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Dickens's London

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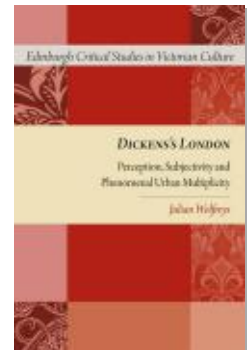
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Arrivals (and Returns)

London

Nicholas Nickleby

They rattled on through the noisy, bustling, crowded street of London, now displaying long double rows of brightly-burning lamps, dotted here and there with the chemists' glaring lights, and illuminated besides with the brilliant flood that streamed from the windows of the shops, where sparkling jewellery, silks and velvets of the richest colours, the most inviting delicacies, and most sumptuous articles of luxurious ornament, succeeded each other in rich and glittering profusion. Streams of people apparently without end poured on and on, jostling each other in the crowd and hurrying forward, scarcely seeming to notice the riches that surrounded them on every side; while vehicles of all shapes and makes, mingled up together in one moving mass, like running water, lent their ceaseless roar to swell the noise and tumult.

As they dashed by the quickly-changing and ever-varying objects, it was curious to observe in what a strange procession they passed before the eye. Emporiums of splendid dresses, the materials brought from every quarter of the world; tempting stores of everything to stimulate and pamper the sated appetite and give new relish to the oft-repeated feast; vessels of burnished gold and silver, wrought into every exquisite form of vase, and dish, and goblet; guns, swords, pistols, and patent engines of destruction; screws and irons for the crooked, clothes for the newly-born, drugs for the sick, coffins for the dead, and churchyards for the buried—all these jumbled each with the other and flocking side by side, seemed to flit by in motley dance like the fantastic groups of the old Dutch painter, and with the same stern moral for the unheeding restless crowd.

Nor were there wanting objects in the crowd itself to give new point and purpose to the shifting scene. The rags of the squalid ballad-singer fluttered in the rich light that showed the goldsmith's treasures, pale and pinched-up faces hovered about the windows where was tempting food, hungry eyes wandered over the profusion guarded by one thin sheet of brittle glass—an iron wall to them; half-naked shivering figures stopped to gaze at Chinese shawls and golden stuffs of India. There was a christening party at the largest coffin-maker's and a funeral hatchment had stopped some great improvements in

the bravest mansion. Life and death went hand in hand; wealth and poverty stood side by side; repletion and starvation laid them down together.

But it was London. (NN 488–9)

So, Nicholas Nickleby, entering the city for the second time, that second time being both an arrival and a return, in which the urban world makes an impression, gathering itself before the subject. The coach rattles, and in doing so augments the initial aural experience and image. More than this, the vehicle's resonance implies its motion also, whilst both standing against *and* commingling with the noises already underway. Here is sound for specific subjects, for both the reader and Nicholas and Smike as well. The reader encounters that which is experienced by the occupants of the coach. Nicholas and his fellow passengers are all but immersed in motion, noise and a fleeting series of successive fragmentary visual images added to the aural figures. However, reverberation precedes vision initially, even though one slides into the other; noise becomes bustle, which suggests both rapid motion and sound, the two becoming enfolded in the momentary definition of the London street in the extract's first sentence, which is crowded: with sound, with sight. The narrating mechanism's lens mediates between what the passengers on the coach witness and what is given the reader to see, through the medium. We are directed 'now' to this, 'here and there' to that, in clausal modifiers that map both temporal and spatial co-ordinates; which points, though concealing nothing, do little, if anything, to construct a stable or complete vision or representation of the urban world. Indeed, the impression is one simultaneously of both too little and too much, mere fragments of information or a sensory overload, grasping after the merest detail, the most minimal of phenomena available to the senses, as they seek a sense of the world of London. There is so much, and the inhabitants of London are so habituated to this kaleidoscopic *mêlée*, that the sense one has of the 'streams of people' is that they barely appear to notice ('scarcely seeming') much at all in the 'shifting scene' constituted through 'the quickly-changing and ever-varying' 'procession' of phenomena. Interestingly, those people who coalesce into a stream, and are elsewhere figured by the motion of 'pouring', thereby losing solidity and individuality in the process, are dissolved into a collective phenomenal city-effect. Their fluidity defines street life, but is also a phenomenon of the streets, as is illuminated by the 'brilliant flood' of lights and lamps, this liquid solution of the urban becoming the medium by which modes of transport are transformed: 'vehicles of all shapes and makes, mingled together in one moving mass, like running water' in a 'ceaseless roar'. The expression of London appears as the experience

of a waterfall, the urban sublime approached through the translation of what strikes the eye and other senses in the *en passant* gesture of immanent analogy. Not only do the city's inhabitants become dissolved into the flow, so too vehicles are seen to deliquesce in the urban solution – and this, of course, is figured in the dissolution of representation into alliteration and other formal effects in the transcription of experience and perception. Additionally, so indistinct are the people rendered in their aqueous condition that the narrator can only observe semblance rather than fact. It is not that the 'people' scarcely notice; rather, they scarcely seem to take account of what takes place around them. The reading of experience, and with that the perception on which reading relies, is rendered, if not problematic, then, at the least, limited in its efficacy and certainty. The narrator's perception is challenged through the limit imposed on it by the unknowability concerning collective perception of others. London thus confronts the subject's perception with an experience of the aporetic.

Of the many effects concerning perception in this passage, there is therefore the curiosity of a double effect, which, seemingly paradoxical, both draws the subject into the experience with a startling immediacy and, in prohibiting settled reflection or comprehension, maintains a distance between subject and experience. This is replicated to some degree when one tries to describe what takes place here, for there is so much, there is such an overflow in all directions, that it becomes difficult to decide which details to stress, what to repeat, where to alight so as to consider reflectively, or what to offer to a reading as a result of the anxiety that something of equal significance might be omitted, occluded or otherwise given too little emphasis. Returning, therefore, to the beginning of the passage excerpted, and starting again with sound: rattle is both noise and motion. The transitive form of the verb involves someone, it takes him or her up as if in a vehicle, which of course this particular trope is. It is both the vehicle, obviously, in which the passengers are conveyed, but it is also the vehicle of re-presentation, having a performative tropic dimension, in which the reading subject is transported, as it were. This motion – by which language performs the action it describes – places the reader in the experience whilst witnessing that experience, albeit in a virtual form.

While the question of how to define, where to direct one's attention, remains therefore, as a result of performative slippage, and seemingly endless re-direction and reiteration, adumbration of phenomena, effect and trope might serve to an extent in apprehending how the Dickens-machine reproduces the city and, more importantly, the idea of the subject's impression of London, his or her sense of the world. Noise

is, as has been observed, the principal medium of urban perception: 'rattle', 'noisy', 'bustling', 'ceaseless roar', 'noise and tumult'. More than that, sound serves as the formal framing device for the first of the three paragraphs cited. Noise surrounds what one sees, it is all around, and thus serves to create the impression that the reading subject is being immersed in the solution of the city and its motility. In this, and, of course, elsewhere, both in this passage and throughout his text, Dickens apprehends what Herbert Read defined in the paintings of Cézanne as the 'surface sensuousness'¹ of objects (Read 1988, xviii), as this is given to the subject's perceptual experience as the 'constitutive eidos of the given' (Williams 1993, 169), to express this in phenomenological terms. Dickens's writing is informed neither by an attempt to impose his own self on the city, nor by attempt to render London merely in an 'impressionistic' manner. Rather, it is a matter of inventing a writing of the city that attends both to the singular and the iterable, re-presenting in turn that which is imprinted on memory, through attendance on 'invariant structures' (Williams 1993, 167), thereby opening a reading / writing of the forms of objective reality received as phenomena. Dickens does not give an impression; he writes the visual and aural as they strike one. If we allow aurality as image into the definition of the painting, or if we admit an expanded sense of writing to include the idea of painting as a modality of the written, then it might be said it is the figure of Boz / Dickens who, as much as Constantin Guys,² is the 'painter' of modern life *par excellence*. Like Baudelaire, and in anticipation of, not impressionism, but the post-impressionism of Paul Cézanne, Dickens is the 'profound painter of appearing objects of perception' (Williams 1993, 168). The sound of London serves, in this apprehension, as the parergon of the image, but also, crucially, that which is given to perception as that which, in memory, frames the re-presented image; hence its priority in Nicholas's return to London, a second entrance to the city in which London returns to the subject with a reality that exceeds mere impressionism, with the force of proximity and intimacy, which no mere impression can conjure. In order that *all* London is figured, though not through the desire for an impossible totality, fully realised, it is to the welter of detail, time and again, that the reading / writing subject has recourse.

Moving from sound to motion, then: bustling, streaming, pouring, jostling, mingling, moving, swelling, dashing, quickly changing, ever-varying, procession, jumbling, flocking, flitting, dancing, restless, shifting, fluttering, hovering, wandering, shivering. Everything that there is found in play, in concert and separately, independently, unconscious of every other movement, but all caught in the image as the machinic-organic operations of the city. As experience reads so writing takes

place, which conveys that experience for the reading of another, in the rhythms and forms where the world becomes text, placing the reader both in, and before, this experience, and, in the process, in the virtual encounter with the phantasm of London of the 1830s. Each motion reiterates every other, even as movement is of the essence of both London and the passage, without being an object in itself. In those movements, and in their inflections of one another, we are given to read that topological work and mode of perception that becomes the play of reflection in the passage from *Our Mutual Friend* discussed elsewhere. Action and activity are the conditions of the objects available to perception, without being objects themselves. Through this mode of production, the Dickens-machine generates the sensate experience of that which is the concrete, to cite Herbert Read, of the image (Read 1988, xix). Perception is thus accorded a primacy in the text of Dickens, through the narrating act of reading / writing. This primacy, however, is not to be taken as the sign of intellectualism, of a perception that is purely one of consciousness, thereby rediscovering a mind / body dualism. Perception, and the experience from which it springs with an immediacy signalled through the shifts, the jumps, the fragmentation, the iterability, and the avoidance of absolute definition that make up the performative dimension of Dickens's text, takes place within a 'living bodily system' (Johnson, 1993, 8). In this, a Dickensian phenomenology of the urban anticipates not the phenomenology of Husserl, but that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose understanding of phenomena was from 'the worldly standpoint of bodily incarnation and intersubjective, historical situation' (Johnson 1993, 8). This is what is given us to read through the details of sound, motion and so forth in the interplay invented by the narrator and experienced in performative fashion through the reading subject, in a fusion of 'self and world' (Johnson 1993, 12).

Which leaves us with what is given to see. One needs light in order to perceive and this is provided by those 'long double-rows of brightly burning lamps' that arrive *now* in order to be seen and to allow us to see; additionally, there is the periodic presence of chemists' 'glaring lights', and the accumulated brilliance flooding from the shop windows. Perception becomes taken over by sparkle, colouration, richness, glitter, and a general vibrancy equal to the work of noise and play of motion. This triadic relationship is then transformed into a somewhat hallucinatory procession, strange, curious and exotic as a result of volume, density, excess, passing 'before the eye'. Objects vie for the eye's attention, as the second paragraph moves with the illusion of increasing rapidity, alighting only to name one detail after another. The word supplements the sensory, phenomenal trace. Hand-worked gold and silver, vases, vessels, weapons,

'engines of destruction', opiates, coffins: all tumble and jostle, replacing and displacing one another, both in temporal sequence and, at the same time, vying for space, alongside one another, and assuming to the eye – which in truth is the roving camera rather than the objects having any vitality of their own – the appearance of a macabre early modern dance, as captured by 'the old Dutch Painter'. Arguably, it is the act of painting which imposes meaning, and which suggests interpretation for the narrating, viewing subject. What is of primary significance throughout, though, is the reminder that there is always perception for some *one*, for a subject in the world, whether it be Boz, the imagined painter, the anonymous figures looking in windows, as a reader looks at the page attempting to consume the details and digest the surfeit, or Nicholas and Smike, along with the other passengers on the coach. Dickens privileges the sensory qualities throughout. In doing so, and thereby in giving attention to the 'sensible properties of the world' (Johnson, 1993, 12), we have returned to us a sense not only of the world, but of the immediacy of our involvement in, and perception of that world. 'Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only', as Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues, 'because they awaken an echo in our bodies' (1964b/1993, 22/125)³ of what is shared with the other. When we read in this manner, attending to the primacy of perception, and that which we apprehend as a result, such 'correspondences in turn give rise to some tracing rendered visible again . . . Rather than seeing [the scene] . . . I see according to, with it' (23/126).⁴ In arriving, London thus returns, as if its coming were for us, as if the arrival were ours.

The narrating spectator is thus in part an optical, if not a reflecting device: a 'mirror as vast as the crowd itself; [comparable to] a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which, with every one of [the crowd's] movements presents the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life' (Baudelaire 1992, 400). This will doubtless be familiar to some as the definition of the *flâneur* by Charles Baudelaire, who continues: 'He is an *I* insatiable for the *non-I*, which, at every instant renders and expresses it in images more living than life itself, always unstable and fugitive' (1992, 400). But as we have argued, the narrating subject in Dickens is no mere consciousness any more than he is just an eye or lens; he is a figure – on occasions named Boz – who is both *in* and *of* the crowd, and whose ability is to transport the reader to that place, on to those streets.

It may be objected, though, that to read a page is *not* the same as standing in the place about which one reads. I am at a remove from any 'real' person corresponding more or less with the fiction, the idea, of 'Boz'. Yet, to argue this is, implicitly, at the least, to decide on the image,

whether in words or as a drawing or painting, to be just a ‘tracing, a copy, a second thing . . . the mental image [being] such a drawing’ (1964b/1993, 23/126). It is to keep the image at a remove, in place-holders, and thus to replicate that scientific distance between consciousness and the world, which the literary breaks down repeatedly through the *as if* of fictional and virtual realities of narrative. One does not ‘look’ at a scene or image in a text as one would look at a thing, certainly. Instead, rather than looking at or seeing a building, a door, a room, the furniture in the scene, as if these were the real things, I see with, according to, the narrative ‘eye’; but the eye, in reading, comes to belong both to the phantom narrator and to ‘I’ as the reader, by virtue of the fact that, in reading the narrator’s re-presentation, I come to be *in* that place, seeing from that perspective, and given perception that is no longer solely that of the narrator, but equally not only, originally, my own. I haunt the place of the “narrator”, the other, even as this figure of the other comes to haunt me⁵; in this, as a result of the phantom effects of the narrating machine, reading and the narrator-effect put back in place, re-presenting, the ‘unoccupied’ space that was filled by the painter. There is still, there remains, implicitly, a ‘painting subject’ with any painting, but ‘narration’, ‘narrating-effect’ and ‘narrator’ all serve to make more explicit that which is omitted or absent, even as these figures are not wholly as absent as the ‘author’ or the present ‘reader’, belonging to or comprising a third term. What we ‘see’ then, in entering London with Nicholas and Boz, along with whoever else might be looking from the coach, is not composed of things borrowed from the real world. Instead, we enter into an imaginary, which is simultaneously very close and further away from the ‘actual’ (23–4/126). The imaginary, which escapes definition even as one reaches the conclusion ‘But it was London’ as a result of the combinatory effects of sound, motion and visual image, offers ‘traces of vision’ from within the real; Dickens’s narration ‘gives vision . . . the imaginary texture of the real’ (24/126).

Whitechapel, Blackheath, Blackfriars, Windsor Terrace,
City Road, The Strand, Drury Lane, Fleet Street,
Buckingham Street, the Adelphi, Custom House [Lower
Thames Street], the Monument, Fish-Street Hill, St Paul’s
Cathedral

David Copperfield

What an amazing place London was to me when I saw it in the distance, and how I believed all the adventures of all my favourite heroes to be constantly

enacting and re-enacting there, and how vaguely I made it out in my own mind to be fuller of wonders and wickedness than all the cities of the earth, I need not stop to relate. We approached it by degrees, and got, in due time, to the inn in the Whitechapel district, for which we were bound. I forget whether it was the Blue Bull, or the Blue Boar; but I know it was the Blue Something, and that its likeness was painted up on the back of the coach. [. . .] More solitary than Robinson Crusoe, who had nobody to look at him and see that he was solitary, I went into the booking-office, and, by invitation of the clerk on duty, passed behind the counter, and sat looking at the parcels, packages, and books, and inhaling the smell of stables (ever since associated with that morning), a procession of the most tremendous considerations began to march through my mind. (*DC* 73, 74–5)

Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse was at the water side. It was down in Blackfriars. Modern improvements have altered the place; but it was the last house at the bottom of a narrow street, curving down hill to the river, with some stairs at the end, where people took boat. It was a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the tide was in, and on the mud when the tide was out, and literally over-run with rats. Its panelled rooms, discoloured with the dirt and smoke of a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant. They are all before me, just as they were in the evil hour when I went among them for the first time, with my trembling hand in Mr. Quinion's. (*DC* 150–1)

'There is a furnished little set of chambers to be let in the Adelphi, Trot, which ought to suit you to a marvel.'

With this brief introduction, she produced from her pocket an advertisement, carefully cut out of a newspaper, setting forth that 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. [. . .] They were on the top of the house . . . and consisted of a little half-blind entry where you could see hardly anything, a little stone-blind pantry where you could see nothing at all, a sitting-room, and a bedroom. The furniture was rather faded, but quite good enough for me; and, sure enough, the river was outside the windows. [. . .] I saw [my aunt] safely seated in the Dover Coach . . . and when the coach was gone, I turned my face to the Adelphi, pondering on the old days when I used to roam about its subterranean arches, and on the happy changes which had brought me to the surface. [. . .] It was a wonderfully fine thing to have that lofty castle to myself, and to feel, when I shut my outer door, like Robinson Crusoe. (*DC* 331–3)

I landed in London on a wintry autumn evening. It was dark and raining, and I saw more fog and mud in a minute than I had seen in a year. I walked from the Custom House to the Monument before I found a coach; and although the very house-fronts, looking on the swollen gutters, were like old friends to me, I could not but admit that they were very dingy friends.

I have often remarked—I suppose everybody has—that one's going away from a familiar place, would seem to be the signal for change in it. As I looked out of the coach window, and observed that an old house on Fish-street Hill, which had stood untouched by painter, carpenter, or bricklayer, had been pulled down in my absence; and that a neighbouring street, of time-honoured insalubrity and inconvenience, was being drained and widened; I half expected St. Paul's Cathedral looking older. (*DC* 753–4)

If every arrival or return, and the experience this implies, is singular, then the vision narration gives to the *imaginary texture of the real* must in some manner be marked by difference and repetition, of necessity. In part, what makes the experience, and the perception, singular is the fact that I stand in this place, and no other. And when someone – David Copperfield in this instance – arrives four times at least, each is as haunted by the others as it displaces them. In *David Copperfield* there are four arrivals into London for David; or, to turn this around, London arrives for its principal, reading / writing subject, to his experience, perception, consciousness and memory. London insists in *Copperfield*. That the older Copperfield narrates each of these occasions makes explicit the work of memory in narration as re-presentation, and complicates, if I can use this phrase, the number of arrivals, as well as the number of Copperfields. Additionally, because there is the figure of the narrating narrator, David Copperfield, whose perception of the city is re-presented as both perception of event and memory of those earlier perceptions, it is not enough to think the various arrivals as being simply sequential in the history of the subject. To begin to grasp how the function of first-person narrator operates in re-presenting London; and, in order that we can, if not account, then apprehend the effect of the arrivals of London to its subject figured through the agency of the first-person narrative (the example of David being only Dickens's second attempt at a first-person narration, the first – if we discount the Boz of *Sketches* – being Master Humphrey, and the third, Esther Summerson), we need to account for the play between sense and idea; and, more than this, it is necessary to perceive how 'the very subtle and complex difference between the memory of sensation and the memory of idea emerges', as Sarah Winter argues, 'in the additional step of being conscious not only of the past self's presence at an event . . . but also of the past self's original conception of the complex ideas' (2011, 68) involved in apprehending the city for a first time, and subsequent times. The role of reading the city, and memory's revisions, indicate that 'reading produces a mediated memory that also permits self-reflexivity and a[n...] awareness of personal identity as a series of past states of consciousness leading up to the present' (Winter 2011, 68). From the very first words of the novel, such self-reflexivity is

always already a constituent element of David's identity and selfhood; Being is self-reflexive by virtue of the fact that one knows one *is* and that one is in the world, even if that perception is marked by a limit of not knowing. London gives to David a particular sense of self, even as, in the various encounters with the city, David's sense of the world is modified by the challenge to his previously held ideas, and the subsequent reflection on the memory of the tensions between anticipation and retrospect. As Peter Ackroyd avers, *Copperfield* is 'a novel of memories and a novel about memory' (1990, 606).

Before considering the various arrivals or returns, and reflecting on the various convolutions of the city and the subject, I wish to address the way in which certain problems can arise if one treats the subject's encounters with the urban space in straightforward historical or contextual terms, seeking in the process to relate the fictive or imaginary vision to that which is real, historically speaking. Jeremy Tambling observes how David arrives in London 'on three separate occasions': the first when he is sent to Salem House school, at Blackheath, the second when he is sent by Mr Murdstone to Murdstone and Grinby's, not far from Blackfriars, and the third when he comes up by coach from Canterbury, as a young man, staying at the Golden Cross (2009, 122–4). There is also a fourth, cited as the last of the passages on which the present essay focuses. Each of David Copperfield's arrivals in London is markedly different from that of Nicholas Nickleby's entries into the capital. No Boz or Master Humphrey conducts the tour while maintaining the pretence that they are either wholly or partially outside the places and events they are directing us to consider. I raise this point because it is important to understand *Copperfield as Copperfield*, a singular creation, as distinct from other narrators as 'he' can be said to be from the author Charles Dickens. Given that there are biographical aspects of Dickens's life to be found in the narration of *Copperfield*, playing hunt the biographical allusion is diverting as a pastime but it does not serve in reading either the narrator or the fictive subject's⁶ relation to place accurately, and certainly fails in apprehending the sense of London that each narrator or narrating effect produces. Prior to considering the passages in question, therefore, I wish to illustrate a couple of local difficulties in Tambling's reading of London in *David Copperfield*, generated in part by the constraints of a biographical-historical reading.

It can be no surprise, surely, as the critic claims, that either David Copperfield or *David Copperfield* speaks, in Jeremy Tambling's words, 'about the place [Warren's Blacking Factory] where Dickens worked: 30 Hungerford Stairs, near Hungerford Bridge, off the Strand, on the

east side of Craven Street, in a position which has entirely disappeared, owing to the remodelling of Hungerford Market, and the building of the Embankment' (Tambling 2009, 123). As detailed and engaging a piece of biographical-cultural-historical material as this is, all of it only points to what is no longer there. Tambling's historical precision is marked because of the surprise he manifests in relation to those biographical and memorial traces on which Dickens drew in giving the sense of place to the young Copperfield's experience of living in London, with the Micawbers, and having to work at Murdstone and Grinby's. The sentence I have cited begins, 'Yet the text refuses to speak', while the next starts 'The evasion allows . . .'. Is this, really, an 'evasion'? What evidence, other than the desire of the reader, is there? Correlates between the imaginary and the real notwithstanding – as soon as there is a 'London' in a novel, there is a relation between the two, and to name streets, boroughs, buildings and so on is only to align the imaginary map with that in the 'real world' in order to call up the sensibility of a location – to assume surprise and suspect the author of evasion or obfuscation, merely because Forster employed a fragment of autobiography Charles Dickens had written 'preceding beginning *David Copperfield*', is, to say the least, suspect in the force it seeks to apply in making one narrative mode couple with another, or the one to fit precisely with the other. Certainly, David Copperfield's initials are those of Charles Dickens reversed, but to move from this, abbreviate them into a supposedly encrypted siglum that stands in for the author – DC – and then connect this, in passing, on the fly, in parentheses, to the inverted coffee shop sign (Tambling 2009, 122) is, if not a fancy too far, then at least open to a psychoanalytic reading of transference on the part of the critic, whose historicist will might be read as desiring to fix the Dickens text in place a little too hurriedly.

That sense of what is missing, the implicit accusation of omission, is signalled elsewhere in Tambling's reading, in the observation on David's first entrance to the city. Although Tambling has begun Chapter 6 of *Going Astray* by stating, as have others, that *David Copperfield* is set in the London of the 1820s (as are, most obviously, *Pickwick* and *Little Dorrit*; see Tambling 2009, 121),⁷ when writing of Copperfield's arrival from Suffolk, 'having spent time at Great Yarmouth, in Norfolk, 120 miles away from London', Tambling initially suggests that Great Yarmouth might be connected to Chatham (Dickens having lived in the latter between 1815 and 1823, a period coinciding roughly with that of *Copperfield*'s setting), and that the former was the first to erect a memorial to Nelson. Immediately after this concatenated series of real-fictional relations, the critic notes that

[w]hen Dickens wrote *David Copperfield*, Nelson's column, planned in 1838, had been completed in Trafalgar Square (1843), one of the principal sites in London which was to impose a way of seeing London as monumental, and mapping everything in relation to it . . . But there is no mention of Trafalgar Square in this text. (Tambling 2009, 122)

Given the historical moment of the novel, this can hardly be surprising. Why mention a location that is not yet a significant site, which is, in fact, a non-place in the time of *David Copperfield*, its symbolic mapping and perceptual determination not having been planned? And, surely, Tambling's associations beg the question, would David have known about the memorial to Nelson, assuming, again, that the real and the fictive are simply interchangeable?

David's early memories of the city govern the narratives we receive. It might seem too obvious a remark to make, so obvious in fact that it verges on the glib, but the older narrator omits all but the most cursory, telegraphic signposting of the city's topography, often employing only place names and streets to identify place. Such naming occurs only as it is pertinent to the re-presentation of the perceptions of the younger self, and that David's past experience of the city, concerning hunger and the acquisition of food. We must distinguish briefly, of course, between topography and architecture as discourses of the urban subject, and the narrating narrator recollects vividly the details of Murdstone and Grinby's, as can be seen in the second of the four passages above. But regarding specific sites in London for the younger David, place is only usually accorded recognition if it is remembered in relation to food, as we have said. Consider, in this light, those two 'first' entries into London: the earlier when David is sent to attend Salem House, Blackheath, the latter when Mr Murdstone dispatches the boy to work in his business at Blackfriars. Before considering the role of food for the younger Davids in the recollection of the experience of London, we have to comprehend the mode of the Davids' arrivals, and, through these, the arrivals of London.

Initially, the youngest David conjured to memory attempts to perceive London as it might be apprehended through the heroic adventures of his favourite literary figures. London is thus a fiction rather than a reality. As such it is given to a poetics of expression, the city being a place, David imagines, of 'amazing . . . adventures' or 'wonders and wickedness'. Such alliterative possibilities continue in the adult's imagined childlike perception through the name of the inn, which is either the 'Blue Bull' or 'Blue Boar', or indeed, 'Blue Something', as the precise name can no longer be remembered, it being the idea of a phantastic creature more than the proper name that registers longest. However, while the narrating narrator maintains the passage through alliteration, the device

modulates from fantasy to the more prosaic recollection / perception, or rather the perception of that earlier perception (reading / writing) of 'parcels', 'packages' and 'procession' to the distinctly mundane 'smell' and 'stables'. There is something deliberate in the alliterative construction, signifying the artistic intervention of Copperfield the novelist in the writing of his younger, past self's perceptions, given in this first encounter with the city as an alphabet of idea and sense, anticipation and experience, moving from A to S. London is 'made out' in David's mind as having more wonders and wickedness than any other city on earth. This 'making-out' is the memory of that initial perception, with the image of London apprehended at a distance, and the reflection on measuring the difference between the imaginary and real, the distant and the immediate, the general and the specific is determined as that procession of 'most tremendous considerations'. The older Copperfield thus constructs the memory of perception that engages in both a narrative and epistemological 'movement of recovery, of recuperation, of return to self, the progression [described as that mental procession which displaces the imaginary life of the city in fiction, with which the passage gets underway as London is approached in the morning] toward internal adequation' (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 33).

An important process is witnessed in play here, one which is as temporal as it is spatial in the reconstitution of the self and the subject's sense of the world through the interrelated accommodations of experience, anticipation, retrospect, memory, narrative, and the perception of perception distinct from the perception of event. Arriving in London is not at this moment a question of taking note of, and giving name to, landmarks, locations, streets and so forth. How can it be, when this younger David, in his relation to the city and his re-presentation of himself as being in the process of determining his selfhood in relation to place, does not yet know anything concrete of London? What is revealed, however, through the older narrative replay of the younger self is a displacement of assumptions concerning *how* the world is understood. 'Objective thought', Merleau-Ponty argues, is 'unaware of the subject of perception. This is because it presents itself with the world ready made, as the setting of every possible event, and treats perception as one of these events' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 207). That 'objective thought' is what the older Copperfield shows to us apropos the younger David's perception of London at a distance, albeit an objective thought mediated through the phantasms of fiction. This in itself is a nicely rhetorical convolution of process, inasmuch as it implies, on the one hand, that the idea of the city perceived as totality is only ever a fiction, while, on the other hand, suggestively positing 'objective thought' as itself a childish fantasy

– which fantasy is subsequently concretised, however, through that first, and the subsequent references to the self compared with Robinson Crusoe (which references are themselves subject to modulation and perceptual transformation, given their different times). But ‘objective thought’ is displaced; it is made to give way, as the image of an indistinct, yet whole London gives way to sensory apprehension, the world no longer being ‘ready made’ but in the making, always unfolding before the subject, whose mind has to accommodate itself and its relation to the world in the authentic registration of process, motion and phenomenal detail. Perception is unveiled through the narrative of reading / writing and the endlessness of the dialectic of ‘narrating-narrated’ Being not as something in the world; rather, the ‘perceiving subject is the place where these things occur’. David Copperfield would have us know – hence the necessity here of a first-person narrative machinery – that ‘[t]here can be no question of describing perception itself as one of the facts of the world, since we can never fill up, in the picture of the world, the gap which we ourselves are, and by which it comes into existence for someone’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 207). That interpolation of the ‘fictional’ Robinson Crusoe – a phantom image projected not by the younger but by the older Copperfield, not merely *an* older Copperfield, we should remember, but the author Copperfield – thus serves to offer a comparison between the imaginary and the real, by which the distinction in terms of perception of the real and the fictional illusion of objectivity breaks down; importantly, though, the fictional ‘whole’ subject momentarily creates the illusion of closing the gap, ‘which we ourselves are’, whilst intimating that a ‘whole’ subject is as much a fiction belonging to the imaginary as the idea of a London envisioned in totality. The question remains: for whom is the fiction of Crusoe the image that fills the absence in the self? The older, narrating or younger, narrated Copperfield? The phantom of the lonely self – the self becomes the island on which the castaway is shipwrecked – is perceived, and perceives himself, to be more alone than the original Crusoe, precisely because Copperfield ‘had nobody to look at him and see that he was solitary’. Yet, did the child in his first encounter with London feel this, does the older figure remember this reflexive perception of the self seen by others, or is the man-become-author fictionalising? Not one of the possibilities excludes the others. The reader is left within the experience of an undecidability that is also Copperfield’s own – which undecidability, in this event, along with the abyss of perception and experience it opens and to which one is opened in reflection and re-presentation, becomes the expression of the gap in the world we are.

The first arrival of London and arrival in London, already complicated

by fictional projection, thus makes plain a number of matters concerning the self and the city. Arriving at the coaching inn in Whitechapel, David is then taken through the city to Salem House and Blackheath. Like *Oliver Twist* before him, though, whose own initial journey across central parts of the city lack much specificity, the young Copperfield notices little by way of district, topography, architectural singularity or other detail. He does not notice, obviously, because his selfhood is still accommodating itself to seeking a grounding in the place, which gives himself to himself, as it were. His senses are too confounded, but the sense that predominates is that of hunger. What David does observe is a 'baker's window' and a 'grocer's shop', from purchases in which, and the change David receives, the older Copperfield reports of his younger self that the latter developed ('made me consider') the idea of London as a 'very cheap place'; but also, subsequently, a place of 'great noise and uproar' through which one must pass, and which confuses the boy's 'weary head beyond description' (DC 77). As with arrival at the inn, in Whitechapel, the sense of London is precisely that, a sensate apprehension, from without and within. Hunger, economic exchange, shop fronts, the visual, noise and motion: all come together in the movement from north to south, a distance of approximately 6 miles, as David is told. Though the boy notices little specifically, and memory shaped by narration either cannot or will not give more detailed information, choosing only to affirm the limits of knowledge and recollection, the details of monetary exchange and distance remain, as the principal 'co-ordinates' and phenomena of the city. There is, then, what might be called a broad or general specificity, as detail of experience appears through the miasma of initial reception.

This is in marked contrast to the second arrival in London, where the ten-year-old David's knowledge of the city and his awareness of his surroundings are more studied, more precise. There is the initial impression of Murdstone and Grinby's cited above, followed by the meeting with Micawber, lodgings, work and, once more, the search for food on a daily basis. The experience of the workplace – the second passage, above – not only is for David a shocking encounter but its mode of appearance is in stark contrast to other, more nebulous perceptions. As Dickensian descriptions of architecture and topography go, this particular passage is notable for the relative shortness of its sentences and clauses. Typically, detail accumulates, semi-colon coming to substitute for the final completion of a sentence, as clause after clause accretes for the reader's eye, inviting the imaginary reconstruction of place through the serial succession of detail. But the detail is traced in what might be called, in comparison with the Dickensian observation of architectural form

or topographical recollection, a certain attenuated adumbration of the elements. Though the locale is given – Blackfriars – definition is sparse, controlled. This is a liminal location, a limit-site, as much of the river as of the land, but also at various ‘edges’: the last house in the street, at the bottom of that street, the final construction on land and at the bottom of the hill, which trajectory the street follows and maps. There is no motion in this passage, aside from the memory of the rats’ endless occupation, and the implicit rhythm of the tide. Nor is there a great deal in this image of sound, save for the aural omnipresence of the rats, whose noise accompanies their movement. Of detail, there is recalled an apprehension of architectural craziness and, with more precision, panels, while the place is recalled through the sense of discolouration, decay, dirt and rottenness, the material decomposition anticipating the moral corruption suggested in the idea of an ‘evil hour’.

The memory is vivid, not to say traumatic. The trauma is attested to inasmuch as this is an image, with the subject now in its disruptive revenance. This is the very nature, the definition of the traumatic phantasm, it being that which returns as, and in, the imaginary *as if* for a first time. Indeed, the traumatic is just this phantasmal re-presentation of experience and perception through memory’s recurrence. Thus trauma is tropic, rhetorical, phenomenal rather than merely physical or empirically experiential. This is borne out in that temporal recurrence where the past does not simply return in a present, but in effect *is* the present; it consumes the present for the subject. This is seen, whether one considers this immediate passage or that scrap of autobiography concerning Warren’s Blacking Factory, to which Tambling alludes, and from which Dickens edits so as to produce the Copperfield version (2009, 124).⁸ It is worth mentioning this, only so as to have done with the reductive, not to say facile comparison made by a number of critics, between Murdstone and Grinby’s and Copperfield’s experience on the one hand, and Warren’s and Dickens’s experience, on the other, once and for all. Unlike Tambling (whose commentary, to be fair, is neither reductive nor facile, but who, in his mapping ‘real’ London on to the fictional counterpart, does seek, unreasonably in my opinion, to make one the image of the other too hurriedly, in a manner that conflates the phenomenal with the empirical), I have no desire to conflate – if not confuse, or at least *fuse* – the two, and I mention the edit of the autobiographical fragment in order to consider briefly the rhetorical, aesthetic and phenomenal aspects of the transition between the author, the narrator and, in this case, the principal subject, David Copperfield.

Copperfield and Dickens, though, it has to be stressed, are not the same. To quote Andrew Sanders, while

certain of the fragments of the autobiographical manuscript printed in *The Life of Charles Dickens* [by John Forster] clearly bear a . . . verbatim relationship to David's account of himself . . . especially . . . the sixth paragraph of Dickens's description of his time at Jonathan Warren's Blacking warehouse . . . Readers should not confuse fact and fiction, or equate living with telling.⁹

They should not; but they do, and this despite the 'fact' that while Warren's was situated at 'Hungerford Stairs, Charing Cross', Murdstone and Grinby's is at Blackfriars, approximately 1 mile east of Warren's location. Dickens excises from the autobiographical fragment a number of small but telling details, in order to give to the act of telling, the voice of another. If David is a sharp observer, as is remarked, and as he observes reflectively of himself, at various junctures in the narrative, his memory of the Blackfriars workplace is just such an example of acute experience and observation (to use two terms from the novel's full title), and subsequent mental registration of the initial perception. Dickens's account of Warren's is adverbially and adjectivally 'richer' (though not by a great deal), and thus arguably more 'typical' of representations of architecture and place that are found in the author's other novels. But what is significantly absent from the Copperfield vision when compared with Dickens's account is Copperfield himself. The work of this passage is to re-present the place to the subject *now*, as the phantasm of place that all but consumes, and certainly encompasses, the ten-year-old. While Dickens can remark that '[t]here was a recess . . . in which I was to sit and work.'¹⁰ going on to describe the work in some detail, as part of, and belonging to, the description of the workplace, David does not enter into a recollection of the work his younger self was expected to perform in this initial paragraph. Indeed, as I have suggested, his own earlier self is barely 'there'. There is the hint of imaginative interpretation ('I dare say') regarding the accumulated dirt, which arrives only after several sentences of apparently objective description in which no overt expression of self is to be read. This is followed by the insistence, twice, that the 'things' are before the mind's eye with a painful proximity, in the 'present instant'. Only in the last sentence of the paragraph does the 'I' of the younger David come to be remembered, going among the things, in imaginary imitation, we might argue, of the experience, much as the reader goes amongst the dirt, the rottenness, the decay, and the sound of the rats. 'David' is barely a body here, only that perception translated in motion just described, and reduced to a 'trembling hand' held by another's.

Of significance, then, is not just the re-presentation but also the persistence of the initial perception, for everything that is of the imaginary texture of the real, its phantom power, does not belong as objective fact,

nor in the past as mere memory. To reiterate and insist on the modality of the textual work: everything, each detail, is 'not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant'. Every aspect is 'all before me, just as they were'. The initial experience defines the self, or some significant aspect of one's Being, to the extent that the temporal space between the two selves suffers erasure, if not collapse. Memory and writing collude, for representation and re-presentation become mutual palimpsests of one another in, and framed by, the subject's sensory apprehension – and it is the self's apprehension which is paramount here, not the objects, as that last-cited observation serves to remind us – so that, as elsewhere in the writing of the city and the subject's relation to London, the extract moves from being mere observation (if it is ever just this), in a performative staging 'before' the reader who comes to stand in for the younger and older Davids.

What we should observe here, before passing to the ten-year-old Copperfield's association of London and hunger in the second example, concerns the process that the Dickens text generates across *David Copperfield* in a manner that is nowhere else presented in any Dickens text – certainly not with the immediacy or sustained intensity that we find in this novel. The process is one of the self coming, through reflection, to know that which Merleau-Ponty describes as the 'unreflected' prior to any reflection (1964a, 152–3), a subjectivity not yet conscious of itself. The novel charts retrospectively, through the filter of the phenomenological narrative, the journey from '*pre-reflexive cogito*' (Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 152) to a self unveiling to itself a return of selfhood the temporality and spacing of which do not guarantee an absolute or totalised knowledge, but which in its reflectiveness apprehends its being in the world and the intimate extent to which selfhood is part of the world, even as the world is given to it through the subject's appearance in that world. In each moment of retrospect the world appears to the subject and determines, simultaneously, the subject's being and, with that, the specificity of site and self in relation. Retrospective re-presentation by the narrating, older David works through the narrating self withholding and shaping knowledge and information particular to the singularity of relation between site and self, and self as a place within place, and employing those traces that compose memory as they make clear the relation, whether experience of a given locus is traumatic or not. Hence, the significance of the search for food, as this always relates to place names. David's memory and narrative reconstruction function as a mapping of the co-ordinates that connect sensory need and locale, as given in place.

In contrast to David's early paucity of urban knowledge – or perhaps a knowledge that admits its own limits through exposing itself as being

on the 'outside' of a world of phenomena and signs too vast, initially, to grasp – there is the modern Babylon of Wilkins Micawber and its 'arcana' (DC 153). Micawber's ripe discourse negotiates between the hieratic and quotidian, the resistance to immediate access and the specificity of place, rendered through reference. It is therefore unwise to write off Wilkins Micawber as merely someone who succumbs to rhetorical flourishes, the baroque turn of phrase and observational hyperbole. His apprehension of London, as presented to David in his inaugural statements, demonstrates that Micawber is someone who knows not only how to move through the city but also, importantly, how to read it, and to respond to the play, always in place between the local and the unknowable, the fixed point and the limit of knowledge. In short, Wilkins Micawber sees London as it is. His projections enable us, to paraphrase Henri Lefebvre, to 'identify those relations but not to grasp them' (Lefebvre 2003, 47), at least not directly, for perception only comes through individual experience. Here, then, is a subject of the city, someone who grasps, if not the city in its totality, then the means by which any topoanalysis, reliant on apperception and indirection, might be most efficaciously articulated.

For, unlike other Dickens characters, Micawber apprehends this at least: that 'it is not enough to define the urban by the single fact that it is a place of passage and exchange' (Lefebvre 2003, 47), by the urban subject. Something other revealed in the imaginary texture of the real that the subject's perception and memory bring to the encounter gives access to 'urban reality' (Lefebvre 2003, 47). Thus, while Lefebvre, wishing to move beyond such apprehension as is opened to the reader in the Dickens text, and which subsequently has become explicated in phenomenological discourse, argues that, in order to grasp that reality, 'we should abandon phenomenology for analysis' (Lefebvre 2003, 47), this is to engage in a fundamental misperception grounded in a desire to know absolutely the totality of phenomena rendered as the totality of objects, and thus miss what is authentic in the experience, remaining outside the urban. Analysis must return to the phenomenological experience of the urban in order that one comprehend in a pre-theoretical manner the relation between being and experience, perception and event. Micawber may not know what he does; he should not be received by readers, though, as merely a figure of fun. For, in his address to the ten-year-old Copperfield, his language offers an explanation of the way the London subject inhabits a space where relation between self and space are intimately and inextricably interwoven. Hence, his address, which fixes self to place, as the site of a landing place in the otherwise endless motions of London's fluid rhythms.

Naming an address gives one little if any immediate access to place, save perhaps through imaginative association of pronouns. Such naming does not, however, provide any more than a co-ordinate awaiting decryption. It belongs initially, then, to the 'arcana', despite its apparent transparency, and this initial inaccessibility for David is maintained, for he is unable to give any sense of the journey there. 'Windsor Terrace, City Road' (*DC* 153) is the home of Wilkins Micawber and his family, and remains initially secreted, unavailable to any approach. Though Micawber gives no details about the house, other than the intimation that, to the London uninitiated such as David it might be difficult to find, David does recollect that he noticed, once arrived, that the house was 'shabby, like himself [Micawber], but also, like himself, made all the show it could' (*DC* 153). House and self are interchangeable to a degree, therefore; that they are reciprocal figures makes their status as phenomena explicit to the subject learning to read the city. For the older David, there is what Husserl describes as '*explication in memory*' (Husserl 1973, 129). That which was first grasped in perception is made clear once the intuition is encountered as 'simple apprehension'. The older David's memory gives nothing away, other than the explication in memory of the simple apprehension, and thus fills in for that which Micawber can only intuitively register: re-presentation must return to the phenomenological ground, reflexively coming to terms with the experience as such in order that the subject can give place to both himself and that which takes place in the specific locus, with the singularity of the authentic apprehension in its historicity, as this encounter has left its trace.

All of which brings me to the question of David, London and food. Lodging with the Micawbers, David's memory of working life is interspersed with only a sketchy sense of place, announced through the punctuation afforded by place names – St Martin's Church, the Strand, Drury Lane, Fleet Street, Covent Garden Market, the Adelphi, all of which are associated principally with food: stale pastry, rolls, pudding, savoy, a penny-loaf, a 'fourpenny plate of red beef', bread and cheese 'and a glass of beer', 'ready-made coffee and a slice of bread-and-butter', a venison shop, 'pine-apples' (155–6). The linear succession of place names is purely an after-effect, rather than a historical route, of course, but it does offer an interesting virtual 'tour' between church and areas in which London's theatres are to be found, through significant thoroughfares and across Covent Garden Market, a principal site belonging to the first chapter – 'The Streets-Morning' – of the 'Scenes' from *Sketches by Boz* (*SB* 49–54). There is something of a parallel to be drawn between the relation of names and that of food. As David's locations move from

the church to theatre, so the food he recalls goes from daily stale pastry and bread to the more costly venison and exotic pineapples. Moreover, the range of food suggests an experience of involvement and of being returned to an outside, a place merely of observation. David's observation of pineapples recalls his first London memory of hunger and looking in shop windows; whereas before he had surmised London an inexpensive place to live, he now understands differently.

Returning to those place names, were we to map these, we would find David's London world a somewhat tightly circumscribed area; with the exception of the Adelphi development (just south of the Strand and abutting the river; Fig. 1), bounded by what are now Shaftesbury Avenue and High Holborn to the north, Tottenham Court Road to the west, the Strand to the south and Farringdon Street to the east, and with the City Road just under 1.5 miles north-east from Fleet Street, David's movements and his memory of the search for food, between work and lodging, cover relatively little ground. In crossing and re-crossing the same streets in search of food in those moments not defined by the workplace or the Micawbers' world of debt, enforced secrecy and misplaced optimism, David comes to be defined through the search after food and the awareness of that which is beyond his immediate experience. He glimpses a world within but other than the world he encounters at hand. Our sense of London as we read is given a sense of immediacy through the constant return of the search for food, but equally we remain at a distance, by virtue of the fact that the labyrinth of lanes and alleys, passages and streets connecting the place names are not figured in any detail, if at all. The names merely trace a map without giving access to any sense of place, except that the sensate apprehension is always tied to food.

London is thus both source of meagre nourishment and threat to life. It is a prison and a labyrinth, a Babylon, having its very own 'Tower of Babel' (*DC* 779). The city is only transformed for David on his third arrival / return, the occasion being taking up with Mr Spenlow and moving into 'a furnished little set of apartments', as seen in a newspaper advertisement by Betsy Trotwood, located in 'Buckingham Street in the Adelphi'. Reading and writing precede location, the newspaper cutting offering to both David and the reader simultaneously an image of the furnished 'compact set of chambers'. What we see *of* the Adelphi here, or previously in the novel in the ten-year-old's reference, is very little, and with good reason. In the present scene, we move from the advertisement to the interior, of which little more is revealed. The faded furniture and the 'stone-blind pantry' aside, there is, 'sure enough, 'the river . . . outside the windows'. In all, this is, as David recalls, a 'wonderfully fine

thing to have that lofty castle to myself, and to feel, when I shut my outer door, like Robinson Crusoe' (*DC* 332–3). However, of the Adelphi there is little by way of concrete or objective detail. Once more, what David sees, that which is David's perception and experience, these are everything. He places himself in his world through the present imaginative comparison with Robinson Crusoe and with the memory of his previous experience when working at Murdstone and Grinby's. His younger self therefore comes back to him as he ponders 'on the old days when I used to roam about its subterranean arches, and on the happy changes which had brought me to the surface' (*DC* 332). Self and place, being and memory are significant; the world as concatenation of objects is given little account, the emphasis being on the manner in which the reception of the world as phenomena determines selfhood, once again. It is instructive to compare this moment with Copperfield's re-presentation of his younger self's experience of the Adelphi arches: 'I was fond of wandering about the Adelphi because it was a mysterious place, with those dark arches [which, according to historical accounts, were the dwelling places of criminals and the homeless]. I see myself emerging one evening from some of those arches, on a little public house close to the river' (*DC* 157). Once more, as elsewhere, we encounter the doubling of the self, imaginary vision closing the space between selves in a perception of experience, a memory of the initial perception given narrative manifestation. The arches, in their imagined mystery, obscure any sense of danger present in the reality of the location, and extend architecturally the exoticism of the pineapples. Beyond the plural noun, there is no other visual or material detail, any more than the Adelphi's material or objective presence is described later. The world is there for both Davids almost exclusively as received phenomena. Space and place are produced only to the extent that they give access to David's different, temporally bound moments of being, and we are forced to conclude that the

relationship between the imaginary and the real is therefore quite unrelated to that of an alleged tracing of the real. In a sense, the imaginary is even closer to the real than a duplicate . . . In another sense, the pictorial image [such as it is in either perception of the Adelphi] is more distant from the real . . . since it is only an expression of it . . . and is not intended to set us back before pragmatic reality. (de Waehrens 1993, 181)

The vision David has of this part of London is one governed by personal change over time, and also of a certain vertical ascent: from an underground labyrinth in which little is to be seen, to an elevated position, occupying a 'castle', from which the river is visible. Growth of reflective consciousness, or otherwise a coming to consciousness of

oneself, is thus charted by a temporal passage that has a particular axis related to a movement from invisibility given in the form of unawareness to a self-consciousness given in the sense of vision. It is important that we note while the younger David had been hungry and found his work a source of misery, he had been 'fond' of wandering through the arches underneath the Adelphi Terrace; and, while the singularity of the experiences remains marked, what threads together the Davids is that iterable reference to the fiction and image of Crusoe. This had initially appeared on David's first arrival in London, at the coach inn before the journey to Salem House.

There is, then – significantly in the formation of David's reflective selfhood – both the sense of seeing himself as an other to himself, whether temporally or through comparative analogues between traces; or through the iterability of apprehensions concerning others seeing him, where perception shifts to become reflection of self and other. The older David asks himself, without being able to answer, what others made of the 'strange, little apparition'. The city is thus mapped through various manifestations of memory, of taste, of watching others and of self-reflection: 'I can see him now, staring at me'; 'I see myself emerging one evening'; 'I wonder what they thought of me!' (*DC* 156). These last comments offer a complex image. The belated, narrating narrator imagines his other younger self, at given points in place and time, being observed, though at the time not obviously conscious of being observed, or, if conscious, then not yet capable of articulating the perception in a manner given to the narrating, later self. Reflection and re-presentation are the conditional co-ordinates of mnemotechnic topoanalysis, a mapping of place in which self, place and others return to figure the poetics of urban identity. Reflection affords a momentary aestheticisation of the phenomenological mode, or perhaps a making modern of Romantic aestheticisation of the individual through a revelation of the phenomenological basis of reflection on one's being in relation to specific sites at given times.

With this, what we are given to read through the returns and arrivals in London, as we read, is a sense of an elucidation, the explication, of self, and with that, a perception that one's being is never totalisable, never finished, any more than the concatenated phenomena of the modern city are available to knowledge in a totalised form. Self is revealed in its reflection to itself as a distinctly modern phenomenon. Unlike a Tom Jones, perhaps, or any other fully formed narrative subject belonging to more traditional novelistic forms; or belonging, say, to the conventions of the *Bildungsroman*, David is an unformed project, and a projection also of what I have called elsewhere the Dickens-machine.

If it takes Dickens seven novels and fifteen years of writing to find the appropriate 'voice' for a first-person narrator (Boz remains implicit in 'his' narrations, Master Humphrey more mechanically a device for 'viewing' the world of London), this must have to do, surely, with the time needed to shift to an elucidation, an exposition or, more accurately, explication in relation to the world, where reflection makes possible 'the actual clarification which reveals what was meant in advance with a distinctness which delimits it' (de Waehlens 1993, 186). Self and world are never separable; both are unfinished projects of modernity and narrative writing has to respond to and map this, with a degree of fidelity, if the historicity of the moment is to be registered fully. The Dickens-machine thus produces a distinctly different mode of being and subjectivity, the truth of which is a product of the need to respond appropriately – that is to say, through a mode of narrative marked by an authentic historicity. 'David' is therefore the subject of, as well as subject to, the modernity of the city. His being is constituted through a reading / writing of London, with which being's appearances to itself are intimately bound, and re-bound.

I will come back to these issues regarding the form of the novel in relation to selfhood, place, perception and memory in the conclusion of this essay, but we must turn to David's fourth entrance into the capital, his last significant arrival and return to London; or, to insist on this inversion, we must recognise how London arrives for its subject, how it returns. This is, of course, still an act of re-presentation, but that of an adult David, whose memory and experience unfold comparatively: to begin with the obvious, in this passage, there are co-ordinates, pronouns giving location, four to be exact. While those street names and places which had been associated with food had been given in no especial order, here a route is mapped: Custom House – the Monument – Fish-Street Hill – St Paul's Cathedral (this last more in expectation of its transformed appearance). What the eye rests on initially, though, is an immensity of fog and mud, as if to signify a changed world, one already signalled as moving into a 'wintry autumn'. There is rain and it is 'dark', so that whatever perspective there might be, whatever light is available, whatever horizon is available to the eye, all must be limited in the extreme. With David, in David's mind's eye, what the reader 'sees' is the limit to perception. Perception is attenuated, restrained. This is what memory re-represents, a minimally visible and knowable world. Evening is also announced, so that the various atmospheric, material and meteorological together inform the seasonal and diurnal temporal phenomena, as these appear to the subject's apprehension. Whereas the younger Copperfield was presented by his older self as barely noticing

the city, here the narrating Copperfield's older, narrated self, notices, experiences and recollects in detail that which cannot be seen through, or got around, so to speak, epistemologically, as well as experientially.

David thus sees and immediately reflects on the limits of visibility – at least he re-presents his other self as being suspended momentarily in this process. What the eye also observes is change. First-person narration, we should remind ourselves, strengthens once again the illusion, on the one hand, that there is someone there, while on the other, the 'I' of the narrator and the 'I' of the reader are, if not the same, then, substitutable in the act of perception, the one elided or supplemented by the other in the work of reflection. Equally, the reader is involved in the perception of perception; I know I am reading someone's 'reading', I see what another chooses I should see, and chooses how I should see what the other's other self had seen, and which is selectively constructed through the linguistic formulation of memory in narrative form.

Most significantly, then, there is the inescapable presentation of the sense that there is always a *someone* and always, equally, a *there*. The self is in the place, and the place is for that someone. Paradoxically, perhaps, this perception on the part of the reader is strengthened by the self-consciousness of a narrator who chooses to confront the limits of representation aesthetically and mimetically, through the stress on limit and phenomena, rather than on an urban reality comprised solely of objects. This is the world of early nineteenth-century London, but it is also, always a world of phenomena, with a sense of the world mediated in a self who is *in* the appearance of the world, simultaneously close and also at a remove. The memory of perception illuminates that of the self's others, which remain as the trace of relations in between a body 'fully in the world' (see immediately below). Narrative mode helps us grasp that mind, body and world are not separable, that there is not a consciousness on one side of a barrier, on the other side of which there is a corporeality. Moreover, 'the relation between the things and my body is decidedly singular':

it is what makes me sometimes remain in appearances, and it is also what sometimes brings me to the things themselves; it is what produces the buzzing of appearances, it is also . . . what casts me fully into the world. Everything comes to pass as though my power to reach the world and my power to entrench myself in phantasms only came one with the other . . . The world is what I perceive, but as soon as we examine and express its absolute proximity, it also becomes, inexplicably, irremediable distance. (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 8)

This *is* David Copperfield, entrenching himself in phantasms, as Merleau-Ponty describes the self's relation to appearances, one's being

in the world, but also at a distance. Such doubleness, of relation spatially and temporally, of self to place, and older to younger self; of the subject apprehending himself as both other *and* himself, through the transformation of the city; this is given directly in the intimation of architectural dilapidation, all the more noted in its disrepair and decay for being anthropomorphised in memory as 'old' but 'dingy friends', in the disappearance of the old house on Fish-Street Hill, 'pulled down in my absence, in the draining and widening of a 'neighbouring street', and in the expectation of Wren's cathedral having aged. There is a curiousness here, a sense of melancholy and irony, in the perception of aging for the city as the sign of alteration, transfiguration or reconstruction, which 'again' is a displacement of the subject's sense of time passing, inflected through his own remembrances of times past and lost as such, and only available in their phantasmic revenance. What is 'time-honoured' is the sense of place being unhealthy, difficult of ingress and egress, as though architectural, urban 'improvement' were a subject of ambiguity, if not ambivalence. And while the appearances of the past crowd the vision of the present, in lieu of clarity of perspective (emotionally as well as atmospherically) with a noticeable intimacy tantamount to a sense of *Sehnsucht*, the world David perceives is announced in its distance, both by change and disappearance, but also through the 'vehicle' of the coach ride, which serves to keep the subject off the street, and seeing a world both his and not his, through the frame of the coach window.

The area of London through which David travels in this arrival covers little more than a mile, if that, but in that mile the history of the city is opened, not least in the references to the Monument and St Paul's, both of which recall the Fire of 1666, inevitably. Less obvious to the modern reader, but not necessarily to a London subject of David's age and acuity of observation, is the implied history of alterations to the Custom House, on Lower Thames Street. Risking speculation, the ten-year-old Copperfield may have seen David Laing's New Custom House, built between 1813 and 1817, the old Custom House having been destroyed by fire in February 1814. In 1825, the year following construction of the new London Bridge – not the old one, on which the young David used to sit in its recesses – part of the floor of the Long Room in Laing's building collapsed, due to subsidence. Reconstruction work was begun, overseen by Sir Robert Smirke, who also transformed the façade. This would have been what greeted the older David on his fourth arrival in London, even though detail is not given. The point to be made is that London is mutable, its identity and meaning unstable, and this is part of the condition of both its existence and any authentic historicised perception or memory of it. To comprehend this is to perceive – perception as

reception – consciousness of one's Being, one's becoming. Both David Copperfield and *David Copperfield* announce this in numerous ways, not only in those details we have already considered,¹¹ apropos arrival and return, and by extension singularity and iterability, but also in the relation the self is perceived, and perceives himself as having, to his other selves and his other, the modern Babylon, a trope that is worked simultaneously as an architectural and textual figure, an imaginative figure of construction both architecturally and in a multiplicity of voices or writings. The urban subject only comes to apprehend itself in seeing itself as other and therefore mutable also. If London is a site, or more precisely a composite and constellation of sites, traced and re-presented through transformation and loss, through phantasmic proximity and, equally, 'irremediable distance', then so also is the modern subject, subject to, and projection of, the modernity of difference rather than sameness.

In conclusion, David's arrivals in and returns to London – and the city's many, not always happy returns in *David Copperfield* – determine his being in relation to place, to which he is at once intimately bound, but from which, perhaps, he longs to maintain a distance. Arrival is, from the first, marked by anxiety, which subsequently modulates through unhappiness, elevation and, finally, melancholy. If there is an ambivalence to be read in David's memories of the city and the subjective reconstructions and re-presentations, then it is not unreasonable to speculate that there is in London for David a 'melancholy' bound up with the sense 'that it must always be in change' as Jeremy Tambling argues (2009, 138). Whether this is to be read, in Tambling's terms, as expressive of a desire on David's – or Dickens's – part to stay 'with the other, repressed areas of London' is, for me at least, questionable (2009, 138); there is here possibly the sign of a Foucauldian recuperation too far. With the exception of the first and final arrival, all other experience of London, and memory of that experience in its re-presented form, concerns the growth, if not of a poet's mind, then that of a novelist (to borrow a Wordsworthian formula). But as the persistence of hunger shows in the childhood and adolescent experiences of London, the mind, or consciousness, is never divorced from the corporeal singularity that repeatedly experiences the sensory experience of the world acutely. Nor are misery and joy purely intellectual perceptions but are also connected to the body for David. It is only in the self become novelist – one fiction or phantasm of the self as other – that some other perspective is afforded to perception, as memory and narrative come to co-operate in the re-presentation of the urban reality, in the telling and showing, occasionally the performing, of being and event in close relation.

Additionally, though, something else is taking place here in the

formation of the narrative history, which has to do, it can be argued, with the historicity of the novel as genre, and concomitantly with a radicalisation, if not, finally, a subversion, and thus a modernisation of the novel, narrative history and the *Bildungsroman* apropos urban modernity and its intimate relation to the self. There is a growth in the apprehension of modernity modulated through Being's ability to reflect and re-present itself through the apprehension of its different, singular selves temporally given and spatially placed. And this in turn may help explain, or at least open an hypothesis on to, both the form of *David Copperfield* and its proto-modernity as a novel, as well as its distanced setting, its being placed a generation before the novel's publication.

To put this differently, and so expound the point through returning to the idea of the two Davids, the narrating narrator and the narrated narrator: as there are at least two Copperfields, so there are two *David Copperfields*. There is one novel embedded in another, framed by the other. This framed narrative is the more conventional, not to say Romantic tale of growth and education, both psychological and moral, which does not see that it sees (any more than its protagonist), but which engages in the use of Romanticism's vehicle of the isolated individual whose experiences are aestheticised through the formalisation of experience in a narrative.

The other novel, the modern narrative which frames the conventional tale and which is a narrative of modernity, is reflexive, open-ended from its very first sentence. It rejects convention and closure, reminding the reader that what is 'just' aesthetic for the Romantic, and therefore the formal working through of a constellation of devices, tropes and rhetorical exteriorisations of the self, is undeniably phenomenological to the modern subject, to the subject produced by modernity – and a modernity, moreover, inescapably defined by the modern Babylon. The younger, narrated David has to come of age, fully in possession of a certainty equivalent to blindness, a lack of insight, only afforded later, and this is figured as much in the younger David's not seeing the city as it is in his choice of first wife, Dora Spenlow. Reader, he married her. Such a narrative belongs to the past, however; its perception is made inauthentic by that later implicit perception of its earlier counterpart. Modernity makes it impossible to believe in such a narrative and the conventions of closure by which it is structured. So, Dora must die, in a traumatic reiteration of David's own mother's death, which, we might say, releases David or at least splits David in two.

David is released both from the fictional world in which he has lived from the time he learned to read, and from the London that is, on the one hand, that of imaginary and fictive characters, and on the other, an

immersive labyrinth that constantly brings home want, hunger, debt and unhappiness. Though *David Copperfield* arrives finally at another, second marriage, and thus accommodates a moment of closure which recuperates it within the conventions it exposes, it does so only in admitting both the reformation of form and the impossibility of defining the self in isolation. Being is always a 'being-there'. Always traced by the signs of its historicity, Being can only be read, after *Copperfield*, as defined in singular but iterable manner, by a world of phenomena, and by places which give place to perception of experience, thereby inscribing on to memory those traces which return through re-presentation. *David Copperfield* thus concludes, if this is the right word, in a final chapter, called a 'retrospect', which, anachronistically – at least with regard to that term – maintains a present tense that can only end when reading comes to an end. In that illusion of a perpetual present tense, that which David writes is, here, a matter of perception, and thus a translation of what he sees. Having begun the final chapter by 'look[ing] back, once more' (DC 802), the phantasm that is David Copperfield records that he sees: 'I see myself . . .'. He asks, though, 'What faces are the most distinct to me in the fleeting crowd?' which are 'all turning to me as I ask my thoughts the question?' (DC 802). The image of the phantom crowd whose faces turn, causing self-reflection, illuminates both the persistence of the urban in that figure of the crowd, and in the self being with others, in the experience of the world and reflective memory of that. As if to emphasise vision as the dominant trope of the chapter but also as the medium bringing the past into the present as a phantom presence, and with that, the relation of self to others in the world, both Betsy and Peggotty return the gaze through spectacles (DC 803). David imagines he sees himself being seen, and so is both within and at a distance from the world perceived. To repeat the words of Merleau-Ponty, '[e]verything comes to pass as though my power to reach the world and my power to entrench myself in phantasms only came one with the other.' Even the eye of Micawber appears to sight, reaching in writing across the world to see Copperfield, whose vision, and reading of the letter, cause it to be transcribed, given a writing that in turn opens it to the reader's view (DC 802). And all this is confessed, as 'faces fade away' (DC 805), realities 'melt' and 'shadows' are dismissed late at night when the world is no longer available to simple vision (DC 806), in 'our house in London' (DC 795). Thus Dickens loses David, even as David had lost himself 'in the swarm of life' (DC 776) on those occasional visits to London before marrying Agnes and moving back to the city for a final return.