square – a square in which there were shops, and public buildings, and many people. From these recollections (of which Lady Glyde was certain) it seems quite clear that Count Fosco did not take her to his own residence in the suburb of St. John's Wood.

(2 June 1860, pp.169-174, p.169)

Here, the clauses are paired around shared words ('they *never* left the streets', 'they *never* passed any gardens or trees'; 'when the carriage *stopped*, it *stopped* in a small street'), and with each repetition comes a sense of accumulating information. The passage reads like a series of double-takes. It is as if Laura, periodically glancing out of the window, first notices something like a 'square' – she registers this most simple of details, but then looks again, deeper and wider, for more information – 'a *square* in which there were shops, *and* public buildings, *and* many people'. She is actively engaging with her surroundings in spite of her abstracted state of mind; we catch her in the act of seeing, registering, remembering and describing. In this way, readers are able to construct an immediate picture of where she has been taken, and it turns out to be Leicester Square. Fosco has enlisted the help of his spies, Monsieur and Mrs Rubelle, who run a boarding-house in the neighbourhood: '[Mrs Rubelle] had arrived in London, about six months before, with her husband. They had come from Lyons; and they had taken a house in the neighbourhood of Leicester-square, to be fitted up as a boarding-

³⁴ Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White, All the Year Round*, 9 June 1860, pp.193-197 (p.196). Subsequent references appear in the text.

house for foreigners, who were expected to visit England in large numbers to see the Exhibition of 1851' (26 May 1860, pp.145-150, p.147).

A familiarity with Leicester Square also informs readings of Dickens's fiction. In the March 1850 number of *David Copperfield*, David takes Peggotty sight-seeing and stops at Miss Linwood's Exhibition in Savile House. He remembers it as 'a Mausoleum of needlework, favorable to self-examination and repentance', a silent room that encourages introspection rather than a reappropriated building in the middle of a noisy, crowded, cosmopolitan and richly layered neighbourhood (xi, March 1850, p.335).³⁵ It has nothing to do with entrepreneurship or ostentation. This tallies with Rosemarie Bodenheimer's observation that Dickens's novel has little or 'no urban vision', that David's 'memory [...] attaches just about everywhere *but* London'.³⁶ Dickens's other *Bildungsroman*, *Great Expectations*, was serialised soon after *The Woman in White* in *All the Year Round* and treads similar ground. Jaggers takes Pip to his home on Gerrard Street, Soho, 'rather a stately house of its kind, but dolefully in want of painting, and with dirty windows' (16 March 1861, pp.529-534, p.532). For Julian Wolfreys, this is 'reserved' writing, because neither the neighbourhood nor the house has any particular attributes. However, this is not just because they are extensions of Jaggers's own secretive nature and occupation, as Wolfreys believes. It is even more unlikely that 'Jaggers's home has the power to curtail the imagination's flight'.³⁷ Rather, Dickens's descriptive strategies have something to do with the kinds of stories his *Bildungsromane* are telling.

Both novels feature emigrations, voluntary and forced. Characters as diverse as Little Emily and Magwitch make new lives for themselves in the colonies, while David and Pip also go abroad to put their lives back together. David's travels on the Continent, 'seeking [he] know[s] not what, and trying to leave [he] know[s] not what behind', are far shorter than Pip's eleven years in Cairo, but Dickens quietly reminds us that emigration also works the other way, and can bring people into London (xix/x, November 1850, p.577). As these boys traipse through neighbourhoods full of Continental immigrants and refugees, they are actually passing harrowing scenes of self-fashioning. The transformations undergone by exiles are radically different to those

³⁵ On Miss Linwood's Exhibition of needlework, which closed in 1846 after forty years of business in Leicester Square, see Altick (1978), pp.229-230.

³⁶ Bodenheimer (2011), pp.177-178.

³⁷ Wolfreys (2012), pp.108-109.

performed by Dickens's heroes, and place David and Pip within a wider context of transient people; the stakes are infinitely higher for the exiles, who experience the homesickness, financial uncertainty, political preoccupations, trauma and distinctive split-perspective intrinsic to their condition.³⁸ Jagers, living among the grubby hotels, taverns and lodgings of cosmopolitan Soho, acts as even more of an anti-Wemmick than ever. Perhaps these passages lack detail because we are already meant to know the neighbourhood intimately. A reader who is well-versed in the lore of urban journalists, and who is receptive to a novelist's use of setting, is able to access hidden layers in narrative and character. We can break through these rich, complex layers if we have been following the story of Leicester Square in the 1850s; Dickens actively rewards those who have acknowledged the collaborative efforts of his circle. Such passages become an exercise in reading for the setting.

Bleak House reinstitutes the missing details. *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House* were published on either side of the Exhibition, and, while Hyde Park is not named explicitly in *Bleak House*, Leicester Square appears as a substitute. George keeps his shooting gallery here:

[George] makes his way to that curious region lying about the Haymarket and Leicester Square, which is a centre of attraction to indifferent foreign hotels and indifferent foreigners, racket-courts, fighting-men, swordsmen, footguards, old china, gaming houses, exhibitions, and a large medley of shabbiness and shrinking out of sight. Penetrating to the heart of this region, he arrives, by a court and a long whitewashed passage, at a great brick building, composed of bare walls, floor, roof-rafters, and skylights; on the front of which, if it can be said to have any front, is painted GEORGE'S SHOOTING GALLERY, &C.

(vii, September 1852, p.214)

The Leicester Square of *Bleak House* is instantly recognisable as belonging to 1851: it has a 'medley' of eccentric sights and characters, is composed of dingy passages, and is the 'centre of attraction to indifferent foreign hotels and indifferent foreigners'. Defined by extremes and contradictions – the violence of its 'fighting-men, swordsmen, [and] footguards', versus the facetiousness of its 'racket-courts', 'gaming houses and exhibitions' – it seems to delight in its own resistance to categories, and its rejection of the organisational principles of the Crystal Palace.

³⁸ For a nuanced account of exile, which brings about a 'need to reassemble an identity out of [...] refractions and discontinuities' and an 'originality' and 'plurality of vision', see Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2000), pp.173-186 (p.179, 186).

Ultimately, the Exhibition stimulated activity in curious neighbourhoods. Leicester Square, with its busy courts, lack of discipline, and, crucially, its many lodgings, was one of them, and Dickens's circle never lost its fascination for this 'real centre of London' (Hollingshead, p.9). Leicester Square generated a particular brand of non-fictional, psychogeographic text, which existed alongside and informed contemporary fiction. The rest of this chapter moves into the city's individual domestic spaces.

'The Beds Here are Quite Full': The Exhibition and the Hospitality Industry

Commentaries published before the opening of the Exhibition betray a sense of apprehension at the logistics involved in housing so many. WH Wills, writing for *Household Words*, asks, 'how are [the welcome invaders] to be housed? [...] The bulk of visitors will be of the artisan and humbler classes; yet, for such persons, has any temporary accommodation been planned, upon a comprehensive scale?'.³⁹ Dickens himself initially belonged to the Central Working Classes Committee, established 'for the purpose of communicating with the working classes on the subject of the Exhibition'.⁴⁰ One of the aims of the committee, of which Thackeray was also a member, was to facilitate the accommodation of working-class visitors to London. The committee was soon dissolved at Dickens's urging, and the responsibility for providing housing fell to individual speculators like Thomas Harrison.⁴¹

Harrison's establishment in Pimlico, built to lodge a thousand working-class visitors, received great publicity. Mayhew mentions it in *1851*: 'The two thousand boots of the thousand lodgers were to be cleaned at one penny per pair, and their one thousand chins [were] to be shaven by relays of barbers' (p.16). This 'Brobdignagian boarding-house' sounds frenetic and crazy, but essentially runs like clockwork (p.17). The mass of barbers, thousand lodgers, thousand chins, and two thousand boots all move in an uncannily mechanical fashion, creating an overall sense of regimentation. *1851* is, of course, a work of fiction, and intersperses its references to real arrangements with those that are imagined: the American showman PT Barnum agrees to pay England's poor

³⁹ [Wills], 'Chips – The Invited Invasion', *Household Words*, 8 February 1851, pp.475-477 (p.477).

⁴⁰ Cole (1884), I, p.189.

⁴¹ On the dissolution of the Committee, see Pettitt (2007), pp.267-268; and Auerbach (1999), pp.129-141.

rates if he can convert Somerset House into a ‘Grand Hotel for all Nations’ and rename it the ‘Xenodokeion Pancosmopolitanicon’. Each guest is ‘provided with a bed, boudoir, and banquet’; the phrase has a comical tidiness that echoes the eighteenth-century mock epic form. At any given hour, guests can also claim a ‘privilege’, ‘prerogative’, or ‘right’ to something, which implies that the hotel is a free and welcoming utopia (pp.2-3). More than anything, it is highly organised. From Harrison’s establishment for labourers to the Xenodokeion Pancosmopolitanicon in Somerset House, this type of large-scale measure is designed to pen visitors in, dictate their every movement, and prevent London from descending into chaos.

Mayhew’s joke is successful because he knows that housing arrangements in 1851 could never work so smoothly. Harrison’s venture was a disaster, and he had to request compensation from the Royal Commission. (They refused on the grounds that it was just a private speculation that had failed). Working-class visitors and their employers were mainly left to their own devices.⁴² The situation was equally haphazard for the middle classes. The Exhibition led to rapid developments in the hospitality industry; suddenly, renting out short-term accommodation was a viable, even mainstream, kind of business, fit for any Londoner who was entrepreneurial enough to take advantage of the climate. 1851 changed the status quo.⁴³ *Crouch’s Stranger’s Guide for London* lists around four hundred hotels, inns, taverns and principal coffee-houses, and around seven hundred lodging- and boarding-house keepers. Demand swiftly grew for short-term lets in central locations; in turn, demand led to overcrowding and overpricing. *Punch* registers misgivings about the general climate of anticipation: ‘Every little hotel and coffee-house keeper [...] is forming the most absurd expectations as to the prices he shall get for beds, fitted up in sculleries, garrets, and dust-bins!’. The writer warns that many of these expectations will not be fulfilled.⁴⁴ An article entitled ‘The Grand Hatching Year’ (Figure 29), meanwhile, appropriates an image from Cantelo’s incubator for chicken-eggs in Leicester Square. Eggs labelled with extortionate room-rates remain unhatched, and houses turn into ‘ommelette-soufflée’.⁴⁵

⁴² See Auerbach (1999), pp.141-144.

⁴³ On the ways in which 1851 was different to other years, see Kay, ‘A Little Enterprise of her Own: Lodging-House Keeping and the Accommodation Business in Nineteenth-Century London’, *London Journal*, 28 (2003), 41-53.

⁴⁴ ‘The Year of Expectations’, *Punch*, 8 March 1851, p.104.

⁴⁵ ‘The Grand Hatching Year’, *Punch*, 5 July 1851, p.14. See also ‘A Few Despairing Questions’, *Punch*, 17 May 1851, p.220.



Figure 29: 'The Grand Hatching Year', *Punch*, 5 July 1851, p.14. Bodleian Library, N.2706 d.10

In spite of these ominous predictions in the press, Mayhew prefers to present a sanguine picture of the industry during the Exhibition. In 1851 the Sandboys family begin their adventure with a clear plan to stay at the Bull and Mouth, a renowned inn, but when they arrive, they are greeted by a placard that announces 'THE BEDS HERE ARE QUITE FULL' (p.58).⁴⁶ Evicted from Mrs Fokesell's establishment on Craven Street, they traverse every lodging-district from the Strand to Stoke Newington, looking for the 'significant inscription of APARTMENTS TO BE LET, ELEGANTLY

⁴⁶ The Bull and Mouth actually existed: it is listed, with a note explaining that it has been renamed, in *Crouch's Stranger's Guide for London and Environs* (London: WA Crouch, 1851), p.157. The traditional coaching-inn was replaced by a hotel, the Queen's, in 1830. In taking the Sandboys family to Mrs Fokesell's establishment, then, Mayhew consciously moves away from reality and a nostalgic vision of hospitality to his own imaginative universe. See Walter Thornbury and Edward Walford, *Old and New London*, 6 vols (London: Cassell, Petter, Gaplin, 1880-6), II, pp.208-228.

FURNISHED' (p.117). Finding rooms full or costs prohibitive in these locations, they only come across Mrs Wewitz's, in Wimbledon, serendipitously: they see an advertisement in a cheesemonger's shop. This boarding-school for ladies is in a 'healthy situation', and Mrs Wewitz has 'thought it a pity to allow so large a house [...] to remain unoccupied, just at a time when so many strangers [are] wanting a place to put their heads' (p.117). The rhetoric of the hospitality industry is everywhere in the fiction of the Exhibition year, and at one level it reflects real circumstances – in 1850 and 1851, prospective landlords registered countless properties with house-agents like Alfred Cox and Samuel Lahee, whose own businesses flourished as a result. Advertisers in *The Times* unabashedly promoted properties as far away from Hyde Park as Shepherd's Bush, Bishopsgate, and Fulham.⁴⁷ There was a sense that the Exhibition was something that everyone had a right to capitalise on, and the flurry of advertising was one manifestation of this right.

Both Mayhew and *Punch* focus on the way this advertising made rhetoricians out of ordinary Londoners. 'Mrs Baker's Second Floor', published in *Punch*, is framed as a domestic disagreement between Mr and Mrs Baker, but it is as much a battle of discourse as a battle of opinion. While Mrs Baker is intent on letting her 'second floor' for the Exhibition, Mr Baker points out that the second floor merely comprises 'the garrets, and you know it'. Mrs Baker, however, is more imaginative than her husband, and gets an advertisement drafted by a 'great scholar' who lives at the nearby milk-shop:

TO THE STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND.—A SISTER of the Great HUMAN FAMILY (about to visit London) proffers the Palm Branch of Hospitality! Her TENT is pitched within a pleasing pilgrimage of the CRYSTAL PALACE; the oasis of the Regent's Park shining in its emerald green betwixt her and the WORLD'S FAIR. A Second Floor, divided into two rooms, is the happy home – on the most moderate terms – awaiting a small Family. A gentleman and his wife may be accommodated with more than Arab cordiality.

Mrs Baker and her friend at the milk-shop have created the most extravagant advertisement imaginable. Its language combines stereotypical tropes from the *Arabian Nights* with Biblical phrases.⁴⁸ There is silly, comic plosive alliteration here – 'proffers the palm branch [...] pitched within a pleasing pilgrimage' – as well as deliberately

⁴⁷ See, for example, the following property advertisements in *The Times*: 28 October and 24 December 1850, p.10; 10 January and 20 May 1851, p.10.

⁴⁸ In the King James Bible, Exodus 2.22 reads, 'and she bare him a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land'.

archaic inflections ('betwixt'). Composed of ill-fitting literary traditions forced together, and revealing Mrs Baker's hypocrisy ('no persons of the Turkish persuasion need apply'), the advertisement still manages to showcase imaginative and rhetorical audacity. And it works: the article ends, 'but I'm interrupted by a double-knock [...]. Two foreign brothers come, as MR. SOCK says, to demand the hospitality of our second floor'.⁴⁹ Thanks to the unprecedented call for accommodation in 1851, anyone in London could become a writer of a kind. 'Mrs Baker's Second Floor' comes to the rather modern conclusion that an advert is not just a commercial aid, but a work of art – a genre in its own right.

Mrs Baker's resourcefulness has seen her transform from a housewife to a landlady. The Exhibition gave many such individuals the chance to enact tiny stories of metamorphosis. Long characterised as either static and farcical or as benignly eccentric figures of pathos, the fictional landladies of 1851 are different. They are not chiefly landladies out of financial necessity, and neither do they have a sincere commitment to the tenets of hospitality. Instead, they are opportunists animated by the event. Mrs Baker, Mrs Rubelle, Mrs Wewitz and Mrs Fokesell all have extensive back-stories. Collins's Mrs Rubelle slips effortlessly from identity to identity: nurse, housekeeper in all but name, jailer, temporary lady's maid in Leicester Square. All the while, she is the landlady of a boarding-house and a spy, a mistress of disguises. Mayhew, too, emphasises that these women can exist in contexts beyond the walls of their establishments: Mrs Wewitz, as a boarding-school mistress, and Mrs Fokesell, as a sailor's wife. Mrs Fokesell even visits the Exhibition, allowing her lodging-house to descend into chaos in her absence. These landladies are not fundamentally defined by their professions, because they have not been landladies for long. They are simply making the most of the season and will probably cease to be landladies after London empties out again.

This is what distinguished 1851 from other years; it was a catalyst for businesses and for narratives that revolved around gleeful, puckish characters. These middle-aged women may seem unlikely candidates for mischief, but they revel in the experience of being landladies, have a nose for the national feeling, and find a way of exploiting it to their own ends. The dominant mood is carnivalesque, and, as the whole of London hosts a Feast of Fools, landladies offer a corrective to the pompous side of the Exhibition.

⁴⁹ 'Mrs Baker's Second Floor', *Punch*, 26 April 1851, p.183.

‘Fokesell’ is a pun that simultaneously alludes to the landlady’s ability to generate income (‘folk sell’) and her kinship with sailors in her street-ship (the ‘forecastle’ is the space under the deck where the sailors live). A ‘forecastle-joke’, which appeared in William Smyth’s *Sailor’s Word-Book* (1867), is a practical trick ‘played upon greenhorns’, rather like the Sandboys family.⁵⁰ In using the sailors’ pronunciation, ‘fo’c’sle’, rather than ‘forecastle’, Mayhew alludes to one of the aims of the Exhibition – the blurring of class boundaries and distinctions to create a human family – and adds a new dimension to Mrs Fokesell’s entrepreneurship. *1851* is not the story of a paternalistic middle class, finding accommodation for visitors in a building like Harrison’s; instead, it presents the financial triumphs of a figure whose own place on the class scale is ambiguous. Ultimately, the landladies of the Exhibition season present a neat study of opportunism as an economic and ethical concept. There is clearly a moral ambivalence to opportunism: to take advantage of opportunities and greenhorns for purely personal gain, to be mercenary, can tip into selfishness and disingenuousness; it involves turning a situation to immediate profit. At the same time, however, opportunism and entrepreneurship are two sides of the same coin. Entrepreneurship is about spontaneity rather than meticulous planning, rewarding resourcefulness, quick thinking, fast talking, and impeccable social reflexes. Alongside the highfalutin official narrative of the Exhibition are alternative narratives that splinter off from it, uncontrollable and even unsanctioned: a display, not of political and economic might, but of cheerful hustling. In prioritising their own self-interest, these unexpected characters insert themselves into the wider sweepings of the nation – and suggest that ‘the nation’ is composed of its individual mercenaries.

Under the auspices of chameleonic and enterprising landladies, familiar domestic spaces are rendered unfamiliar. Mrs Fokesell’s establishment is compared several times to a ship, but unlike the tidy, ship-like homes in *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, this space is fundamentally unstable.⁵¹ As the demand for accommodation grew, landladies dreamed up inventive measures to profit from it. London was suddenly full of beds, because a bed was all a visitor would need; landladies were bed peddlers. In *Punch*, we hear that ‘somebody has even

⁵⁰ ‘forecastle’, n.C.1., in the *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <www.oed.com/view/Entry/72986> [Accessed: 9 August 2016].

⁵¹ On Dickens’s ship-homes, see John Carey, *The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens’ Imagination* (London: Faber, 1991), pp.42-49.

proposed to make the bed of the Serpentine available'.⁵² 1851 normalises this ridiculous proposal: it becomes perfectly acceptable for Mrs Fokesell to offer Mr and Mrs Sandboys a hammock in a cellar, a 'wretched wabbling, swingy substitute for the substantial security of a four-post' (Figure 30). It is also acceptable to accommodate their daughter in Mrs Fokesell's bed, their son 'on the top of the grand piano', the footman 'on the knife-board', and various noblemen in 'tent[s] on the tiles'. Mrs Fokesell's neighbour has 'put a feather bed into her warm bath, and let it off to a young East Injun at a guinea a week' (pp.59-61). Inside the Crystal Palace, there was a bed that doubled as an alarm clock (Figure 31). Mrs Fokesell's ingenuity, and her willingness to ostentatiously misuse the things around her, similarly encourages us to reconsider the properties of everyday objects that once formed an unassuming part of the domestic setting. These improvised measures, in accommodation that has been cobbled together for the Exhibition, reveal the ability of London's spaces to yield new surprises and become more physically and imaginatively elastic.



Figure 30: George Cruikshank, 'Looking for Lodgings', Henry Mayhew, 1851: or, the Adventures of Mr and Mrs Sandboys and Family, Who Came Up to London to 'Enjoy Themselves', and to See the Great Exhibition, 1851, p.54. Bodleian Library, Johnson e.2350

⁵² 'The Great (Expected) Season of 1851', *Punch*, 18 January 1851, p.30.

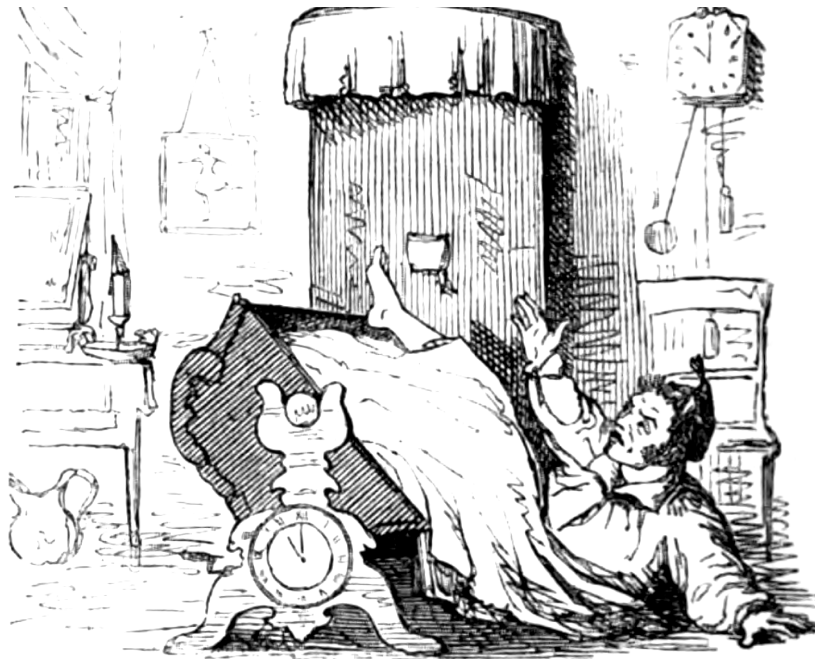


Figure 31: 'Don't Sleep Upon It', *Punch*, 7 June 1851, p.240. Bodleian Library, N.2706 d.10

There is something odd about the preponderance of beds in Exhibition fiction. The event was, after all, devoted to displaying ingenious, exotic or breath-taking objects: that was one of its fundamental purposes. It invested objects with ideological weight, turning things into symbols of national power and identity.⁵³ Objects in the Crystal Palace were carefully positioned and meticulously catalogued, but these texts imply that the most fascinating object in London was the humble bed, at once drawing attention to it and defamiliarising it. A bed inside a bedroom is meant to be a cocoon inside a cocoon; a space for sleep, sex and dreaming, it unites safety and chaos, vulnerability and abandon, the primal body and the illogical and unique terrors of the individual subconscious. It is, above all, private. Lodging-house beds are nothing like this, especially in the chaotic Exhibition year. A turn-up bedstead in a lodging-house dismantles all of these ideas on a daily basis. Describing the temporary structure of the Crystal Palace, Wills compares it to one: 'The proposed edifice could be constructed at Birmingham, [...] "brought home" to Hyde Park ready-made, and put up like a bedstead'.⁵⁴ Paxton, the most feted man in the land, has done nothing but make a glorified turn-up bedstead – a bathetic suggestion, to say the least. As the Crystal Palace transforms into something almost exclusively meant for the use of single lodgers,

⁵³ See Clemm (2009), p.23.

⁵⁴ [Wills], 'The Private History of the Palace of Glass', *Household Words*, 18 January 1851, pp.385-391 (p.386).

domestic and rented space starts to encroach upon this most public of events. If the Exhibition offers up one way of reading objects, these texts use beds to emphasise and celebrate how object culture actually works: thanks to constant misuse, reuse, abuse, appropriation and makeshift arrangements, the most normal objects retain the potential to astonish, amuse, or frustrate.⁵⁵

In 'What is Not Clear about the Crystal Palace', Morley mocks a speculator who owns property near the Exhibition but has been unable to profit from it (p.400). The main point of Morley's joke is clear: he believes it is impossible for a truly ambitious landlord to lose £10,000 in 1851. This forms the cornerstone of Collins and Mayhew's engagement with the Exhibition. Karen Chase and Michael Levenson compare *1851* with *London Labour and the London Poor*, published in volume form in the same year, registering surprise that Mayhew should publish a comic novel in the wake of his research on London's streets; indeed, an 1850 panorama book by Sala reveals similar expectations of Mayhew's contribution (Figure 32). But Cursty Sandboys's inability to enter the Exhibition building itself is actually 'the author's opportunity. For in failing to enter the great interior space, [he] wanders in the still greater exterior space', where he sees the 'diffuse social effects' of the event.⁵⁶ He comes across unlikely people, who stake a claim to the Exhibition without apology or awe. Focusing on some of the compelling opportunists of 1851 – the men and women who decided to let rooms, without necessarily having any experience of the business – Mayhew and Collins ultimately prove their own ability to adapt to new circumstances. In other words, they are opportunistic writers indulging the opportunism of their characters. The next section explores what happens when these opportunists begin to rub shoulders with visitors from beyond the nation's borders.

⁵⁵ On the notion that we only notice things when they stop working, see Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28 (2001), 1-22.

⁵⁶ Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, 'Mayhew, the Prince, and the Poor: The Great Exhibition of Power and Dispossession', in Buzard, Childers and Gillooly (2007), pp.123-137 (pp.125-126).



Figure 32: George Augustus Sala, *The Great Exhibition: 'Wot is to Be', or Probable Results of the Industry of All Nations in the Year '51*, 1850, np. Bodleian Library, (OC) 50.169

'The Receptacle of the Denizens of All Nations': Cosmopolitanism, Rented Spaces, and Literary Form

In their manipulation of the hospitality industry, London's landlords and landladies were drawing upon one of the pillars of English identity: 'Old English hospitality', which was a celebrated national virtue.⁵⁷ The paradox at the heart of this idea is clear. If an Englishman or Englishwoman was willing to welcome others to their hearth, they could only hope that their visitors would not disrupt the workings of the space. The sense of an uncomplicated national identity was constantly under threat, destabilised by one of its own defining characteristics. *Punch* wastes no time in testing the fissures in this kind of thinking. 'Old English Hospitality' explains: 'A wealthy householder of ancient Tory principles, who keeps a shop in an opulent metropolitan parish, in order to prevent foreigners, during the approaching Exhibition, from interrupting his business by coming in to ask the way, intends to put up a bill in the windows [...] "ICI ON NE PARLE PAS FRANÇAIS"''.⁵⁸ As foreign visitors travelled to England, the hospitality of 'mine host' was challenged in an unprecedented way. What was happening inside the Crystal Palace obviously brought questions of nationhood to the fore; meanwhile,

⁵⁷ Waithe (2006), pp.17-18.

⁵⁸ 'Old English Hospitality', *Punch*, 8 February 1851, p.56.

the overcrowding of hotels, boarding-houses, and neighbourhoods like Leicester Square forced people from different countries into close contact. For writers, this was a chance to experiment with genre – to inject established genres with new life, and to test the potential of new ones. New narratives and relationships were realised when a compact space became a ‘receptacle of the denizens of all nations’, yielding opportunities for farce, sensation fiction, and a conscious meditation on literary cross-pollination.⁵⁹

Amanda Anderson’s broad definition of cosmopolitanism suggests it is a ‘reflective distance from one’s original or primary cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in common humanity’.⁶⁰ During the Exhibition, both *Household Words* and *Punch* parodied the affectations of faddish cosmopolites – *Household Words*, in the voice of Bendigo Buster, whose description of Albert’s model houses is peppered with Latin mistranslations and references to China, and *Punch*, in an imaginary letter from a reader who laments her husband’s sudden Frenchification.⁶¹ As Tanya Agathocleous has shown, the connotations of the term ‘cosmopolitan’ were debated in public channels throughout the Exhibition year. For Marx, it was synonymous with the evils of free trade. For Exhibition officials, meanwhile, it pithily expressed the ethical objectives of 1851: the creation of an international human family, the promotion of peace, and the tolerance of others while maintaining a sense of English worth.⁶² In 1851, Mayhew exposes the self-congratulatory nature of this cosmopolitanism when a French hairdresser lodging at Mrs Wewitz’s establishment paints an ‘elaborate allegory, commemorative of the cosmopolitan character of the Great Exhibition’. The picture features Britannia, ‘attended by the four quarters of the globe’, throwing down a boxing-glove (p.195). Mayhew, Dickens and Collins are also interested in the intersection between cosmopolitanism and hospitality. While hospitality comprises a willing and warm

⁵⁹ Redding, *London and the Exhibition: The Stranger in London* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1851), p.3.

⁶⁰ Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p.63.

⁶¹ ‘The Cosmopolitan Before and After the Exhibition’, *Punch*, 19 July 1851, p.44. Anderson’s work on the figure of the cosmopolite in *Little Dorrit* has opened up similar lines of inquiry in other Dickens texts: to Rigaud, Henry Gowan and Miss Wade, critics have added Magwitch, Pip, Sydney Carton, the Landlesses, Skimpole, and Mrs Jellyby. See Tanya Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.34-35, 107-114; Anderson (2001), pp.63-90; John McBratney, ‘Reluctant Cosmopolitanism in Dickens’s *Great Expectations*’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 38 (2010), 529-546.

⁶² See Agathocleous (2011), pp.29-53.

reception of guests, cosmopolitanism goes deeper. It suggests a celebration of eclecticism and an openness to influence. During the Exhibition year, English landlords, landladies and lodgers were obliged to share houseroom with foreign visitors; this casual and unregulated interaction created the conditions for reassessing not only the nation's political might, but its culture.

In the Crystal Palace itself, there was an urge to use the objects on display to wider ideological ends; it was possible for viewers to take them as a fundamental representation of what it meant to be Chinese, or American, or French. Ultimately, however, this desire to neatly define and sequester other nations remained hollow. When Mayhew refers to the 'magnificence of the silks and velvets from Lyons' (p.160, 214), we know that the fictional Lyons actually sends two sets of products to London: the other being Collins's Rubelle couple, who set up a boarding-house for foreign visitors in Leicester Square. Objects in the relatively manageable environment of the Crystal Palace had their counterparts in the urban landscape, which was less easy to monitor or control. The line between the Crystal Palace and the rest of London is blurred beyond recognition in an article in *Punch*. Nonplussed by the sparseness of the American section of the building, the writer recommends that America 'should be allowed to utilise its empty space by letting it out in lodgings':

Why should half-a-dozen families be crowded into one house, several persons into a room, and three or four in a bed, when there is a quantity of waste ground in the Crystal Palace itself which might be profitably occupied? [...] the Yankee Commissioners [...] might describe it as 'Eligibly situated within a few minutes' walk of Austria, Russia, France, and Switzerland, [...] and immediately opposite the largest looking-glass in the world, by which the process of shaving may be greatly facilitated.'⁶³

When Londoners thought about one issue, the international displays in Hyde Park, it was impossible to avoid another, infinitely more insidious in their eyes: where foreign visitors would be housed, and what effect they would have on the neighbourhoods and domestic spaces they infiltrated. Were foreign visitors to sleep in the Crystal Palace, they would have no reason to leave that enormous greenhouse at all; they could be watched through the glass and maintained like tomatoes. But this could not happen. For every gaping, catalogued space in the Crystal Palace, there was a teeming boarding-house or hotel in a seamy pocket of London, concentrating intrigues and unlikely interactions between people.

⁶³ 'A Hint for the American Non-Exhibitors', *Punch*, 14 June 1851, p.246.

In certain cases, hotels tried to perpetuate a myth of sequestered nations – a feeling perfectly articulated by a *Punch* cartoon, which portrays three guests at a hotel, peeking reluctantly out from their separate rooms, speaking their own languages to the equally uncertain maid, and refusing to talk to each other (Figure 33).



RATHER ALARMING; Or, HOTELS IN 1851.

No. 7.—*Frenchman*. "MADÉMOISELLE! MES BOTTES, S'IL VOUS PLAÎT!"
 No. 10.—*Italian*. "SIGNORA, AVRÒ IO L'ACQUA CALDA STA MANE?"
 No. 6.—*German*. "WO IST MEIN SODA WASSER?"

Figure 33: 'Rather Alarming', *Punch*, 18 January 1851, p.28. Bodleian Library, N.2706 d.10

Here, rented spaces appear to cement the distinctions between nations that the Exhibition itself tried to remove. Mayhew's descriptions of the French Gardes Nationales, who come to stay at Mrs Wewitz's, draw upon unshifting clichés: moustaches, 'gynolatry', smoking, and fastidiousness about appearance. The 'Frenchness' of these Frenchmen is brazen: Miss Wewitz is 'horrified to find that, in front of her best bed-room windows [...] there dangled some dozen of newly-washed shirt collars' (pp.164-165). There is an exact visual equivalent in *Punch*: over the caption 'Perfidious Albion lets his drawing-room floor to a distinguished foreigner – the result!!' is an image of about a dozen bearded men, smoking, hanging up laundry lines, and cutting their hair in one room (Figure 34). The Wewitzes – indeed, the whole of 'Perfidious Albion' – are outraged at the extent to which their guests fulfil stereotypes, refuse to integrate, and yet make themselves at home, indicating that being

‘at home’ is more a psychological state than a geographical one. In unofficial contexts, it seems, the enforced cosmopolitanism of 1851 did little to increase international understanding, especially when guests overstayed their welcome.



Figure 34: ‘Perfidious Albion Lets His Drawing-Room Floor’, *Punch*, 26 April 1851, p.174.
Bodleian Library, N.2706 d.10

These stereotypes provided new comic fodder for lodging-house farces. Most of the jokes in William Brough’s *Apartments*, ‘*Visitors to the Exhibition May Be Accommodated*’ are xenophobic, demonstrating, in Marty Gould’s words, ‘the social disruption caused by the Great Exhibition’ and ‘the intrusive and demanding incursions of the foreign into the British domestic sphere’.⁶⁴ Mayhew’s approach, however, is more complicated; *1851* is interesting because it showcases a motley collection of home-grown idiots. Mrs Fokesell’s foreign lodgers largely keep to themselves, except at key moments: whenever the Sandboys family cause a particularly cacophonous problem, they descend to watch the fallout. Mayhew invariably reverts to the language of the theatre during these comic set-pieces: the foreign lodgers are ‘enjoying the scene’

⁶⁴ Marty Gould, *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and the Imperial Encounter* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.128. Opening on 14 May at the Princess’s Theatre after a performance of Lovell’s *The Wife’s Secret*, Brough’s farce was an ‘unqualified success [...] it sparkle[d] with happy hits and dry allusions to passing events. The applause at the end was uproarious and the author called for’. See ‘Drama’, *The Lady’s Newspaper*, 17 May 1851, pp.276-277.

and the establishment rings with ‘the laughter “of all nations”’ (p.73, 83). These lodgers comprise a new audience to English follies and farces. For Mayhew, 1851 becomes a time for self-reflection as much as for the observation of others – because ultimately, who is really being laughed at? The foreign visitors, or their hosts?

Upon reading *1851*, then, we feel a persistent sense of déjà vu, because the novel relies on a number of familiar lodging-house farce tropes to advance its plot. Mrs Fokesell’s establishment is almost a parody of itself: slapstick accidents bring lodgers into painful contact, there are repeated cases of mistaken identity, and the novel concludes with a revelation that the world is smaller than it appears. A disparate group of strangers is, in fact, linked by mutual acquaintances, and forms further links through a marriage in the final pages. The longer lodgers stay, the more eccentric they become: Mrs Quinine, one lodger, is an outrageous hypochondriac, Major Oldschool has many tics, and both have their origins in theatrical caricature. Finally, the novel’s most magnetic character is a landlady: Mrs Fokesell, a dedicated eavesdropper, who is meddling, impertinent, and garrulous. She also has unrivalled power; using her authority to accept and evict, she engineers, then regulates, narratives. It is curious that such an insistently public, unprecedented event generates insistently domestic, familiar plots. This suggests that, despite the grand claims of the Exhibition organisers, it is ultimately business as usual for the everyday citizen – if at a higher octane. The ways of living together in London are so embedded that it will take more than the Exhibition, a mere flash in the pan, to change any practices or habits. People continue as they always have, and the Exhibition simply brings these habits into focus.

But Craven Street, the site of Mrs Fokesell’s lodgings, is about ten minutes away from the heart of Leicester Square; when the Sandboys family is evicted and wanders around, searching for a new place to stay, they are perilously close to being sucked into a very different kind of narrative. Exhibition texts that use lodging-houses as their primary settings, and recycle established frameworks from farce, lull readers into a false sense of security. Readers and audiences feel cosy in these spaces and can nestle within the pages of these stories – thus, the points of departure are starker when they finally come. Dickens and Collins take advantage of this. They are drawn more to the cosmopolitanism of the boarding-house than that of the Crystal Palace, because the boarding-house is a space where people are relatively unguarded. If they go to the Crystal Palace to see and be seen, they come to their lodgings to rest. In this supposedly unthreatening environment, the sense of breach is heightened when an unexpected

guest, a new kind of lodger, also takes a bed. At the same time, the interaction between people is at its most sustained and everyday here. Foreign lodgers are given houseroom, and hence are able to become entrenched in their surroundings.

They also become entrenched in particular neighbourhoods, and Leicester Square was the most significant of these. Most of the French and German hotels in contemporary registers were located in Leicester Square, and they caused clusters of foreign nationals to form. Mayhew observes that ‘Leicester, [...] what with [...] the denizens of all nations swarming on every side of it, was as full as it could well hold’ (pp.119-120). The cosmopolitan nature of Leicester Square’s rented spaces had long made it reverberate with plots: as Hollingshead puts it, ‘Leicester Square has always been a favourite district of plotters’, whether of the criminal or literary variety (p.20). Hollingshead and Taylor recount, in lurid detail, the case of Theodore Gardelle, a Swiss miniaturist who lived at 37 Leicester Fields, killed his landlady, hid the dismembered body in the garret, and misled the other lodger about her whereabouts. Plots quietly but steadily amassed in the neighbourhood’s foreign hotels, which were implicated in royal scandal, robbery, violent assault, suicide, inheritance theft, and unexpected windfalls.⁶⁵ A multitude of stories converged in the rented spaces of Leicester Square, albeit with little direction or discipline.

The Exhibition brought both by concentrating Londoners’ focus on a very specific issue: political exile. After the Continental revolutions of 1848, émigrés and refugees fled to London, joining the small German, Italian, French, Polish and Hungarian colonies that already existed in the city. London was by no means the only destination for refugees – they also went to France, Switzerland, the Ottoman Empire, and the USA – but British asylum policy was almost uniquely generous. Anyone could enter the country for any reason and, throughout the nineteenth century, not one refugee was made to leave; there was an Alien Bill in place for a fleeting period, between 1848 and 1850, but it never resulted in deportations. Coupled with a vaunted belief in freedom of speech, freedom of association, the trial of all residents according to one rule of law regardless of their provenance, and a general antipathy towards police surveillance that ensured spying was not normally practiced, the country’s asylum

⁶⁵ See, among others, the following articles from *The Times*: ‘Law Report’, 3 August 1810, p.3; ‘Parliamentary Intelligence’, 23 October 1820, p.2; ‘Coroner’s Inquest’, 7 May 1829, p.6; ‘Affair of Honour’, 24 November 1842, p.6; ‘Central Criminal Court’, 28 October 1851, p.7; ‘Louisa Bauer’, 4 October 1867, p.1.

policy made London an especially attractive destination.⁶⁶ The German colony was the largest: 30,000 in London in the 1850s, twice the size of the French colony. It was extremely heterogeneous; for every celebrity émigré or revolutionary leader there were others who, though politically influential on the ground, have been largely forgotten in the intervening century. Figures with an enduring and active political commitment accounted for five to ten percent of the colony. There were also thousands of Germans in the country for economic reasons: struggling journalists and language teachers, music teachers and musicians, orientalist, bankers, merchants, governesses and domestic servants and milliners, broom-girls, prostitutes, tailors and tanners, sugar-bakers, shoe-makers, cigar-makers, watch-makers, cabinet-makers, goldsmiths, waiters, clerks, and hairdressers. They ranged from minor aristocrats to the genuinely destitute and exploited, coming from various regions of Germany and systems of religious belief; only a third were women.⁶⁷ In spite of this diversity, which led to some internal tensions, colonies acted as networks of support for arriving immigrants. One of their most important roles was, quite simply, to offer suggestions of lodgings: a primary concern for any friendless and disoriented newcomer.

Though there was a significant pocket of German immigrants in the East End, many foreign artisans made their homes around Leicester Square, and the neighbourhood's boarding-houses and public-houses became key meeting-points for exiles. There were central venues on Rupert Street, Long Acre, and Maddox Street, among many others.⁶⁸ Jacob Venedey, a scholar and political émigré, depended entirely on the returns from his wife's boarding-house to fund his work.⁶⁹ Marx had lodgings in Dean Street, August Willich plotted agitations from a Soho public-house, and many exiles walked around the streets with *Sketches by Boz* fresh in their minds.⁷⁰ 'Exile', Christine Lattek explains, 'functioned as a kind of hothouse or experimental laboratory for political options and theories, which could be played out without the constraints of

⁶⁶ For an in-depth study of the nineteenth-century British asylum policy, including the reasons for its liberality, see Bernard Porter, *The Refugee Question in Mid-Victorian Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). On these rights specifically, see pp.112-115.

⁶⁷ These figures come from Christine Lattek, *Revolutionary Refugees: German Socialism in Britain, 1840-1860* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp.10-12. On the wealth, religious beliefs and occupations of refugees, see pp.12-17.

⁶⁸ See Lattek (2006), pp.122-124; and Heléna Tóth, *An Exiled Generation: German and Hungarian Refugees of Revolution, 1848-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.196-197.

⁶⁹ See Tóth (2014), p.102.

⁷⁰ Rosemary Ashton, *Little Germany: German Refugees in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.viii-ix, 22, 35-36, 100-101.

realpolitik'.⁷¹ This is where German socialists and democrats – two distinct groups – honed their thinking, coping with the desolation of exile and consumed by fears about the direction things were taking at home. The revolutions also led some Forty-Eighters to look outwards and consider the potentially international reach of their various causes. Though this did not lead to any concrete results, London became a city where political activists from various nations met, shared ideas, and situated themselves in a wider European framework.⁷²

In this context, the Exhibition caused anxiety on two fronts. Continental authorities sent spies to London, worried that the mass movement of people would offer an opportunity for exiles to unite and stoke further agitation from abroad; British authorities, meanwhile, braced for collaborations between Continental agitators and Chartists.⁷³ In 1851, the press repeatedly called the influx of visitors an 'invasion'; the language of colonisation alluded to contemporary anxieties about the Exhibition's lasting political impact. *Punch* and Sala aimed to discredit the alarmists who believed that the Exhibition would bring in further agitators from the Continent – agitators who would ostensibly come for the season but then not leave, abuse 'old English hospitality', and destabilise the nation with their ideas. These anxieties are parodied in a *Punch* article, 'A New Use of the Globe', which recommends that Wyld's Globe be 'fitted up as lodgings for foreigners' and 'made to perform a revolution once in twenty-four hours'.⁷⁴ It is a classic case of humour being used to puncture the bubble of hysteria. Meanwhile, throughout three of his Leicester Square articles – 'The Foreign Invasion', 'Phases of "Public" Life' (1852) and 'Perfidious Patmos' – Sala emphasises that these exiles are refugees. He describes them gathering in the neighbourhood's public-houses, forming generous communities and trying to create homes out of the dankest garrets. They have swapped political repression for truly oppressive circumstances. Sala is

⁷¹ Lattek (2006), p.5.

⁷² See Tóth (2014), p.17, 193-194.

⁷³ The above summary of the situation is drawn from Ashton (1989); Sabine Freitag (ed.), *Exiles from European Revolutions: Refugees in Mid-Victorian England* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2003); Lattek (2006); Panikos Panayi, *German Immigrants in Britain During the Nineteenth Century, 1815-1914* (Oxford: Berg, 1995); Porter (1979); Tóth (2014). See also Robert Evans and H. Pogge von Strandmann (eds.), *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848-1849: From Reform to Reaction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Caroline Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁷⁴ 'A New Use of the Globe', *Punch*, 1 March 1851, p.103.

greatly sympathetic towards these nationless immigrants, and urges his readers to offer them assistance.⁷⁵

This story of exile and immigration was, itself, trying to find a literary home. 1851 was a moment of soul-searching for the nation's writers: how would they address this story? *A Tale of Two Cities*, serialised just before *The Woman in White*, is Dickens's most thematically relevant novel; in its representation of a family of French exiles in Soho, it is a historical novel that sheds light on the modern, mid nineteenth-century moment. The Manette household near Soho Square is maintained by the labour of the immigrant community of 'impoverished French', the 'decayed sons and daughters of Gaul' who are descended from the Huguenots (18 June 1859, pp.169-173, p.172). Frequently emphasising the quietness of the lodgings and the rural feel of the neighbourhood in the eighteenth century, Dickens creates a clear contrast with Leicester Square and Soho in the present day. Denounced in France for being an 'emigrant' – the opposite, in this revolutionary climate, of a 'patriot' – Charles Darnay speaks poignantly about the nature of his decision to become a language tutor in London. 'Like you,' he tells Dr Manette, 'a voluntary exile from France; like you, driven from it by its distractions, oppressions, and miseries; like you, striving to live away from it by my own exertions, and trusting in a happier future' (9 July 1859, pp.241-245, pp.242-3). The Marquis scorns Darnay for calling England his 'Refuge'; 'they say, those boastful English, that it is the Refuge of many' (2 July 1859, pp.217-221, p.219). Darnay may be the exile seeking refuge, but it is Sydney, the Londoner, who fails to find a true home for himself. He lives in a garret, a 'high chamber in a well of houses' (11 June 1859, pp.145-149, p.149), and must endure romantic advice from the insufferable Stryver:

'Marry. Provide someone to take care of you. Never mind your having no enjoyment of women's society [...] Find out some respectable woman with a little property – somebody in the landlady way, or lodging-letting way – and marry her [...] That's the kind of thing for *you*. Now, think of it, Sydney'.

The weekly instalment ends at this point, with Sydney's dry response, 'I'll think of it' (9 July 1859, pp.241-245, p.245). The thought of Sydney embarking on a lodging-house romance with someone like Mrs Bardell raises a chuckle. This unanticipated nod to farce stands in direct contrast to the romance narrative that ultimately plays out:

⁷⁵ [Sala], 'Phases of "Public" Life: Chapter the Second', *Household Words*, 29 May 1852, pp.250-255 (pp.253-254).

Sydney's self-sacrifice and redemption, rooted in a broader narrative of European history and politics, is at the heart of the novel, and his refusal to write himself into the farce genre ensures the survival of Lucie's tiny expatriate community.

There is a 'lonely lodger rumoured to live up stairs' above the Manettes (18 June 1859, pp.169-73, p.169). The presence of this lodger is effaced entirely once Lucy and Darnay marry; they 'extend' their occupation of the house 'by taking to themselves the upper rooms formerly belonging to the apocryphal invisible lodger' (13 August 1859, pp.361-5, p.362). As discussed in Chapter 1, the garret is legendarily the home of poets and artists; indeed, one of the most enduring illustrations of this idea came from the brush of a Leicester Square resident, William Hogarth. But in the neighbourhood around Leicester Square, the garret is invariably rented by a political exile: for Sala, the poorest refugee, for Dickens, the most volatile. There is a strange caginess in the passage in *Bleak House* that recounts George's journey home to his shooting gallery. Here, in 'that curious region lying about the Haymarket and Leicester Square', walls are 'bare', buildings have no discernible fronts, passages are 'whitewashed', the alliteration in 'shabbiness and shrinking out of sight' indicates that something is being hushed into silence, and 'indifferent' is a pun that does not simply connote mediocrity, but a lack of engagement.

Dickens eventually does some digging and some compartmentalising. He finds two stories of social injustice here; both Gridley and Jo the crossing-sweeper die in George's Shooting Gallery, at the very 'heart of this region'. George repeatedly refuses to take money for lodging Jo, demonstrating an unflashy, honest hospitality. The shooting gallery is where people go when they are lost and hounded. In Leicester Square, infamous for accommodating 'vagabonds' like George, Gridley and Jo find the reverse, a sanctuary and final resting place (ix, November 1852, p.273; xi, January 1853, p.334; xv, May 1853, p.452). Viewed in this context, the most quoted passage in the novel – 'Dead! [...] And dying thus around us, every day' – becomes more complicated (xv, May 1853, p.459). Because the gallery is housed in a particular neighbourhood, the passage is inflected with the idiosyncrasies of that neighbourhood. Jo and Gridley die here because there is nowhere else for them to go, but their stories must compete with the far more outlandish kinds of oppression found in Leicester Square. 'Around us' is as much a fixed geographical location as a sweeping reference to the human family of men, women, Right Reverends, Wrong Reverends, lords,

gentlemen and Queen. Dickens unstitches the Exhibition's collective 'us', and reasserts the importance of local details and stories, stories that compete with Jo and Gridley's:

Many of [the inhabitants] are not early risers [...] being birds of night who [...] are wide awake and keen for prey when the stars shine out. Behind dingy blind and curtain, in upper story and garret, skulking more or less under false names, false hair, false titles, false jewellery, and false histories, a colony of brigands lie in their first sleep [...] spies of strong governments that eternally quake with weakness and miserable fear, broken traitors, cowards, bullies, gamesters, shufflers, swindlers, and false witnesses [...] all with more cruelty in them than was in Nero, and more crime than is in Newgate [...] Mr Bucket shall find him, when he will, pervading the tributary channels of Leicester Square.

(ix, November 1852, p.257)

This passage comes at the very beginning of the novel's eleventh part, the start of a story that might have been. Dickens ultimately chooses not to tell the stories of Leicester Square's political exiles and dangerous Continental spies. The juxtaposition between the spies and exiles on the one hand, and Jo and Gridley on the other, forms a part of his agenda for *Bleak House*. He deliberately focuses on the domestic issue rather than the foreign one, in spite of the physical proximity between Jo, Gridley, George, and the 'colony of brigands'. This echoes his sentiments in 'The Metropolitan Protectives' (1851). Describing the reorganisation of the police in the lead-up to the Exhibition, he reproaches Londoners for fearing plots hatched in 'certain back streets behind Mr. Cantelo's Chicken Establishment in Leicester Square', 'at a small coffee-shop in Soho', or 'in the attics of a cheap *restaurateur* in the Haymarket'. Their real concern during these years should be the poverty and wretchedness of London's own children.⁷⁶ In demarcating the boundaries of *Bleak House*, he consciously insists upon its credentials as a work of social commentary. To pay too much heed to the Continent, with its revolutions, 'foreign galleys and home treadmills', would amount to a case of telescopic storytelling.

However, no matter how stern this seems, it is difficult to ignore a note of excitement under Dickens's condemnation of the spies; his imagination is, after all, simultaneously obsessive and darting. Beneath each 'false history' lies another, and another, and another. These spies are deft users of masks, performers in high-stakes plays. The aptitude for performance, switching masks, self-fashioning and re-fashioning is something Dickens explores throughout his career; broadly speaking, it is also something that every immigrant has to master during the struggle to create a new

⁷⁶ [Dickens and Wills], 'The Metropolitan Protectives', *Household Words*, 26 April 1851, pp.97-105 (pp.97, 105).

home. Though Dickens suggests that this is a story for another day, or another novel, his hints tantalise both the reader and the writer. There is an inevitability in the words ‘Mr Bucket will find him, when he will’. Not ‘if’, but ‘when’. The next line, ‘but the wintry morning wants him not and wakes him not’, seems like a lid hastily placed on these narratives before they go too far. Indeed, the entire passage is paraliptic; Dickens does not intend to talk about the exiles but finds he has done so anyway. Despite the resolute focus on Jo and Gridley, the stories of Leicester Square demand to be told, and there is a breathless moment when *Bleak House* almost turns into a kind of sensation novel. Political intrigue may not be the main or only ingredient of sensation fiction, but this sense of a shadowy force, subverting the comfort of the nation from within, is one manifestation of a more general theme: namely, the unexpected, fascinating horrors that readers can find on their own doorsteps.

In *The Woman in White*, Collins rises to the challenge set by Dickens and tells some of these stories. As Gabrielle Ceraldi points out, the Exhibition is fundamental to the novel’s central narrative.⁷⁷ Walter quickly surmises that the Rubelles, employed by Count Fosco, form part of the complex network of exiles, revolutionaries and assassins who flood to England in ‘the year of the famous Crystal Palace Exhibition in Hyde Park’ (11 August 1860, pp.409-418, p.412). In setting up their Leicester Square boarding-house, they turn it into an alien space. When Laura is taken there, luggage is ‘carefully brought in’ rather than lost; Monsieur Rubelle speaks ‘with great politeness’ rather than the shrillness of other fictional landlords and landladies; and, most unusually, ‘the place [is] remarkably quiet’ (2 June 1860, pp.169-174, p.169). Everything seems preternaturally organised. We can imagine spies plotting purposefully behind closed doors and at the dinner table. (This probably explains why Collins has chosen a boarding-house for the Rubelles, an establishment where meals are shared, rather than a lodging-house). All the while, Collins plays with generic expectations. The recognisable backdrop of urban writing, comedy and the *Bildungsroman* has suddenly turned sinister, political.

The Exhibition, therefore, facilitated new plots. Leicester Square concentrated plots because, like all squares, it was simultaneously a junction and a stopping place:

⁷⁷ Gabrielle Ceraldi, ‘The Crystal Palace, Imperialism, and the “Struggle for Existence”: Victorian Evolutionary Discourse in Collins’s *The Woman in White*’, in *Reality’s Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins*, ed. Maria K. Machman and Don Richard Cox (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), pp.173-194 (p.173).

people were thrown into fleeting contact and moved on, or else stayed and simmered. Short-term visitors lingered indefinitely, becoming lodged instead of simply lodging. Accordingly, as the natural locus for sensation fiction, the boarding-house appears to be the weak spot in the nation's defences – Britannia's Achilles heel. At the same time, however, such intrigues inject potentially tired fiction with new interest. Thus, the interaction between nations in 1851 generated experiments in literary form, and often these experiments played out in rented spaces.

Writing as a French count, Gobemouche, in *Punch*, Thackeray urges the English to re-evaluate their literature and language and acknowledge signs of cultural influence.⁷⁸ The Exhibition, a display of culture as much as industry, encouraged writers to take stock of their existing literary traditions. But their favoured genres did not exist in a vacuum: French literary culture, with its vaudevilles, *portières* and apartment buildings, both influenced and was influenced by English literary culture.⁷⁹ When one of Mrs Wewitz's Frenchmen decides to integrate, the results shock his landlady. Count Sanschemise elopes with a student at the school – Miss Chutney, from Kerala – and exits the novel, ready to embark on an entirely new story of racial and social mixing. As Miss Chutney prepares to leave the novel that has housed her, she 'smile[s], bow[s], and [withdraws]', enacting the precise choreography of a curtain-call (p.182). Her name, 'Chutney', is telling: Mayhew takes a word from the empire that was in the process of being adopted by the English and perfectly represents the mixed-up English language.⁸⁰ Sala uses an equivalent in his biography of Hogarth; imagining the tenements and brutal landlords of Cranbourn Street and Cranbourn Alley in the early nineteenth century, he writes, 'the whole *pâté* of lanes and courts between Leicester Square and St Martin's Lane had become so rotten and decayed, that they half tumbled and were half pulled down'.⁸¹ *Pâté* – an appropriate word for the liver of London.

During the Exhibition year, Sala likens the Cock Tavern to the Tower of Babel – a biblical story that is, of course, about the hubris of builders – and remarks, 'I think

⁷⁸ [Thackeray], 'The French Conspiracy', *Punch*, 12 April 1851, p.151.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever (eds.), *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002); Maxime Leroy (ed.), *Charles Dickens and Europe* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2013); Anny Sadrin (ed.), *Dickens, Europe and the New Worlds* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998). On the figure of the *portière*, the French version of a landlady, see Marcus (1999), pp.42-50.

⁸⁰ Salman Rushdie theorises about 'chutnification' in *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage, 2009).

⁸¹ Sala, *William Hogarth: Painter, Engraver, and Philosopher: Essays on the Man, the Work and the Time* (London: Smith, Elder, 1866), p.59.

I must have heard tea called for in at least twenty-two languages' ('The Foreign Invasion', p.63). Fidget, the landlord of a Brighton boarding-house in an early play by Samuel Beazley, similarly describes himself as the 'head-waiter at the Tower of Babel'.⁸² Babel stands for a transition from univocality and harmony to heteroglossia, incomprehension and dispersion; Fidget is alluding to the simultaneous crisis and birth of nationhood and language. Within the splintered community of his boarding-house, every individual is trying to be heard as he comes to terms with his difference for the first time. As languages mixed in these semi-public, semi-domestic spaces, writers are led to think about understanding, misunderstanding and the permeability of English. Sala wilfully uses multiple French and Italian phrases to discuss the fears of the xenophobes (p.60, 61). His panorama book, *The Great Exhibition: 'Wot is to Be'*, uses a different approach, incorporating puns that celebrate linguistic cross-pollination. Two fabricated etymologies invent literal connections between England and other nations: one, for 'Saracen's Head', a popular name for quintessentially English public-houses; the other, for a 'castle in Spain', also known, of course, as a castle in the air (Figure 35). Spain provides a genuine 'chateau en Espagne', while Turkey brings a real Saracen's head, giving a new perspective on the tavern in *Nicholas Nickleby*. It was possible to be sensitive to cultural exchange, to have a hospitable idiom, without being a dilettantish cosmopolite like Bendigo Buster.

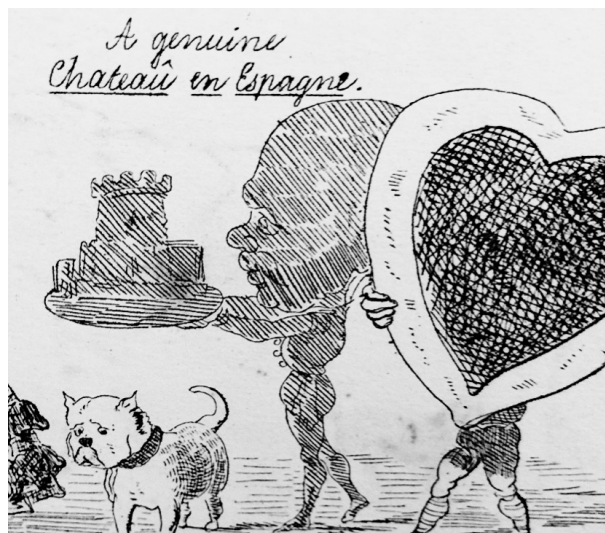


Figure 35: Sala, *The Great Exhibition: 'Wot is to Be', or Probable Results of the Industry of All Nations in the Year '51*, 1850, np. Bodleian Library, (OC) 50.169

⁸² Samuel Beazley, *The Boarding-House; or, Five Hours at Brighton* (London: C. Chapple, 1811), p.1.

As Agathocleous argues, cosmopolitanism is not just a question of ethics or exposition. It is also necessary to consider its aesthetic implications. ‘How’, she asks, ‘do various texts create cosmopolitanism as a literary effect? What formal techniques were used to create the sense of global space?’. She demonstrates the way that writers bring together competing perspectives, the sketch and the panorama, in realist fiction to create a cosmopolitan aesthetic.⁸³ In the Exhibition year, it was equally perceptible in the generic choices writers made: they opened up their texts to characters from different nations and saw where they pushed their stories. Dickens and his circle do not go especially far when it comes to turning the plight of nineteenth-century refugees into coherent narratives, but as they return to the lodging-house, we realise this space will never quite be the same again.

*

In *England and the English* (1833), Edward Bulwer-Lytton remarks upon the extent to which the sacredness of property is a discernible national characteristic:

The root of all our notions, as of all our laws, is to be found in the sentiment of property [...] It is *my* house that you shall not enter; it is *my* country that you shall not traduce [...] Our main element is home [...] Thus (the consequence is notable) we acquire the habit of attaching an undue importance to our own circle, and viewing with indifference all the sphere beyond.⁸⁴

Bulwer-Lytton’s shift from what is ‘mine’ to what is ‘ours’ raises questions about the different degrees of collectivity in a nation. The Exhibition crystallised some of these issues; in its attempts to bring England together, it sought the point at which distinct local and economic identities could be subsumed into a wider sense of the national character. That being said, in the decades following the publication of *England and the English*, Dickens made a case for another truth entirely: that renting was as marked a national characteristic as the love of property. The Exhibition crystallised this, too.

Sabine Clemm argues that the Exhibition was ‘an event that appeared to bring the whole world together under one roof’.⁸⁵ Ultimately, however, it brought the whole world together under hundreds of *different* roofs. It encouraged opportunistic

⁸³ Agathocleous (2011), p.12.

⁸⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *England and the English* (Paris: Baudry’s European Library, 1834), pp.3, 5.

⁸⁵ Clemm (2009), p.13.

Londoners to emerge from the shadows and transform themselves, their homes and their neighbourhoods. Writers also found themselves assessing the opportunities suddenly offered to them. They reworked the same geographical and imaginative spaces, the same strange parts of the city and obscure boarding-houses, and invested them with new life. In 1851, the business of hospitality became everybody's business.

Interlude

Londoners *Maritimized*

Dickens decided to run away to the seaside for the Exhibition season. Following months of tragedy in the family, and horrified to find London ‘filling to [a] preposterous extent’, he described his escape in extravagant terms: ‘I must fly,’ he said, ‘to save myself’. If he absolutely had to return to town during the family’s ‘Expositional absence’, he would stay in his ‘tent’: a pair of back rooms over the *Household Words* offices. He instructed William Phillips, a house agent, to try to lease Devonshire Terrace for six months at £300, but his hopes for securing a tenant were not high. ‘They all say that there are innumerable furnished houses to let wildly, on account of the Exhibition, for which there never *can be* a demand. I think with you’, he told Henry Austin, ‘that it will be a bad season than otherwise, for getting rid of one’. Though he was worried that ‘the Broadstairs people’ would be ‘made, Expositionally, more than usually sharkish’, he managed to rent the same ‘airy nest’ in which he had previously completed *David Copperfield*. In a letter to Catherine Gore, he described Fort House as a ‘Hermitage’; this rented space was, essentially, a pastoral space, one in which to nestle, to work in peace, to renew his energies and himself.¹

Dickens’s time in Broadstairs was an interlude between urban acts, just as seaside scenes in his fiction offer similar opportunities for his predominantly urban characters. His fiction often relocates traditional pastoral narratives to the seaside.² In doing so, it problematises these narratives, modernising them for the nineteenth century. Seaside pastoral, Dickens finds, is fraught pastoral; it cannot be wholly idealising. The coast was fast becoming contested – indeed, congested – territory. Seen from one angle, it was an idyll, an alternative and corrective to the chaotic, class-riven

¹ See Dickens to William Phillips, 16 December 1850 and 26 December 1850; to Henry Austin, 12 March 1851; to WH Wills, 7 April 1851; to Emile de la Rue, 25 April 1851; to the Duke of Devonshire, 1 June 1851; to Geraldine Jewsbury, 25 June 1851; to Catherine Gore, 4 July 1851; and to Augustus Tracey, 10 October 1851, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VI, p.237, 249, 313-314, 349, 363-364, 405, 417, 420, 517.

² This is not, of course, the only kind of narrative to take place at the seaside. The sea generated a huge variety of narrative forms in the nineteenth century. On the picaresque, Gothic, adventure fiction and historical fiction, see Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010); on nautical melodrama, Captain Marryat’s sea-writing, Dickens, and literary ‘vagueness’, see Kerr (2013); on Gosse and realism, see Amy M. King, ‘Reorienting the Scientific Frontier: Victorian Tide Pools and Literary Realism’, *Victorian Studies*, 47 (2005), 153-163; on Dickens, see John Peck, *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British and American Novels, 1719-1917* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp.70-88.

metropolis; here, visitors could delight in the beauty around them, and amateur naturalists could observe the wonders of tide-pools and beaches, especially on the Jurassic Coast. At the same time, increasing interest in the pleasures of the seaside changed places like Brighton, Dover, Margate, Ramsgate and Yarmouth from sites of simple retreat to those of tourist resort.³ Contemporary guidebooks charted the growth of these towns and Dickens drove his characters there in pursuit of something that was arguably unobtainable: simplicity, play, earthiness, a connection to a purer time.

Dickens and his contemporaries acknowledged the limitations of this vision. They realised that these spaces could not be pastoral simply because they represented a lost world. Modernity would not allow it. Instead, they were pastoral because they held the possibility of personal reinvention; when characters arrive here, they fashion and refashion themselves. There were no hotels in Arcadia, but seaside resorts boasted all kinds of accommodation, from grubby lodgings kept by landladies to lavish hotels.⁴ In nineteenth-century fiction and drama, seaside lodgings offer a refuge to people who have escaped; they are also scenes of transformation. It is difficult, however, to reconcile the romance of this concept with the tackiness of a seaside hotel, and these transformations do not always go well. Dickens introduces a note of darkness where we expect sun, sand and happy endings. At the seaside, escape can be as nefarious as it is freeing; liberation can give way to license. If, at the seaside, it is possible to throw off one's obligations and connections, to become the person one always wanted to be, it is equally possible to adopt any number of disguises. For every story of social climbing, there is one of social downfall; for every happy courtship or lovers' reunion, there is a seduction or a scene of heartbreak; for every convalescence, there is a death. These events and encounters are momentous, and the rented spaces in which they occur must somehow expand to accommodate them.

³ On the development of these towns, see John K. Walton, *The English Seaside Resort: A Social History, 1750-1914* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983).

⁴ On seaside accommodation for tourists from the Georgian to the Edwardian periods, see Walton (1983), p.74, 81-95. On the patterns of landownership that dictated the development of resorts, see pp.45-63. Walton estimates that 20% of households were involved in the lodgings industry in Brighton in 1800; see p.82.

Money

Seaside resorts had distinct social identities over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The apex of the working-class holiday came at the end of the Victorian period, in towns like Blackpool. Meanwhile, towns in the south, particularly Brighton, benefited from the patronage of the fashionable gentry.⁵ Brighton – ‘a portion of the “west end” of London *maritimized*’, a ‘suburb of the metropolis’ – was the place to be.⁶ Being seen in Brighton during the season was a sure sign of having made it. Samuel Beazley’s *The Boarding-House* follows the farcical adventures of a circle of upper-class visitors there. The intrigues of the Contracts and the Belfasts, Admiral Culpepper, Caroline Hartley and Caroline Wheatsheaf are invariably orchestrated by their servants and a fast-talking landlord, Fidget, who also happens to be a theatre manager, a tax collector, and the deputy master of ceremonies in the town. Fidget is in a unique position, interacting with high society on the one hand, and with jobbing actors and boarding-house porters on the other. He also guides the audience of the farce through the action. Performed to a primarily working- and lower middle-class audience at the Lyceum, this farce structures its comedy around the class dynamics of a boarding-house where the guests are fashionable and the servants are witty and powerful. Both the rich and the poor come to play in Brighton, and the season lives up to all social expectations. The boarding-house becomes the unofficial centre of this activity.

The Boarding-House was performed several decades before Dickens began to write about the sea; nonetheless, his fiction addresses similar questions to those on the stage. Dombey conducts regular visits to Brighton to see little Paul, who is entombed first at Mrs Pipchin’s, and later at Dr Blimber’s. During these visits, Dombey stays at the imperious Bedford Hotel: an immediate marker of his status. His rooms at the Bedford become the site of a crucial exchange about money. When the Midshipman is taken into possession, Walter and Captain Cuttle visit Dombey’s rooms for help. Walter requests financial assistance, while Captain Cuttle believes his collection of ‘treasures’, viewed by Dombey as ‘so much crumb’, can act as a surety. Dombey immediately sees this as an opportunity to give Paul, who is solemnly watching the proceedings, an

⁵ Walton (1983). On the fact that aggressively demarcated social identities were often undermined by the unofficial mingling of the classes, see pp.3-4.

⁶ AB Granville, *The Spas of England, and Principal Sea-Bathing Places* (London: Henry Coburn, 1841), p.565; *Knight’s Excursion Companion: Excursions from London* (London: Charles Knight, 1851), p.5.

impromptu lesson. In a strange pedagogical moment, he tells Paul to make the final decision: ‘Would you like to begin to be Dombey and Son, now, and lend this money to young Gay’s uncle? [...] You see, Paul [...] how powerful money is’. Captain Cuttle leaves believing that this meeting at the hotel is ‘only a step or two removed from a regular betrothal of Florence to Walter’, but it is, in fact, a stark display of the workings of nineteenth-century capitalism. Though the conversation takes place in Brighton, the town offers no escape from rigid social structures; Dombey is as stubborn and cold as ever. Dombey’s first words to the pair – ‘I think you have made some mistake in the door’ – draws attention to the fact that they are completely surrounded by people who are not like them (iii, December 1846, pp.92-96). It is a lonely place to be.

If Brighton’s hotels and boarding-houses provide a backdrop for the shenanigans of the moneyed classes in nineteenth-century literary culture, then Margate and Ramsgate are the purlieus of the shabby-genteel. Dickens’s ‘The Tuggs’s at Ramsgate’ is a parable about social climbing. The members of the Tuggs family are humble, but when they suddenly receive an inheritance, they feel they must do the fashionable thing: abandon their home ‘in a narrow street on the Surrey side of the water within three minutes’ walk of the old London Bridge’, scuttle to a seaside resort for the season, mingle with the members of a higher society, and anxiously prove that they belong. To ‘leave town immediately’, they agree, is ‘an indispensable preliminary to being genteel’.⁷ Unfortunately, they are fleeced in Ramsgate. As they begin their search for lodgings, Mrs Tuggs must shout from the fly whenever she spots an ‘apartments to let’ bill. She is lured into various establishments, shown the view by the landladies, and belatedly informed that her family can expect only ‘one parlour, and a mattress’ (p.7). They eventually find accommodation in a ‘dusty house, with a bay window, from which you could obtain a beautiful glimpse of the sea – if you thrust half your body out of it, at the imminent peril of falling into the area’ (p.7). They see what is on offer and are immediately persuaded to pay five guineas a week by the shrewd lodging-house keeper, cowed by her ‘benign smile of pity at the ignorance of manners and customs, which the observation [“rather dear”] betrayed’ (p.8). The routine overpricing of seaside accommodation was a favourite joke for the writers of *Punch* later in the century, and was infamous in Blackpool; smart landladies are figures of derision and fascination

⁷ Dickens, ‘The Tuggs’s at Ramsgate’, *Library of Fiction, or Family Story-Teller*, 31 March 1836, pp.1-18 (p.1, 3). Subsequent references appear in the text.

simultaneously, and are a testament to the resourcefulness of the humbler classes.⁸ These are some of the games that can be played to convince the gullible and the fashionable to part with their money.

It is only the beginning for the hapless Tuggs family. Cymon Tuggs – who has dispensed with the name ‘Simon’ for reasons of fashion – falls in love with a beautiful married woman. In the final scene of the story, Cymon is trapped behind a curtain in Belinda’s lodgings, hiding because her husband has returned unexpectedly. When Cymon coughs and is discovered, the family is forced to pay the couple fifteen-hundred pounds in compensation for his indiscretion. It transpires that Belinda and her husband are confidence-tricksters, ‘designing impostors [who] never found more easy dupes’ than in the Tuggs family (p.18). The family is punished for its pretensions. In its desire to reinvent itself, it is bested by a pair for whom clever, iniquitous reinvention is their stock in trade.

‘The Tuggs’s at Ramsgate’ opens with a phrase lifted from fairytale: ‘Once upon a time’ (p.1). The family believes the seaside is a space for realising social aspirations – but they do not live happily ever after. Thackeray’s unfinished *A Shabby Genteel Story* (1840) considers similar themes, from the other side of the reception desk. Thackeray christens Caroline – the youngest, neglected daughter of the Gann family, labouring as a maid-of-all-work in their boarding-house – ‘our humble Cinderella’.⁹ This version of the Cinderella tale is about both love and money; when the Ganns fall on hard times and are forced to open an establishment in Margate, Caroline hopes to be rescued from the drudgery of her parents’ world. Thackeray charts the whole story of the Ganns’ rise and fall in relation to the properties they frequent. We first meet Mrs Gann when she is still a fashionable young widow, living in a boarding-house in Brussels with her mother. Her mother is relatively wealthy now, having sold her own establishment, the Ram Hotel and Posting-House. James Gann, staying at the same Belgian boarding-house, proposes; upon marriage, Mr and Mrs Gann move between respectable addresses, and Caroline is given the middle-name ‘Brandenburg’ after a ‘large yellow mansion near Hammersmith’ (June 1840, pp.677-689, p.679). (Caroline of Brunswick, whose marriage to George IV was a spectacular

⁸ See, for example, Charles Keane, *Mr Punch at the Seaside* (London: Educational Book Co., 1910); Walton, *The Blackpool Landlady: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978).

⁹ Thackeray, *A Shabby Genteel Story*, *Fraser’s Magazine*, August 1840, pp.226-237 (p.226). Subsequent references appear in the text.

disaster, lived in this mansion). When they become bankrupt, they are pushed into ‘an obscure lodging in Lambeth’ (June 1840, pp.677-689, p.679). Then comes Margate. Once their boarding-house is opened, Mr Gann enjoys a social circle composed entirely of other hotel-workers. So, in this narrative, the seaside boarding-house represents financial desperation – the agonising slide into shabby gentility.

The Ganns’ fate, Thackeray suggests, is a common one:

Numberless lodging-houses are kept by the females of families who have met with reverses: are not ‘boarding-houses, with a select musical society, in the neighbourhood of the squares,’ maintained by such? [...] After a certain period, Mrs. James Gann kept a lodging-house (in her own words, received ‘two inmates into her family’)...

(June 1840, pp.677-689, p.680)



Figure 36: RB Wallace, The Ganns’ Boarding-House at Margate, WM Thackeray, *A Shabby Genteel Story*, 1878, I, p.15. Bodleian Library, (OC) 270.f.703

The plate on the door of the boarding-house reads ‘Mr. GANN’, and ‘it [is] the work of a single smutty servant-maid to clean this brass plate every morning’: a literal act of polishing up the family name. The house ‘being not very far from the sea, and as you might, by climbing up to the roof, get a sight between two chimneys of that multitudinous element’, Mrs Gann decides to ‘set down her lodgings as fashionable; and [declare] on her cards that her house [commands] “a fine view of the sea”’ (June 1840, pp.677-689, p.680; Figure 36). In doing so, she is exactly like the landlady in

‘The Tuggs’s at Ramsgate’ – but in this narrative of social downfall, Thackeray is offering a picture of sordid and sorry lives.

Seaside lodgings, then, are spaces of social transformation, bringing together tales of the affluent and carefree, of aspiration, and of ruin. Here, characters either luxuriate in their wealth or become all the more acutely aware of their poverty. It is interesting, however, that Thackeray’s story is itself labelled ‘shabby-genteel’. This is a sign that we should expect a narrative that is slightly tired, and is trying, like its characters, to keep up appearances of grandeur and relevance. It is automatic, almost too easy – the kind of story authors are bored of telling, because it is so predictable. It is counter-intuitive for Thackeray and Dickens to be inflexible – to restrict themselves to standard stories – when the beach is forever shifting beneath their feet.

Love

Beazley’s *The Boarding-House* follows a standard farce plot. Apparent strangers converge in rented space, undergo slapstick misadventures, and are revealed to be a combination of long-lost relatives and lovers. Seaside lodgings are sites of happy coincidence and flirtation; Beazley gives us Brightonian pastoral. *Dombey and Son*, however, casts resort courtships in a very different light. Dombey comes to Leamington Spa intending to spend time alone after the death of his son, but Mrs Skewton soon debases this wish for repose and retreat. ‘Nature intended me for an Arcadian,’ she parrots; ‘I am thrown away in society. Cows are my passion [...] What I want, is frankness, confidence, less conventionality, and freer play of soul. We are so dreadfully artificial’ (vii, April 1847, p.205). The matches made in resorts, be they spas or coastal towns, are defined by their artificiality and conventionality, not their frankness or confidence. Souls are not free here; instead, they are squeezed and stretched until they fit into a particular social mould.

Dickens stayed at the Royal Hotel in Leamington and the Bedford in Brighton, and converted these spaces into sites of intrigue in his fiction. Dombey and Major Bagstock’s poisonous friendship plays out in the Bedford and is eventually consolidated in Leamington, a town where Bagstock is entirely and rather disgustingly at home. He talks incessantly over lunch at the Royal, eats and coughs to repulsive excess, arises on the first morning ‘like a giant refreshed’, and makes it his personal responsibility to introduce Dombey into the right social circles (vii, April 1847, p.202).

He is in his natural habitat. It is Bagstock's decision to take Dombey to Leamington after Dombey ends his weekly visits to Brighton. These two watering-places, one inland, one on the sea, are placed in direct dialogue. Here, friendship is insincere to the point of harm: as Dombey, Bagstock and Carker praise one another to ridiculous heights in the dining rooms of the Royal, and as Bagstock proposes 'an alteration of the name of the Royal Hotel' to 'the Three Jolly Bachelors, in honour of [themselves] and Carker', Carker is plotting his employer's downfall and Bagstock is, himself, plotting a mercenary match (ix, June 1847, p.279).

Dombey's courtship of Edith is conducted almost exclusively in Leamington's rented spaces, and it is excruciatingly awkward. He addresses her with 'cumbrous' and 'solemn gallantry' in the lodgings she shares with her mother, while Bagstock grotesquely constructs Dombey as a lovesick young man at dinner (vii, April 1847, p.210). Mrs Skewton may lisp her praise of '*the* most – touching, and thrilling, and sacred emotions of which our sadly-fallen nature is susceptible', but Edith has no illusions about the kind of marriage she is entering into (ix, June 1847, p.261). She decries her place in the marriage market: 'The licence of look and touch [...] have I submitted to it, in half the places of resort upon the map of England? Have I been hawked and vended here and there, until the last grain of self-respect is dead within me, and I loathe myself?' (ix, June 1847, p.280). This marriage, engineered in the hotels and lodgings of a spa town, is doomed to failure, a product of the strained, false interaction such spaces encourage. (It is fitting that, when Edith flees to Dijon with Carker, she finds herself in an enormous hotel, and that she tells Carker what she really thinks of him within its four walls.) Edith and Mrs Skewton have been moving from resort to resort – between Harrogate, Scarborough, and Devonshire, which boasts the resort of Torquay – and Edith declares she has 'not found that there is any change in such places' (vii, April 1847, p.205). Leamington is stagnant, and this, Dickens suggests, is the downward trajectory that Brighton might follow. The romantic intrigues of the season at the spa may have been exciting once, in Austen's day, but in *Dombey and Son* they produce only hopeless marriages of convenience. Love and friendship are debased in towns that were initially expected to free the soul.

If *The Boarding-House* is structured around the joys and frissons that come with the coincidental meetings between lovers, *Bleak House* explores what a coincidence actually feels like. Dickens's working memorandum for Chapter 45, 'In Trust', reads: 'Esther to – Plymouth – no – Deal'. One reason for the change in location may have to

do with Deal's own literary history; Douglas Jerrold's *Black-Ey'd Susan* sees a happy reunion between Susan and her husband, the sailor William, in this town. Deal or no Deal, Esther's visit to Richard's barracks turns out to be bittersweet rather than jubilant. In the previous chapter, she accepts Jarndyce's proposal of marriage. As she sends Charley for Jarndyce's letter, she becomes intensely aware of the sounds made by Bleak House:

Charley went up the stairs, and down the stairs, and along the passages – the zig-zag way about the old-fashioned house seemed very long in my listening ears that night – and so came back, along the passages, and down the stairs, and up the stairs, and brought the letter.
(xiv, April 1853, p.430)

Charley's footsteps sketch out a sonic map of the house that will now be Esther's permanent home. She equates marriage to Jarndyce with happy domesticity; when he looks at her, it is with 'the old protecting manner which had made that house [her] home in a moment', and when he proposes, he asks her if she could possibly consider becoming 'the mistress of Bleak House' (xiv, April 1853, pp.429-430). It is a marriage to a house as much as it is to a man.

These observations and interactions are abruptly contrasted with Esther's experiences in Deal. In the hotel there, she unexpectedly encounters Allan Woodcourt, who has just returned from his adventures as a ship's surgeon. Dickens begins the Deal segment by constructing Esther and Charley's hotel as a safe and rejuvenating space. Tired after a long night's travel, Esther is initially unimpressed by the 'very gloomy' sights Deal has to offer. However, the scene magically transforms after she has rested in the hotel: 'But when we got into a warm room in an excellent hotel, and sat down, comfortably washed and dressed, to an early breakfast [...] Deal began to look more cheerful. Our little room was like a ship's cabin, and that delighted Charley very much'. With its 'cabin-room' – a clear analogue of the Peggotty's boat-house and Sol Gills's Midshipman – the hotel is homely, a delight to both Charley Neckett and Charles Dickens. Esther is lulled into a false sense of security that makes her later encounter with Woodcourt all the more unsettling. As the fog rises 'like a curtain', a set-piece is only just beginning (xiv, April 1853, p.436). But this is not a romantic comedy.

An Indiaman has arrived and is berthed at Deal. Charley is intoxicated by its exoticism, but Dickens does not elaborate on any imperial fantasies here; instead, he focuses on Esther and Woodcourt, who has just got off the ship. Esther sees Woodcourt

by the waterside and runs back to the ‘cabin-room’. In a cheerless distortion of the trope of overhearing, so common in lodging-house narratives, she recognises his voice on the hotel’s staircase and steels herself. She refuses to avoid him – ‘it would still have been a great relief to me to have gone away without making myself known, but I was determined not to do so. “No my dear, no. No, no, no!”’ – contemplates what to do with her veil, and sends him a note. She tells him that she is ‘rejoiced to be by chance among the first to welcome him home to England’, but in acknowledging this coincidence, silently reveals that it is full of sudden pain. As they interact, and as she sees strong emotion in his face, she convinces herself that Woodcourt feels nothing but pity for her. She wears the scars of smallpox, after all. The hotel in Deal has proved itself to be the least appropriate place for a reunion between undeclared lovers, especially given Esther’s recent engagement to Jarndyce. Though, superficially, the hotel is neutral territory – something that would negate a measure of awkwardness – the entire meeting is uncomfortable and charged with regret. The very neutrality and impersonality of the space makes matters worse. Not only is Esther caught off-guard, but we are hit by the strangeness of staging such a momentous emotional event in a place neither lover has a real prior connection to, or will ever have occasion to visit again. It is not even in London; it simply is not right. The chapter ends with Esther leaving Deal once more:

And in his last look as we drove away, I saw that he was very sorry for me. I was glad to see it. I felt for my old self as the dead may feel if they ever revisit these scenes. I was glad to be tenderly remembered, to be gently pitied, not to be quite forgotten.

The coincidence in Deal has turned Esther into a ghost who recalls, but is ultimately detached from, her former self. Her meeting with Woodcourt is defined by what is left unsaid. The seaside gives neither of them the freedom to express their feelings; instead, these feelings and words are repressed, overwhelmed by the weight of pre-existing obligations and lost time (xiv, April 1853, p.440, 442).

Another type of nineteenth-century character, however, acts upon a very different conviction: according to the young and restless London lothario, what happens at the seaside stays at the seaside. Thackeray’s Margate feels wrong from the very beginning. *A Shabby Genteel Story* takes place during the off-season, and thus is the direct antithesis of Beazley’s teeming narrative of playful dalliances. Caroline, the seaside Cinderella, is exploited not only by her parents, but also by her vain and eligible sisters. She is loved by two lodgers – one, an artist who ‘build[s] castles in the air as

best he might', another, Brandon, an apparent aristocrat – both of whom pledge to free her from her current situation (August 1840, pp.226-237, p.226). Caroline spends her days in the kitchen reading romances, including *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and sees Brandon as a substitute for Valancourt. Brandon, however, is a fraud fleeing from his guardians under an assumed name. After all, 'the cramped lodgings of an unpretentious seaside could offer a haven from the pressures of social competition, or from the demands of creditors at home'.¹⁰ Never revealing his real name, Brandon is performing his own rebellious pastoral transformation, and Caroline is persuaded into a false marriage. Cinderella, Thackeray suggests, should have been careful what she wished for: her fairytale romance has turned into a boarding-house seduction.

Brandon has a counterpart in *David Copperfield*'s Steerforth, who describes the Peggottys as pastoral figures, shepherds of old, updated for the period: 'Let us see the natives in their aboriginal condition', he tells David (vii, November 1849, p.213). Ultimately, though, the Peggottys are pastoral folk who are failing to keep the nineteenth century at bay. As Yarmouth is caught up in the throes of change – a simple fishing village being reinvented as a resort, moving towards a more commercial modernity, welcoming visitors into its inns – Steerforth is a tourist in a fisherman's home.¹¹ The boat-house becomes the site of a clash between traditional and contemporary modes of using the seaside, and Emily finds herself caught in the current. Preoccupied with picking shells – complex symbols of snugness, emptiness, protection, fragility, and death – Emily is getting ready to share a 'doll's parlor' with Ham when Steerforth arrives (x, February 1850, p.311). For Steerforth, Yarmouth means sexual license – moments of madness in a fantasy land that can surely have no consequences in the real world. He makes a mockery of the welcome afforded by an inn's community by ingratiating himself with the fishermen, Mr Peggotty included, at the Willing Mind (viii, December 1849, p.225). In David's desperate wish to fit into pre-existing, happy homes wherever he goes, he decides to stay in his 'own room' in Peggotty and Barkis's house. 'To bring you so far, and to separate, seems bad companionship, Steerforth', he apologises. Steerforth, however, replies cheerfully: 'Why, in the name of Heaven, where do you naturally belong!' (vii, November 1849, p.219). David makes an offhand

¹⁰ Walton (1983), p.17.

¹¹ Yarmouth's economy was sustained by fishing, shipbuilding, and shoe manufacture. Nevertheless, it was still possible to find pocket guidebooks for the town. See *The Yarmouth Hand Book; or, Visitor's Guide Through the Town* (Yarmouth: C. Barber, 1843); and Walton (1983), p.47, 51, 74.

remark slightly later, explaining that his ‘occupation of Peggotty’s spare-room put a constraint upon [him], from which [Steerforth] was free [...] Steerforth, lying at the Inn, had nothing to consult but his own humour’ (viii, December 1849, p.225). In fact, this turns out to be a vital plot-point in Emily’s seduction. Because the inn affords more privacy than Peggotty and Barkis’s home, Steerforth has the independence to go where he pleases and meet whoever he chooses. He is not under surveillance. If Yarmouth is repeatedly portrayed as a pastoral space, it becomes apparent that David is trying to write a different version of pastoral to the one Steerforth agrees to participate in.

As the inn in Yarmouth bears witness to Steerforth’s sexual scheming, it simply replicates something David has experienced before. David vividly remembers a scene at a Lowestoft hotel, where Murdstone brazenly discusses his wooing of Mrs Copperfield with his friends:

We went to an hotel by the sea, where two gentlemen were smoking cigars in a room by themselves. Each of them was lying on at least four chairs, and had a large rough jacket on. In a corner was a heap of coats and boat-cloaks, and a flag, all bundled up together. They both rolled on to their feet in an untidy sort of manner when we came in...

(i, May 1849, p.17)

There is something nasty about the group’s conversation about women. They seem to take easy possession of their surroundings in spite of the fact that they are in a public room, making use of all the available space and carelessly flinging their clothes into corners. (In the Peggottys’ boat-house, corners are sacred, safe and deeply personal spaces; each is assigned to one member of the family, David included.) Like Yarmouth, Lowestoft is ostensibly idyllic, tailored for the appropriate amusement of children – Murdstone and David sit on the grass by a cliff-edge, play with a telescope and go yachting, all with Mrs Copperfield’s blessing – but this call to wonder is proved hollow (i, May 1849, p.18). Seaside hotels seem to concentrate the perversion of the pastoral mode; they are all the more sordid because plotters can see the beauty of the beach from the window.

When Aunt Betsey is ruined financially, she asks Janet, her servant, to arrange for the lease of her peaceful Dover cottage (xi, March 1850, p.352; xiii, May 1850, p.397). With its view of the sea, the cottage on a cliff will undoubtedly fetch a good rent. Janet has long been enlisted in keeping Dover’s donkeys off Aunt Betsey’s lawn; the donkeys are a rude sign of the town’s encroaching tourist economy. Yet no matter how hard Aunt Betsey tries, this economy cannot be kept away forever, and Janet

marries a 'thriving tavern-keeper' at the end of the novel (xix/x, November 1850, p.594). Love brings Janet close to the very centre of the town's growing resort scene – but resorts, we know, do strange things to love. In his indictment of Brighton's false friendships and Leamington's marriage market, in his subtle study of Esther's psychological trauma, and in his representation of sexual exploitation on the North Sea coast, Dickens paints sobering pictures in sun-kissed settings. After all, more sun, more shadow.

Death

It is bad manners, remarks Mary Douglas, to die in a hotel.¹² Georgian and Victorian doctors prescribed visits to the seaside to all manner of ailing patients. As villages grew into towns, and towns into resorts, developers planned their building projects with health in mind: Brighton, for example, appeared depthless, growing laterally across the shore because speculators wished to ensure that each building had access to the view and the breeze.¹³ It was hoped that the sea air, waters, light, exercise, and escape from the city smog would rejuvenate convalescents and bring fading lodgers back to life.¹⁴ However, a *Punch* cartoon, explaining 'there is always a chance that the last lodgers may have occupied their rooms as convalescents', emphasises how haunted seaside lodgings could seem: either crawling with residual germs, or peopled by the ghosts of those who had altogether failed to recover.¹⁵ Alongside narratives of gradual repair in rented spaces, then, were those of deterioration and violent death.

Dombey and Son's Mrs Pipchin bears a superficial resemblance to Mrs Gann. She opens her Brighton boarding-house after her husband's failures in the Peruvian goldmines; essentially, she is opportunistic, perfectly happy to take up employment as Dombey's housekeeper and as Mrs Skewton's nurse when the right price is named. After Dombey is ruined, she returns to her lucrative boarding-house, having first bought Dombey's best chair at a bargain in the auction (xix/x, April 1848, p.592, 594). Dombey sends Paul to Mrs Pipchin's 'infantine Boarding-House of a very select description' because this is where all fashionable parents send their delicate children. Mrs Pipchin

¹² Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space', *Social Research*, 58 (1991), 287-307 (p.295).

¹³ Granville (1841), pp.564-567.

¹⁴ John Hassan, *The Seaside, Health and the Environment in England and Wales since 1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp.39-42, 75-107.

¹⁵ Walton (1983), p.43.

is a 'respectable matron' and, when Dombey comes to visit, he 'incline[s] his head with the satisfied air of a patron, who [feels] that this [is] the sort of thing for which he [pays] so much per quarter' (iv, January 1847, p.98). Sadly, the boarding-house is exceptionally unhealthy. A 'Castle' in which Mrs Pipchin is an 'ogress', it is the stuff of childhood nightmares, full of plants like 'hairy serpents', 'spiders', and 'green lobster[s]'. Equally nightmarish is a 'flower-pot hanging to the ceiling, which appear[s] to have boiled over'; in a town famous for its placid bath waters and tide-pools, here is something that is out of control. The soil on which the house is built is 'chalky, flinty, and sterile', the house itself is 'brittle and thin', and it is 'not, naturally, a fresh-smelling house': pungent with earth and vegetation, it is stuffy in the summer and draughty in the winter, as if it were a 'great shell' full of mournful noises. Absent parents pay Mrs Pipchin a great deal to lodge their offspring, but the house has its fair share of lodgers who pay nothing: spiders, earwigs 'in the season', as loyal to Brighton as the socialites nearby, and snails on the doors, which stick 'with the tenacity of cupping glasses'. The very house is having its skin bruised and blood let. Here, Miss Pankey, another child boarder, becomes more and more effaced as her visit continues. When she is shampooed, she 'seem[s] in danger of being rubbed away, altogether' (iii, December 1846, pp.71-73). This is the great irony of Dickens's Brighton. Instead of aiding in the convalescence of invalids, it becomes the site where they degenerate or die (Figure 37).



Figure 37: Phiz, 'Paul and Mrs Pipchin', *Dombey and Son*, iii, December 1846, pp.65-96. British Library, C.144.b.6

While Paul is brought home for his final days, Mrs Skewton is banished to Brighton for hers. A woman who has so long desired to be Shakespeare's Cleopatra meets a bathetic end. The travesty reaches its apex in a rented house by the seaside, hardly a monument purpose-built to enshrine a legendary queen. While Cleopatra weaves verses and pronounces her immortality until her last moments, Mrs Skewton suffers a stroke before she dies and cannot even form sentences from her bed. Alain Corbin's insight into seaside convalescence – that the hypochondria and obsessive diary-keeping of newly coenesthetic invalids assisted in the creation of the modern, self-conscious individual – does not ring true for Mrs Skewton, whose illness renders her inarticulate and passive.¹⁶ In Dickens's Brighton, there is no happy community of hypochondriacs busy complaining. In a complete perversion of its original purpose, the seaside resort saps energy instead of renewing it, leads to no greater understanding of the body, and becomes an unexpected stage for death: the most intense of narrative moments.

Ham and Steerforth's deaths in the Yarmouth tide, meanwhile, are sudden and dramatic.¹⁷ As the tempest gains power, inns become spaces of relative safety in the great battle between town and sea, civilisation and nature. As people 'ris[e] from their beds in the night, fearful of falling chimneys' and 'falling slates and tiles', as they avoid the 'angry corners' exposed to violent winds, they find shelter in inn-yards (xviii, October 1850, pp.558-559). Penned up in a room at the inn, David's anxiety for Ham grows:

The howl and roar, the rattling of the doors and windows, the rumbling in the chimneys, the apparent rocking of the very house that sheltered me, and the prodigious tumult of the sea, were more fearful than in the morning [...] I could not eat, I could not sit still, I could not continue steadfast to anything [...] I walked to and fro, tried to read an old gazetteer, listened to the awful noises: looked at faces, scenes, and figures in the fire.

(xviii, October 1850, p.560)

When he finally manages to fall into a half-sleep, he is haunted by waking nightmares; when he is awake, he strains to hear what is happening outside and peers out of the window. Pacing incessantly, he reconstitutes the space around him with his tread,

¹⁶ Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), pp.86-89. On hypochondria in resorts, see Mary Jane Curry, 'A New Kind of Pastoral: Anti-Development Satire in Sanditon', *Persuasions*, 19 (1997), 167-176.

¹⁷ On the sexual, psychological, gendered undertones of drowning in Dickens's fiction, see Vybar Cregan-Reid, 'Drowning in Early Dickens', *Textual Practice* 19 (2005), 71-91.

unconsciously learning its contours. As the deaths of Ham and Steerforth approach with a kind of inevitability, the inn concentrates and can hardly contain David's nervous energy. So restless is he that it seems likelier that the inn will implode from the force of his emotion, than shatter from the impact of the storm outside. This obsessively detailed account of David's psychological turmoil never leaves the immediate scene; we are never utterly submerged in his mind and never lose sight of the inn. He interacts with several characters during the course of his enforced stay indoors as they exchange news, keeping each other company in their shared trauma. When the sinking schooner is sighted, everyone leaves the inn and rushes down to the sea in a band. The guests, innkeepers and servants automatically decide to usher in death together.¹⁸ Both the community's anxieties and David's rawest terrors are articulated in this space. It is simultaneously a safe haven, a mental prison, and a point from which truly to appreciate the monstrous power of the sea.

Berry, Mrs Pipchin's assistant at the boarding-house, owns a work-box with an image of the Royal Pavilion on the lid (iii, December 1847, p.74). Built for the Prince Regent – the future George IV – the Pavilion lay at the heart of upper-class seaside fashion.¹⁹ However, this is not the only landmark that defines Brighton for Dickens. The building in which Berry sits, Mrs Pipchin's boarding-house, is just as definitive, and its narratives of loss and decline are prevalent. In seaside lodgings, boarding-houses and hotels, there is a strong chance that the Reaper is in the room next door. Et in Arcadia ego.

*

Sometimes, holidays turn out to be more than holidays. We return, changed for good. When Dickens's Londoners become '*maritimized*', they expect to participate in narratives of social self-fashioning, romantic adventure, or physical and mental rejuvenation. There is real momentum here – but momentum can push people in any direction. As the next chapter shows, seaside lodgings can even play host to the worst transgression of all: murder. In Charles Warren Adams's *The Notting Hill Mystery*,

¹⁸ Shipwrecks often occurred within view of the shore, leading to crowds of horrified onlookers; see Corbin (1994), pp.234-245.

¹⁹ On Dickens's use of a similar souvenir, this time with St Paul's on the lid, see Pettitt, 'Peggotty's Work-Box: Victorian Souvenirs and Material Memory', *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, 53 (2009), <id.erudit.org/iderudit/029896ar>.

Baron R** takes his wife on a mid-novel detour to a boarding-house in Bognor. Because he 'is not likely to meet with any one to whom he [is] known' in Bognor, and because no questions will be asked about the presence of an invalid at the seaside, it becomes easy for him to poison Madame R** slowly.²⁰ Ensconced in Fort House for the Exhibition season, Dickens had already made one thing clear. At the seaside, there is always a cuckoo in the 'airy nest'.

²⁰ [Charles Warren Adams], *The Notting Hill Mystery*, *Once a Week*, 17 January 1863, pp.85-92 (p.87). Subsequent references appear in the text.

Chapter 4

‘Is This an Hotel? Are There Thieves in the House?’: The Spatial Contexts of Crime

As Rachel Verinder is deciding where to keep her new diamond in Collins’s *The Moonstone*, her mother is quick to remind her that her cabinet has no lock. ‘Good heavens, Mamma!’, Rachel reproaches; ‘is this an hotel? Are there thieves in the house?’. Both Lady Verinder and Gabriel Betteredge dismiss Rachel’s statement as a mere ‘fantastic way of talking’, but in among these ‘fantastic’ notions are some significant insights about contemporary attitudes to domestic space.¹ At face value, Rachel is suggesting that there cannot possibly be thieves in her country home; an estate in Yorkshire, it is the embodiment of the domestic ideal. Owned outright by her family, it is rural, private and impregnable – a space where one’s body, possessions and morality are safe. This, of course, forms the crux of most sensation novels. When familiar, cosy spaces do get infiltrated and begin to house criminal plots, characters and readers alike experience the unsettling thrill which defines the genre.²

The nineteenth century witnessed continuous and successive experiments in writing about crime, and mysterious subplots feature throughout Dickens’s fiction.³ The 1850s and 1860s, however, marked something of a departure for both Dickens and his circle, as they began to bring the process of detection closer to the very heart of narrative. With their range of professional and amateur detectives, *The Moonstone*, *Bleak House*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and *The Notting Hill Mystery* have been claimed as foundational texts by critics of the detective story who wish to impose a ‘quasi-evolutionary’ or ‘teleological’ narrative on the development of the genre.⁴ These

¹ Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone, All the Year Round*, 8 February 1868, pp.193-199 (p.193).

² In speaking of Collins and sensation some years prior to the publication of *The Moonstone*, Henry James writes, ‘instead of the terror of Udolpho, we are treated to the terrors of the cheerful country-house, or the busy London lodgings’. See ‘Miss Braddon’, *The Nation*, 9 November 1865, pp.593-595 (p.594). See also Maurizio Ascari, *A Counter-History of Crime: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.111-127.

³ On the mystery elements of Dickens’s fiction, see Philip Collins, *Dickens and Crime* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1994), p.213. On Newgate novels, the ‘mysteries’ novel, and sensation fiction, see Anne Humpherys, ‘Generic Strands and Urban Twists: The Victorian Mysteries Novel’, *Victorian Studies*, 34 (1991), 455-472 (pp.455-456).

⁴ Martin Priestman, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Priestman (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.1-6 (p.3); Ascari (2007), p.8. Robert P. Ashley subscribes to this kind of reading, describing *The Moonstone* as the first detective novel. See ‘Wilkie Collins and the Detective Story’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 6 (1951), 47-60.

and other works of detective fiction have been enlisted to serve a variety of theoretical ends in criticism, from the narratological to the feminist, Freudian and Foucauldian. Geographers, too, have been drawn to this body of literature: they highlight the varying levels of descriptive detail employed by crime writers, placing emphasis on the landscape as pathetic fallacy, exotic backdrop, and active agent in plot.⁵ For Simon Joyce, nineteenth-century literature was intensely concerned with the relationship between space, class and crime, and both tapped into and perpetuated a moral map of London.⁶ While Joyce offers a macrocosmic view of urban geography – focusing on entire neighbourhoods, for example, and the difference between the East and West Ends – it is worth reverting our attention to the microcosm. Dickens and his associates were interested in the inconspicuous corners of London where crimes were conceived, committed and solved, and repeatedly found themselves peering into rented spaces. Viewed in this light, Rachel Verinder's casual statement has deeper implications. She sets up a direct contrast between the 'house', on the one hand, and the 'hotel', on the other. The hotel becomes an inferior sort of space, a version of the home that never quite lives up to its prototype. If one is staying at a hotel, she implies, it is likely that one will come face to face with thieves. In her opinion, a hotel is particularly susceptible to becoming a crime scene. Dickens, Collins and Adams rehearse several variations on this theme, which are explored in the present chapter. The first section reviews the place of the low lodging-house in social discourse and fiction; the second concerns detection in rented spaces more broadly; the third places the new genre of detective fiction alongside those which were more established in the period.

Situating the detective fiction of the 1850s and 1860s in its immediate historical context produces rich results, because the publication of these texts coincided with extensive social debates about rented space and vice. During the middle decades of the century, the city's unofficial anthropologists were especially active in bringing one mode of dwelling to the public consciousness: the 'low' or 'common' lodging-house, described by Mayhew as the 'hotels for the poor' and discussed by politicians, health

⁵ For literary-geographical readings of crime fiction that encompass the Sherlock Holmes stories, the novels of the Golden Age, and the modern police procedural, see Gary J. Hausladen, *Places for Dead Bodies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Yi-Fu Tuan, 'The Landscapes of Sherlock Holmes', *Journal of Geography*, 84 (1985), 56-60; Douglas R. McManis, 'Places for Mysteries', *Geographical Review*, 68 (1978), 319-334.

⁶ Simon Joyce, *Capital Offenses: Geographies of Class and Crime in Victorian London* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2003).

officials, religious figures, journalists and authors alike.⁷ There were huge differences in the nature and structure of poor housing from city to city.⁸ In London, it mainly comprised a mixture of terraces and tenements. Though the distinctions between types of housing were often blurred, they may be grouped into the three categories isolated by John Burnett: cellar-dwellings, low lodging-houses, and tenemented houses, which involved the 'subdivision of existing houses into separately-occupied floors or single rooms', designated for 'longer-term tenancy'.⁹

Mayhew estimated that in London there were at least two hundred low lodging-houses, defined by legislators as establishments where lodgers either paid for beds by the night or were housed in a single room with other families (p.252).¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, however, there was a gap between formal definitions and their wider connotations. The terms 'low' and 'common' began to accrue resonances beyond the merely descriptive as report after report suggested that overcrowding led to sexual indecency, and that certain spaces attracted and created criminals. In this context, 'lowness' came to denote not only the quality of the lodging-house but also the supposed morality of its inmates. 'In applying the epithet "low" to these places,' Mayhew writes, 'I do but adopt a word commonly applied, either in consequence of the small charge for lodging, or from the character of their frequenters' (p.251). 'Common', which was favoured in legal documentation, did not simply refer to the sheer proliferation of this kind of housing; it too quickly tipped into a more evaluative register. Though it may have encompassed ideas of democracy, sympathy and intimate community, it also carried echoes of the inverse.¹¹ 'Commonness' implied a cheapness of life, and these spaces separated common criminals and common prostitutes from the city's more respectable

⁷ Henry Mayhew, 'Of the Low Lodging-Houses of London', in *London Labour and the London Poor*, by Mayhew et al., 4 vols (London: Griffin, Bohn and Co., 1861), I, pp.251-254 (p.252). Mayhew's other pieces on low lodging-houses are 'Of the Filth, Dishonesty, and Immorality of Low Lodging-Houses', pp.254-257; 'Of the Children in Low Lodging-Houses', pp.257-258; and 'Of the Low Lodging-Houses Throughout the Country', pp.258-261. Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁸ The most recent and focused historical study of common lodging-houses is Tom Crook, 'Accommodating the Outcast: Common Lodging Houses and the Limits of Urban Governance in Victorian and Edwardian London', *Urban History*, 35 (2002), 414-436. For a detailed study of the types of poor housing in the provincial metropolises, with a particular emphasis on the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, see MJ Daunt, *House and Home in the Victorian City: Working-Class Housing 1850-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983).

⁹ Burnett (1986), pp.58-70.

¹⁰ Robert A. Strange, *Lodging Houses Acts: The Common Lodging Houses Act, 1851, and the Labouring Classes Lodging Houses Act, 1851; with Plain Directions and Forms for Putting Them into Execution, Published for the Society for the Improvement of the Condition of the Labouring Classes* (London: Shaw and Sons, 1851).

¹¹ On the connotations of 'commonness', see Dart (2012), pp.104-105.

inhabitants. Indeed, some lodging-houses were specifically used by tramps, some by sailors, and some by destitute Irish immigrants. Even the lowest strata of society became atomised in the lodging-house, which underscored just how many sorts of ‘lowness’ there could be. The ambiguity of the lodging-house’s descriptive vocabulary, meanwhile, neatly paralleled the nature of the space: here, definitions were as mobile as the populations they housed. This instability was also apparent at the level of genre, as writers employed a range of modes of social commentary without ever being completely satisfied with the results. In attempting to depict the way the urban poor lived, they soon realised that it was almost impossible to pin these subjects down.

At the same time, low lodging-houses proved to be fertile spaces for asking questions about character. As increasing amounts of attention were directed towards these dwellings, a vein of thinking suggested that a lodger’s moral character was largely informed by space and circumstance; such arguments are crucial in late-century naturalism.¹² Dickens and Collins’s fiction and journalism play with this idea without ever fully appropriating it, and plumb the low-lodging house for less predictable narratives than those of steady, simple deterioration. Moreover, it was not the only kind of rented space to lend itself to stories of crime. Along with Adams, Dickens and Collins move on to study the narrative potential of less openly sinister rented spaces, from taverns in the East End to lawyers’ chambers in Holborn, from furnished apartments in Notting Hill to private homes that open their doors to lodgers. Throughout, the relationship between individual morality and the built environment remains a pressing subtext. In his Preface to the first edition of *The Moonstone*, Collins attempts to draw a distinction between his previous and recent work: ‘In some of my former novels, the object proposed has been to trace the influence of circumstances upon character. In the present story I have reversed the process’. And yet, the texts addressed here show that circumstances do have an influence upon character in this context – the self does react to the spaces around it.

Ultimately, the opportunities afforded by the contemporary domestic landscape allowed the genre to grow in certain directions. In their very nature – their architectural peculiarities, the kinds of society they attracted, the manner of human interaction they

¹² On the genesis and development of these arguments and their resulting ‘moral and religious crusades’ throughout the century, with respect to slum-dwelling more broadly, see Wohl (1977), pp.8-9, 50-74. There was uncertainty whether depravity led to the formation of slums, or that slum-dwelling led to depravity.

encouraged – rented spaces were a convenient tool in the workings of detective plots. Thus, it is important to re-evaluate the literary geographies of crime. This was not merely a country-house genre, or one that was most deeply invested in exploring the ideologies of the middle-class home.¹³ In narratives by Dickens, Collins, and Adams, characters and plots are tugged away from grand estates and are set down again in unstable urban spaces. And it is not only detectives and criminals who use rented spaces to bring their plans to fruition. Novelists do, too.

‘Where Vice is Closely Packed and Lacks the Room to Turn’: Low Lodging-Houses in the 1850s

In 1840, Lord William Russell was murdered by his valet, François Benjamin Courvoisier, who stashed a parcel of stolen plate in the French hotel in Leicester Square where he used to work. During the trial, a substantial amount of time was spent interrogating the landlady of the Hotel Dieppe and ascertaining the nature of Courvoisier’s employment and conduct there. Courvoisier’s lawyer tried to question the landlady’s morals and tarnish the name of the hotel; in two pseudonymous letters to the *Morning Chronicle*, Dickens expressed his disgust at this tactic of ‘casting disgraceful aspersions on [the landlady’s] character’. A particularly troubling suggestion to come out of the trial, meanwhile, related to Courvoisier’s reading habits. Allegedly, Courvoisier was inspired to violence by William Harrison Ainsworth’s *Jack Sheppard* (1839) – one of a number of ‘Newgate novels’, which were taken to include *Oliver Twist*.¹⁴ Citing Courvoisier’s example, the more hysterical elements of the middle classes came to a firm conclusion: reading about criminals, especially among the barely literate, led to acts of heinous criminality. Though Oliver himself refuses to be turned by a version of the Newgate Calendar, offered to him by Fagin, a treatise on the causes of crime affirms that *Oliver Twist*, Oliver’s own story, was a favourite in

¹³ On the middle-class home in Collins and Dickens’s detective fiction, see DA Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1988), pp.33-106.

¹⁴ On the Courvoisier murder, including the influence of *Jack Sheppard*, see ‘Murder of Lord William Russell.– Trial of Courvoisier’, *The Times*, 20 June 1840, p.6; and Ainsworth’s indignant letter ‘To the Editor’, *The Times*, 7 July 1840, p.7. On the landlady of the Hotel Dieppe, see Dickens to the Editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, 21 and 26 June 1840, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), II, pp.88-91. On capital punishment in Dickens’s fiction, see Tambling, *Dickens, Violence and the Modern State: Dreams of the Scaffold* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1995), pp.129-154. On Newgate novels, see, for example, Keith Hollingsworth, *The Newgate Novel, 1830-1847: Bulwer, Ainsworth, Dickens and Thackeray* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963); Joyce (2003), pp.59-99; Lyn Pykett, ‘The Newgate Novel and Sensation Fiction, 1830-1868’, in Priestman (2003), pp.19-40.

London's low lodging-houses.¹⁵ Even after measures were taken towards moral and housing reform in 1851, vulnerable sectors of society were interpreting *Oliver Twist* in questionable ways.

According to Edmund Edward Antrobus, 'those very moral and exciting publications, Jack Sheppard, *Oliver Twist*, Martha Willis, and a host of other public lodging-house works, are read by those who can read,' particularly by delinquent children who went on to plot robberies.¹⁶ Here, Dickens's fiction was not simply passed around a stable middle-class household; instead, it was pored over at parodic hearths, versions of the family like Fagin's. (Mayhew notes that Dickens's popularity in such spaces only fell after he published condemnations of begging-letter writers in *Household Words*; p.250). This leads to a reassessment of accepted models for nineteenth-century authorship, where the writer situates himself and his texts in his reader's parlour – a space where homeliness is relatively easy to define. Now, Dickens's novels created an imagined community of a more sinister kind, within the city's hundreds of low lodging-houses. The shared experience of reading *Oliver Twist* ultimately forged a bond between lodging-house and parlour, criminal and clerk.¹⁷ Magwitch, after all, learns to read in a Travellers' Rest (25 May 1861, pp.193-198, p.195).

Writing the 1841 Author's Introduction to *Oliver Twist*, Dickens declares that the highwaymen and criminals of old have found their fictional homes in the 'snuggest of all possible caverns'. His choice of the term 'snug' is charged, because, in much of his fiction, it is a shorthand for the domestic ideal.¹⁸ If criminality is a pressing social concern, he argues, the author must dedicate himself to a more realistic portrayal of 'the foul and frowsy dens, where vice is closely packed and lacks the room to turn'. After all, it is very easy to fall from a snug 'cavern' to a seedy 'tavern' full of thieves, like the Three Cripples in Saffron Hill. From the first stages of his career, then, Dickens revealed a desire to explore the spaces that were associated with vice. The public

¹⁵ On the ways in which the Newgate Calendar scene anticipates the reaction to *Oliver Twist* itself, see Joyce (2003), p.88.

¹⁶ Edmund Edward Antrobus, *The Prison and the School: The Chief Ascertained Causes of Crime Considered, With Suggestions for the Care, Relief, and Reformation of the Neglected, Destitute, and Criminal Children of the Metropolis* (London: Staunton and Sons, 1853), pp.27-29, 31. Philip Collins uses extracts from Antrobus to situate Dickens in the Newgate debate. See Collins (1994), p.258.

¹⁷ On 'imagined communities' of readers and the creation of nationhood, see Anderson (1983). On the ways in which *Household Words* fits into Anderson's arguments, see Clemm (2009), pp.3-4, 50.

¹⁸ On 'snugness' and the ideal Dickensian home, see Armstrong (1990), pp.25-28; and Carey (1991), pp.42-53.

replicated this desire particularly vociferously in the 1840s and 1850s, when low lodging-houses came under intense scrutiny. Though initial discussions revolved around the problem of cholera, an influential circle of legislators and philanthropists were more interested in the moral conundrums these spaces posed.¹⁹ An 1848 speech by Lord Ashley centred upon juvenile destitution; like Antrobus, Ashley proposed a clear link between the moral choices children made and the houses they grew up in. The corresponding editorial in *The Times* echoed Ashley's arguments: these children were 'spending the night in filthy styes called lodging-houses, than which mountain or marsh can hardly be less accessible [...] They form a state of life too hideous, too foul, too loathsome, to be explored and described but by the most self-denying eyes, tongue, and pen.'²⁰ The author of the editorial stutters into inarticulacy, defeated by such defeated lives; a possible allusion to *Hamlet*, a fable of inaction, can be found in the call to civic action.

For Ashley, low lodging-houses were not 'styes', but 'nests of every abomination that the mind of man could imagine', 'sinks of wretchedness and vice', and 'haunts of pollution' – spaces 'where hundreds and thousands of the human race congregated', like a grotesque inversion of parishioners in a church. Ashley read out the report of a city missionary, who entered the 'parlour' of a lodging-house – 'for there were many euphonous terms to be applied' – and found fifty-seven men, women and children in this 'contracted den'. In an unlikely turn of phrase, the missionary continued: 'The quantities of vermin are amazing. I have entered a room, and in a few minutes I have felt them dropping on my hat like peas'. Along with the references to nests, dens and parlours, this suggests a bizarre kind of cultivation. The lodging-house was a version of a greenhouse, as indeed is Dr Blimber's school in *Dombey and Son*.²¹ There were misshapen versions of the *Bildungsroman* being formed here, away from the kindly direction of a paternalistic figure, and the key moments in these stories of personal development were, invariably, moments of criminal activity. The

¹⁹ On sanitation and lodging-houses, including the ways in which legislation empowering the central authority was seen to threaten the free market and the rights of private property, see Wohl (1977), pp.14-20. On public health legislation, the links between sanitation and morality, and the ways in which the sewer system complicated the notion of separate spheres, see Michelle Elizabeth Allen, *Cleansing the City: Sanitary Geographies in Victorian London* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), pp.13-14, 30-42, 45-49.

²⁰ 'The difficulty which Lord ASHLEY...', *The Times*, 7 June 1848, p.4.

²¹ On Dickens's use of the image of the forcing apparatus, see Shuttleworth (2010), pp.107-130. Similar language was used to describe low lodgers during the window-tax debates; see [Dickens and Wills], 'Red Tape', *Household Words*, 15 February 1851, pp.481-484.

overcrowding, the lack of privacy and modesty, and the manipulative nature of lodging-house keepers meant that it was only a matter of time before lodgers were corrupted. Drawing upon evidence from local magistrates and missionaries throughout the country – for example, that ‘seven-tenths of the crimes perpetrated in the different localities were concocted by the society which met in those lodginghouses’ – Ashley proved that these nests, dens and parlours were not cosy spaces, but ‘the general receptacle of offenders’.²² And the ‘offenders’, themselves, were difficult to define. As Robert Douglas-Fairhurst explains, writers were attempting to find a place for the urban poor in contemporary vocabulary; they tapped into the images of contagion and waste-matter, for example, revealing a ‘confusion over whether these “nuisances” [came] from humans, or simply [were] humans’.²³ In the descriptions of low lodging-houses, similarly, there seems to be a constant substitution between real and metaphorical ‘vermin’. Vermin infest, rather than dwell. They are a threat to the human communities upon which they have a parasitic dependence, and have no identity of their own.

Antrobus’s treatise is constructed around a series of interviews with imprisoned children who have planned robberies in the safety of their lodging-houses. These children are the working-class rivals to Dickens’s middle-class cherubs. As John Carey points out, ‘the bright, pure child in the mouldering house is an image to which his imagination constantly returns’; a ‘beautiful contrast to the gloomy building[s]’, Oliver, Nell and their ilk embody the ‘purity of the middle-class soul’.²⁴ Not so in Antrobus’s treatise. Here, the child is an image of virtue being tarnished, and becomes a metonym for a stunted class of society, penned into a particular place and unable to develop beyond a certain period of life. A powerful faction of public officials subscribed to a belief in architectural determinism – the shape of one’s home, especially a child’s home, governed the shape of one’s life and the bent of one’s character. Criminals could not be understood without taking their physical circumstances into account. In the light of these conclusions, two pieces of legislation were introduced in 1851: the Common Lodging Houses Act and the Labouring Classes Lodging Houses Act, collectively known as the Shaftesbury Acts. With the ‘well-ordering of common lodging houses’ given as a general objective, the first act put forward methods of regulating, supervising

²² ‘House of Commons’, *The Times*, 7 June 1848, p.2.

²³ Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.132-134.

²⁴ Carey (1991), pp.149-153.

and maintaining these spaces, with particular emphasis on the registration of addresses by lodging-house keepers. Certain practices by these keepers were formally criminalised, although, in a concession to laissez-faire principles, the property holder seemed to remain untouchable. Local authorities were given the power to enter and inspect buildings freely, quashing the idea that an Englishman's house was his castle.²⁵

If living in a lodging-house gave thieves and murderers a safe space to plan their exploits, then maintaining a lodging-house could also offer a cover for criminal activity: lodging-house keepers and the landlords of flash-houses could profitably work as 'fences'. Umpteen police reports in *The Times* described the crimes committed in lodging-houses, by keepers and lodgers alike.²⁶ As this material appeared in journalistic and legal circles, novelists, including Dickens and Collins, turned to poor housing in earnest. *David Copperfield*, 'On Duty With Inspector Field' (1851), *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit* and 'The Diary of Anne Rodway', all published in the immediate context of reform, share a central preoccupation with how social commentary can modulate into imaginative narrative.

Dickens and Collins were united in their attempts to locate the true villains of the piece. In this, they took a cue from John Poole, who, in 1838, published *The Oddities of London Life*, by Paul Pry: a series of courtroom-scenes in which stock Londoners air their grievances against one another. The case of an Irishman, charged with 'administer[ing] a bellyful of broomstick to his mother-in-law' in a St Giles's lodging-house, gives the impression that the social body should be on trial instead.²⁷ Though Dickens and Collins acknowledged that lodgers participated in criminal activity, they were especially anxious to probe the extent to which there were more institutional powers at fault. Published in *Household Words*, 'Inspector Field' is an account of Dickens's tours through the lodging-houses of St Giles's and the East End, in the company of Charles Frederick Field. Usually read as a paeon to Field, the Chief

²⁵ On the radical nature of the Labouring Classes Lodging Houses Act, which urged a move towards social housing and was taken up by very few local authorities, see Wohl (1977), pp.74-79; and Enid Gaudie, *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working-Class Housing 1780-1918* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974), pp.239-246. Wohl describes 1850s housing legislation as 'permissive, piecemeal [...] complicated, [and] lack[ing] real bite'.

²⁶ On crimes with a connection to lodging-houses, see the following articles in *The Times*: 15 February 1850, p.7; 6 March 1850, p.7; 12 April 1850, p.7; 15 April 1850, p.7; 22 October 1850, p.8; 20 January 1851, p.8; 17 February 1851, p.8; 15 March 1851, p.8; 27 October 1851, p.7; 25 November 1851, p.7; 15 December 1851, p.7. On 'fences', or receivers of goods, who worked in lodging- and public-houses, see Kellow Chesney, *The Victorian Underworld* (London: Temple Smith, 1970), pp.194-195.

²⁷ [Poole], 'An Irish Lodging-House', in *Oddities of London Life*, by Paul Pry, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1838), I, pp.196-200 (p.196).

Inspector of the Metropolitan Police's detective branch, the essay is also a meditation on the nature of the lodging-houses themselves.²⁸ Dickens begins by condemning Parliament, whose ineffectiveness amounts to a dereliction of moral duty to the poor. The parliamentarians did acknowledge this – it was 'the fault of the House, in not preventing such a state of things' – but Dickens's criticism is vicious.²⁹ 'With such scenes at our doors,' he writes, 'with all the plagues of Egypt tied up with bits of cobweb in kennels so near our homes, we timorously make our Nuisance Bills and Boards of Health', which are mere 'nonentities'.³⁰

However, social apathy and political incompetence only constituted one part of the story. Dickens and Collins ultimately laid the blame at more impressive doorsteps, and pointed to a sinister truth: that the exploitative landlords who owned these properties were more concerned with maintaining their own takings than improving the conditions of the communities they had created. Historians have attempted to temper widespread preconceptions about the greed of the nineteenth-century landlord; moreover, poor housing was governed by a chaos of letting and under-letting that made it difficult to know who was making the real profit – the freeholder, the rent-collectors, or any number of intermediary landlords.³¹ But Dickens and Collins were damning, rather than nuanced, in their judgement. In 'Inspector Field', 'the vested interest of the profitable nuisance' – namely, a low lodging-house – 'has been in one family for a hundred years, and the landlord drives in comfortably from the country to his snug little stew in town' (p.267). 'Stew' is a particularly cutting choice of word for the landlord's 'snug' town-house, given that it also signifies a brothel; Dickens uses this meaning himself to refer to Nancy's places of work in *Oliver Twist* (p.332).³² With fiction, Dickens has the room to expand on this reference and bring the situation to life. In *Little Dorrit*, the wealthy landlord of Bleeding-Heart Yard is exposed by his rent-collector. Casby's struggling tenants are divided between the rooms of a tenement, with the Plornishes living in the parlour. Mr Plornish is a plasterer by profession; employed to

²⁸ On Dickens's adulation for Field, see, for example, Joyce (2003), pp.110-144; Martin Priestman, *Detective Fiction and Literature: The Figure on the Carpet* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991), p.13; Heather Worthington, *The Rise of the Detective in Early Nineteenth-Century Popular Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.160-169.

²⁹ 'House of Commons', *The Times*, 9 April 1851, p.3.

³⁰ [Dickens], 'On Duty With Inspector Field', *Household Words*, 14 June 1851, pp.265-270 (p.267). Subsequent references appear in the text.

³¹ See Chesney (1970), pp.96-7; Wohl (1977), p.4; Dauntton (1983), pp.122-175; Burnett (1986), p.69.

³² 'stew', n.2.1.4a., in the *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <www.oed.com/view/Entry/190080> [Accessed: 9 August 2016].

cover up the cracks and fissures in other people's houses, he does not notice his landlord doing some symbolic plastering of his own. 'What's your moral game?', Pancks asks Casby, before working through a dozen carefully chosen epithets to pinpoint the precise nature of his villainy: Casby is everything from a 'sugary swindler' to a 'shaver by substitute', who allows his agent to take the responsibility for his own sins. Pancks's accusations touch upon both the immoral and the illegal. Having 'been so seized by assault, and requir[ing] so much room to catch an idea in, and so much more room to turn it in', Casby has no response: he is in as tight a corner as his tenants (xix/x, June 1857, p.605, 607). This narrative is particularly appropriate to Bleeding-Heart Yard; in one of his *Ingoldsby Legends*, the supernatural 'The House-Warming!! A Legend of Bleeding-Heart Yard' (1843), Richard Harris Barham shows how the neighbourhood gained its grisly name because of an Elizabethan couple's greed for property.

As Dickens was serialising *Little Dorrit*, he published a two-part short story by Collins in *Household Words*. Dickens was so excited about 'The Diary of Anne Rodway' that he decided to extend an offer of a full staff contract to Collins, along with the suggestion they work collaboratively.³³ 'Anne Rodway' is set in a poor tenement, and deals with many of the same themes as Dickens's Bleeding-Heart Yard segments. A major subplot of 'Anne Rodway' – structurally unusual, given this is a short story – centres around the cruelty of Anne and Mary's landlord. 'The inhuman wretch who owns the house', Anne says, 'lives in idleness on the high rents he wrings from poor people like us'; he is more concerned about Mary's three-weeks' arrears than her suspicious death.³⁴ The language and gestures in this subplot owe a great deal to the tropes of rural melodrama, in which tenant farmers are subjugated by malicious landowners and stewards. As Anne Humpherys argues, melodrama – which contrasts the resolution of individual and institutional crimes – is a 'dominant theatrical mode' in the 'mysteries novel'.³⁵ Collins and Dickens use the example of the low-lodging house to tease out the different kinds of vice that exist in the city, be they overt or more insidious.

³³ On his strong reaction to 'Anne Rodway', see Dickens to WC Macready, 8 July 1856; to WH Wills, 10 July 1856; to Collins 13 July 1856; and to Angela Burdett Coutts, 15 July 1856, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VIII, p.156, 158-159, 161-163, 164-165.

³⁴ [Collins], 'The Diary of Anne Rodway', *Household Words*, 19 and 26 July 1856, pp.1-7, 30-38 (I, p.4). Subsequent references appear in the text.

³⁵ Humpherys (1991), p.466.

Fiction, however, does not simply exist as a scion of social commentary. Though nominally a piece of journalism, ‘Inspector Field’ lingers on questions of language and narrative, and reveals Dickens’s fascination with the stories that lodging-houses generate. His essay is a collage of literary registers. Alongside allusions to melodrama and the Old Testament are others, made fleetingly, to the *Arabian Nights*, dream visions, high tragedy, the supernatural, and whimsical magic tricks: ‘Examine these intricate passages and doors contrived for escape’, Dickens writes, ‘flapping and counter-flapping, like the lids of the conjuror’s boxes’ (p.268). With their architectural sleights of hand, lodging-houses seem to imitate the mouldering buildings of Gothic fiction: the Old Farm House is a degenerated manor that once belonged to a pastoral idyll of the *David Copperfield* variety, but whose ‘rooks [...] have yielded to a different sort of rookery’ (p.268).³⁶ Meanwhile, the numerous references to Rats’ Castle, an infamous lodging-house, amount to a grotesque distortion of the fairytale. This is compounded by the fact that Field is looking for a criminal called the ‘Earl of Warwick’. The irony is straightforward – an earl is a member of the landed gentry and this lodger owns neither land nor possessions – but the title also has a deeper resonance for Dickens. The real Earl of Warwick’s seat is Warwick Castle, the site of Dombey and Edith’s highly respectable and doomed courtship (ix, June 1847, pp.269-281). To some extent, Dickens is tapping into a common discourse here, evident in Ashley’s speech and Antrobus’s treatise: these lodging-houses are at best perversions of the ideal home. However, a castle is also a generic convention. Dickens is groping for a suitable literary mode with which to depict a social and geographical reality, the horrors of which may prove impossible to describe. As Sharon Marcus notes, ‘urban observers singled out the ills of lodging houses for exhaustive description – and marked lodging houses as the cause of descriptive exhaustion. Almost all urban observers spoke of lodging houses as unspeakable’.³⁷ Dickens, an ‘urban observer’ who is also a creative writer, finds himself confronting a space that has no independent identity or language of its own. Composed of borrowed fragments from various genres, the literary foundations of ‘Inspector Field’ are shaky.

³⁶ On the architecture of nineteenth-century rookeries, and the ways in which this helped criminals escape their pursuers, see Chesney (1970), pp.107-110. On the ways in which the archetypal features of the Gothic mansion were superimposed onto the ‘labyrinth of city streets’ in the ‘mysteries novel’, see Humpherys (1991), p.459.

³⁷ Marcus (1999), p.107. Marcus also describes the ways in which nineteenth-century discourse presented the low lodging-house as a metonym for the city as a whole.

Venturing into a lodging-house on Wentworth Street, Whitechapel, Dickens shines the novelist's torch on a figure so familiar from journalism that he has turned into a trope: the 'lodging-house keeper and receiver of stolen goods' (p.269). The line between these two categories is ambiguous; with that carefully imprecise connective 'and', Dickens implies there is an equivalence between them, as if being a lodging-house keeper could automatically make a person a receiver. He reveals an insatiable interest in the types of characters produced by these spaces. Like his lodgers, Bark is an animal, barely identifiable as a human character at all. He sleeps in a hutch, 'foam[s] at the mouth', 'growls' and 'flies out of bed' when Dickens and Field enter (pp.269-270), as if he were cast in a nineteenth-century retelling of *Volpone*. The joke is obvious. As he threatens the police – 'I'll rip up their adjective substantives. Give me my adjective trousers! [...] and I'll spile the bileing of 'em!' – Bark's bark is quite as bad as his bite. He 'calls' for his trousers, 'as Hercules might for his club'. These linguistic games, Bark's relentless repetition of a catchphrase, and his resemblance to an unchanging archetype – the classical hero – render him one of Dickens's flatter characters, rather like Barkis in *David Copperfield*. However, he also has a 'ferocious individuality' that prompts him to brand his linen with the phrase 'STOLEN FROM Bark's!' (p.270). Individuality is one of the crucial elements that changes the stock character in a melodrama or the peripheral caricature in a novel into the hero of his own life. Dickens is weighing up two different methods of creating character here: should Bark be ferocious in his individuality or a darkly comic stereotype, dehumanised by the space in which he belongs? Dickens opts for the latter, but acknowledges that he has not gone far enough. Thus, 'fence' emerges as an appropriate slang-term for a receiver: the lodging-house keeper hems people in and is also hemmed in himself, trapped by established patterns of representation.

This sense of defeat permeates the entire essay. Dickens describes a crowd of thieves in Bark's 'low kitchen', who are 'holding a *conversazione* by lamp-light' (p.270). A derivative of formal intellectual discussion, this suggests that they have nothing of interest to say in their own right. It seems extraordinary that the plotting of thieves – plans for weird and wonderful crimes, the seeds for a variety of stories – does not merit ventriloquising. Meanwhile, a 'woman mysteriously sitting up all night in the dark by the smouldering ashes of the kitchen fire' could be another Louisa Gradgrind or Lizzie Hexam, whose passions and imaginations are invariably concentrated in the flames (p.269). But this motif for dangerous creativity leads, once again, to nothing. As

various lodgers from different houses cry ‘mine next! Mine! Mine!’, as doors are opened and closed resoundingly, each space could easily stand in for the next (p.267). Dickens implies that there are infinite numbers of these identical spaces, where the same conversations are repeated eternally. Thus, when he writes about the low lodging-house, readers are left with the bitter taste of wasted narrative potential. The passage gives us a vision of hell.

In an early letter to Forster, Dickens complained about putting together a particular number of *The Old Curiosity Shop*: ‘I was obliged to cramp most dreadfully what I thought a pretty idea in the last chapter. I hadn’t room to turn’.³⁸ Though, generally speaking, he has greater room to stretch and turn in the novel, which is a far more capacious genre, his description of Tom-All-Alone’s in *Bleak House* is just as tentative as the ‘Inspector Field’ passages. Dickens speaks with heavy irony when he mentions this ‘desirable property’. A slum caught up in Chancery, Tom-All-Alone’s has been annexed by a group of ‘bold vagrants’ who ‘[establish] their own possession’ and set up a warren of lodging-houses (v, July 1852, p.156). Dickens mentions a pair of lodging-house keepers here, recognisable permutations of Bark – one, who takes a cut of Jo’s sovereign to buy drinks, another, a woman with a ‘drunken face tied up in a black bundle’, who ‘flar[es] out of a heap of rags on the floor of a dog-hutch which is her private apartment’ (vi, August 1852, p.189; vii, September 1852, p.220). Jenny, Liz and their abusive husbands find shelter in Tom’s lodging-houses; there is a tragic irony in placing brick-making families, commissioned to construct homes for a living, in such squalid spaces.³⁹ Of the people to be found in Tom-All-Alone’s, Dickens says:

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 the fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years - though born expressly to do it...

(v, July 1852, p.156)

The language in ‘Inspector Field’ is repeated almost verbatim in *Bleak House*: the earlier piece contains references to lodgers like ‘maggots in a cheese’, bodies ‘coiling’ around Dickens’s feet, and ‘Mr Wix of Piccadilly’ and ‘Mr Nix of Oxford Street’

³⁸ Dickens to Forster, early June 1840, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), II, p.80.

³⁹ On brick-making, see Burnett (1986), pp.27-28. In 1851, a male workforce of 6.5 million included 463,491 in the building trade – skilled men, apprentices and labourers; p.18.

(‘Inspector Field’, pp.266-267). Dickens cannot, or will not, conjure up new images. ‘Vermin parasites’ is a tautological construction and stems directly from the tired metaphors used by urban commentators. This linguistic promiscuity – a nod to the fear of incessant breeding in crowded rooms – is not fertile, but merely duplicates something familiar. The lodgers in Tom-All-Alone’s are parasites with no agency, condemned to an endless cycle of ‘crawling’ and ‘coiling’, ‘coming’ and ‘going’, ‘fetching’, ‘carrying’, and ‘sowing evil’. ‘Coiling’ is especially evocative; it suggests a life that can only turn in on itself, a spring that is never released, and a narrative that never plays out. Squeezing in through ‘gaps in walls and boards’, these lodgers are deprived of the charged threshold spaces – like doorways – that signify choice and progression.



Figure 38: Phiz, ‘Tom-All-Alone’s’, *Bleak House*, xiv, April 1853, pp.417-448. British Library, C.144.b.7

Though Jo may be a metaphor for the principle of narrative, the source of contagion that connects characters together and moves inexorably on from scene to scene, he is hardly a character in his own right. He has little motivation, inner life, or hope for personal development. He can neither grow up nor turn over a new leaf. ‘Jo lives —’ Dickens writes, before he corrects himself, ‘that is to say, Jo has not yet died — in a ruinous place’ (v, July 1852, p.156). For Dickens, living in such ‘ruinous places’ denies a character ‘the room to turn’ physically or metaphorically; any ‘turn’ that does occur

will inevitably be a peripeteia, a reversal that brings even deeper tragedy. Jo is one of Lord Ashley's atrophied children. Not for nothing is his nickname the 'Tough Subject' (vii, September 1852, p.220, 222-223; viii, October 1852, p.253; xviii, August 1853, p.548, 550; Figure 38).

In 'Anne Rodway' and *David Copperfield* – the other Dickens novel contemporaneous with poor housing reforms – the questions of gender and sexual indecency become central. Dickens posits a straightforward argument about rented rooms housing rented bodies; low lodgings are a stopping-point for fallen women. It is no surprise when Martha brings Emily to a space like this, in Golden Square, near Leicester Square and Soho. David displays his usual hyper-awareness of space when he describes the scene. Significantly, the tenement itself has experienced a trajectory from 'fairness', 'grandeur' and 'ornament[ation]' to 'rot', 'damp', 'age' and 'swarming' poverty (xvi, August 1850, p.508).⁴⁰ Its narrative parallels Emily's, and the repeated references to 'commonness' – 'common staircase', 'common deal', 'common dust-heap' – cement Emily and Martha's position as common women. Here, Rosa Dartle calls Emily an 'earth-worm' from a 'low place'. An earthworm burrows, literally consuming and digesting the land in which it lives; Rosa suggests that Emily is an inevitable product of her 'home' in Yarmouth, whose lowness is both monetary and moral – no different, indeed, from a lodging-house (xvi, August 1850, p.508, 510, 512).

Rosa acknowledges that 'there are decent women in the house' where Emily takes refuge (xvi, August 1850, p.512). 'Anne Rodway' takes this a step further, leaving the matter of prostitution behind and offering a vision of a close-knit female community in a poor tenement. Collins's reassessment of space, gender and morality proves to be exceptionally fruitful, and marks an important point of departure for lodging-house narratives. Here, the lodging-house is not simply a space where crimes are planned or committed, but where they can be solved in a systematic fashion. The victim, Mary, is a lodger, and is murdered outside an inn; the murderer takes refuge in the inn and becomes so ill from excessive drinking that he is trapped and captured. The mystery surrounding Mary's death is cleared up by her friend, neighbour and fellow-seamstress, Anne, who tells the story as a diary. Anne is intelligent and, obviously, literate – a version of Esther Summerson, whose sections of *Bleak House* are narrated with deftness

⁴⁰ This was quite usual for poor housing; tenements had often begun as fashionable houses. See Burnett (1986), p.65.

and elegance. Anne's diary gives a voice to the artisanal classes, proving that the tenement need not be a silent or inarticulable space; this is a canny generic choice on Collins's part. Sitting in her room and putting the clues together, Anne turns the tenement into a detective's home and study, anticipating Betteredge's 'detective fever' in *The Moonstone* when she admits, 'not once did I close my eyes that night. A kind of fever got possession of me' (II, p.33). In the process, Collins radically rethinks both the nature of the space itself and the kinds of fictional plots it has the potential to generate.

He is careful to emphasise the relative lowness of the accommodation, but in spite of this, he suggests that it is a credible analogue for a middle-class home. There is a grate, a desk, and a hand-glass in Anne's room; her room is her own, rather than shared; she calls it a 'shelter', and, repeatedly, a 'home'; it is a site of nursing and vigil as Mary lies dying (I, p.3, 6; II, pp.30-34). This homeliness is essential for the narrative itself, because it offers Anne a protected space in which to think, keep her journal, and dream about her future with her fiancé. Anne is a poor female lodger, a detective and a writer, and the tenement is essential to each of these aspects of her character. It is also a convivial space. To Mary, Anne says, 'you ought to be ashamed of yourself for saying [you are alone] [...] Haven't you got me for a friend. Didn't I take a fancy to you when first you left your stepmother, and came to lodge in this house? And haven't I been sisters with you ever since?' (I, p.2). As Mary is brought in, the anguish of the other lodgers – the precise numbers of whom we are never told – is apparent. Here, Collins is interrogating the difference between proximity and intimacy in city spaces. Unlike Nemo and Miss Flite, Anne and Mary collapse the difference between physical and human geography, and this yields a new kind of narrative. The tenement actively fosters interaction and sympathy – Mary and Anne are friends because they live together, and Anne is spurred to turn detective because of her closeness to Mary. In this way, Collins suggests that poor lodgings are no longer innately corrupting or deadening places. Bonds of solidarity are created in their rooms and corridors, leading individuals to expose the crimes committed against their neighbours. In putting these arguments forward, Collins brings poor lodgings to the heart of the detective story. Though an official account of Mary's death circulates in the newspapers, he also argues for the novelist's right to take such stories in a different direction.

When Dickens returns to the lodging-house fifteen years after the publication of 'Anne Rodway', he accepts this baton and chooses to leave London for Cloisterham. It seems as if he has to prise the lodging-house out of the labyrinthine slum in order to

be able to look at it properly. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is his only official mystery novel, and has, in Dick Datchery, its probable detective. The Travellers' Twopenny is an incongruous landmark in a cathedral town defined by its quaint architecture. In labelling it a 'house all warped and distorted, like the morals of the travellers', Dickens rearticulates the ideas proposed by commentators in the 1850s to make one of his most explicit statements about space and character (i, April 1870, p.31). His descriptive language seems equally derivative; the Twopenny is an almost exact copy of the Old Farm House in 'Inspector Field'. Both texts feature the figure of the 'Deputy' – a standard title given to the managers or attendants in low lodging-houses – but this, ultimately, is where the similarities end. In *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the Deputy undergoes an alchemical transformation and is granted a distinct narrative purpose. This demonic urchin is befriended by Datchery, who enlists him as a spy in the Twopenny. Deputy is commissioned to pass on invaluable information about the Princess Puffer, lodging at the Twopenny for some nights. It is tantalising to speculate what would have happened to and because of the Twopenny, had the novel been finished; perhaps Deputy would have outgrown his title. Nominally a second-in-command or understudy – an indistinct figure, in Dickens's journalism – it is likely that he would have taken centre stage in *Edwin Drood*, contributing his unique talents to the resolution of a middle-class crime. Given a slew of monikers that identify him as totally amoral, and totally dynamic – 'Baby-Devil', 'little savage', 'thing', 'creature', 'Imp', 'Power of Evil', 'brother to Peter the Wild Boy' – this child of the low lodging-house ushers in a genre that Dickens had only fleetingly experimented with to date: the detective novel (i, April 1870, pp.28-29; iii, June 1870, p.95; vi, September 1870, p.187).

The Detective and the Philosophies of Furniture

Though Jo has no concept of home – 'what's home?', he asks – he adores Nemo for paying for his shelter in the low lodging-houses of Tom-All-Alone's (iv, June 1852, p.104). Later in the novel, he asks a police constable a resigned rhetorical question: 'Who ud go and let a nice innocent lodging to such a reg'lar one as me!' (vi, August 1852, p.189). Dickens's pun works at several levels; Jo is a 'regular' at Tom-All-Alone's, and he is also 'regular' in the sense of being more archetype than individual. At the same time, he is articulating one of the novel's major arguments – that no lodging is intrinsically 'nice' or 'innocent'. Low lodging-houses may be directly associated with

vice, but, as this section of the chapter shows, less overtly threatening rented spaces can also tumble into the mystery genre. When Dickens, Collins and Adams shift their plots into inns, private lodgings, and lawyers' chambers, it becomes clearer what detective fiction offers to them as theorists of space. The detective is not simply a figure who solves mysteries, but a connoisseur of space, and the perfect crime can only be committed by a perfect geographer of contemporary domestic environments. As rented spaces are appropriated by criminals and detectives alike, the victor in the battle is invariably the character who can manipulate his or her surroundings to best advantage.

Depending on the papers one read and the plays one went to see during Dickens's lifetime, neither the urban thoroughfare nor the house appeared to be wholly safe spaces. Throughout the period, highly publicised domestic murders destabilised prevalent ideologies of home; the 1850s and 1860s, meanwhile, witnessed several spikes in moral panic about street murders by garrotting.⁴¹ Fictional accounts of crime wander between public and private space, reluctant to settle in one dominant sphere. Sergeant Cuff's retirement plans, to transplant himself to Dorking and cultivate roses in the garden of his cottage, imply that the detective story is a fundamentally urban genre. He cannot divorce the city from his profession, or his profession from the city, so he leaves both simultaneously. Literary theorists have long been eager to situate the genre in these urban contexts. Their most extreme arguments suggest that the development of detective fiction owed everything to the parallel growth of the city in the mid-nineteenth century: for Walter Benjamin, the detective is a type of *flâneur* who feels at home on the streets, and the crowd gives the criminal an 'asylum' in which to become immediately invisible.⁴² GK Chesterton, whose work is cited in *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940), argues that the city is newly vivified by the existence of a detective – the detective encourages the reader to notice things that were not worthy of

⁴¹ On the 'dangerous classes', murders by garrotting and the role of the media in generating hysteria, see Rob Sindall, *Street Violence in the Nineteenth Century: Media Panic or Real Danger?* (Leicester and London: Leicester University Press, 1990). On the killing of 'lovers, spouses or love rivals', with particular reference to Victorian melodrama and the media, see Bridget Walsh, *Domestic Murder in Nineteenth-Century England: Literary and Cultural Representations* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014). Walsh argues that the incidence and depiction of domestic murder both corroborated and complicated the middle-class concept of home, especially by challenging gender identities.

⁴² Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), p.41. Benjamin's often disjointed remarks on detective fiction are helpfully summarised by Carlo Salzani, 'The City as Crime Scene: Walter Benjamin and the Traces of the Detective', *New German Critique*, 100 (2007), 165-187. For an extended study of the confluences between Benjamin and Dickens, see Gillian Piggott, *Dickens and Benjamin: Moments of Revelation, Fragments of Modernity* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012). Piggott's readings of the *flâneur*, the crowd and the Gothic city (pp.156-207) contain only fleeting references to the detective.

notice before. In this universe, everything on the street is a potential clue, or else it would not have been included in the text. For Chesterton, the detective story celebrates the ‘poetry of modern life’ and the metropolis. ‘Anything which tends, even under the fantastic form of the minutiae of Sherlock Holmes, to assert this romance of detail in civilization, to emphasize this unfathomably human character in flints and tiles, is a good thing’, he insists. ‘It is good that the average man should fall into the habit of looking imaginatively at ten men in the street even if it is only on the chance that the eleventh might be a notorious thief’.⁴³

This is immediately translatable to domestic landscapes, which are also rendered poetic by detective fiction. The genre can charge with significance an object in a room that is, at first glance, simply one of the forgettable elements of everyday life. Another fragment by Benjamin asserts the importance of the bourgeois interior, pointing out that Edgar Allan Poe was both a mystery writer and a design enthusiast: ‘The Philosophy of Furniture’ (1840), in which Poe meticulously constructs his dream home, was published only a year before ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ (1841). ‘To dwell’, Benjamin writes, ‘means to leave traces [...] The traces of the inhabitant are imprinted in the interior. Enter the detective story, which pursues these traces. Poe, in his “Philosophy of Furniture” as well as in his detective fiction, shows himself to be the first physiognomist of domestic interiors’.⁴⁴ Domestic interiors become claustrophobic sites when they become murder scenes, concentrating fury and danger. This is particularly apparent in the locked-room mystery, where bodily harm is preceded by a breach of personal space. It is a subgenre that celebrates the structures of houses and hinges on unexpected thresholds in familiar apartments.⁴⁵

Thus, crime narratives situate mayhem in both the urban street and the hermetically-sealed room. Dickens, Collins and Adams bring these strands together by turning to rented spaces, which constitute the central landscapes of their detective

⁴³ GK Chesterton, ‘A Defence of Detective Stories’, in *The Defendant* (New York: Dover, 2012), pp.74-77 (pp.75-77).

⁴⁴ Benjamin, ‘Louis Philippe, or the Interior’, in *The Arcades Project* (2002), pp.8-9 (p.9). Miller (1988) discusses the prevailing sense that ‘everything might count’ in a detective story, and that the detective has ‘super-vision’; see pp.33-35.

⁴⁵ For Marxist and psychoanalytic readings of the locked-room mystery, see, respectively, Moretti on Sherlock Holmes, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs and David Miller (London: Verso, 1983), pp.135-137; and Michael Cook, *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction: The Locked Room Mystery* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). On the importance of the locked room for Gothic novelists, especially Radcliffe and Lewis, see Mark S. Madoff, ‘Inside, Outside, and the Gothic Locked-Room Mystery’, in *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression*, ed. Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp.49-62.

novels. Murders are committed in the chambers of Lincoln's Inn Fields, in a waterside public-house in the East End, and in cosy but rented houses in Notting Hill. These domestic interiors are inflected, even created, by the wider workings of the city. Tulkinghorn's death offers an example where investigators actually glean very little from their 'strict search of every corner, careful tracing of steps, and careful noting of the disposition of every article of furniture' (xv, May 1853, p.470). The mystery is eventually solved when Bucket looks further afield. The only piece of useful information that the room yields is the wadding from the pistol, and this is interesting for symbolic reasons rather than because it pushes the enquiry forward. The wadding is a torn description of Chesney Wold – a stately home in the countryside that is far from encapsulating the domestic ideal, but nonetheless boasts superficial qualities of grandeur. Its presence on the crime scene highlights, through contrast, the strangeness and porosity of Tulkinghorn's own home. A bachelor apartment that is simultaneously a workplace, located in the heart of commercial London, a lawyer's chambers invite correspondingly unusual narratives.

Godfrey Abelwhite's murder involves a locked-room scenario, but one that takes place in a tavern near Lower Thames Street. Godfrey is initially told that there are no rooms free at the Wheel of Fortune. However, the barmaid quickly corrects the landlord, and Godfrey is assigned Number Ten. The Indians' accomplice has been listening to this conversation, pretends to be drunk, and disappears upstairs, using the opportunity to examine the layout of both the building and the room. He reconnoitres with chilling efficiency, is discovered by the landlord and, as he is evicted, glances up at the light at Godfrey's window in a grotesque parody of *Romeo and Juliet* – another tale of enclosure and breach. Godfrey's garret, only seven feet high, has a trapdoor in the roof. It is easily accessed from an empty house further down the street, which is under repair. The Indians climb a ladder at the building site, scramble across the roofs and force their way into Godfrey's room, killing him and reclaiming their diamond. Collins is not depicting one of Benjamin's bourgeois interiors here. This murder takes place in a rented space, paid for by the night, and is facilitated by a particular type of nineteenth-century criminal: the Indians' accomplice is a variation on a 'snoozer', described in the new edition of *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861) as 'one of those thieves who take up their quarters at hotels for the purpose of robbery' (Bracebridge Hemyng, 'Thieves' Women', p.242). Taverns and hotels were so susceptible to crime that they even had their own, customised criminals, who boasted a

lofty reputation in the underworld.⁴⁶ In giving a cameo to a snoozer, one of the distinctive figures of the contemporary city, Collins reveals his commitment to urban realism in a novel rife with exoticism. The odd moment of confusion between landlord and barmaid may at first seem like an aberration, which interrupts the smooth progress of the narrative, but this apparently insignificant moment is a tantalising pivot on which the novel's detective plot turns. If the barmaid had not contradicted the landlord, or if this particular room – Number Ten – had not been free, then Godfrey would have left the tavern and disappeared, and Cuff and Franklin would not have discovered his role in the theft of the Moonstone. It is fitting that the tavern is called the Wheel of Fortune, because these fates – personal, and novelistic – are decided by its run of business on one random night. Dying in a rented room, Godfrey learns too late that he has taken his own body on lease. The same is true in *The Notting Hill Mystery*: though the Andertons stay in the hotels of health resorts and a furnished house in Notting Hill to increase Mrs Anderton's lease of life, she is nonetheless poisoned.

Sergeant Cuff reads the clues in the Wheel of Fortune, but ultimately the Indians win their battle against the detective. This is largely because they are more adept at manipulating the space around them. The Wheel of Fortune and the empty house on Lower Thames Street – which is, presumably, being prepared for new tenants – are the last in a number of rented spaces they dominate. This proves just how comfortable the three outsiders are with all of the idiosyncrasies of the British property market; they are better Londoners than the Londoners themselves. Two private houses in popular lodging districts – one, on Northumberland Street, Strand, the other, in Alfred Place, Tottenham Court Road – become sites of elaborate ambush. Godfrey and Septimus Luker are tricked into these houses, distracted by the sight of a planted Oriental manuscript, attacked by the Indians, and searched for the Moonstone. They are rescued by respectable landlords and landladies who have let rooms to the Indians without suspicion. Though these locations never appear again, they suggest that successful criminals must also be successful geographers, with a preternatural knowledge of the mechanics of rented spaces. Once again, this reproduces an argument put forward in *The Notting Hill Mystery*. The murderous Baron R**, whose crimes are being investigated by an insurance agent, travels deftly between lodgings in Acacia Cottage, Kensington, the first and second floors in Russell Place, Notting Hill, and a Bognor

⁴⁶ Chesney (1970) goes into some detail about 'snoozers' and their tactics; pp.184-187.

boarding-house. Russell Place is a convenient location to commit a gradual murder because the ground-floor tenant is a doctor who no longer lodges there. Having moved out, he simply keeps his rooms for medical consultations. Thus, Baron R** and Collins's Indians are equally good at exploiting the property market to serve their particular, and peculiar, ends.

Henderson, the insurance agent and amateur detective, also proves his proficiency in this regard, sifting through landladies' testimonials and rent ledgers and drawing major inferences from tiny inconsistencies. In a novel about mesmerism, poisoning, and the eerie bond between twins, these banal details about everyday life turn out to be just as crucial. Inspector Bucket, however, trumps Henderson, and succeeds where Cuff fails. He has an uncanny ability to bend space to his will. As he arrests George, he has an 'air of business rather in the upholstery way than otherwise [...] With his upholsterer manner, as if the trooper were a window to be fitted up, he takes from his pocket a pair of handcuffs'. He asks if the handcuffs are comfortable, 'like a most respectable tradesman, anxious to execute an order neatly, and to the perfect satisfaction of his customer' (xv, May 1853, p.480).⁴⁷ Both the upholsterer and the detective are connoisseurs of domestic space. They go from house to house, attempting to tidy them up, to restore them to their original pristine state. But they can also be creative with space. Bucket understands London's landscapes so completely that he can control them from the inside and turn them into weapons; his father, he tells us, was an innkeeper (xvi, June 1853, p.511). In fact, this is one of the most essential characteristics of the fictional detective: like Inspector Field, he is 'equally at home wherever [he] go[es]' (p.269).

Bucket leaves the Bagnets' parlour – a traditional hearth – with George, and arrests him before the evening is over in a public-house. This is a type of space he must know well, given his father's erstwhile profession. Dickens does not go into any detail about the architectural quirks of this tavern, but readers appreciate the sheer practicality of Bucket's choice. People come and go as they please in such spaces, drawing little attention to themselves in the general merrymaking. However, they would also be

⁴⁷ Significantly, Dickens aligns his detectives with upholsterers in this context, rather than housewives. This may be to emphasise the working-class origins of the detective, who is reduced to a 'respectable tradesman'. For Bonita Rhoads, however, gender is central to the analysis of private and public spheres in detective fiction. She reads Poe's Dupin stories as a direct comment upon the increasingly popular genre of the domestic novel: Dupin and the narrator's apartment is a space of homosocial domesticity that is untainted by the marketplace, and stands as an alternative to the L'Espanaye home. See 'Poe's Genre Crossing: From Domesticity to Detection', *Poe Studies*, 42 (2009), 14-40.

powerless to run away if they needed to. There are too many interconnected rooms and too many loiterers by the exits. Though Bucket is wrong about George, his masterstroke also involves a manipulation of rented space. This time, it is the very home he shares with his wife: they take Hortense in as a lodger at Hortense's own request. Philip Collins dismisses Bucket's strategies as 'extremely improbably cloak-and-dagger', but in fact, they show Dickens at his most playful.⁴⁸ Linda Strahan, meanwhile, historicises Mr and Mrs Bucket, placing them within the context of the nineteenth-century police force to illuminating effect:

The wife could not be employed outside the home; although she could earn money through such domestic pursuits as dressmaking and laundering, she was particularly prohibited from taking lodgers into her house [...] The placement of Mademoiselle Hortense under Bucket's own roof as a lodger constitutes Dickens's single breach of the legislated rules of conduct [...] Ultimately, Inspector Bucket's failure to conform to the unpopular housing restriction is the sine qua non of *Bleak House*, just as Inspector Bucket himself is the sine qua non of British detective fiction.⁴⁹

We never actually witness the interaction between landlord, landlady and lodger in this unassuming London house, but soon, the premises becomes an agent in the plot – the site of a two-way game of cat and mouse. The logistics are difficult; the house is 'small', Hortense's ears are 'sharp', and the price of an overheard conversation is rather higher here than in a lodging-house farce (xvii, July 1853, p.524). Bucket explains how they each establish a false sense of trust as they mould the relationship to their own ends. Fittingly, his epiphany about Hortense's guilt comes at the most convivial of moments, over the evening meal – when she is holding a knife in her hand.

To the Bagnets, Bucket declares, 'my wife, and a lodger, constitute my family' (xv, May 1853, p.476). For Strahan, this statement indicates Bucket's kindness, even to criminals.⁵⁰ It is equally tempting, however, to read it as a subtle reference to the 1851 census, which Leonore Davidoff describes as trying to define the family in a formal way for the first time. Lodgers and boarders were problematic figures; though they lived under their landlord's roof, it was unclear whether they belonged to their landlord's family, or whether they should be counted independently.⁵¹ In knowing

⁴⁸ Collins (1994), p.280. Michael Steig and FAC Wilson read Bucket's victory over Hortense as a triumph of conservatism and order over dangerous sexual energy and political subversion. See 'Hortense Versus Bucket: The Ambiguity of Order in *Bleak House*', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 33 (1972), 289-298 (p.291, 294).

⁴⁹ Linda Strahan, 'There's a Hole in the (Inspector) Bucket: The Victorian Police in Fact and Fiction', *Clues*, 23 (2005), 57-62 (pp.58-59, 61).

⁵⁰ Strahan (2005), p.60.

⁵¹ Davidoff (1979), pp.76-77.

when to expand their family circle, Mr and Mrs Bucket are able to ensnare a murderer. Mrs Bucket takes on the role of a welcoming landlady; she becomes a surrogate mother who looks to her ‘amiable’ lodger for ‘companionship and conversation’, even taking her to tea. This language clearly derives from property advertising, or, alternatively, from comedy, in which a city turns strangers into friends. It conjures up scenes from Miss La Creevy’s rooms, Todgers’s, or the Micawber establishment. Mrs Bucket takes advantage of this stereotype to lull Hortense. A perfect landlady, she is also ‘a lady of a natural detective genius, which if it had been improved by professional exercise, might have done great things, but which has paused at the level of a clever amateur’ (xvi, June 1853, p.505). She is a spy who gathers crucial evidence and communicates with her husband by leaving messages among milk bottles and loaves of bread. Husband and wife enact a sort of wedding vow as they lay their trap, proving that their professional collaborations make their marriage all the sounder (xvii, July 1853, p.525). Hortense seems to take Mrs Bucket’s betrayal particularly badly, because she realises the story has spun out of her control. The relationship between landlady and lodger has soured beyond recognition, revealed to be a mere façade – a dropped ceiling or false set of walls that Bucket knocks through during the denouement, revealing the true structure of the plot. Previously, Bucket has told the Bagnets that he ‘is in his humble way a public man, but it is not in that sphere that he finds happiness. No, it must be sought within the confines of domestic bliss’ (xv, May 1853, p.478). His conduct, however, suggests that domestic bliss and public duty are interdependent, each one at the service of the other.

Speaking of *Our Mutual Friend*, published a decade after *Bleak House*, J. Fisher Solomon draws attention to the figure of the Night Inspector, who vanishes after a few brief scenes. In abandoning its Night Inspector and, consequently, its detective plot, the novel is also abandoning a certain vision of urban life; for Solomon, this is the moment Dickens questions whether London can truly be understood or rendered.⁵² The detective – from Bucket to Henderson, Cuff, and, indeed Field – may be a tool for urban realists, an omnipresent character, who, in traversing various geographies, does the novelist’s legwork and becomes the novelist’s analogue. However, he does not simply exist to make London knowable. Instead, his role is to subject a very particular *version* of

⁵² J. Fisher Solomon, ‘Realism, Rhetoric, and Reification: Or the Case of the Missing Detective in *Our Mutual Friend*’, *Modern Philology*, 86 (1988), 34-45.

London to scrutiny: a city that is structured around its unstable domestic spaces, where fates are determined by landlords, and where the choice of one's lodgings becomes literally a case of life or death. Introducing a detective into a narrative is a way of exploring certain spaces in forensic detail. The Night Inspector behaves as if he is 'in a monastery on the top of a mountain', but his counterparts are more likely to be found discovering bodies, tailing criminals, and solving mysteries in rented spaces.⁵³ The final section of this chapter sees the detective come into unlikely contact with the city's more comic elements, pulled, as they are, towards the same kinds of space.

'Endless Involutions': The Philosophies of Fiction

As the previous section pointed out, Dickens, Collins and Adams furnish themselves with unique narrative opportunities by acknowledging the fractured nature of urban domesticity. Rented spaces are instrumental in pushing mystery plots forward, proving that setting is not a mere backdrop, but a determining factor in the shape of each novel. In the detective fiction of the Dickens circle, these spaces also stage scenes of self-reflection. When rent-collectors become detectives, dead bodies appear in taverns and witnesses take refuge in lodgings, Dickens, Collins and Adams pause to contemplate larger metafictional issues, such as literary experimentation. They constantly remind us, and themselves, that they are testing the potential of a genre in its most incipient stages. As this genre jostles against others for elbow-room, the boundaries between tragedy and comedy, seriousness and levity, eulogy and entertainment, begin to collapse.

Classified by most critics as a work of Dickens's first phase, *Martin Chuzzlewit* is generically chaotic, largely because its plotlines were not planned in advance. It features Dickens's first detective-landlord. When Tom and Ruth Pinch take lodgings in Islington, they are bemused by the mysteriousness of their landlord. He is later revealed to be Mr Nadgett, hired as Montague Tigg's detective and eventually driven to investigate the circumstances of Tigg's own death. Nadgett uses Tom to pass a letter to Jonas, is at the head of the crowd confronting Jonas, and reveals that he has taken advantage of the urban environment to spy on Jonas. 'From the garret-window opposite

⁵³ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (London: Chapman and Hall), I, May 1864, p.18. Subsequent references appear in the text.

[Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son]’, he discloses, ‘I have watched this house and him for days and nights’ (xix/x, July 1844, p.590).⁵⁴ Anticipating the arguments of later novels, *Martin Chuzzlewit* suggests that being a landlord makes a Londoner a good detective; alternatively, being a detective makes a Londoner a good landlord. Both professions require an understanding of domestic and urban space – escape routes (given the possibility of moonlight flits), garrets, and, indeed, family politics. Both trade in secrets and overheard conversations; both need to be enterprising and, at times, imaginative; both mingle personal warmth with a certain shrewdness. Both are positions of power with a great deal of independence and limited accountability. Nadgett’s rightful heir is the rent-collector, Pancks, down to the Islington connection. Because he is so good at bullying money out of the petrified tenants in Bleeding-Heart Yard, Pancks is equally proficient at handling another kind of currency: information.⁵⁵ Dickens transposes the steward of rural melodrama to *Little Dorrit*, but soon realises that Pancks is more suited to a different kind of narrative altogether. Taking on the role of private investigator and deploying a network of benevolent informants – including his own humble landlord, whose Pentonville apartments become a headquarters of sorts – Pancks pieces together the story of the Dorrits’ downfall. Arguably, Pancks the tug-boat, a detective in all but official title, is the most important propeller in the novel’s plot. The description he gives of his life and work gains new significance when viewed in this light: to ‘turn the wheel, turn the wheel’ (xix/x, June 1857, p.607).

Though *Bleak House* features a detective-landlord, Bucket’s role forms just one part of the intertwined mysteries Dickens explores. Many of the novel’s plots rest on the secret of Nemo’s identity. With Nemo, who dies over Krook’s rag-and-bone shop, Dickens plays on the fact that there is something inherently mysterious about all lodgers. Anne Rodway and Mary’s friendship seems anomalous in the wake of Nemo’s utter alienation from his neighbours. Every lodger is a ‘nemo’, a ‘no-one’, to a certain extent, and a novel like *Bleak House* demonstrates how little we actually know about the people who live next door. The nature of the itinerant urban population and the condition of lodging in the nineteenth century directly lend themselves to mystery stories; there are more strangers in this universe, and so there are also more secrets.

⁵⁴ There is a similar story in the columns of *The Times*: policemen stationed themselves in the garret of the SICLC’s model lodging-house on Charles Street, Drury Lane, in order to spy on a number of forgers in the opposite house. See ‘Central Criminal Court’, *The Times*, 12 January 1850, p.7.

⁵⁵ On the role of the rent-collector in perpetuating the domestic ideal and encouraging moral reform, see Livesey (2007), pp.87-105.

This drives the Harmon/Hanford/Rokesmith plot in *Our Mutual Friend*, where the hero of the novel, supposed dead, is able to create an imaginary identity for himself as a lodger in the Wilfer household. It leads Pip to steer Magwitch from lodging to lodging, hoping the fugitive will remain unnoticed, and allows John Jasper to melt into London. In the anonymous ‘hybrid hotel’ on Aldersgate Street, a ‘hotel, boarding-house, or lodging-house, at its visitor’s option’, Jasper is effectively paying to be asked no questions (vi, September 1870, p.179). It means that Datchery can take a ‘venerable, architectural, and inconvenient’ lodging at Mrs Tope’s, spying on Cloisterham’s residents without anyone knowing who he is (v, August 1870, p.140). Like Datchery, Tony Jobling and Guppy appreciate that lodging provides a good cover for detective work. Guppy persuades Tony to change his name to ‘Mr Weevle’ and hopes he will be able rummage through Krook’s documents in adopting this persona. A weevil is a kind of destructive beetle: this ‘maggot in a cheese’ is determined to turn his lodging to some advantage.

Taking Nemo’s old room, Tony declares ‘it’s devilish odd that he need go and die at *my* place!’ (vii, September 1852, p.199). The coroner’s inquest that investigates Nemo’s death is held in the Sol’s Arms, a public-house next door, which becomes a makeshift court. This was a common occurrence and is also mentioned in *Our Mutual Friend*; there were no coroner’s courts or mortuaries until the final decades of the nineteenth century, and taverns provided the most convenient infrastructure for inquests. The law stipulated that each juror had to see the body during the course of the proceedings. The body was usually kept in the room of death, as in Nemo’s case, and a tavern would be the nearest public building. (Sometimes, the body would be displayed in the tavern itself.) Quite simply, the tavern was one of the few really accessible spaces in city and country alike. It was open to anybody and everybody, at most times of day, and hence was a suitable venue for a legal process that depended on the popular voice. In fact, a tavern was a centre for all kinds of civic procedure and public enquiry, from the collection of taxes to the registration of births. A coroner’s inquest was, therefore, just one of several formal proceedings that could occur in these ostensibly informal surroundings.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ In Middlesex, approximately 80% of coroner’s inquests were held in taverns through most of the nineteenth century. The practice was only challenged in a sustained way from the 1870s onwards, when a Public Health Act was passed and local authorities became responsible for establishing mortuaries and coroner’s courts. On the use of taverns for inquests and the medical, legal, political and ethical implications of this practice, see Olive Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford:

Dickens's distaste for the practice manifested itself even before the publication of *Bleak House*. In 'A Coroner's Inquest', which Dickens included in an 1850 issue of *Household Words*, WH Wills's voice is heavy with incredulity. While commercial disputes are settled with pomp and circumstance in the city's most impressive buildings, 'for an inquest into the sacrifice of a mere human life, "the worst inn's worst room" is deemed good enough'. For Wills, this is simultaneously a moral, legal and medical issue: justice cannot be served, he argues, when coroners and jurors are tipsy and when proceedings are so informal, held 'amidst several implements of conviviality, the odour of gin and the smell of tobacco-smoke'.⁵⁷ Nor is it appropriate for jurors to have a previous acquaintance with the witnesses, as is often the case when they hail from the same parish. The body in 'A Coroner's Inquest' remains in the baker's shop where the death occurred, posing a threat of infection to the crowd of lodgers upstairs. Wills ends with a clear policy recommendation: that dead bodies be kept in designated reception-houses.

This moral outrage carries through into *Bleak House*, where the landlord's takings go up because of the ghoulish fascination of his customers, and the sombreness of death is juxtaposed with a carnivalesque atmosphere. As Wills explains, this is a stage for an 'ill-played farce' – a place for drunken gossip, rather than legal enquiry or elegy (p.112). The coroner, who 'frequents more public-houses than any man alive', enters to the sound of skittles and piano music. He 'takes a Windsor-chair at the head of a long table [...] ornamented with glutinous rings in endless involutions, made by pots and glasses' (iv, June 1852, pp.102-103). This curious image becomes a credible metaphor for the central question and project of *Bleak House* as a whole: namely, to ascertain what connection there is between disparate worlds and circles of people. Suddenly, the clear voice of outrage falters, displaced by metafictional comment. The tavern becomes a site of tension between Dickens the social reformer, who loathes the practice, and Dickens the novelist, who cannot help but appreciate its strangeness, narrative potential, and – ultimately – its celebration of the popular, in both the political and cultural sense of the word.

Clarendon Press, 1987), pp.33-34; and Ian A. Burney, *Bodies of Evidence: Medicine and the Politics of the English Inquest, 1830-1926* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp.80-88. Burney explicitly draws upon Jürgen Habermas's arguments about coffee-houses in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

⁵⁷ [Wills], 'A Coroner's Inquest', *Household Words*, 27 April 1850, pp.109-113 (pp.109-111). Subsequent references appear in the text.

Even in death, Nemo is confined to rented spaces, and this serves to highlight his degradation. But there is also something else at work here, pushing beyond the boundaries of tragedy. The ‘endless involutions’ of rings reflect the overlapping of genres inevitable in a tavern. This is a space where age-old ballads are sung, tall tales proliferate, and comic vocalists take centre stage: an entertainer called Swills performs a version of the inquest as soon as the coroner leaves. The facts are pulled apart and reconstituted in a more traditional, popular genre. This alternative take on Nemo’s mysterious story would not exist without the Sol’s Arms, which is a space for creativity. Dickens hovers here to ask whether ‘ill-played farce’ and tragedy, comedy and detective fiction, have more in common than we think. As Anne Humpherys argues, ‘farce is never far away from potential tragedy in the mysteries novel’, and the converse also holds true: tragedy is sometimes rather close to potential farce.⁵⁸ There is an odd moment when Jenny’s husband predicts that Mrs Pardiggle will ‘poll-pry and question according to custom’; in a crumbling hovel, a brick-maker alludes to Poole’s *Paul Pry* (iii, May 1852, p.75).⁵⁹ In *The Notting Hill Mystery*, the Andertons go to the Haymarket to see *Paul Pry* and *How to Pay the Rent* (1833), a farce by Tyrone Power. The segment is full of warm references to the quality of these comedies (13 December 1862, pp.673-678, p.675). Dickens and Adams seem to find themselves at a crossroads. Though they abandon certain registers in favour of others, they can rest easy because Poole, Power and Swills’s versions of the lodger’s tale exist somewhere. In Jo’s words, Nemo has been ‘Inkwhich’d’ – Dickens has been deciding which ink to paint him with (xiv, April 1853, p.446). Dickens makes similar allusions to the proximity between genres during Bucket’s arrest of George in a tavern parlour; behind every other door, a separate, self-contained story is being played out. In his private parlour, Bucket seems to assume that he can have an equally private conversation with George. However, private rooms are never fully private in rented spaces. Just as farces on the nineteenth-century stage can only function because doors are porous passageways, rather than barriers, so Bucket and George speak behind closed doors only to be overheard, misunderstood, and gossiped about, by landlords, waiters, drunkards and musical entertainers. As the scene closes, the Sol’s Arms springs to mind: once again, we leave a tavern with the sense of a story being passed on, rather than concluded.

⁵⁸ Humpherys (1991), p.466.

⁵⁹ On the significance of the allusion to *Paul Pry* in this episode, and on philanthropic home-visiting as a wider nineteenth-century phenomenon, see Vincent (2015), pp.182-189.

Both *The Moonstone* and *The Notting Hill Mystery*, meanwhile, are full of lodgers and tenants of some variety: the witnesses, suspects, victims, culprits and amateur detectives in these mysteries all have some connection to the London property market. Franklin, Miss Clack, the Indians, Godfrey, Lucy and Rosanna fall into this category in *The Moonstone*. Even Rachel, who exhibits such scorn for hotels at the beginning of the novel, eventually finds herself in one, en route to a furnished house in Brighton. The hypocritical Miss Clack, who lives in rented apartments herself, posits that the ‘aimless flitting about from one place of residence to another’ shows an ‘insatiate restlessness of body and appalling stagnation of soul’ (2 May 1868, pp.481-486, p.482). She is, of course, simply setting herself up for ridicule, but it is true that the characters around her are never entirely sure of the spaces in which they live. As they are never in spaces where they fully belong, they could disappear at any moment to an unknown address, throwing the detective plot off-kilter. It is the kind of plot in which certain types of characters are by definition indispensable. By making his characters lodgers, Collins shows the structure of detective fiction to be very fragile; they are not snowed into a country manor where they can be watched by a frosty Hercule Poirot. Collins tends to introduce, even name, insignificant landlords and landladies in *The Moonstone*, who never appear again. A key example is Mrs McCann in Frizinghall, who oversees a common lodging-house frequented by the Indians. Collins exults in the teeming nature of towns and cities, with their infinite narratives; all of his characters are surely players in scraps of lodging-house farce and pastoral scenarios in seaside resorts which we, as readers, never witness. As Collins sidelines these more established genres to get to the heart of the detective process, we get a sense he is doing something consciously pioneering.

While the likes of Mrs McCann remain incidental in *The Moonstone*, Dickens cannot resist building the comic interactions between landladies and lodgers into fully-fledged scenes – even if the novel in question is explicitly a mystery, like *Edwin Drood*. When Grewgious takes Rosa and Miss Twinkleton to lodge with Mrs Billickin, they step into a farce. The Billickin, with her ‘personal faintness’ and ‘overwhelming personal candour’, seems as familiar as Mrs Bardell (vi, September 1870, p.170). This interlude brings comedy into what is, ostensibly, a sombre plotline; after all, Rosa is here to take refuge from Jasper, a love-crazed stalker and probable murderer. Adams goes even further, and places landladies and lodgers right at the centre of his chosen narrative structure: the key testimonials in the novel are provided by these figures.

Henderson collects and arranges information from Mrs Whitworth at Bognor, the landlady in Kensington, Mrs Brown in Russell Place, and Aldridge, a clerk who lodges in the Russell Place attics. All of these witnesses are shown to be potentially unreliable. The landladies comprise a ‘very deaf old person, whose memory [is] evidently failing’, a snoop who holds certain lazy prejudices, and a widow who admits that her ‘memory is very bad’ (20 December 1862, pp.701-707, p.702; 27 December 1862, pp.1-7, p.2). The value of Aldridge’s vital evidence, meanwhile, rests on the question of his drunkenness. Their statements are provided in distinctive vernacular and contain mundane details about the practicalities and difficulties of the lodgings industry. The mystery, therefore, unfolds along class lines: these characters are providing clues to solve an aristocratic crime, one that involves Continental barons, heiresses, and members of the gentry, who also find themselves frequenting rented spaces. For Adams, the humble landlady’s voice is relevant and worth hearing, in spite of its tics, digressions, and bursts of comedy. It stands on the side of truth and moral clarity.⁶⁰

The Ladbroke Estate underwent major works during the years Adams describes, leading to the rapid growth of Notting Hill.⁶¹ The glut of references to lodgings in detective fiction quietly contributes to a general sense of flux. The fact that there is so little permanence in this version of London makes it a more convincingly enigmatic, threatening place. But there is also a simple metaphor at play. Adams, Collins and Dickens present urban landscapes and communities that are under construction. In the process, they suggest that the literary landscape – the detective novel – is also being developed, redeveloped, speculatively built. In allowing their mystery plots to play out in rented spaces, they ensure that an embryonic genre is in constant dialogue with other, more established registers; death, violence and crooked morality are passed through filters of varying shades. Describing Jasper’s ‘hybrid hotel’ as a ‘novel enterprise’ (vi, September 1870, p.179), Dickens reminds readers of the complex imaginative work an author has to do when he turns rented spaces into novelistic enterprises.

⁶⁰ On a similar role played by house-servants, see Brian W. McCuskey, ‘The Kitchen Police: Servant Surveillance and Middle-Class Transgression’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28 (2000), 359-375.

⁶¹ Sheppard, ‘The Ladbroke Estate’, in Sheppard et al. (1900-2012), XXXVII: ‘Northern Kensington’, pp.194-200.

As the landlord of the Sol's Arms learns to his advantage, death and murder make for good business, even in the most obscure rented spaces. This was in full evidence during the public executions of Marie and Frederick Manning in November 1849.⁶² Contemporary accounts in the newspapers described the 'disgusting levity' of the gathering crowd, but what piqued the particular interest of journalists was the scene at Winter Terrace, beside Horsemonger Lane Gaol. For a day or two, this shabby tenement was suddenly the most famous and desirable property in London: 'Beyond and fronting the gaol the gardens, windows and house tops of Winter-terrace were filled with people belonging to the more respectable classes of society, who were made to pay exorbitantly for the gratification of witnessing the execution undisturbed by the invasions of the rabble.'⁶³

After much hesitation, a party including Dickens, Forster and John Leech rented the roof and back kitchen of a similarly grimy property for the event, 'for the extremely moderate sum of Ten Guineas, or two guineas each.' 'The passage', Dickens wrote to Leech while making plans, 'would clearly have been a dismal failure, and I am not sure but that even this arrangement may turn out a Do'.⁶⁴ This was not the first execution the Dickens circle had attended: when Courvoisier, Lord William Russell's valet, was hanged, Dickens spontaneously hired the last remaining upper room in a house opposite the scaffold, bringing Daniel Maclise and Henry Burnett with him. 'Just once,' he said, 'I should like to watch a scene like this, and see the end of the Drama', and proceeded in 'taking mental notes'.⁶⁵ At the Mannings' execution, he was predominantly horrified by the ghoulishness of the crowd, and published two letters to *The Times* raising his concerns about public execution – but as his message to Leech reveals, the period leading to the event was taken up with more practical concerns.

⁶² Marie Manning was a Swiss lady's maid who married the landlord of the White Hart in Taunton. Together, the Mannings murdered Patrick O'Connor in their house in Bermondsey, then stole money and shares certificates from his lodgings. They escaped separately but were eventually caught, tried and hanged; particular attention was paid by the press to Mrs Manning's passionate outbursts and elegant clothing in court.

⁶³ 'The Bermondsey Murder', *The Times*, 13 November 1849, p.4. See also 'The Condemned Convicts', *The Times*, 13 November 1849, p.5.

⁶⁴ Dickens to John Leech, 12 November 1849, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), V, pp.644-645.

⁶⁵ Henry Burnett, 'Mr Henry Burnett's Reminiscences', in *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil*, ed. Frederic George Kitton, 2 vols (London: Frank T. Sabin, 1890), II, pp.136-144 (pp.142-143). Thackeray also went to Courvoisier's execution: see 'Going to See a Man Hanged', *Fraser's*, August 1840, pp.150-158.

Dickens's day at the hangings also had an imaginative effect, because it is widely believed that Marie Manning provided a template for Hortense.⁶⁶ Surrounded by a group of people who were happy to eschew their 'luxurious homes' and 'fashionable clubs at the west end' for a day, Dickens found himself crammed in an unfamiliar tenement with his friends, paying an extortionate rent for the privilege of seeing a murderess up close.⁶⁷ From this vantage point, Hortense was born – the invader of lawyers' chambers, the failed lodger who, in wadding her pistol with a description of Chesney Wold, tries to fabricate a country-house murder. According to treatises, newspapers, and parliamentary speeches, rented spaces were particularly susceptible to crime, but they were also the kinds of spaces that activated the literary imagination. Here, real murders were transformed into fictional plots, complete with dying opium-addicts, stolen diamonds and tenacious detectives. The detective fiction of the 1850s and 1860s encourages a re-evaluation of the nature of London's domestic landscape, because marginal spaces become central to narrative resolution. The same holds true of the extra Christmas numbers for Dickens's journals – the subject of the next chapter.

⁶⁶ In the corrected proofs for Chapter 2 of *Bleak House*, Dickens named Hortense 'Marie'; like Mrs Manning, Hortense has worked as a lady's maid in several aristocratic families, is dark, and is particular about fashion. Four months after the publication of the number where Hortense is introduced, Dickens wrote 'Lying Awake', which describes his enduring horror at the Mannings' execution. See Susan Shatto, *The Companion to Bleak House* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p.119, 276. Fitzgerald made the connection in *Life of Charles Dickens as Revealed in His Writings*, I, pp.133-134. See also BB Valentine, 'The Original of Hortense and the Trial of Marcia Manning for Murder [sic]', *Dickensian*, 19 (1923), 21-22. Walsh (2014) accepts the Marie/Hortense relationship, pp.99-101. Tambling (1995) moderates this by suggesting Hortense is drawn both from Mrs Manning and from characters in Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837), pp.144-145. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston argues that Hortense belongs less to real life than to a long-running tradition of violent Frenchwomen in literature, particularly in Victor Hugo's novels. See *To Kill a Text: The Dialogic Fiction of Hugo, Dickens, and Zola* (London: Associated University Press, 1994), pp.155-156. In her discussion of the dangerous and powerful nurse in sensation fiction, Kristine Swenson asserts a direct genealogy between Hortense and Collins's Mrs Rubelle. See *Medical Women and Victorian Fiction* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), p.72.

⁶⁷ 'Execution of the Bermondsey Murderers', *Examiner*, 17 November 1849, p.730.

Chapter 5

Collaborative Fiction: From the Bachelor-Apartment to the Lodging-House

In the 1858 extra Christmas number for *Household Words*, the elderly Sophonisba moves to London and is suddenly fixated by a vacant house to let opposite hers. Determined to learn the secret of the house, she enlists help from her servant, Trottle, and an old friend, Jarber, to piece together its history. It transpires that a man has kept the rent of his house deliberately high to prevent anyone from taking it; this allows him to stow away his orphaned grandson and direct the child's inheritance elsewhere. Collins contributed this perfect morsel of sensation fiction to the collection *A House To Let*, demonstrating the sinister and outlandish things that can happen behind closed doors in any given neighbourhood. Dickens and Collins, who shaped *A House To Let* together, turn Sophonisba, Trottle and Jarber into amateur sleuths. Viewed more broadly, *A House To Let* is an embryonic project in psychogeography, as each story in the collection recounts the experiences of one past resident. Revealing the history of a building through these lives, it suggests that space is given meaning through layers of memory and inhabitation. Before reaching its current state, as a prison, the house has gone through a series of radical reinventions. In 'The Manchester Marriage', by Gaskell, it is home to the new industrial rich, recently arrived from the north of England. In 'Going into Society', by Dickens, it is an amusement hall, described as a 'caravan'.¹ In 'Three Evenings in the House', a poem by Adelaide Anne Procter, it is a sickroom and place of mourning. The garret – now a little boy's cell – has once served as an artist's studio. The house is so elastic that it facilitates each of these wildly different narratives and genres.

Most of the Christmas numbers of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* follow this format. They are collections of short stories by different contributors, usually housed within a framing narrative. They also share a thematic interest in the conviviality of rented spaces such as lodging-houses, rural inns, and London coffee-houses. Dickens's foray into generic bricolage paid dividends, for no one was publishing anything quite like this. He had devised an innovative and vastly successful

¹ [Dickens], 'Going into Society', *A House To Let*, *Household Words*, 7 December 1858, pp.18-23 (p.18, 22).

way of capturing an audience; the popularity of the Christmas numbers, which were twice the length of a normal number, was so great that it encouraged the editors of other periodicals to follow Dickens's example.² Dickens was delighted to announce sales figures of over 185,000 for *Somebody's Luggage* (1862) and 220,000 for *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings* (1863), which meant a profit of between £1000 and £1500 each year.³ He went on to perform 'The Boots' from *The Holly-Tree Inn* and 'Going into Society' at his readings; he also considered introducing *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings* into his repertoire.⁴ 'The Boots' was adapted into a farce by Benjamin Webster and put on at the Adelphi.⁵

Dickens had been named as the voice of the season long before the publication of the Christmas numbers in the 1850s and 1860s. In *The Bachelor of the Albany* (1847) by Marmion Savage – an Irish satirical novelist who took over the editorship of the *Examiner* from his friend, Forster, in 1856 – the eponymous bachelor is not Dickens's greatest fan.⁶ Mr Barker has plenty of literature at hand in his chambers, including 'one or two odd volumes of Carlyle and Dickens', but modern books are 'evidently none of Barker's pets'.⁷ His distaste for Dickens becomes clearer when he is invited to spend Christmas with his friend, the generous Mr Spread. Mrs Spread is to be found 'glancing [...] over the pages of a little volume refulgent in red and gold', 'the new Christmas book of the author of the "Pickwick Papers"', which Mr Spread ha[s] brought down with him from London' (p.85). Mr Barker, however, has not read the 'charming little red book' (p.90). He equates it with mere 'sentiment', disapproves of all illustrations,

² Fitzgerald, *Memories of Charles Dickens*, p.146.

³ Ella Ann Oppenlander, *Dickens' All the Year Round: Descriptive Index and Contributor List* (New York: Whitston, 1984), p.33. As Oppenlander notes, however, the same amount of effort on a novel could have brought in between £16,000 and £20,000. For sales figures, see Dickens to Thomas Beard, 24 December 1862, and to Wilkie Collins, 25 January 1864, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), X, pp.180-181, 346-349.

⁴ See, for example, Dickens to Angela Burdett Coutts, 23 August 1858; to HG Adams, 30 November 1858 and 1 November 1860; to John Forster, late August 1861 and 5 January 1868; to Henry Chorley, 12 January 1866; to the Ladies and Gentlemen of the Theatre, 24 March 1869, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VIII, pp.632-634, 711-712; IX, pp.334-335, 449-450; XI, pp.136-137; XII, pp.4-5, 316-317.

⁵ See Dickens to Wills, 19 January 1856, and to Benjamin Webster, 6 February 1856, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VIII, p.32, 46. Sources disagree as to the quality of the farce, *Boots at the Holly-Tree Inn; or the Infant Elopement to Gretna Green*, which opened on the 4th of February and which Dickens attended with Mark Lemon on the 8th.

⁶ For a full-length biographical and critical study, see Paralee Norman, *Marmion Wilme Savage, 1804-1872: Dublin's Victorian Satirist* (Lewiston and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000). On the value of reading Savage and other 'minor popular novelists', see Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p.4.

⁷ Marmion Wilme Savage, *The Bachelor of the Albany* (London: Mathews and Marrot, 1927), p.46. Subsequent references appear in the text.

‘launche[s] into a sweeping, indiscriminate attack upon the literature of the day’, and is about to give his opinions on *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845) when he treads on the dog and gets distracted. Barker, Laura Smyly whispers in amusement, is ‘the *Critic* on the Hearth’ (p.90). Favoured by the welcoming Spreads, Dickens is synonymous with sociability in Savage’s novel: to read him is to keep away the harshest Christmas frost. Though there is no evidence that Dickens and Savage knew each other personally, they interacted on the page – a contemporary reviewer compared Barker to Scrooge, Spread to the Cheerybles – and, as this chapter shows, they shared a common vocabulary.⁸

Dickens himself remarks upon Christmas in an 1860 ‘Uncommercial Traveller’ piece about the loneliness of bachelors in the Inns of Court and Chancery. It is Christmas Eve in Temple, just off the Strand. A bachelor injures himself and thrashes around his room, until, at last, he dies. His neighbours hear the noise, but do nothing; they are playing Blind Man’s Bluff and assume he is doing the same. ‘They all laughed at the conceit’, Dickens writes, ‘and went on with their play, more light-hearted and merry than ever. Thus, those two so different games of life and death were played out together, blindfold, in the two sets of chambers’.⁹ The episode brings home the gulf between spatial proximity and real intimacy and highlights the most crushing aspects of living alone. If the city can be a place where lonely people get lonelier, chambers create a particularly toxic brand of loneliness. Unlike the house to let opposite Sophonisba’s, they bear no traces of past lives lived to the full.

This chapter weighs up the benefits and frustrations of different modes of dwelling: living alone, in chambers or the Albany; living with another person; and lodging. Dickens and his contemporaries explore the extent to which these spatial practices, and the interactions and intimacies they foster, are viable alternatives to the traditional middle-class family. Dickens, Holly Furneaux argues, endorses a ‘rigorously defamiliarized domestic’ based around ‘elective, affective formations’ and ‘nurtured ties over genealogy’, creating a ‘much greater flexibility in the thinking and modelling of family’ than we usually give him credit for.¹⁰ Dickens is believed to have coined the terms ‘bachelor-apartment’, in *Little Dorrit*, and ‘bachelor cottage’, in *Our Mutual Friend*; this positions him as a pioneering anthropologist of the genus *bachelor*, an

⁸ For the review, see Norman (2000), p.116.

⁹ [Dickens], ‘The Uncommercial Traveller’, *All the Year Round*, 18 August 1860, pp.452-456 (p.455). Subsequent references appear in the text.

¹⁰ Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.23-29, 65.

enthusiastic explorer of its habitats, and a chronicler of its stories.¹¹ At the same time, he never lost his fascination for the lodging-house, which was often peopled with ‘single gentlemen’ but nonetheless represented the spiritual antithesis of a set of chambers. He was immensely proud of Mrs Lirriper, a benevolent landlady on the Strand and the most popular of his Christmas characters, and was frustrated that he could not work with her or her lodging-house in a more sustained way: ‘The waste of these Christmas numbers,’ he told Fitzgerald, is perfectly dreadful. In one of my regular stories I could have done immense things with Mrs Lirriper!’.¹² A contemporary reviewer wholeheartedly agreed: ‘Our only objection to [Dickens’s part of the number] is that it should be made to serve the purpose of a picture frame instead of standing forth as a picture by itself’.¹³

Though he could only offer readers a glimpse of Mrs Lirriper and her lodging-house, Dickens had already achieved ‘immense things’ with her – things he could not necessarily have accomplished in a full-length, ‘regular’ nineteenth-century novel. Showcasing multiple levels of collaborative writing, the Christmas numbers of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* were exercises in literary sociability. The rented spaces they described became metatextual spaces, sites of negotiation for the Dickens circle. Here, Dickens and his associates could reflect on their own dynamics. Published at the end of the year, they were Dickens’s most natural opportunity to take stock as an editor. They crystallised the entire process and project of his journals, the personal tensions and bonds formed in the course of their day-to-day management.¹⁴ In weighing up different modes of dwelling, Dickens also offered up a theory for creative enterprise. Deborah A. Thomas remarks upon the tonal disparity between the ‘disillusionment’ and ‘sombreness’ of Dickens’s late novels and the ‘festive exuberance’ of his Christmas confections, published at the same time; she suggests the latter acted as ‘a kind of creative antidote’.¹⁵ Taken together, however, they belong to the same wider conversation, offering a sustained and coherent discourse on solitude and conviviality.

¹¹ ‘bachelor’, n.C1.b., in the *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <www.oed.com/view/Entry/14313> [Accessed: 9 August 2016]. See also Furneaux (2009), p.69.

¹² Fitzgerald, *Memories of Charles Dickens*, p.141.

¹³ ‘Mrs Lirriper’s Lodgings’, *The Times*, 3 December 1863, p.12.

¹⁴ See Oppenlander (1984); and Anne Lohrli, *Household Words: A Weekly Journal, 1850-1859, Conducted by Charles Dickens* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

¹⁵ Deborah A. Thomas, *Dickens and the Short Story* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p.94.

Living Alone: Angular Men, Social Circles

In *Charles Dickens* (1870), Sala pauses to consider the lucky string of events that structured his mentor's early career. 'If poor Seymour had not proposed to execute a series of humorous etchings for Messrs. Chapman and Hall,' he writes, 'and if those gentlemen had not been compelled to cast about for a clever young man to "write to the engravings," Charles Dickens might have continued, for many years longer, to vegetate in his chambers in Furnival's Inn'.¹⁶ Sala chooses to map Dickens's creative and professional fulfilment onto his place of residence, and associates living in chambers with obscurity and paralysis. Dickens's own memory of chambers, however, was fonder: 'I shall never be so happy again as in those chambers three storeys high', he wrote in his diary; 'never if I roll in wealth and fame. I would hire them to keep them empty, if I could afford it.'¹⁷ To preserve them would also be to preserve his past bliss.

Critical studies have highlighted the ambivalence of nineteenth-century attitudes towards bachelorhood. As cultural tropes, bachelors were often portrayed negatively: Furneaux notes that they were figures of either 'incompleteness' or outright 'transgression'; typically they were shown to be hypochondriacal, petty or selfish, and 'narratives of bachelor "development"' or 'bachelorhood-resolved', ending in marriages, proliferated.¹⁸ 'The Bachelor Bedroom', an 1859 article by Collins published in *All the Year Round*, draws attention to the largely one-sided literary tradition, which presents this state of being as something that needs a 'remedy'.¹⁹ Collins and Dickens, in contrast, were much more receptive to the idea of bachelorhood and were fascinated by its implications. Being a bachelor involved two levels of non-conformity. It was a rejection of both conventional sexuality and the expectation to procreate; especially in the latter stages of the century, it was perceived to be

¹⁶ Sala, *Charles Dickens*, p.20.

¹⁷ Dickens's Diary, 6 January 1838, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), I, pp.629-643 (p.630).

¹⁸ Furneaux (2000), pp.68-69; and 'A Distaste for Matrimonial Sauce: The Celebration of Bachelorhood in the Journalism and Fiction of Collins and Dickens', in *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Andrew Mangham (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), pp.22-35 (p.26, 29, 30). On the seventeenth-to nineteenth-century literature surrounding bachelors, appearing in various media, see Katherine V. Snyder, *Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel, 1850-1925* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.3, 20, 28-30. On the historical changes to marriage patterns, which led to more bachelors, see pp.21-28.

¹⁹ [Collins], 'The Bachelor Bedroom', *All the Year Round*, 6 August 1859, pp.355-360 (p.355). Subsequent references appear in the text.

synonymous with homosexuality. At the same time, bachelors refused to subscribe to the prevailing domestic ideology. If the middle-class family was, in one sense, an economic structure, the bachelor actively chose not to subscribe to what Herbert Sussmann calls ‘normative bourgeois masculinity’; he did not earn to support dependents.²⁰ To these two existing critical arguments it is possible to add a third: bachelorhood may be a sexual and ideological decision, but it is also a decision about spatial practices. Being a bachelor is about opting to live in a different way – often, to live alone. Dickens, Collins, and Savage investigate where and how bachelors live. In doing so, they open up the chambers of the Inns of Court and Chancery and their much more expensive analogue, the apartments of the Albany, Piccadilly. As Katherine Snyder points out, living in these two establishments amounted to living in self-contained flats: residents were not like the ‘single gentlemen’ in lodgings, who had little personal space.²¹ Ultimately, characters are forced to confront whether living alone – a spatial decision – means being lonely – a psychological and emotional condition.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, the indolent Fascination Fledgeby lives in the Albany, lounging perpetually in a pair of Turkish trousers. Driven by greed and a desire to keep up appearances, Fledgeby is embroiled in a plot to marry the naïve Georgiana Podsnap; he schemes with Alfred Lammle in his apartments and ultimately gets his just deserts there (xi, March 1865, pp.1-11; xiv, June 1865, pp.104-111; xviii, October 1865, pp.225-233). He owns Pubsey and Co., and, from his comfortable bedroom, merrily directs Riah to harass those who are ‘lodgers in Queer Street’: namely, those who are in financial difficulties (xi, March 1865, p.4, 10). The Albany was an establishment comprised of fashionable sets for bachelors; in the *fin de siècle*, Oscar Wilde decided to house Jack here in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).²² Given Fledgeby’s conduct, living in the Albany does indeed seem to be a marker of selfishness and greed. Savage’s *The Bachelor of the Albany* brings this establishment into more sustained focus, associating residents less with greed than an untenable distance from social responsibility. The novel centres around the friendship between Mr Spread, a Liverpool

²⁰ See Furneaux (2000), p.79; Furneaux (2007), p.26, 31, 32; Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.4-5.

²¹ On multiple-occupancy accommodation, ‘alternative styles of bachelor domesticity’ in England and the United States, and middle-class suspicion of life in flats, see Burnett (1986), pp.209-210; and Snyder (1999), p.14, 19, 34-36, 45-6. Morley argued that flats – ‘little Albanies built up into the air’ should be constructed throughout London for the sake of comfort and the rental market; see ‘Houses in Flats’, *Household Words*, 24 March 1855, pp.182-186 (pp.184-186).

²² On the Albany and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), see Snyder (1999), p.226n.

merchant – ‘essentially a family-man, who [is] never at home in clubs, and [cannot] domesticate himself in hotels or lodgings’ – and Mr Barker, the bachelor (p.29). Barker has around £1500 a year at his disposal, and his ‘organs of firmness, combativeness, and self-esteem [are] superbly developed’ (p.47).

As Barker spends more time with the Spread family, first in Liverpool, then in their new house in leafy Richmond, he finds himself interacting with the world in spite of his best efforts. When the novel ends, he is an MP, a husband, and the legal guardian to a young woman recently arrived from the West Indies. ‘You know the Albany’, Savage addresses the reader, suggesting it is a notorious address. It is:

...The haunt of bachelors, or of married men who try to lead bachelors’ lives – the dread of suspicious wives, the retreat of superannuated fops, the hospital for incurable oddities, a cluster of solitudes for social hermits, the home of homeless gentlemen, the diner-out and the diner-in, the place for the fashionable thrifty, the luxurious lonely, and the modish morose, the votaries of melancholy, and lovers of mutton-chops. He knoweth not western London who is a stranger to the narrow arcade of chambers that forms a sort of private thoroughfare between Piccadilly and Burlington Gardens, guarded at each extremity by a fierce porter, or man-mastiff...

This breathless catalogue turns the Albany into a zoo, and its residents into categorisable species and subspecies. Barker’s suite, or ‘*sanctum-sanctorum*’, is ‘small, but complete’, ‘arranged and furnished with a precision and taste rigidly baccalaurean’. Everything here is ‘substantial and comfortable; nothing ambitious or superfluous’: a far cry from Fledgeby’s rooms, which scream ambition and superfluity (pp.44-45, 174). It has the comfort that comes from fastidious control. ‘The only article’ in the suite that ‘might, perhaps, have been impeached of sensuality, [is] a chair, constructed and cushioned after a plan of Barker’s own, and placed [...] at a particular angle, in a particular position’. ‘The slightest derangement of this established order of things’ – what Savage calls ‘the topography of the chamber’ – ‘ruffle[s] [Barker’s] serenity for hours’ (p.45). It sharply contrasts with the Spreads’ family homes: their Richmond house is a lived-in and, crucially, witty space, playing benign tricks on its visitors, ‘commodious without being regular; a house for incident as well as comfort, for adventure as well as convivial enjoyment’. ‘There is no satisfaction in a house where one cannot occasionally make a geographical blunder,’ Savage writes, and the Rosary keeps guests on their toes: ‘One likes, now and then, to make an innocent error of a door or two in the navigation of a strange corridor; it is so comical, novelish, Don-Quixotish, and all that sort of thing, which is so very pleasant’ (p.195). In its capacity for surprise, the Rosary sounds almost like an inn.

In essence, *The Bachelor of the Albany* is homiletic. Barker may be harmless, but he doggedly follows ‘the no-responsibility principle’ (p.35, 60, 80). When Spread reminds Barker that ‘there is no living in society, without taking one’s fair share of its cares and its duties’ (p.292), he is simply condensing the sentiments expressed by the narrator:

Mr Barker contrived to live to the age of forty [...] as if he was no part of the great machine [...] But life is life; humanity is humanity; to be in the world and not of the world is systematically practicable only in the apostolic sense. Life is made up of relations, affinities, dependencies, connexions, ties, and obligations [...] To try to escape them is to try to elude an universal law, and, like every such endeavour, is sure to terminate in failure, if not in punishment. The attempt is selfish, and selfishness may succeed for a while, but never eventually or entirely triumphs.

(p.60)

As Barker falls in love with Laura Smyly, Savage invokes the Albany in explicit terms: ‘Fortune, indeed, had now very nearly demolished the Albany system’ (p.272). ‘The Albany system’ – for Savage, one place, one simple decision about where and how to live, has complex ideological corollaries.

The bachelors of the Albany, men of independent means, make an active choice to isolate themselves. To live in the Albany is to make a statement. The men who live in the Inns of Court and Chancery, meanwhile, seem to have less control. The Inns, situated around Holborn, comprised a mixture of offices and apartments for barristers, solicitors, and single men. (Furnival’s offered rented accommodation to men who had nothing to do with the legal profession, and hotel accommodation to respectable visitors.) The Inns do not fare particularly well in contemporary journalism and fiction. The erstwhile ‘house of state’ in Lincoln’s Inn Fields where Tulkinghorn meets his grisly end is ‘let off in sets of chambers now; and in those shrunken fragments of its greatness, lawyers lie like maggots in nuts’ (iii, May 1852, p.92). These lawyers are no different to the itinerants of Tom-All-Alone’s, described in their ‘maggot numbers’. Content to ‘lie’ rather than live, they are larvae, perpetually undeveloped, burrowing in their nutlike chambers and turning them rotten. The compactness of a nut highlights the parochial nature of the lawyer’s world. In spite of the presence of teeming London on all sides, Tulkinghorn exists in a state of disconnection and atrophy: Dickens describes him ‘dwelling among mankind but not consorting with them, aged without experience of genial youth, and so long used to make his cramped nest in holes of corners of human nature that he has forgotten its broader and better range’ (xiii, March 1853, p.411). As

change and interaction are key ingredients for narrative movement, people like Tulkinghorn are a frustrating prospect for authors; Tulkinghorn's lifestyle cannot sustain whole stories, and so, Dickens kills him.

Fitzgerald imagined John Jasper 'decoy[ing] his victim' to a 'garret' in Clifford's Inn.²³ These 'stronghold[s] of Melancholy' attract alienated souls and serve to exacerbate their alienation ('The Uncommercial Traveller', pp.452-453). They both generate and perpetuate an unhealthy lifestyle.²⁴ Here, Dickens emphasises the extent to which one's physical surroundings can have a psychological effect, and the Uncommercial Traveller's observations about the 'loneliness of life in chambers' are stark (p.453). The Inns are both sepulchral – gloomy, full of ghosts – and 'suicidal', charged with the grim promise of more deaths in the future among members of the current community (pp.452-3). The Uncommercial Traveller tells the story of Parkle, who lives in Gray's Inn and, after three or four years of living on the same floor, begins speaking to his neighbour. This neighbour is 'a man a good deal about town', but all he can do is lament 'the monotony of all the streets, streets, streets – and of all the roads, roads, roads – and the dust, dust, dust!' (p.454). Despite his daily excursions in a crowded, vivifying city, his faculties of perception and articulation have been obliterated because he is 'always alone'; for him, London is 'too small' and 'want[s] variety' (p.454). When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life. The man hangs himself from his bedstead and leaves a note: 'I should prefer to be cut down by my neighbour and friend (if he will allow me to call him so), H. Parkle, Esq.' (p.454). In Gray's, this macabre act is the ultimate act of friendship. Life in chambers is associated with self-loathing and self-destruction. Only a change of scene can alleviate Parkle's trauma after the suicide; he goes 'into lodgings immediately', indicating that the lodging-house is the antithesis of a bitterly lonely Inn (p.456).

The inmates of chambers in nineteenth-century literature guard their furniture jealously. Given that they have no human beings to cherish, owning furniture and hoarding objects becomes a mechanism for coping with extreme isolation; their possessiveness over things is a form of displacement.²⁵ Chairs, beds and tables become prostheses of human identity. In Lyons Inn, a tenant faces a crisis when he stumbles

²³ Fitzgerald, *Life of Charles Dickens as Revealed in His Writings*, II, pp.157-158.

²⁴ On each of the Inns of Court and Chancery, considered separately, see Tyler (2012), pp.74-95.

²⁵ On loneliness, including observations on hoarding, see Olivia Laing, *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2016). Laing focuses on New York and the visual arts but many of her arguments can be adapted to other contexts.

upon a collection of old furniture in a storeroom. He begins to use the furniture as his own, feeling like a 'Resurrection Man', polishing it in a 'murderous and guilty sort of way', aware that it is 'another man's property' (p.455). One night, he is accosted by a stranger who wanders around the room, examines each piece of furniture, and hisses 'mine!' (p.456). Thackeray's Percy Sibwright pays very precise attention to the adornment of his chambers. The bed has 'chintz curtains lined with pink'; there is also a 'mignonette box in his bedroom window', a 'little exhibition of shiny boots', a 'museum of scent, pomatum, and bears' grease pots', a 'tolerably large collection' of classical, French and English books, and, on the 'neat walls', a 'choice selection of portraits of females, almost always in sadness and generally in disguise or deshabelle' (II, p.135).

Though he lives in lodgings, not chambers, *Bleak House*'s Tony Jobling/Weevle shares Sibwright's habit. 'Borrow[ing] a needle and thread of Miss Flite', his fellow lodger, and a hammer from Krook, his landlord, Weevle 'goes to work devising apologies for window-curtains', 'knocking up apologies for shelves', and hanging crockery on a 'pennyworth of little hooks, like a shipwrecked sailor making the best of it'. He plasters the walls of his lodgings above the rag-and-bone shop with something he 'prizes most, of all his few possessions, (next after his light whiskers)': a 'choice collection of copper-plate impressions from that truly national work, The Divinities of Albion, or Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty' (vii, September 1862, p.202). These are illustrations of women of high fashion, including Lady Dedlock. Though the increasing importance of personal taste in interior decoration is usually associated with the Victorian middle classes, who turned the family home into a reflection of selfhood, status and morality, *Pendennis* and *Bleak House* offer another perspective.²⁶ Those who live alone in insecure spaces, where tenancy means dwelling to a strict time-limit, are equally obsessed with decorating. The pictures they paper the walls with are scraps of identity, cheat-sheets to remind them of who they are when they gaze around their lodgings. Snyder associates 'bachelor domesticity' with a move to a 'more self-expressive, pleasure-centred, consumer-oriented, even luxurious ideal', but this is also a statement about staving off loneliness.²⁷ Sibwright's 'invitation cards of the past

²⁶ See, for example, Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006). On Dickens as an obsessive decorator, see, for example, Bodenheimer (2007), pp.126-169; and Hilary Macaskill, *Charles Dickens at Home* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2011).

²⁷ Snyder (1999), p.34.

season still [decorate] his looking-glass': a reminder and reassurance of his popularity (II, p.135).

David Copperfield's Tommy Traddles, training for the bar, sets great store by his furniture: a flower-pot and a 'little round table with [a] marble top'. However, this is not because he is a covetous bachelor; in fact, the very opposite is true, because these items represent his future with his wife-to-be Sophy. The lovers share the cost of the furniture, making 'a beginning towards housekeeping', until they can afford to marry (ix, January 1850, p.286; xi, March 1850, pp.349-350; xii, April 1850, p.372). After Traddles moves to Gray's with his new wife and her sisters, the flower-pot and table – which represent both a financial and emotional investment – are given pride of place. Gray's is transformed by the presence of this family, which opens it up and fills it with laughter. The solution to the 'loneliness of chambers', it turns out, is simply to renounce bachelorhood altogether: to stop living alone. 'Just get married!', though, is rather fatuous advice, and Dickens is far from being so normative or so obvious; his fiction evinces a noticeable streak of 'counter-marital plotting'.²⁸

In *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, he uses scenes in chambers to explore whether it is possible to live alone and remain essentially sociable. At first, the shy, elderly Mr Grewgious, who receives rents from his chambers in Staple Inn, seems to fit comfortably into a standard narrative template. Staple Inn is described in similar terms to Gray's, Temple, and Lincoln's Inn Fields. In an echo of 'The Uncommercial Traveller', Grewgious's door is inscribed with the initials of a former tenant. This suggests Grewgious does not have enough force of personality to leave his own impression (iii, June 1870, p.76). His room is awkwardly divided to accommodate both his public and private characters; it is neatly lined with boxes and there is a turn-up occasional table in the corner. The easy chair is very much Grewgious's chair, but as Edwin comes in from the fog, Grewgious defies readerly expectation and insists that Edwin take it (iii, June 1870, p.77). When he leans against the chimney-piece, it is to facilitate 'easy conversation' (iii, June 1870, p.78). This is a small sign of openness that sets him apart from earlier bachelors in the period's fiction: Tulkinghorn, for example, stands against or taps his chimney-piece when he is asserting his power over his visitors, forcefully demonstrating his ownership of the space (xiii, March 1853, p.395, 414). The tendency is more pronounced in Barker; arguing with Spread, he '[throws] back his

²⁸ On Dickens and 'counter-marital plotting', see Furneaux (2000), pp.66-69, 80-84.

head, put[s] his arms a-kimbo, and standing up, plant[s] himself with his back to the fire, controversial as a game-cock'. It is, in fact, his 'usual attitude when he [is] going to defend a paradox of his own, or attack the opinions of another'; 'with his back to the fire', he 'bristl[es] with pugnacity' (p.54, 58). These disparate bachelors come from a universe of common, involuntary gestures and spatial practices, but Grewgious performs them with a different set of sentiments.²⁹

Though many of the elements of Grewgious's existence are familiar to fiction's most miserable, lonely lawyers, the episode of Edwin's visit proves it is possible to be a hospitable bachelor, making the most of the tiny community around him. As befits a crotchety character with a strict routine, Grewgious spends 'three hundred days of the year' eating dinner at the hotel in Furnival's Inn (iii, June 1870, pp.76-8). (Roland Barthes observes that 'the horror of eating alone seems to be widespread [...] [it is a] mark of malediction: the essence of solitude'.)³⁰ Edwin's call, however, prompts Grewgious to order an extravagant 'pot-luck' dinner from the hotel, complete with a comic double-act of waiters sent across for the occasion. The 'gipsy-party' has all of the energy of David Copperfield's housewarming on Buckingham Street, or Pip and Herbert's first meal together at Barnard's Inn (iii, June 1870, pp.78-80). Living arrangements with a 'gipsy character', hospitality without stuffy ceremony, give rise to scenes of exuberant comedy.³¹

When Rosa asks him to join her Christmas party, he stutters his acceptance, admitting, 'as a particularly Angular man, I do not fit smoothly into the social circle' (ii, May 1870, p.62). He offers Edwin and Rosa sound advice about the responsibilities that come with marriage, though he frets that 'the speculations of an Angular man [...] are probably erroneous on so globular a topic' (iii, June 1870, p.82). Constantly thinking in spatial terms – natural, perhaps, for a man who lives in a small room, where things must be made to fit – Grewgious is preoccupied with tessellation. Once again,

²⁹ The Victorians, according to Deborah Vlock, 'understood their theatre, their literature, even their social world, in terms of very explicit non-narrative signs', such as 'voices' and 'postures'; see Vlock (1998), p.5.

³⁰ Barthes (2013), p.109.

³¹ For further references to this 'gipsy'-like way of life, see, for example, Dickens to James E. Roney, 23 September 1856, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VIII, p.191. Dickens and Roney lived together on Buckingham Street in 1831, in the 'Mansion of Mrs. Rogers', the landlady. On the history of the gypsy community and its associated cultural stereotypes, see Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); and David Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth-Century Society* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). There were sizeable communities in nineteenth-century London; see Mayall, pp.34-45.

Dickens is broadly sharing Savage's vocabulary. Barker likes square tables, probably because a square forces each person at the table to take a side; Spread, the genial friend and father, likes round ones (p.53, 158). Discussing Barker and Spread, the unlikely friends, two MPs agree that 'Barker is the most *angular* man [they] ever encountered [...] Angular! so full of angles, that to understand him is as difficult as taking a trigonometrical survey'. Meanwhile, Spread 'has not a single corner in his mind; it is one of the roomiest minds [...] yet there is not a nook in it for a single crotchet' (p.52).³² Human interaction is figured in geometric terms, as a matter of shapes and angles rather than chemistry – a figuration modern readers may be more used to.³³ Chemistry is about reactions that actively create new compounds and energy; geometry is mathematical, connoting a social vision based on structure, not a radical change in states.

In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, published three years before *The Bachelor of the Albany* and thirty before *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Martin and Mark return from America and promptly enter a whimsical tavern in London. The tavern has 'more corners in it than the brain of an obstinate man' (xiii, January 1844, p.412). Like a quirky inn, a brain full of corners inspires curiosity; Dickens even encourages us to view it as curiously English, as this is a moment of homecoming. Dickens picks up the contrasts between angularity and expansiveness, nooks and plains, and complicates them in his portrait of Grewgious.³⁴ An angular bachelor is less a social scourge than an interesting writerly challenge. Towards the beginning of the chapter in Staple Inn, a question is posed: 'Who could have told, by looking at Mr. Grewgious, whether he had ever known ambition or disappointment?'. The question has been answered neatly by the end of the chapter, when Dickens reveals that Grewgious loved Rosa's mother and assures us that 'there are such unexplored romantic nooks in the unlikeliest men' (iii, June 1870, p.76, 85). It is the novelist's role to throw a light into such nooks. Dickens lingers in the room in Staple Inn after Edwin's departure, extending the scene beyond its natural end-point in order to offer some insight into the psychology of loneliness; he uses Grewgious as a focal point for these abstract meditations. Momentarily animated, the room seems

³² 'Of character: stiff and formal; hard and wanting suavity; crotchety and deficient in *savoir faire*; unaccommodating; cantankerous'; see 'angular', adj.4., in the *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <www.oed.com/view/Entry/7652> [Accessed: 9 August 2016].

³³ The first apparent use of 'chemistry' to signify the attraction between people is attributed to George Bernard Shaw, 1898; see 'chemistry', n.4., in the *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <www.oed.com/view/Entry/31274> [Accessed: 9 August 2016].

³⁴ On the way Dickens's own 'animation and protean shapes [...] filled and expanded every portion' of the snug Gad's Hill, see Fitzgerald, *Life of Charles Dickens as Revealed in His Writings*, I, pp.192-193, 201.

abruptly empty, emptier than usual, in the way rooms often do when visitors leave. After pacing restlessly for an hour, agonising over other people – ghosts from his past, friends in the present – Grewgious closes a drawer, then an escritoire, and decides to ‘shut out the world with the bedclothes’ (iii, June 1870, p.85). Thus, an instance of energetic, almost performative sociability is followed by a series of images of contraction and containment. The self is extendable and collapsible; extroversion and introversion fluctuate over the course of a few hours; sociability and solitude, Dickens shows, are not permanent states, but more like shifting moods. Grewgious’s enjoyment of one is immediately followed by a strong desire for the other, a sudden need to curl up tight in bed and keep the world away. However, there is no indication that one is inherently better than the other; they can be equally comforting and equally exhausting. In this short study of how one man handles his essential loneliness, Dickens suggests that living alone is not numbing; in fact, it might allow for a greater degree of self-knowledge. He turns away from the idea that loneliness is taboo, a pathology to be resisted at all costs – something Olivia Laing has recently deconstructed in *The Lonely City* (2016), albeit using different milieux and cultural materials. Dickens accepts loneliness as a complex emotional condition that, in its combination of psychological and spatial factors, can and should be explored.

Collins’s ‘The Bachelor Bedroom’ is entirely different in tone. It is a comic celebration of the spatial practices of bachelorhood; indeed, Collins jokes that he is going to publish ‘a large and serious work [...] on [...] the subject’ to succour ‘worn-out readers of the nineteenth century whose fountain of literary novelty has become exhausted at the source’ (p.355). He is exasperated by contemporary clichés. When the fabled bachelor ‘is away from his solitary chambers, and is thrown straight into the sacred centre of that home circle from which his ordinary habits are so universally supposed to exclude him’, he finds himself in ‘the Bachelor Bedroom, in a certain comfortable country house, whose hospitable doors fly open’ to receive him (p.355). As each visiting bachelor throws midnight parties for the other men in the house, leaving scenes of minor ruin – the image of ‘half a lemon [...] in the soap-dish’ is especially playful – the bedroom becomes a unique space for male sociability and authenticity (p.356).³⁵ Watched over by Sir John Giles – ‘enterprising gentleman-farmer’, ‘respected chairman of Quarter Sessions’, proprietor of Coolcup House, and

³⁵ On authenticity in the Bachelor Bedroom, see Furneaux (2000), p.70.

obvious stand-in for Dickens – a litany of literary men feel able to reveal their true selves. Gentlemen-farmers are affluent freeholders who are interested in growing something out of their own soil, and the Bachelor Bedroom is one space Sir John can cultivate (p.355). As he facilitates a productive sociability among this happy ‘circle’ of male writers, Collins suggests there are certain models of solitary living that make allowances for, or even enable, the exchange of ideas (p.359).

Edmund Yates’s memoirs shed light on the afterlife of the Bachelor Bedroom in Gad’s Hill. Ultimately, Dickens turned it into his own study, ‘a large room, entirely lined with books, and with a fine bay-window, in which the desk was placed [...] Originally the Bachelor Bedroom, and under that title most humorously described, with its various tenants, by Wilkie Collins’.³⁶ Given Dickens’s belief in the layering of spaces, the Bedroom’s transformation into his study was logical. Even in moments of stillness, concentration and solitude, it is likely that it retained traces of its former energy and conviviality, keeping the memory of Dickens’s boisterous, roistering circle close at hand when he was at work.

Cohabiting: ‘All Things Fitting’

‘The Bachelor Bedroom’ reveals the kinds of homosocial interaction bachelors were thought to enjoy. As long as they escape their chambers and join forces in an all-male space, they stave off loneliness. When Yates and Sala were working on *Temple Bar* together, they met to discuss the periodical in Clement’s Inn, one of the Inns of Chancery. ‘I used to go to [Sala],’ Yates writes, ‘from time to time at the chambers which, with a friend, he then occupied in Clement’s Inn – I always used to think that the names on the door, Mr. George Augustus Sala, Mr. Rudolph Gustavus Glover, were highly suggestive of a farce’.³⁷ It is not difficult to imagine the farcical elements of such a life: a couple of men with unusual names, rather like Box and Cox, bumble around a cramped set of rooms, bump into furniture, overhear conversations, speak at cross-purposes, and attempt to assert control of the space by becoming increasingly exaggerated in their habits and personalities, maintaining at all times the unity of place. This mode of living works to combat some of the city’s ill-effects. Choosing a person to share rent and space with becomes a way of claiming agency in a landscape that is

³⁶ Yates, *Recollections and Experiences*, p.304.

³⁷ Yates, *Recollections and Experiences*, p.276.

often impossible to negotiate. In these situations, a pre-existing affection leads to a decision to move nearer in physical terms.

Early in 1835, Dickens wrote a strangely bashful letter to Henry Austin, proposing that they share chambers in Furnival's. The short letter is threaded through with Dickens's thoughts about intimacy. He reiterates the existing understanding between the two young men. 'You know me well enough to be aware that I occasionally take strange ideas into my head', the letter opens; later, 'it is an offer I would make to no other creature living, and that I only make it to you because I sincerely believe after a tolerably close intimacy, that we could agree well'. He acknowledges that any relationship between flatmates, uniquely intense and intimate, comes with certain demands: 'Our tastes are not wholly dissimilar, and [...] we should both be disposed to resign any little peculiarities of our own, for our mutual comfort and sociality'. And he also assures Austin that he is a man who knows his own mind, suggesting that one must have a solid level of self-awareness before really being able to live with another person. 'I am on sufficiently intimate terms with myself,' he reflects, 'to know that I never act upon [my ideas] without a great deal of previous consideration'. Ultimately, however, Dickens's reasons for suggesting cohabitation were as economic as they were sentimental. 'I throw it out as an arrangement which would afford us an opportunity of enjoying the pleasure of each other's society' – of course – 'and', he concludes, 'of economizing at the same time'. It was cheaper to live together in a world where 'pounds, shillings, and pence' were the 'little screws of existence'.³⁸

There are several pairs of bachelors, or pseudo-bachelors, living together in *Pendennis*: Sibwright and Bangham, Bows and Costigan, the Chevalier Captain Strong and Colonel Altamont. There is no real love lost between them, with practical concerns coming into all of these relationships: they 'live together from habit and convenience', and because they prefer 'any company rather than none' (II, p.41, 169). Pen and Warrington ostensibly live together because it saves them both money. Though Major Pendennis grudgingly accepts these arrangements while Pen is trying to make his way – the three-pair set, with its 'nasty black staircase', 'feeble and filthy oil-lamps', and damp banisters, is 'economical at any rate' – they become harder to justify when Pen achieves success as a society novelist (I, pp.284-285). 'It is a queer taste', Warrington tells Bacon, the publisher, 'but we are fond of each other; and as I can't afford to live

³⁸ Dickens to Austin, early 1835, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), I, pp.56-57.

in a grand house, he comes and stays in these rickety old chambers with me' (II, p.28). After much pressure from the Major to 'take respectable apartments', Pen 'compromise[s], by descending to the second floor in Lamb Court: Warrington still occupying his old quarters, and the two friends being determined not to part from the other' (II, p.30, 231). Thackeray's language is unexpectedly tender here, and he ends the passage with a direct exhortation: 'Cultivate kindly, reader, those friendships of your youth [...] It is only in that generous time that they are formed. How different the intimacies of after days are' (II, p.231). He argues that the most precious and durable friendships are formed when two people – surrounded, on all sides, by 'mole'-like lawyers – decide to live together (I, p.327).

Pendennis is a paean to male friendship and cohabitation, but it also includes more matter-of-fact observations about the everyday realities of living with another person. Unfortunately, there is 'no philanthropist good-natured enough to devise a set of Hummums for the benefit of the lawyers'; Temple may be geographically close to the respectable hotel, but it shares few of its attributes (I, p.290). Pen and Warrington's three pair set is unavoidably shabby and it only becomes shabbier as its two occupants continue to share the space. When Pen moves in, the 'queer rooms' boast a 'carpet full of holes', 'scarcely any article of furniture that ha[s] not been in the wars', and a 'table stained with many circles of Warrington's previous ale-pots' (I, p.287). Evidence of Warrington's past, spent living and drinking alone, the circular marks come to represent the promise of a new and sociable future. (In the Sol's Arms in *Bleak House*, we remember, they symbolise the intersections between genres and groups of people.) After 'two years of joint occupancy', 'the ragged carpet ha[s] grown only more ragged', 'a constant odour of tobacco perfume[s] the sitting-room', and one of the chairs finally breaks under an unlucky guest (II, p.28). As cohabitation puts pressure on space, Pen and Warrington's communal rooms physically start to buckle. Indeed, Mr Grump, who lives in the chambers below, is horrified to discover water from their shower-baths coming through his ceiling; this moment emphasises the porosity of such spaces. Shower-bathing, Grump grouses, is 'an absurd, new-fangled, dandified folly' (I, p.290).

There is little privacy: Pen can hear 'Warrington's vigorous and regular snore from the neighbouring apartment' (I, p.329). This is rather different to hearing strangers making sounds in a lodging-house. Friendship, of course, assumes a level of mutual knowledge, but this takes on a very different texture when friends move in together. The forms of knowing one another change, because people's behaviour shifts at home,

when they are no longer performing within a specific social situation. Though Barthes argues that ‘idiorrhythmy’ only works in groups of more than two, elements of his theory of Living-Together, framed using literary examples, can be applied to Dickens and Thackeray’s pairs of friends. Idiorrhythmy allows an individual such as Pen or Warrington to live ‘according to his own rhythm’. This is a ‘flexible, free, mobile rhythm’, existing ‘in opposition to power’; it operates on a separate plane, we might assume, to restrictive house-rules, tenancy agreements and covenants. As an idiorrhythmic relationship is ‘something like solitude with regular interruptions’, it respects the essential independence of its members, who weave together the rhythms of their lives without being subsumed into one another. ‘There’s nothing contradictory’, Barthes stresses, ‘about wanting to live alone and wanting to live together’. Warrington’s ‘regular snore’, the tempo of his breathing, physically manifests a vital aspect of this kind of arrangement: namely, that cohabitation is structured by pace, the particular quality that time takes on, as much as the use of space. For Barthes, ‘to fantasize Living-Together as an everyday reality’ is to ‘refuse, repel, violently reject the event’, because ‘the event is the enemy of Living-Together’.³⁹ This suggests that cohabitation is one of the many features of everyday life that structures itself cyclically, instead of teleologically. In narrative terms, to ‘violently reject the event’ might be to reject incident or plot; thus, in its essential circularity, it is a difficult state to capture in the bounds of a novel. The tension between ‘propulsive narrative’ and the ‘recursive, fragmented’ forms of everyday life is vital to Andrew Miller’s reading of *Cranford*; using Lefebvre’s *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1968) to inform his analysis, Miller points to the productive conversations literary critics can have with philosophers working in this field.⁴⁰

In Thackeray and in Barthes, to live together is to celebrate patterns and frequent, trivial interactions; finding the traces of another person’s routine in shared space brings deep comfort and reassurance. It is a form of sociability that revolves around familiarity and compromise rather than mystique. Therein lies the danger: cohabitation makes it difficult for two people to moderate when and how they interact. *Our Mutual Friend*’s Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood’s decision to set up a ‘joint establishment’ for the summer leads the pair to discuss the possibility that they

³⁹ Barthes (2013), pp.5-8, 35, 43, 72, 84.

⁴⁰ Miller (1995), pp.93-108.

will just become weary of each other's company (iv, August 1864, p.109). Eugene hopes that the two old friends do not 'prove too much for one another' – after all, it does not necessarily follow that good friends will be good housemates – but nonetheless fantasises about living with Mortimer in a lighthouse. 'If we were on an isolated rock in a stormy sea', he says, 'Lady Tippins couldn't put off to visit us, or, better still, might put off and get swamped'. When Mortimer points out that 'there might be a degree of sameness in the life,' Eugene replies:

It would be a defined and limited monotony. It would not extend beyond two people. Now, it's a question with me, Mortimer, whether a monotony defined with that precision and limited to that extent, might not be more endurable than the unlimited monotony of one's fellow-creatures. (iv, August 1864, p.110)

Eugene, who is bored of everything, prefers the inoffensive boredom of living with one person to the general and crushing predictability of humanity as a whole. His lighthouse fantasy is less a celebration of Mortimer per se than a way for Eugene to turn his back on the rest of the world. Poised at the threshold of land and sea, looking forever outwards, and built to make sublime natural landscapes safe for others, the lighthouse is a space that rescues its inhabitants from the responsibilities and hollow civilities of urban life: nothing deters Eugene from this dream, not even the rain.⁴¹ Ultimately, Eugene and Mortimer's snug 'bachelor cottage near Hampton [...] with a lawn, and a boat-house, and all things fitting' is a fitting arrangement, because it allows them to fit their lives around one another (iv, August 1864, p.109).

For Warrington and Neville Landless, the stakes are higher: living with another person, someone who is 'gay and spirited, and brim-full of health, and life, and hope', becomes a balm for corrosive loneliness (I, p.375). 'I was dev'lish lonely in chambers and wanted somebody', Warrington admits (I, p.312). Captain Tartar, Neville's neighbour, performs a similar function to Pen. Neville is a stranger: *neville* means 'new town', *landless* is self-explanatory. He lives in an Inn of Court: a den of forgotten souls. Shunted into a garret and a corner, he is as isolated, in pure spatial terms, as it is possible to get. Unsurprisingly, 'an air of retreat and solitude [hangs] about the rooms, and about their inhabitant. He [is] much worn, and so [are] they' (v, August 1870, p.133). Tartar's lucky presence 'on the other side of the party-wall' acts as a kind of salvation for this

⁴¹ On lighthouses as 'interstitial spaces of imaginative possibility', see Furneaux (2000), p.51, 53, 104-105.

murder suspect (vi, September 1870, p.163). We first meet him perched on Neville's ledge like a 'venturesome glazier' (v, August 1870, p.138). A glazier's job is to fit or fix windows, to open up lines of vision; as a sympathetic neighbour determined to understand and aid the ailing Neville, Tartar achieves precisely this ambition. Dickens uses the relationships in Staple Inn to glorify the unique forms of sociability – solace, even nursing – that cohabitation creates.

These might seem like exclusively male intimacies, forged around exclusively male routines and in male spaces. *Pendennis*'s Blanche expresses excitement at the 'odd, strange, delightful, droll little idea of being in a bachelor's chambers in a queer old place in the City!'; the very thought of a single woman entering these spaces is a form of transgression, a 'new adventure' (II, p.276). However, Dickens and his contemporaries also reveal some interest in the spaces women share, from which men are excluded. As befits a receiver of rents, Grewgious believes that housing Rosa comfortably after she flees from Jasper is the ultimate act of care, and establishes her in the 'prettiest chamber in Furnival's'. Though he is worried about how she might react to her new surroundings – 'I hope you don't feel very strange indeed, in this strange place' – Grewgious has managed to squeeze homeliness out of an unprepossessing corner of London. Pacing outside the hotel after he leaves her, 'as if he ha[s] laid a dove in a high roost in a cage of lions, and ha[s] it on his mind that she might tumble out', he is the unlikely epitome of 'knight-errantry'. Though he takes pleasure in seeing her in the Inns, they 'are not fit surroundings for a young lady', and he proceeds to secure accommodation for Rosa and Miss Twinkleton with Mrs Billickin (v, August 1870, p.157, 160, 169). Her lodgings may be a place of refuge, but Rosa finds the day-to-day experience of cohabitation stultifying; the 'dove' feels cooped up in her new roost, vying for space with two theatrical women. Living with farce characters is trying for those who do not come from the same universe, and Rosa's only escape is in reading stories of the high seas.

For *The Moonstone*'s Limping Lucy, however, London lodgings play a central role in the happy future she has projected for herself and Rosanna:

I had a plan for our going to London together like sisters, and living by our needles [...] I had saved up a little money [...] We should have had a little lodging in London, and lived together like sisters.

(28 March 1868, pp.361-367, p.364)

The references to ‘littleness’ and the alliteration running through the passage – ‘we should have had a little lodging in London, and lived together like sisters’ – is almost childlike, and equates the modest ‘little lodging’ with a dream house. The conditional tense suggests it is their entitlement, a home they have so far been denied – because, for Lucy and Rosanna, it stands in for independence and sisterly support. In this mirror image of the bachelor-apartment, they will be the authors of their own stories and can afford to be entirely themselves. But ultimately, it is doomed to remain a dream house. When Rosanna dies, the narrative that Lucy has spun for the two of them is also cut short.⁴²

Taking lodgings together can also become an explicit act of social and sexual rebellion for women. The idea reaches its apotheosis in *Little Dorrit*: Miss Wade and Tattycoram are marginalised women who live together in marginal spaces, thereby ostracising themselves further. Lodging is the only option available to them. Deploing her defiance, deep-seated anger, opaqueness, and refusal to perform to the crowd, Meagles refers to Miss Wade as ‘that immoveable woman’; this belies the fact that, geographically, she and Tattycoram are always on the move (viii, July 1856, p.239). Their lodgings, first near Park Lane and then in Calais, are on out-of-the-way streets. In London, they are eventually found in ‘a dingy house, apparently empty, with bills in the windows, announcing that it [is] to let’. The bills ‘almost [amount] to a decoration’, as if they were a kind of wallpaper (viii, July 1856, p.240). Likewise, in France, their house has ‘two printed bills in French and English, announcing Furnished Apartments to let, with immediate possession’ (xvi, March 1857, p.494). Such bills signify as-yet-unwanted space – in Rosemarie Bodenheimer’s terms, ‘sad stories of decline that can only be imagined from the street’ – and become a kind of label pasted onto the two women.⁴³ With her ‘waifs and strays of furniture’, which ‘[do] not belong to the room’, her ‘disorder of trunks and travelling articles’, and a ‘small square of carpet’, Miss Wade has ‘taken up her quarters’ near Park Lane ‘as she might have established herself in an Eastern caravanserai’ (viii, July 1856, p.241, 245; Figure 39). Caravanserais were roadside travellers’ inns; once again, we have the exoticism of the gipsy party, but here, in a more ambivalent context, the emphasis is on homelessness and otherness. When Arthur tries to find the pair again, the furniture is gone and the elderly servant is of no

⁴² On Lucy and Rosanna and Anne Rodway and Mary, another story of cohabitation cut short by death, see Furneaux (2007), pp.24-25, 33n.

⁴³ Bodenheimer (2007), p.133, 166.

help ‘beyond constantly offering for perusal a memorandum relative to fixtures, which the house-agent’s young man ha[s] left in the hall’ (viii, July 1856, p.245). Very quickly, the situation slips from the highly charged to the prosaic, as Miss Wade’s charisma and erotic power are completely erased by the forms and patter of the agent. It is as if the space has been shaken back to normal.



Figure 39: Phiz, ‘Five-and-twenty’, *Little Dorrit*, viii, July 1856, pp.225-256. British Library, C.144.c.3

‘Sir,’ Miss Wade tells Arthur, ‘whether you find me temporarily and cheaply lodging in an empty London house or in a Calais apartment, you find Harriet with me’ (xvi, March 1857, p.498). To lodge, and to lodge together, is to reject the middle-class family: Miss Wade, portrayed as dangerous because she desires other women, is ‘sharing [her] small means’ with Tattycoram, pushed away by the banality and belittlement of her adoptive parents and sister (xvi, March 1857, p.507). Here, rented spaces become queer spaces; they are the only spaces that truly foster female intimacy and can accommodate sexual love between women. ‘Sexualities’, according to Gavin Brown, Kath Browne and Jason Lim, ‘are geographical’, and ‘spaces and places are sexualised’; ‘sexuality – its regulation, norms, institutions, pleasures and desires – cannot be understood without understanding the spaces through which it is constituted, practised and lived’.⁴⁴ In *Little Dorrit*, these spaces are uniformly and extensively

⁴⁴ Gavin Brown, Kath Browne and Jason Lim, ‘Introduction, or Why Have a Book on Geographies of Sexualities?’, in *Geographies of Sexualities: Theory, Practices, and Politics*, ed. Brown, Browne and Lim (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), pp.1-18 (p.2, 4).

described in negative terms (viii, July 1856, pp.235-244; xvi, March 1857, pp.493-500). Upon arriving in Calais, Arthur is ambushed by hoteliers shouting ‘Hi! Ice-say! You! Seer! Ice-say! Nice Oatel’, who offer a cheery and anarchic contrast to the gloom of Miss Wade and Tattycoram’s own lodgings (xvi, March 1857, p.493). Miss Wade’s picture of her relationship with Tattycoram – the younger woman is ‘taking refuge’ with her – is completely at odds with the narrator’s own, later comparison between Tattycoram and an ‘abject dependant and serf’ (viii, July 1856, p.242; xvi, March 1857, p.500). Miss Wade, figured as a feudal landlord, is in oppressive control, and the arrangement ends before the novel does. It is easy to read all of this as a moral comment on Miss Wade’s sexuality and on both women’s decision to live together; ‘by depicting Miss Wade’s dwellings as dead’, Shale Preston argues, ‘Dickens effectively seeks to deny Miss Wade a valid place wherein she can express and explore her same-sex desire’.⁴⁵ Alternatively, it could be a grim reminder of the price that nineteenth-century women have to pay, the sacrifices they have to make, in order to live as they want.

Arthur’s journey to Calais takes him past a ‘meagre lighthouse’ that looks ‘as if it were the ghost of an edifice that had once colour and rotundity, dripp[ing] melancholy tears’. A fantasy space eaten up by time, it poses a warning to Eugene, who longs to live in one with Mortimer (xvi, March 1857, p.493). To live with another person in a rented space is to be in a version of utopia: it creates an intense and sometimes homoerotic bond, expands the traditional definition of the family, collapses the wall between personal and shared space, and allows individuals to coexist without losing a sense of their own identities. But though it is one of the most fitting ways of combating urban alienation, it is touched with sadness, because it is not sustained in any of these novels. Still, each episode offers a vivid reminder that other lifestyles are possible.

⁴⁵ Shale Preston, ‘Miss Wade’s Torment’, in *Changing the Victorian Subject*, ed. Madeleine Seys, Maggie Tonkin, Mandy Treagus and Sharon Crozier-De Rosa (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2014), pp.217-239 (p.229). See also Annamarie Jagose, ‘Remembering Miss Wade: *Little Dorrit* and the Historicizing of Female Perversity’, *GLQ*, 4 (1998), 423-451. For an alternative reading of Miss Wade, that aligns her with ‘political rebellion’, see Janet Retseck, ‘Sexing Miss Wade’, *Dickens Quarterly*, 15 (1998), 217-225. On female friendship and desire in the nineteenth-century more generally, see Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007). On places and utopian projects that allowed single women to cohabit, see Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London: Virago Press, 1985).

Lodging: Dickens's 'Old Christmas "Properties"'

An 1850 short story by WH Wills and William Blanchard Jerrold, 'Christmas in Lodgings', begins by declaring that 'a bachelor's life is not without its attractions'.⁴⁶ Taking lodgings in order to concentrate on his neglected studies, the narrator becomes steadily more selfish until he hears his landlady's family making merry on Christmas Day. The piece appeared in the inaugural Christmas number for *Household Words*. Published for the most sociable time of year, the extra numbers of Dickens's journals take sociability and space as a recurring theme.⁴⁷ A significant proportion of their frame narratives – *The Seven Poor Travellers* (1854), *The Holly-Tree Inn*, *A House To Let*, *The Haunted House* (1859), *Tom Tiddler's Ground* (1861), *Somebody's Luggage*, *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings* and *Mrs Lirriper's Legacy* (1864) – involve rented space. Meticulously detailed about the mundane practicalities of nineteenth-century domestic life, from the ground-plans of rural inns to the various trials of entering the lodgings industry, the Christmas numbers brought readers closer together in their celebration of familiar surroundings. Dickens dedicated his last word of the dying year, and his first word of the new year, to committedly ordinary situations. By virtue of their structure, the Christmas numbers also offer sophisticated theoretical arguments about the relationship between space, self and story. Finally, their descriptions of people negotiating cramped quarters, building their lives around one another, serve as a metaphor for the workings of the journals themselves. Meditating on the nature of cohabitation in physical terms, Dickens and his circle recognise that writers, too, must share space – it is the very nature of nineteenth-century literary culture.⁴⁸

The settings around which the Christmas numbers revolve are stopping-places where diverse people come together, introduce themselves, and can be reasonably

⁴⁶ [Wills and Jerrold], 'Christmas in Lodgings', *Household Words*, 21 December 1850, pp.295-298 (p.295).

⁴⁷ A number of other common themes have been suggested, including moral regeneration, forgiveness and memory. See Ruth F. Glancy, 'Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 35 (1980), 53-72; and Thomas (1982), pp.74-5.

⁴⁸ Thomas recommends that we identify, isolate and preserve Dickens's work from amidst the anonymous collections; see 'Contributors to the Christmas Numbers of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, 1850-1867', *Dickensian*, 69 (1973), 163-172 (p.163); and 'Contributors to the Christmas Numbers of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*: Part II', *Dickensian*, 70 (1974), 21-29 (p.29). Conversely, M. Clare Loughlin's intertextual reading of the periodicals celebrates the dialogue between authors on the page; see 'Charles Dickens as Novelist, Journalist, and Editor: The Relationships Among the Constituent Texts of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1999).

expected to exchange tales. Rented spaces are ideally suited to the mechanics of the Christmas numbers, because they offer a good narrative excuse for finding and compiling otherwise unconnected stories: the jaded narrator of *The Holly-Tree Inn*, for example, approaches each person at the tavern for a story to overcome his shyness. (Tellingly, he lives in Temple.) Using rented space in this way was a convenience that contemporary reviewers recognised, and some found slightly exasperating. Following the publication of *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings*, a writer for *The Times* put it neatly:

Every year Mr. Dickens is harder and harder pushed for the means of stringing together a small collection of tales which are issued as the Christmas number of the periodical he edits [...] He falls back this year on the good old fashion of making all the inmates of a lodginghouse tell each story. Pilgrims at an inn, or travelers in a caravanserai [...] or guests snowed up in a country house [...] have from time immemorial, if we may believe the story-tellers, been in the habit of relieving their tedium by relating to each other their adventures with practised skill. [...] Half a dozen people are always meeting each other by chance, and each can tell a good long story pat on the spur of the moment [...] When a writer has produced a number of short tales which he wishes to preserve, he is not content to collect them and to put them forth as a chance bundle, but thinks it necessary to give them a factitious unity.⁴⁹

According to the reviewer, these collections exaggerated the willingness of strangers to share stories, and overstated the ability of rented spaces to encourage storytelling.

And yet, Dickens insisted, year after year, on making more work for himself. According to Fitzgerald, Dickens had a 'strange, almost romantic, fancy for a poetical sort of "framework", destined to enclose and colour a collection of short stories'.⁵⁰ Fitzgerald goes into detail about how these collections were assembled. First, Dickens would come up with the frame – a 'good and telling idea', shrunk to 'the small but effective scale with which he had latterly grown unfamiliar, owing to his habit of dealing with large canvases'.⁵¹ He would then send out a 'pleasantly welcome circular' to friends and likely contributors, outlining the concept of the frame (p.731). Besides the connecting sections and two framing sections – co-written, on certain occasions, with Collins – he generally supplied a piece of his own to the number.⁵² The aim was to give contributors as much freedom as could be afforded. The circular for *Tom Tiddler's Ground* reads:

⁴⁹ 'Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings', *The Times*, 3 December 1863, p.12.

⁵⁰ Fitzgerald, *Memories of Charles Dickens*, p.117.

⁵¹ Fitzgerald, 'Charles Dickens in the Editor's Chair', *Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1881, pp.725-742 (p.730).

⁵² For a brief description of the process, see Oppenlander (1984), p.33.

Your tale may be narrated either in the first or in the third person – may be serious or droll – may be told by an individual of either sex, and of any station. [...] The tale is supposed to be related by word of mouth to a man who has retired from the world and shut himself up moodily, gloomily, and dirtily. Generally it should have some latent bearing by implication on the absurdity of such a proceeding – on the dependence of mankind upon one another – and on the wholesome influences of the gregarious habits of humanity.⁵³

The result of this free rein is a series of tales that are eclectic in theme, tone and genre, largely playing to the strengths of each contributor. Thus, the overarching moral aim of *Tom Tiddler's Ground* reflects the literary project performed by the numbers as a whole: to prove the 'dependence of mankind upon one another', and 'the wholesome influences of the gregarious habits of humanity', by bringing Dickens's associates together on the page during the season of sociability.

As the circular shows, *Tom Tiddler's Ground* centres around the freehold property of a hermit in the countryside. Under the initiative of a Traveller, who is determined to change him, Mr Mopes is told several stories to persuade him to re-enter society. *Great Expectations* was published in the same year, and, indeed, in the same journal; Mopes's resemblance to Miss Havisham is obvious. The village publican shows some admiration that Mopes has 'landed property', but when the Traveller sees this property, he is amazed: 'As to these being your premises,' he tells the Hermit, 'they are in far too disgraceful a condition to claim any privilege of ownership'.⁵⁴ The Traveller echoes the rhetoric that had earlier been used in *The Bachelor of the Albany*, closely and at length; he concludes that 'the healthy tenure on which we hold our existence' is to 'do our gregarious work and act and re-act on one another' (pp.4-5).⁵⁵ It is misguided, in the collection, to be excessively covetous of property. This makes Mopes the antithesis of Sophonisba, the elderly narrator of *A House To Let*, who rescues and adopts the imprisoned orphan inside, buys the house outright and turns it into a children's hospital.⁵⁶ She is rewarded for being a nosy and proactive neighbour.

Throughout the Christmas numbers, personal space is depicted as overrated, and communal spaces are celebrated. If the *Bildungsroman* presents the lodging-house as a stop-gap for the protagonist who ultimately leaves to start a family, and if in farce the

⁵³ Fitzgerald, 'Charles Dickens in the Editor's Chair', p.731.

⁵⁴ [Dickens], 'Picking Up Soot and Cinders', *Tom Tiddler's Ground, All the Year Round*, 12 December 1861, pp.1-5 (p.1, 4). Subsequent references appear in the text.

⁵⁵ This is also similar to an idea Dickens proposed for the 1858 Christmas number. See Dickens to Collins, 6 September 1858, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), VIII, pp.649-651.

⁵⁶ [Collins and Dickens], 'Let at Last', *A House To Let, Household Words*, 7 December 1858, pp.32-36 (p.36).

lodging-house is where romance blossoms, then *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings* and *Mrs Lirriper's Legacy* explore another, more radical alternative: that a lodging-house community can offer a direct substitute for the traditional family. Major Jackman, the parlour lodger and archetypal 'bachelor-dad', puts together the first collection of stories 'to console himself while his godson is away at school'; the little boy is the son of the lodging-house, which 'becomes home to an emphatically non-sexual and non-reproductive family of choice'.⁵⁷ Mrs Lirriper's, however, is haunted by Todgers's. Under Mrs Todgers's maternal gaze, the commercial gentlemen revel in the conviviality of the boarding-house, but are also described in terms of stuntedness: they are surrounded by feeble trees, birds in cages, and 'forgotten plants [...] like old walking-sticks' (iv, April 1848, pp.98-99). There is an 'old, disjointed, rickety, ill-favoured skylight' that 'cover[s] Todgers's up as if it were a sort of human cucumber-frame, and only people of a peculiar growth [are] reared there' (iii, March 1843, p.95). If the commercial gentlemen are a row of diseased and uniform cucumbers in a hothouse, then the boarding-house partly fails in its utopian promise to be an alternative family. It creates a pressure to conform – for the sake of respectability and for the reputation of the boarding-house itself, which is an entity that exists above and beyond its individual members. This drives the landlord in 'Our Next-Door Neighbours', among others; he is thrilled when he appears to have found a lodger 'of just his own way of thinking' (p.124).

It is true that Dickens regularly presents the lodging-house as a harbour for eccentrics. Todgers's has been described as an affirming space in which lodgers 'cultivate their own and respect each other's oddities'; as Steven Marcus puts it, 'every one' at Todgers's 'is able to enact his own distinct conception of who he is', no matter how 'foolish and inconsequent' he may be.⁵⁸ In her discussion of Dickens's style, Mrs Oliphant might well be describing the social dynamics of these spaces: 'If we do "rub each other's angles down" in the world, we certainly do not find it so in Mr Dickens' novels'.⁵⁹ At the same time, however, lodging-houses need their residents to toe the line, and risk demanding a kind of cohabitation that rubs down angles too far. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, the Kenwigs family lives in a lodging-house that is extremely

⁵⁷ Furneaux (2000), p.25, 60, 63-4.

⁵⁸ Marcus (1965), p.258. For similar arguments about Todgers's encapsulating 'the comic principle of accommodation' and a 'new, synthetic kind of family', see James R. Kincaid, *Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp.132-151; and Schwarzbach, (1979), pp.92-94.

⁵⁹ Mrs Oliphant, 'Charles Dickens', *Blackwood's Magazine*, April 1855, 451-466.

hierarchical in structure. This is because the rents of each room, paid by the week, vary – the case in every lodging-house. ‘A curious visitor who had to climb his way to the top’, Dickens writes, ‘might have observed that there were not wanting indications of the progressive poverty of the inmates, although their rooms were shut’. First floor: a mahogany table; second floor: deal chairs; third floor: a ‘worm-eaten wash-tub’; garrets: ‘two crippled pitchers, and some broken blacking-bottles’. Mr Kenwigs is ‘a person of some consideration on the premises, inasmuch as he occupie[s] the whole of the first floor, comprising a suite of two rooms’ (iv, June 1838, pp.120-121). The parlour lodger, meanwhile, holds a special position: ‘Deputed by the landlord to dispose of the rooms [in the house] as they [become] vacant, and to keep a sharp look-out that the lodgers [don’t] run away’, he is ‘permitted to live rent-free, lest he should at any time be tempted to run away himself’ (v, July 1838, p.139).

This not only influences the way lodgers behave and interact in Dickens, but also colours the stories they tell. *Mrs Lirriper’s Lodgings* is made up of the personal histories of each lodger, and chapters are named according to the rooms that the lodgers rent: for example, Charles Collins’s story is ‘How the Best Attic was Under a Cloud’. (At the Kenwigses’, lodgers are described in similarly metonymic terms; ‘the back parlour sat with her mouth wide open’; v, July 1838, pp.133-134). Major Jackman, who puts the *Lirriper* stories together, has the parlours – the most expensive rooms, followed by the first floor. Sure enough, the first-floor lodger’s story is a melodramatic romance about aristocrats in a castle, handed down orally in a rural tavern until it has become a part of local legend. Meanwhile, the cheap attic houses a clerk who strains to speak like a poet and tells a tired tale about disappointed love. Like *The Canterbury Tales*, where the knight offers a courtly romance, and the miller, a *fabliau* about a dodgy lodger, *Mrs Lirriper’s Lodgings* suggests that a speaker’s class determines the stories that interest him, those he accumulates, and the manner in which he tells them.⁶⁰ The class gradations in a lodging-house are fine – Mrs Lirriper could hardly house both a knight and a pauper – but they have a visible impact, nonetheless. They establish who lives where, who hears what, what they see out of their windows, the size of their personal spaces, the light and dust in their rooms, the number of stairs they need to climb. And

⁶⁰ On these elements of Chaucer, and what they imply about his social vision, see Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Marion Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict: Languages of Antagonism in Late Fourteenth-Century London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).

though Major Jackman is regularly behind on his rent, his position in the household, as the tenant of the parlours, is significant. Streamlining and writing down the stories he is told, the Major channels Dickens's implicit observations on the economic basis of traditional narrative authority. The collection points to a complex relationship between money, power, space and storytelling.

Metatextual questions, then, cluster in the rented spaces of the Christmas numbers, and the lodging-house – a space that is utopian and hierarchical in turn – becomes an elegant metaphor for collaborative literary work. Writing to Yates about his contribution to *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings*, Dickens told him, 'you will find, I hope, that the Dog fits the design admirably'.⁶¹ The process of putting these numbers together involved fitting stories, and voices, around one another. Dickens's closest collaborator through the 1850s and 1860s, both on the Christmas numbers and more generally, was Collins; it is tempting to read the two men in Eugene and Mortimer.⁶² Collaboration, and making jokes about collaboration, was intrinsic to Dickens's wider vision. Thanks in part to their format, the Christmas numbers are overtly playful – not just about Dickens and Collins's relationship, but about the nature of the Dickens circle at large.

Somebody's Luggage is, perhaps, the most explicitly self-reflexive collection. Many of the individual stories are about writers and artists, and Dickens was extremely proud of the extended joke in the framing narrative which amounted to a 'comic defiance of the difficulty of an Xmas No.'. ⁶³ Christopher, head-waiter at the Slamjam Coffee-House in London, buys the abandoned luggage of an unknown guest – 'Somebody' – and finds a number of stories stashed among the items, from portmanteau to umbrella. Christopher decides to sell the stories to 'One who never yet* (*The remainder of this complimentary sentence editorially struck out)'.⁶⁴ This is one of several complimentary sentences and parentheses that are expunged by the bashful

⁶¹ Dickens to Yates, 15 November 1863, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), X, p.315.

⁶² Having offered to help Collins with *No Name* (1862) and co-written *The Frozen Deep* (1857) and *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* (1857), Dickens asked him to provide stories for *The Seven Poor Travellers*, *The Holly-Tree Inn*, *The Wreck of the Golden Mary* (1856), *The Haunted House*, *A Message From the Sea* (1860), and *Tom Tiddler's Ground*. They co-wrote *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners* (1857), *No Thoroughfare* (1857), and the framing sections of *A House To Let*. See, for example, Thomas (1982), pp.80-82, 91. For a reading of the relationship between Dickens and Collins that casts Collins as a radical, pushing against Dickens's conservatism in all of their collaborative works, see Nayder (2002). See also Anthea Trodd, 'Collaborating in Open Boats: Dickens, Collins, Franklin, and Bligh', *Victorian Studies*, 42 (2000), 201-225.

⁶³ Dickens to Wills, 14 September 1862; to Forster, mid-September 1862; to Collins, 20 September 1862, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), X, pp.125-126, 128-129.

⁶⁴ [Dickens], 'His Wonderful End', *Somebody's Luggage*, *All the Year Round*, 4 December 1862, pp.45-48 (p.45). Subsequent references appear in the text.

editor. The editor, of course, is Dickens, who has accepted the stories into ‘A.Y.R.’: the abbreviation for *All the Year Round* used in the story. Christopher needs the money, especially because Christmas is approaching. When Somebody does return, he is overjoyed at Christopher’s success; having failed to tempt booksellers himself, he is delighted to be in print at last and names Christopher a ‘benefactor’ and ‘philanthropist’ (p.47). Somebody, described as a ‘comically stereotypical author’ by Deborah Thomas, speaks in the ‘deeply purple prose’ that we might expect of a writer unused to conducting business, but his statement to Christopher – ‘you are an instrument in the hands of Destiny’ – rings as true as the ‘golden bowl [...] struck by the magic hand’ (p.48).⁶⁵ Being a writer, we are reminded, is only one tiny element in a process that places equal importance on printing, editing and publishing. It is a collaborative effort.

For the Dickens circle, therefore, the ‘house of fiction’ might more accurately be described as a ‘lodging-house of fiction’: it is embodied in Mrs Lirriper’s complex surrogate family. The ramifications of this argument are clearest in Andrew Halliday’s contribution to *Mrs Lirriper’s Lodgings*, ‘How the Side-Room was Attended by a Doctor’. Seven lodgers meet as members of the Mutual Admiration Society, vowing ‘to love each other, ever to believe in each other, ever to be true and just and kindly towards each other, and never to be estranged one from another either by prosperity or adversity’.⁶⁶ They are ‘pleased with [their] own ideas, and with each other’s’ (p.25). Soon, however, the happy society is rocked by the arrival of a doctor. ‘Considerably older than any of us there present’, the narrator says, ‘his face beamed with intelligence, his eyes sparkled with humour, and his whole expression was that of a man confident of mental strength and superiority. The look on his face seemed to imply that he had reckoned us all up in an instant’ (p.26). The punch-brewing Doctor begins to challenge the Mutual Admiration Society, until, finally:

We became a society of iconoclasts. Tom, and Jack, and Sam, and Harry, and the rest of us, who had begun by swearing eternal friendship, were now bitter disputants, despising each other’s mental qualities, calling each other duffers behind each other’s backs [...] Our society, in its new form, prospered exceedingly. We became famous for the freedom of our speech and the audacity of our opinions. Our company was much sought after, and we were proud of our originality and independence. We spent all our leisure hours together, and our defiant discussions kept us in a constant state of mental intoxication.

(p.28)

⁶⁵ Thomas (1982), p.95. On the self-reflexiveness of *Somebody’s Luggage*, see p.96, 101.

⁶⁶ [Andrew Halliday], ‘How the Side-Room was Attended by a Doctor’, *Mrs Lirriper’s Lodgings*, *All the Year Round*, 3 December 1863, pp.25-31 (p.26). Subsequent references appear in the text.

Though the Doctor is eventually revealed to be as soft-hearted as the rest of them, the story nonetheless asks important questions about the dynamics of intellectual networks. Members must achieve the correct balance of sympathy and agreement, on the one hand, and productive antagonism and contradiction, on the other. Mrs Lirriper's lodging-house has provided a space for these dynamics to play out. The Doctor, a catalyst for change who is unafraid to push the impressionable band of friends to its limits, seems to stand in for Dickens himself. As the group's friendship cup 'grow[s] dull and battered like a public-house pot', Halliday makes use of the now-familiar motif: if, in *The Pickwick Papers*, an ale-pot was used to clobber Mr Bardell, here the cup is itself beaten-in, associated with constant use and combative, creative conversation (p.28).

This interplay between harmony and healthy competition is developed at other points in the Christmas numbers: for example, in the bickering between Jarber and Trottle, who cannot agree about the proper way to collect information in *A House To Let*. While Jarber learns about the history of the house through his connections – 'I am on terms of acquaintance with every person of responsibility in this parish [...] I lodge with the water rate [...] I lounge habitually at the house agent's' – Trottle simply decides to knock on the door and present his findings in an official report.⁶⁷ Trottle questions the effectiveness of Jarber's investigations. However, in spite of Trottle's overt hostility, Jarber loses energy when he is absent and is not 'in his usual spirits'.⁶⁸ Though collaboration can involve skirmishes and compromise – Gaskell and Douglas Jerrold were particularly grieved by Dickens's editorial policies – writers and thinkers who occupy the same space ultimately benefit from their proximity.⁶⁹ By emphasising the advantages of an establishment like Mrs Lirriper's, with whom he expressed an extraordinary level of affinity, Dickens found a means of redressing qualms about his literary project.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ [Collins and Dickens], 'Over The Way', *A House To Let, Household Words*, 7 December 1858, pp.1-6 (p.5).

⁶⁸ [Collins and Dickens], coda to 'Three Evenings in the House' by Adelaide Anne Procter, *A House To Let, Household Words*, 7 December 1858, pp.23-26 (p.26).

⁶⁹ On contributors' grievances, and their means of overcoming them, see Gregory Gill, *The Life and Work of Adelaide Procter: Poetry, Feminism and Fathers* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp.192-250.

⁷⁰ On the affinity Dickens felt with Mrs Lirriper, see, among many, Dickens to Wills, 14 September 1863, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), X, p.289.

As a general metaphor, tenancy also served to mediate questions of literary influence in the circle. Its members were accused of ‘slavish imitat[ion]’, and Jerrold was perhaps being wistful rather than realistic in his advice to Sala: ‘Study everybody and don’t imitate anybody’.⁷¹ At one level, the Christmas numbers hint at Dickens’s own openness to influence; it has been argued that Christopher in *Somebody’s Luggage* is derived from ‘The Waiter’ by Leigh Hunt, and that the overarching narrative of *A House To Let* can be traced back to Bryan Procter’s ‘The Story of the Back-Room Window’ (1838).⁷² These stories suggest that each unit of literature exists to be rented rather than owned outright. Nowhere is the argument clearer than in ‘His Brown-Paper Parcel’, one of Dickens’s own contributions to *Somebody’s Luggage*. The narrator is an artist who seems inordinately jealous of London’s street-chalkers. He laments his own lack of public image – ‘it has been remarked by a certain (or an uncertain) philosopher, that the world knows nothing of its greatest men’ – and is obsessed by the shabby graffiti artists who decorate the pavements with pictures of cherubim, salmon, hermits, scrolls, Mount Vesuvius, ships, shoulders of mutton, cucumbers, cottages and rainbows.⁷³ These artists attract great crowds and scrawl requests for employment on the ground, which are promptly met. The narrator’s relationship with such ‘brother artist[s]’ is fraught to say the least (p.32). In fact, it turns out that there is no brotherhood at all, only rivalry and envy. The story ends with a revelation:

I – I – I – am the artist [...] I am the only artist of all those pavement-subjects which daily and nightly arouse your admiration. I do ’em, and I let ’em out. The man you behold [...] the man you give the credit to, the man you give the money to, hires – yes! and I live to tell it! – hires those works of art of me [...] Such is genius in a commercial country.

(p.34)

His productions are no longer his: others take the credit and the popularity, because profiting from rented work is endemic to the system. The idea also holds true in less overtly economic, or literal, terms. Artists and writers cannot claim their properties as freehold – in a literary environment that is structured around imitation or plagiarism, they are never more than tenants of the forms and ideas they inhabit on the page.

⁷¹ Sala, *Things I Have Seen*, I, p.90.

⁷² Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, ‘Dickens, Hunt and the Waiter in *Somebody’s Luggage*’, *Victorian Newsletter* (2005), 25-28; and Gill (1998), pp.230-231.

⁷³ [Dickens], ‘His Brown-Paper Parcel’, *Somebody’s Luggage*, *All the Year Round*, 4 December 1862, pp.30-34 (p.30). Subsequent references appear in the text.

The strange urban phenomenon described in 'His Brown-Paper Parcel' had earlier made an appearance in 'On Duty With Inspector Field'. In *Somebody's Luggage*, Dickens has the space and the time to expand upon this fleeting early reference, reviving it and reworking it until it becomes a credible anchor for metatextual thought. This sense of self-revision pervades many of the Christmas numbers. Gaskell's contribution to *A House To Let*, 'The Manchester Marriage', has a number of marked similarities to *North and South*. Reading about Openshaw, we feel as if John Thornton has taken lodgings and married his landlady's niece. Dickens's own Mrs Lirriper is a stock character, but she breaks out of her mould and refuses to play her prescribed part – her 'liripoop'.⁷⁴ She marks a development both in terms of a literary tradition that expected certain things of its landladies, and in terms of Dickens's own comic female characters. In the same way that Christopher challenges Dickens to test new narrative voices, Mrs Lirriper is a radical technical experiment.⁷⁵ Thomas traces her provenance on the comic stage, then in Mrs Tibbs, Mrs Bloss, Mrs Nickleby, and Flora Finching. Because Dickens grants her business acumen and a clear insight into human nature, Thomas argues, she is 'not a haphazard manifestation or mutation, but the clear result of an evolutionary process in Dickens's art [...] We can observe [Dickens], like all compulsively creative artists, reworking his own earlier compositions, delving within his own published but never quite finished products, and deepening his own previous conceptions'. The evolution is also stylistic. With her utterly unique voice and bizarre mental associations, Mrs Lirriper is a foray into stream-of-consciousness writing; Dickens attempts to capture the nature of thought in language.⁷⁶ In doing so, he creates an exceptional level of familiarity between character and reader. The Christmas numbers, then, are a space in which authors return to old ideas and hone them. They negotiate their relationships not only with each other, but also with past versions of themselves. Dickens writes that 'we all come home, or ought to come home' at Christmas; if the home is a place to return to, then he is also coming back to his home key, stylistically, at this time of year.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ 'Lirriper' may be a play on the word 'liripoop', which, in the Renaissance, was one's 'lesson', 'role', or 'part' to be learnt; see 'liripoop', n.2.a., in the *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <www.oed.com/view/Entry/108947> [Accessed: 9 August 2016].

⁷⁵ On Christopher's first-person narrative, see Edgecombe (2005), p.27.

⁷⁶ Thomas, 'Dickens's Mrs Lirriper and the Evolution of a Feminine Stereotype', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 6 (1977), 154-166 (pp.155-157, 159, 163, 166); and Thomas (1982), p.81.

⁷⁷ [Dickens], 'A Christmas Tree', *Household Words*, 21 December 1850, pp.289-295 (p.292).

Dickens eventually grew tired of the stress and coordination that went into producing the Christmas numbers, and decided to forgo them altogether in 1868. He published a note advertising the new series of *All the Year Round* that explained, ‘the Extra Christmas Number has now been so extensively, and regularly, and often imitated, that it is in very great danger of becoming tiresome’.⁷⁸ He was more candid when writing to Mr and Mrs JT Fields: ‘My reason for abandoning the Christmas No. was, that I became weary of having my own writing swamped by that of other people’.⁷⁹ In 1863, he had described the ‘Christmas stone on the road’ impeding the ‘grander journey’ of his novel-writing: specifically, *Our Mutual Friend*.⁸⁰ Fitzgerald admits that the collections seemed ‘machine-made’ by the end, and imagines Dickens saying to himself, ‘these old Christmas “properties” have been worked to death [...] I have really *said* all that can be said’.⁸¹ This combination of factors – the saturation of the market, the comparatively low profits, the investment of time, the frustration that his contributors’ stories did not match his vision or meet his artistic standards, the desire to go back to working for himself – saw him refocus his full attention on his novels and public readings. He grew tired of sharing space. Though these numbers may have become mere stage-properties to Dickens – trotted out on cue each year, always a little more battered than the last time – his ‘Christmas properties’, from the Holly-Tree Inn to Mrs Lirriper’s lodging-house, are enduringly useful to critics who wish to read Dickens in context, not in isolation. They offer a trove of nuggets about nineteenth-century literary culture, articulated by the practitioners who were central to some of that culture’s most innovative experiments.

As *The Times*’s reviewer pointed out, these ‘Christmas properties’ were also useful to nineteenth-century readers: ‘Mr Dickens is on familiar ground when he undertakes to relate the simple story of a poor lodginghouse-keeper’. Dickens’s interest in figures like Mrs Lirriper was long-running, and was ‘inexhaustible [...] for so humorous a writer’. But *Mrs Lirriper’s Lodgings* was more than the sum of its jokes:

⁷⁸ Dickens, ‘New Series of *All the Year Round*’, *All the Year Round*, 28 November 1868, p.596.

⁷⁹ Dickens to Mr and Mrs JT Fields, 30 October 1868, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), XII, pp.211-213.

⁸⁰ Dickens to Forster, 30 August 1863, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), X, p.283.

⁸¹ Fitzgerald, *Memories of Charles Dickens*, p.147.

It is not every man who can see a good heart and a right honest nature under the dross, and pettifoggery, and worldly ways of a lodginghouse-keeper. We have all been at some period of our lives in lodginghouses, and if all mankind, therefore, may be divided into lodgers and lodginghouse-keepers here is a Christmas sketch for all mankind. Those who keep lodgings may read it for the honour of their calling, and those who have ever gone into lodgings and have carried away not very elevated ideas of landlord or landlady may learn to think kindly of a class who are not much considered in this world of ours. "It is a hardship hurting to the feelings," says Mrs. Lirriper, "that lodgers open their minds so wide to the idea that you are trying to get the better of them [...]" as Major Jackman says to me, "I know the ways of this circular world, Mrs. Lirriper, and that's one of 'em all round it."

'Let everybody read our great humourist's account of Mrs Lirriper', the review concludes. It is one way of breaking up the 'ways of this circular world'.⁸²

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Rosemary Ashton's *142 Strand* (2006) takes as its focus 'one of the most important of London's streets', where 'reformers and revolutionaries' had always gathered. Establishing themselves at Number 142, John and Susanna Chapman divided their talents, hoping that 'the publishing business and the boarding-house business would [...] complement and even augment one another': they used the house as the base for their bookselling activities while taking in up to twelve lodgers, who were often connected to the same world.⁸³ Mrs Lirriper's first years as a lodging-house keeper have been spent in Islington, where the Pinches and Pancks make their homes, but the Strand is where she wants to die. Her establishment is on Norfolk Street, one of the many tributaries coming off the great river of traffic. She describes the neighbourhood in great detail:

Number eighty-one Norfolk Street, Strand – situated midway between the City and St James's, and within five minutes' walk of the principal places of public amusement – is my address [...] Norfolk is a delightful street to lodge in [...] but of a summer evening when the dust and waste paper lie in it [...] it is a trifle dull.⁸⁴

Her way of mapping urban space – places being defined by their relation to important or fashionable landmarks – derives from the universal rhetoric of property advertising, but ultimately, the Strand is unique.

⁸² 'Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings', *The Times*, 3 December 1863, p.12.

⁸³ Ashton, *142 Strand: A Radical Address in Victorian London* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2006), p.2, 10, 38-39, 125.

⁸⁴ [Dickens], 'How Mrs Lirriper Carried on the Business', *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings, All the Year Round*, 3 December 1863, pp.1-12 (p.1, 6-7).

This is because of its ‘middleness’: it *links* the City with St James’s. Franco Moretti is particularly interested in the ‘third London’, the middle ‘wedge’, the ‘petty bourgeois utopia’ that makes for a more ‘complex’ city by connecting the East and West Ends. While the two are polarised in early Victorian fiction, including *Oliver Twist*, a journey taken by Eugene and Mortimer in *Our Mutual Friend* ‘unif[ies] the two halves of the city’: they awake by degrees from their fantasies of lighthouses and cohabitation and find themselves in Limehouse, taking in the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters.⁸⁵ (The connection between their ‘lighthouse’ and ‘Limehouse’ is even evident in the way these words sound.) For Simon Joyce, Moretti’s wedge is ‘a space where the antagonisms of mutual misrecognition and suspicion hopefully begin to dissolve’, and the ‘east-west arteries of the Strand, Fleet Street, and [...] New Oxford Street [are] the site for utopian projections of a harmonious and classless society’.⁸⁶ Explaining why the East and West Ends developed as they did, Joyce believes ‘it is important that this meeting of opposites is imagined as occurring in the Strand, which forms one of the central horizontal trajectories uniting the different socioeconomic spheres of London’.⁸⁷

Like Islington, the Strand was a prime lodging-house district in the nineteenth century, and Dickens and his contemporaries make much of this in their fiction. Mrs Lirriper and Miss Wozenham are not the only landladies who set up their establishments in the vicinity. Miss La Creevy’s lodgings are here; Martin Chuzzlewit lodges on the Strand after returning from America; David Copperfield passes through the Golden Cross Inn and takes a room at Mrs Crupp’s on Buckingham Street; Watkins Tottle dreams of better things from Cecil Street; Mayhew’s Mrs Fokesell houses lodgers on Craven Street; in *The Moonstone*, Godfrey Abelwhite is waylaid by the three Indians in lodgings on Northumberland Street. The Strand cleaves through legal London, past the Inns of Court and Chancery, with their tales of extreme loneliness and restorative cohabitation. In nearby Covent Garden, Arthur Clennam finds a humble lodging and Pip stays at the Hummums Hotel. Further east, the Strand merges into Cannon Street, near Todgers’s. And so it is not simply a road for travellers, but a cluster of domestic spaces. It concentrates itinerant people who come to a stop, try to fashion mock-families for themselves, learn to live together, tell stories, and take part in a multitude of

⁸⁵ Moretti (2007), pp.116-117. For a reading of Kingsway in Virginia Woolf, see Snaith and Whitworth (2007), pp.1-28.

⁸⁶ Joyce (2003), p.4.

⁸⁷ Joyce (2003), pp.35-36.

narratives. This network of references creates a mythology for the neighbourhood. As we connect the dots between individual lodging-houses, they become a part of the wider social project of the Strand – a classless, utopian, liminal space that raises the possibility of a bridgeable London.

Responding to a query from Peter Cunningham, who acted with Dickens, Collins and Lemon in *Not So Bad As We Seem*, Dickens was very specific about the location of Mrs Lirriper's establishment: 'Of course Mrs Lirriper lived on the East side of the Street (how did you know it?) but not so far down as you suppose. On the Northern side of Howard street'.⁸⁸ Dickens knew the neighbourhood intimately, and both *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* were published out of nearby Wellington Street. Fitzgerald remembers Number 16, the *Household Words* office, with particular affection. With its bow windows, it was a 'graceful, highly-inviting, *dainty* little structure' that 'seem[ed] somewhat in keeping with the brilliant owner, and even with his genial, sympathetic character'; it 'seemed more a residence suited, as the auctioneer would say, for "a bachelor of position"'.⁸⁹ Above the *All the Year Round* office, at Number 26, Dickens had 'snug bachelor rooms', where he stayed in during visits from Gad's Hill.⁹⁰ Thus, when Mrs Lirriper speaks of 'dust and waste paper' on Norfolk Street, and when Eugene and Mortimer fantasise about their lighthouse in the neighbourhood of Temple Church, surrounded by a 'mysterious paper currency', we are tempted to think of swirling paper of a very different kind: the submissions, proofs, and final pages of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, being put together a few minutes away (iv, August 1864, p.110). It is the ultimate illustration of the relationship between writing and living together.

⁸⁸ Dickens to Peter Cunningham, 5 December 1863, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), X, p.322-323 (p.323).

⁸⁹ Fitzgerald, *Memories of Charles Dickens*, p.125, 196-197.

⁹⁰ Dickens to WWF de Cerjat, 16 March 1862, in Storey et al. (1965-2002), X, pp.52-55 (p.52). See also Shannon (2015).

Coda

Taking Leave

Dickens's *Book of Memoranda* includes an intriguing fragment from 1862-4, between the serialisations of *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*: 'P. and his Landlady – "I would have taken *you* with me."' ¹ Though it is impossible to reconstruct the thought-process or history behind this line, P., we might assume, wishes to maintain the friendship with his landlady after their formal contract has come to an end. This is precisely what happens to the Nicklebys and Miss La Creevy, the lonely painter: she remains a 'member of the little council' even after the family has moved out of her apartments on the Strand (iv, June 1838, p.97). Mrs Nickleby never quite forgives Miss La Creevy for having the audacity to marry Tim Linkinwater and enter the Cheerybles' circle, though she assures Kate it is 'very gratifying' to know they 'should have been the means of introducing her into such society' (xix/x, September 1839, pp.608-609). The Nicklebys have taken their landlady with them in a literal sense – and now, she is no longer a landlady.

Dickens, too, took the figure of the landlady and the stories of the lodging-house with him, from *Sketches by Boz* through to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Mrs Billickin is the last new Dickens character contemporary readers would have encountered before his death; the closing lines of the novel's final existing part, meanwhile, see the probable detective Dick Datchery in his lodgings, chalking a mysterious mark upon his cupboard-door before he sits for a meal. 'Mrs Tope's care', we are told, 'has spread a very neat, clean breakfast ready for her lodger' (vi, September 1870, p.190). Dickens's soul had left its own lodging-house in June of that year; in the words of an anonymous poem, published in 1820 by the conservative *Englishman's Fire-Side*, 'such is Man—/ he rents his dwelling for a span,/ and flits – forgot'. ² Dickens, however, was not forgotten.

A scene with a lodger settling down to breakfast, nicely prepared by his landlady, may seem an unexpected gauntlet for Dickens to throw to the writers who survived him. However, given the arguments this thesis has put forward about the

¹ Dickens, *Charles Dickens's Book of Memoranda: A Photographic and Typographic Facsimile of the Notebook Begun in January 1855*, ed. Fred Kaplan (New York: New York Public Library, 1981), p.105.

² 'Life's Likenesses', *The Englishman's Fire-Side*, December 1820, pp.435-436 (ll.54-56).

extraordinary creative potential of tenancy, there is an appropriateness to the situation: it becomes an implicit challenge to explore what else can be done with this fundamental fact of everyday life. The writerly fascination with tenancy certainly did not die with Dickens; Collins, for example, published *The Haunted Hotel* (1878) and *The Guilty River* (1886) in the decades following the loss of his mentor. Both novellas use rented space as a prism through which to address broad concerns about modernity. In the first example, the conversion of a Gothic *palazzo* into a luxury hotel financed by speculators is a way of showing the pressure of the present, the relentless move forward towards a capitalist future; however, its haunting suggests that the past, be it a family or a space's secrets and legacies, cannot be built over so easily. Neither can the literary past: when Henry decides to take shares in the renovation, 'attempting to make money [...] out of the house in which his brother ha[s] died', he seems to be acting for Collins himself, gaining financial and imaginative purchase out of Dickens's houses. 'Large hotels always pay well,' Henry tells Agnes, 'if they are well managed'; rented spaces also paid well if they were cannily handled by an author. They had proven to be a 'promising speculation' throughout the century.³

The Guilty River, published in the same year as *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and a few years before Freud's investigations into the unconscious, shares the more famous novella's fascination with the *doppelgänger*; a miller's cultured, handsome landlord and his perverse, ostracised lodger are clearly meant to represent two sides of the same self. This places *The Guilty River* firmly within its *fin de siècle* context: enquiring into what lies hidden within the mind, it prickles with a paranoia that feels removed from Dickens but in tune with Stevenson. More broadly, *fin de siècle* literature abounds in narratives of the property market, from the works of Gissing to Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which revolves around a threatening Eastern European aristocrat buying up English real estate. At the heart of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries (1887-1927) are an eternally patient landlady and two lodgers living together, while landladies and lodgers also play a surprisingly important role in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891). When Tess stabs Alec in a fashionable Bournemouth boarding-house, leaving a blood-stain on the landlady's ceiling that looks like an ace of hearts,

³ Collins, *The Haunted Hotel: A Mystery of Modern Venice*, 2 vols (London: Chatto and Windus, 1878), I, pp.108-109. On supernatural tales in rented spaces, see Marcus (1999), pp.116-132. See also Natalie B. Cole, 'A Bed Abroad: Travel Lodgings and the "Apartment House Plot" in *Little Dorrit* and *The Haunted Hotel*', *Wilkie Collins Society Journal*, 10 (2007), 3-12.

much of the scene is related through Mrs Brooks's perspective. She eavesdrops, peeps through keyholes, and observes Tess – an established cultural trope scrutinising a new kind of female character, whose solemn arc belies the luridness of this denouement. Finally, in 'Death in a London Lodging' (1892) – composed sixty years after Dickens's 'Lodgings To Let' and in an entirely different idiom – Richard le Gallienne's speaker ruminates over the untimely passing of his landlady's sister. Taken together, these examples raise complex questions about the continuities and disjunctions in nineteenth-century fiction and, indeed, poetry; there seems to be a melancholic undertone that belies the overt playfulness of Dickens's engagement with the theme. Of course, the examples do not stop with the *fin de siècle*: the birth of film brought still further opportunities to capture these spaces and the people inside them. To name just a few cinematic visions of extreme paranoia and high comedy – tenancy is a thread linking Hitchcock's *The Lodger* (1927), Alexander Mackendrick's *The Ladykillers* (1955), Richard Curtis's *Notting Hill* (1999), and the sitcoms *Happy Days* (1974-84) and *Fresh Meat* (2011-16).

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Nor are these examples limited to fictional narratives. In 2002, the installation artist Tatzu Nishi, also known as Tatsurou Bashi, created a temporary project for the Liverpool Biennial. *Villa Victoria* was a single, working, elevated hotel suite, built around FM Simpson's 1906 monument to Queen Victoria in Derby Square. 'Tatsurou Bashi', the catalogue explains, 'creates environments for sculptures and monuments in the public realm that pose questions and invent new contexts through the transformation of space'.⁴ As Victoria's plinth disappears and she stands at eye-level, 'an act of democratisation occurs': hotel guests are able to see her close-up, which means she ceases to be a grand and inaccessible relic of the past. In Nishi's own words, 'when the sculpture is surrounded by my project, people notice it again and they also remember its story. The sculpture looks fresh and renewed, because you see it, standing in a room or foyer, and you see it from a new perspective'.⁵ Familiar places suddenly become

⁴ 'Tatsurou Bashi' (Liverpool: Liverpool Biennial, 2002), <www.biennial.com/2002/exhibition/artists/tatsurou-bashi> [Accessed: 9 August 2016].

⁵ Catherine Gibson, 'Villa Victoria' (Liverpool: Liverpool Biennial, 2002), <www.biennial.com/events/villa-victoria> [Accessed: 9 August 2016].

unfamiliar; a monument, long taken for granted, is no longer invisible. We are actively encouraged to look afresh at Victoria and what she stands for. A public monument commemorates the glory of the past, and Simpson's Victoria seems to hail monarchical and imperial power; *Villa Victoria*, however, adds exciting new dimensions to the question of the nineteenth-century legacy.

Nishi draws an analogy between the hotel, as a space, and the city of Liverpool: 'I came up with the idea of expressing the character of Liverpool, the port city where "strangers come to enjoy for a fleeting moment and disappear to somewhere else", in the form of a "hotel" created over around the statue and square'.⁶ Actually, hotels are analogous to all cities, not just to Liverpool. *Villa Victoria* emphasises a particular aspect of urban life, reminding us that to be urban is to be cosmopolitan, on the move, dependent on first impressions, and as much a dweller as a walker. This is a major argument in nineteenth-century writing about lodgings.

Villa Victoria 'make[s] the everyday strange'.⁷ It complicates our understanding of the public and the private by inserting an outdoor, civic monument into a quasi-domestic space. In playing with ideas of public and private, outside and inside, it replicates one of the key preoccupations of the nineteenth century – Nishi is actively associating the period with tenancy. As the initial shock of the contrast fades, the historical monument and the strange hotel begin to blur together; this may be a tribute to Victoria, but it also pays homage to a quintessentially Victorian kind of space.

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What happens when a statue of Victoria is encased in rented space? She is studied – closely, intensely, and with wonder – by people who are just passing through. The same feeling of ephemeral intensity also seems to capture the experience of a researcher. We unpack a couple of bags, commit to making ourselves at home, learn to fit our lives around the things that the Victorian age has come to represent. But we must take our leave.

⁶ Tatzu Nishi, 'Swapping Public and Private', trans. Minako Jackson, in *Cultural Hijack: Rethinking Intervention*, ed. Ben Parry, Myriam Tahir and Sally Medlyn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), pp.177-188 (p.185).

⁷ Anthony Bond, 'Introduction', in Parry, Tahir and Medlyn (2011), pp.172-176 (p.174).

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