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Literature & Language

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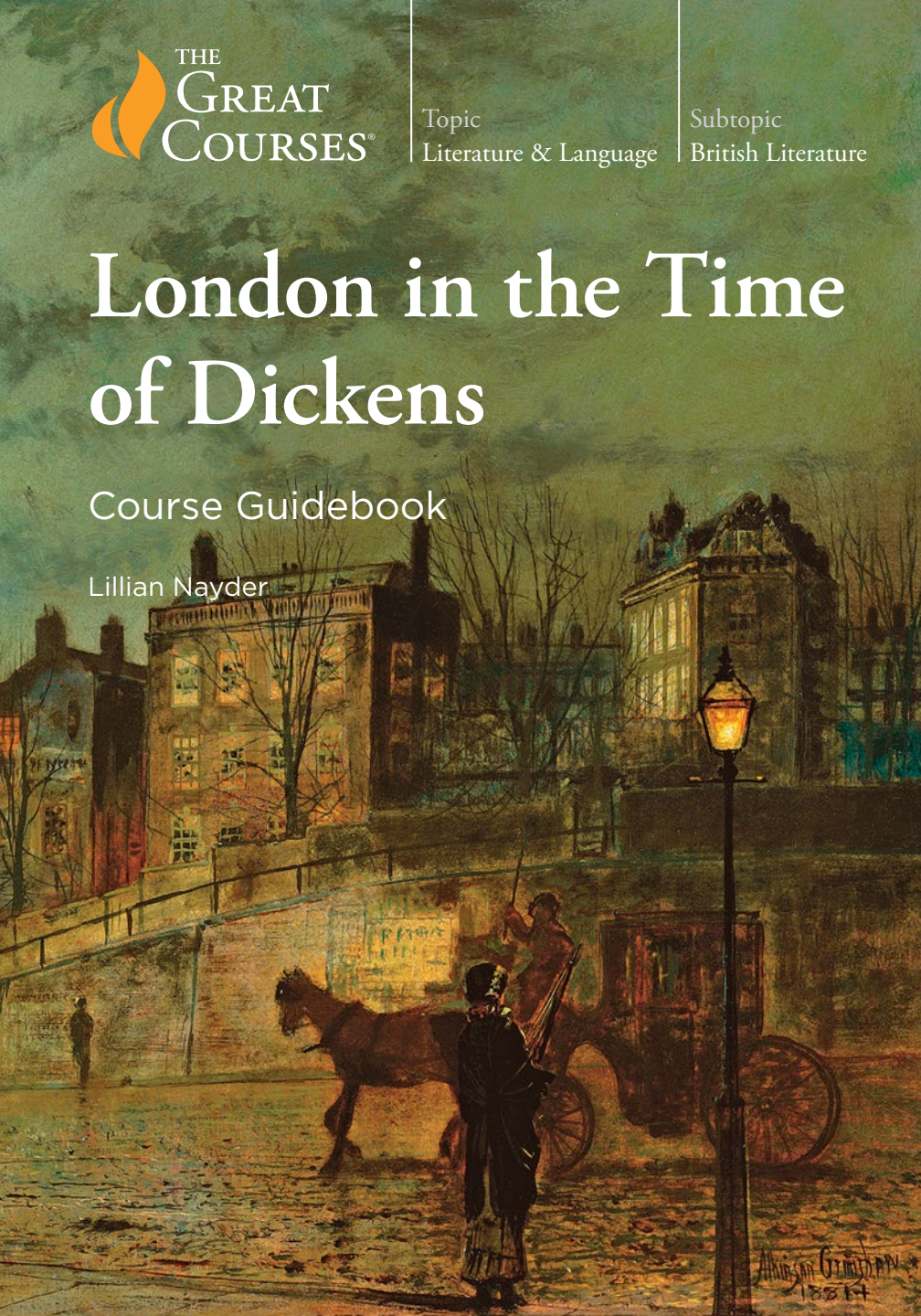
British Literature

London in the Time of Dickens

Course Guidebook

Lillian Nayder



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A Tale of Two Londons

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." With these words, Charles Dickens begins *A Tale of Two Cities*, his novel of the French Revolution, published in 1859. As you'll see throughout this course, Dickens's reasons for pairing opposites together in that novel can help you understand his vision of London as a city of polarities. In this lecture, you'll look at *Oliver Twist* and *Bleak House* and explore the shifting ways in which Dickens depicts the city and its contrasts. The lecture will draw on the journalism Dickens used for these details as well as his daily walks through London's districts. Taken together, the fiction and journalism will help you measure the "great gulf" separating rich from poor in Dickens's London.

Melodrama

Literary critics who focus on Dickens emphasize his interest in the popular 19th-century form of entertainment called Victorian melodrama, which draws sharp contrasts and pits good against evil. Dickens draws from melodrama in *Oliver Twist*, his second novel, serialized from 1837 to 1839. Here, he claims that his young hero illustrates "the principle of Good," while Fagin, Oliver's antagonist, embodies evil. As Dickens represents these two characters, Fagin not only threatens to corrupt Oliver but also to "poison" his "soul … for ever." This overinflated language is typical of melodrama.

Dickens himself wrote and acted in melodramas. With his friend Wilkie Collins, he coauthored *The Frozen Deep* in 1856. Based on the lost expedition headed by Sir John Franklin in 1845, the play depicts the heroism of starving Arctic explorers and pits the civilized against the savage. Dickens identified *The Frozen Deep* as a source for *A Tale of Two Cities*. His taste for melodrama helps to explain the oppositions that structure *A Tale of Two Cities* and its famous opening and that characterize his fiction more generally. So, too, do the stark inequities that concerned him as a writer, whether his subject was social revolution or everyday life in London.

London's Division

In the early 19th century, the English were spared the social upheaval they witnessed across the Channel. In the face of class unrest, Parliament enacted reforms that enabled social change to occur gradually in the country. Yet England had its own share of gross inequities, some of which only got worse in the 19th century. Among nations, Victorian Britain had the greatest inequalities in income and wealth. These disparities were most obvious in London.

Depending on fluctuations in unemployment in the Victorian period, dire poverty threatened as much as 30% of the population. An avid walker of London's streets, Dickens bore witness to the city's riches and, more pointedly, to its abject poverty; he often made these sights the subjects of his writing. When he gave *A Tale of Two Cities* its name, he was referring to Paris and London—the dual focus of that novel. Yet his title has another meaning since each place was deeply divided and proved to be "two cities" in one. In his novels, Dickens represents London's oppositions in various ways—rich and

poor, lawful and criminal, savage and civilized. He maps these polarities onto his urban landscape. To those characters who make their way through the streets of London in his fiction, the city can seem a heaven or a hell.

Consider the feelings of Oliver Twist after he's falsely accused of picking a pocket. Chased down by a mob, hauled to the police court, and nearly imprisoned, the boy finds shelter with Mr. Brownlow, the kind gentleman he's wrongly charged with robbing. Oliver has escaped from Fagin's den of thieves in Saffron Hill, one of London's notorious "rookeries" or overcrowded slums. Once he joins Brownlow's household on a "quiet shady street" of Pentonville, Oliver feels as if he's left a hell behind him.

Mr. Brownlow checking in on Oliver Twist

Dickens exercises his "melodramatic imagination" when he presents the stark divisions of London in *Oliver Twist*. However, he is also a realist writer and a social reformer. For example, to save Oliver, the prostitute Nancy seeks out Rose Maylie, a young lady eager to help the boy. Nancy crosses London from east to west to find Rose; she travels by foot from her poor lodgings on a "dirty lane" in Spitalfields to a "handsome street near Hyde Park" in Mayfair, "the wealthy quarter of the town." The distance Nancy travels also measures the moral divide between her and Rose—one of them angelic and the other fallen.

As he does with these two female stereotypes, Dickens pairs together opposed versions of London. Whether he treats these pairings as comic or tragic, he claims that London's slums deserve as much of his attention as its wealthy sections. In other words, London's opulence finds its counterpart in the city's festering poverty.

Dickens and the Slums

From his own life experience, Dickens understood that the stark divisions of Victorian social life were mapped onto London's terrain. Over the 2-year period when he first published *Oliver Twist*, from 1837 to 1839, Dickens was living at 48 Doughty Street in what is now the Charles Dickens Museum in the London borough of Camden. He and his family moved there in March 1837. Living on Doughty Street, in a "distinguished metropolitan parish," as Dickens described it, the 25-year-old writer felt that he had "arrived." However, while his new home seemed grand, it was only a short walk from Coldbath Fields' Prison just east, across Gray's Inn Road. A few blocks further south, Dickens could find Saffron Hill, the very neighborhood in which he sets Fagin's den.

In a popular guidebook written by Peter Cunningham, a friend of Dickens, readers learn that some of London's worst "plague spot[s]" lay next to fashionable districts. Dickens often ventured into London's "plague spots." In October 1842, he took the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow with him on a tour of "the Mint," a slum in Southwark, on the south bank of the Thames. Arranging for prison officials to serve as guides, Dickens highlighted one particular view of London and its polarities for his American

guest. This view set law-abiding citizens against a dangerous, criminal class. Dickens suggested the need for slum boundaries, even as he crossed over them with his friends. In effect, he justified the existence of London's "two cities." The divide resulted from lawlessness among slum dwellers, he suggested.

Dickens had a strong interest in policing the slums, sometimes joining a Scotland Yard detective, Inspector Field, on his rounds in the Mint and St. Giles. Dickens wrote about these experiences in *Household Words*, the weekly periodical he edited in the 1850s. In his 1851 article "On Duty with Inspector Field," Dickens celebrates the inspector's power, comparing it to a sultan's. Dickens was so impressed by Field that he took him as a model. Walking London's streets, he sometimes imagined himself as an amateur policeman.

Yet what Dickens terms his "amateur beat" often leads him to a different perspective on London and its extremes. Daniel Tyler of Oxford University convincingly argues that, over time, Dickens altered his idea of the slums. In his earliest works, he treats poor areas as "seat[s] of vice and crime," but "the later Dickens" focuses instead on "urban deprivation." Even when Dickens judges slum dwellers harshly, he calls our attention to all they lack.

In novels of the 1850s and 1860s, Dickens draws from the language of the British empire to depict London's poor areas as uncivilized lands. Those who visit the slums in these novels describe the "savagery" they find there. In using such terms, Dickens reveals his own biases and limitations as a middle-class Englishman. However, if there are English savages on London's streets, he contends, we should blame the civilization that has produced and abandoned them.

In a collection of essays that he published in the 1860s, Dickens describes a walk from Covent Garden to Limehouse in East London. Dickens's narrator is an "uncommercial traveler," as opposed to a "commercial traveler" or traveling salesman. He collides with a ragged child near Temple Bar, a medieval gate, and recounts how a group of other such children appear. Clawing each other as they fight for a coin, these feral children are "wolfish." Dickens uses their bestial condition to expose Britain's own uncivilized state.

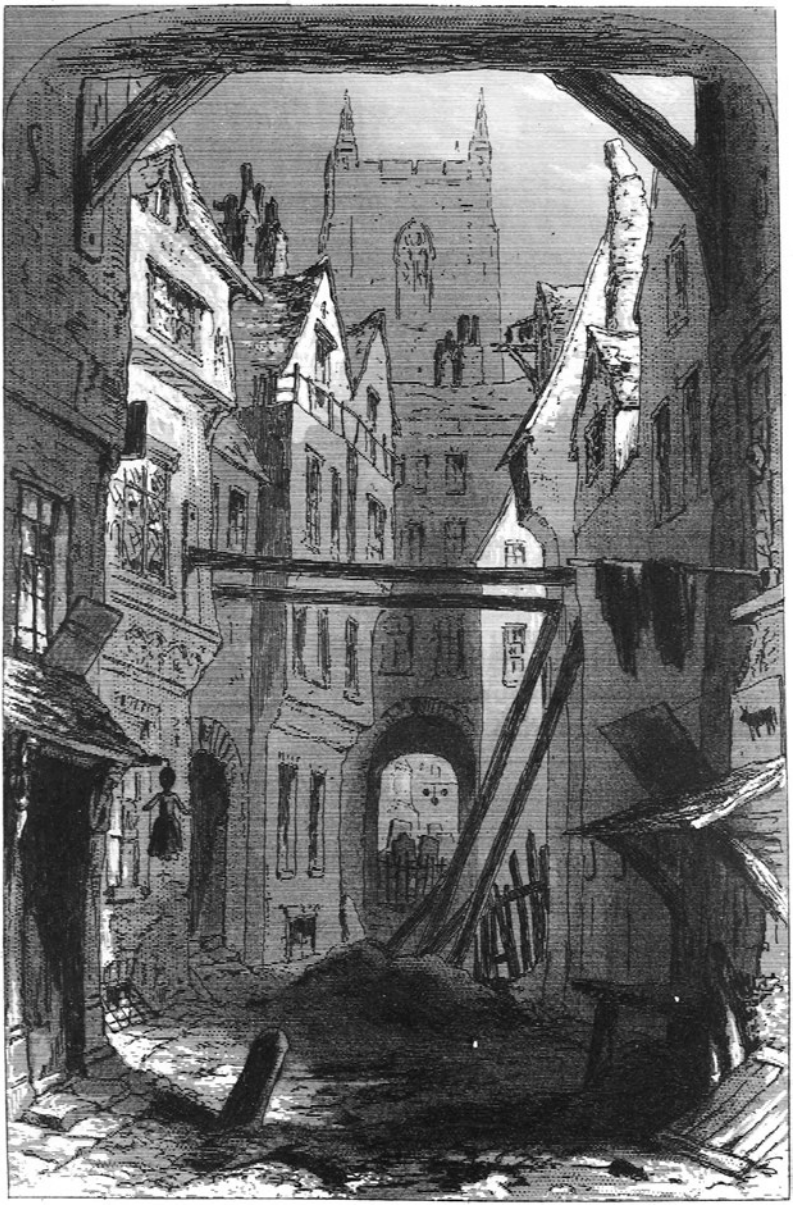
Dickens develops this theme in his 1853 novel *Bleak House*, arguing that the British have failed as colonizers. Busy abroad, they pay no heed to "ordinary home-made" savages—"heathen" Londoners covered in "homely filth," devoured by "homely parasites," and dressed in "homely rags," "the growth of English soil and climate."

The "Great Gulf"

At times, Dickens polices boundaries within London and bolsters divisions. However, more often than not, he seeks to bridge them by means of mobile characters who seek common ground. Mobility is a class privilege in Dickens's London—and not only because the poor must travel by foot. Protected by the police, gentlemen can tour the slums as they would a foreign country or a British colony. However, the same isn't true of slum dwellers when they venture where they don't seem to belong.

When the poorest of Dickens's characters continually move about London, their mobility proves a punishment, not a privilege. In *Bleak House*, serialized from 1852 to 1853, poor Jo, the crossing-sweeper, is always "moving on." Police constables force him to do so as he tries to earn tips by sweeping muddy road crossings for pedestrians. Jo watches invisibly as people go to church on Sundays. They don't see the humanity they share with him. However, the slum itself makes that connection for them. Personified as Tom-All-Alone's—a place Dickens knew from childhood, built on "waste ground" and housing a whole colony of people—the slum spreads the disease that afflicts Jo and his fellow "savages." The slum is "a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people."

The highest of the high converges with the lowest of the low, but only because of the contagion that spreads across every parish, regardless of wealth, poverty, or social status. Dickens looks ahead to this convergence of high and low early in *Bleak House*, after the suspicious death of a person known only as Nemo—Latin for "no one." Jo is called to testify at the inquest because he knew the dead man. Nemo proves to be Captain Hawdon, the former lover of Lady Dedlock. Eager for information about Hawdon, she leaves her home in aristocratic London disguised as her lady's maid and seeks Jo at the spot he often sweeps near Chancery Lane.



Tom-All-Alone's

With Jo as her guide, Lady Dedlock tours the sites of Hawdon's poverty. However, her contact with the poor crossing sweeper does little to connect them. Throughout the scene, she recoils from Jo. He's a "loathsome" creature in her view. Her haughty behavior conflicts with her working-class costume, and Jo sees through her disguise. It's one of Dickens's ironies that Lady Dedlock treats Jo very differently than her dead lover did. While Hawdon sometimes gave Jo small change to pay for his supper or a night's lodging, Lady Dedlock gives him a gold coin, a sovereign he has no easy way to change or use.

She hands Jo "more money than [he] ever had in [his] life," but she fails to cross the "great gulf" between them in any meaningful way. To cross that "great gulf" is heroic in Dickens's fiction, a feat that few characters achieve. In *Bleak House*, Allan Woodcourt is one of that number. A doctor, he wanders London's "miserable byways." He looks around him with "compassionate interest" as he walks the streets and acts on his compassion. He buys Jo food, finds him shelter, and tends him at the last. The scene in which Woodcourt helps the dying boy recite the Lord's Prayer is one of the most memorable in Dickens's writing.

The difference between Lady Dedlock and Woodcourt is crucial to *Bleak House* and to Woodcourt's value in Dickens's eyes. Direct and empathetic, Woodcourt reaches across divides; those he addresses respond to him in kind. In a city of polarities, Woodcourt and Jo discover common ground. Dickens encourages us to do the same.

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Crime and Punishment, London Style

Throughout his career, Dickens the authoritarian went hand in hand with "Dickens the liberal reformer." The advocate for social equity and "second chances" was also the champion of "law and order," willing "to take the law into [his] own hands" if necessary, as he says in "The Ruffian." Neither version of the author exists without the other. As you'll see in this lecture, the pairing of Dickens the "liberal reformer" with his other, authoritarian self reflects divisions central to Victorian culture. If the self-contradictions of Dickens are one element of his idiosyncratic genius, they also mirror debates and disagreements typical of his time and place.

Ruffians

In 1868, Dickens wrote "The Ruffian," a piece on crime and policing for his journal *All the Year Round*. Adopting the guise of the "Uncommercial Traveller," Dickens describes a class of criminals whom he thinks deserve "perpetual imprisonment" yet whom the police usually don't arrest. These are the ruffians. Dickens writes that ruffians "never turn … [their] liberty to any account but violence and plunder." Incorrigible "roughs" or thugs, they proved a daily menace to Londoners. Dickens felt that the police unduly ignored them. If Dickens had his way, ruffians would not only be imprisoned but also put to "hard labor" and flogged. The novelist himself could resort to his "own riding-whip … and walking-stick" to maintain order, and so could others determined to counter lawlessness in the city.

The portrait of Dickens that emerges here is a world apart from the figure that advocates for the Artful Dodger in *Oliver Twist*. He concurs with the pickpocket that the court "ain't the shop for justice" and seeks to expose and remedy inequities in the legal system. What, then, are we to make of the Dickens who gladly imagines himself as a vigilante? As critic Myron Magnet explains it, the writer we meet in "The Ruffian" is "the *other* Dickens," a writer defined by what he's not: "Not Dickens the liberal reformer, readily recognizable to … generations of readers, but rather the darker Dickens who had … 'a strong authoritarian strain in him.'"

Dickens the Authoritarian

Dickens befriended members of the Metropolitan Police Service, accompanied them on their rounds of neighborhoods and criminal haunts, and developed the "habit" of regarding his city walks "as [his own] Beat, and [him]self as a higher sort of Police Constable." What Dickens learned from his interrogations of the police fueled his imagination and served him well as a writer. He sets portions of his novels in criminal areas of London, and policemen and detectives play important roles in his fiction—perhaps most notably Inspector Bucket of *Bleak House*. Dickens also wrote or coauthored numerous articles on policing for *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, with titles such as "The Modern Science of Thief Taking."

To Dickens, the police detective seemed to exercise a godlike power comparable to the one that the novelist gives to his third person narrators. In taking a thief, the detective exhibits a "Protean cleverness of disguise," for example, and can counterfeit "every sort and condition of distress," as Dickens's subeditor William Wills wrote. Dickens himself adds that the detective brings "his shrewd eye to bear" on every person and place in London." The all-knowing, omniscient narrators in Dickens's fictional worlds prove a match for the detective. They move freely up and down the social ladder and in and out of characters' minds, regardless of class or gender, "disguising" themselves in assuming disparate perspectives. Like the "Protean" detective, they "become" whomever they choose, at least in the imaginations of the novelist and his readers.

In his life and fiction, Dickens sought to match—at times, to surpass—policemen in his own policing: pursuing malefactors whom members of the force let through their net. In "The Ruffian" and elsewhere in his writings, the novelist repeatedly describes "giving chase" to assailants. You can find this authoritarian side of Dickens paired with his more celebrated, reformist self in his work on behalf of Urania Cottage, a "Home for Homeless Women" at Shepherd's Bush in London. The Home sought to rescue its inmates from prostitution and lives of crime. For more than a decade, the novelist played a crucial role at this refuge. He assisted the philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts, who funded the venture, by selecting its site, establishing its rules, and hiring its staff. He consulted with London prison wardens and recruited inmates from among those due for release at the Westminster House of Correction, among other prisons and reformatories.

According to Dickens's scheme, the women would be given the chance to start life anew in Australia, where they would be sent as emigrants after their time at Urania Cottage. Dickens saw to their "proper" discipline, striving to ensure their conformity with gender norms and expectations and adopting the "Marks System" to that end. The women were rewarded with points for "good behavior"—for adhering to the rules—but stripped of points and privileges if they were wayward. His letters from 1847, when the Home was established, reveal his power struggles with various women, who proved "recalcitrant" in his eyes.

So, Dickens's approach to those living at Urania Cottage was divided. On the one hand, he wanted to liberate them and make hope where none had existed. On the other hand, he sought to strictly control and discipline them, and he enjoyed countering their resistance at every turn.

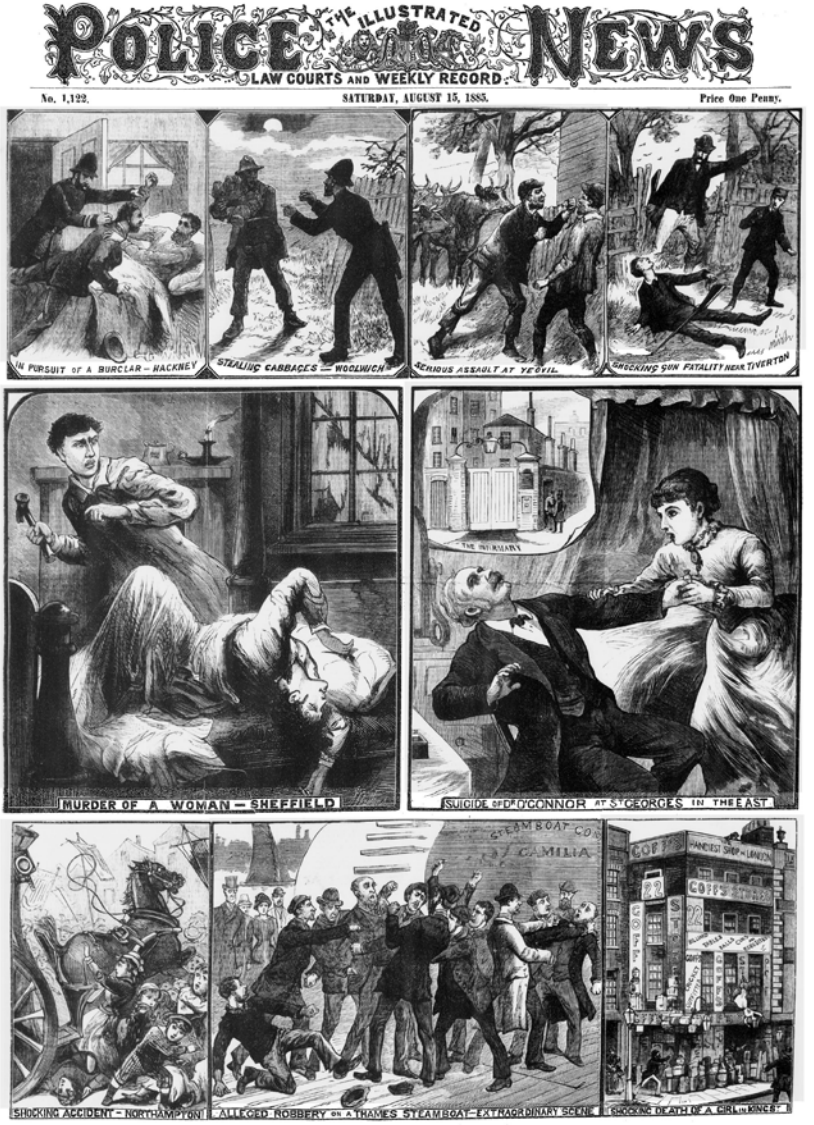
Victorian Ideas on Crime

In this conflicted response to the ex-convicts, Dickens voiced contradictions central to debates over criminality in the period. These emerged as he and his contemporaries grappled with the problem of crime, tried to determine its causes, identified mitigating factors, and argued over how best to respond to the lawlessness they witnessed in London.

Jurists established the "general rule … that people [were] responsible for their actions" but then "confronted" what the prominent judge Sir James Fitzjames Stephen described as "exceptions of great importance and interest." What seemed a straightforward rule proved nothing of the kind, as vexed questions of criminal intent emerged. Why does someone commit a criminal action? What bearing does circumstance or intention have on judgements of culpability?

In depicting criminality in Victorian London, Dickens addresses these questions—in part, by representing the consciousness of criminals themselves. He makes minds "transparent" and reveals "inner selves" through the use of his third-person narrators. In so doing, he makes it more difficult to adopt an authoritarian position toward crime. In their portraits of crime, Dickens's novels question "the law's … boundaries" by advocating for criminal figures, and they point to the limits of legal understanding. As Oliver Twist realizes once he's mistaken for a thief, "justice itself … confound[s] the innocent with the guilty when they['re] in accidental companionship."

The erring of justice is a recurring theme in Dickens's fiction. However, his novels also acknowledge, correct, or otherwise counter the transgressions they represent and seem to approve—punishing crime and reestablishing law and order. That impulse was timely, as the 19th century proved to be what Philip Collins called "the great age of prison-building," and problems of crime burdened Dickens and his fellow Londoners.


THE ILLUSTRATED
POLICE NEWS
LAW COURTS AND WEEKLY RECORD.
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IN PURSUIT OF A BURGLAR—HACKNEY
STEALING CABBAGES—WOOLWICH
SERIOUS ASSAULT AT YE OVIL
SHOCKING SUN FATALITY NEAR TIVERTON
MURDER OF A WOMAN—SHEFFIELD
SUICIDE OF Dr O'CONNOR AT ST GEORGES IN THE EAST
SHOCKING ACCIDENT—NORTHAMPTON
ALLEGED ROBBERY ON A THAMES STEAMBOAT—EXTRAORDINARY SCENE
SHOCKING DEATH OF A GIRL IN KINGS

A few months after Dickens railed against ruffians in *All the Year Round*, Parliament passed the Habitual Criminals Act of 1869, most of its members believing that "society [needed to] arm itself with more effectual weapons" against repeat offenders. In the newspapers of the day, Victorians avidly read columns detailing the latest criminal activity. The fear of being assaulted and robbed was palpable.

These factors go a long way toward explaining harsh reactions to criminality and efforts to define crime solely on the grounds of conduct, regardless of character or intent. Yet such efforts often fell short as criminal law was practiced and enforced in the period.

Fagin and Magwitch

In Dickens's novels, what seem to be straightforward accounts of crime and punishment often prove double-edged, forcing readers to reassess their views. Dickens provides one such example in Fagin, the sinister fence, or receiver of stolen goods in *Oliver Twist*. By implication, Fagin is a pimp as well and profits from the work of the prostitutes he manages and exploits.

Drawing on anti-Semitic stereotypes, Dickens identifies Fagin as demonic, inside and out. The judgments passed on the villain seem unequivocal, as absolute as the evil that Fagin embodies. Yet elsewhere in the novel, Dickens qualifies his stance, tracing crime to a different source than Fagin's evil essence. He adds complexity to our understanding of the "wily" old villain by using Fagin to parody the figure of the London gentleman and to expose the social inequities that contribute to poverty and crime.

In the pickpocketing game Fagin uses to train the boys for the "trade," he places valuable items in his pockets. He then "trot[s] up and down the room." Pretending to window shop, he "look[s] constantly round him for fear of thieves … slapping all his pockets in turn, to see that he [hasn't] lost anything." The gentleman Fagin parodies seems to be solely made up of pockets for storing material things. Defined by the valuable goods he's acquired—focused on protecting them yet always in the market for more—this figure helps us measure the gap between London's haves and have-nots.

In a further twist, Dickens brings us into Fagin's mind toward the end of the novel, forcing us to share his innermost thoughts and perceptions. Dickens uses the third person narrator to help us see justice, or injustice, through Fagin's eyes, and to experience his "last night alive." Apprehended and charged for his part in the murder of Nancy, a crime that he provoked Bill Sikes to commit, Fagin stands trial. We watch the proceedings from his perspective, unsettling though that is. We share in his "bewildered glance" as he looks around the courtroom, where "in no one face—not even among the women … —could he read the faintest sympathy with him, or any feeling but one … that he should be condemned."

By making us share the criminal's experience and perspective, Dickens lends force to the question Fagin poses in his cell as he awaits execution: "What right have they to butcher me?" This question is even more pressing when it's posed later in Dickens's career, in the scene that describes the sentencing of Abel Magwitch in *Great Expectations*. Here, the question is implied, not openly stated. It's all the more powerful because the criminal himself accepts the sentence of the judge rather than challenging it.

We meet Magwitch in the opening chapters of *Great Expectations*. He's escaped from a convict ship anchored off the Kentish coast. Before he's recaptured, he's helped by young Pip, the novel's protagonist and first-person narrator, though only because he's threatened the boy. Used as a tool in financial crimes hatched by others, Magwitch is transported to Australia for life, earning his freedom and considerable wealth. From that colony, he arranges—anonymously—to give Pip a substantial income and transform him from a blacksmith into a gentleman. But after Magwitch returns to London to seek out Pip, whom he considers his "son," he's captured as a returned transport following a near-fatal struggle with Compeyson—the man who betrayed him—and sentenced to hang.

As Pip recounts it, the scene in which Magwitch receives his death sentence highlights the limits of justice and legal judgment. Both prove inadequate in his case. Magwitch is tried for returning to England, a capital crime since he was transported for life. Yet the outcome's injustice seems clear. Not only is Magwitch sentenced to death in a group of 32 people, but also the judge who's presiding completely misjudges his character. The judge singles him out from

the condemned crowd for the alleged "propensities and passions" that make him "a scourge to society"—all traits that he lacks. It's clear in the novel that Magwitch is no "scourge."

As Dickens knew, the court system could show little mercy to those subject to its workings, despite its often-glaring inequities—inequities that he exposes in *Great Expectations*. For the same financial crime, Magwitch received 17 years, while Compeyson, who had used him, received only 7, having been perceived as "gentleman-like" by the court. Such "wide variations in sentencing" were typical of the period, historians note.

Dickens and Capital Punishment

Criminal law was subject to reform throughout the 1800s. By the 1830s, the number of capital offenses had been greatly reduced from more than 200 at the start of the century. Dickens voiced support for capital punishment for the crime of murder, at least in certain cases, though his views on the subject changed over time. He also advocated for the abolition of public executions, believing that they demoralized those in the crowds that gathered to view them.

In his novels, Dickens adapts the penal code in "sentencing" his criminal figures, punishing them in ways that suit his ends. Magwitch dies at the hands of a merciful God, evading the sentence imposed on him in the courtroom. Fagin does not, though we hear of his execution indirectly.

In his conflicting depictions of crime and punishment, Dickens presents an intriguing paradox. He uses crime to decry social injustice while also advocating for a harsh response to widely ranging offenses. To help explain this illogic, look to the deep ambivalence toward criminality and legal justice that Dickens shared with his readers. Given the flaws in human judgment, for example, they could only perceive the decision to inflict a grim and ritualized death on those who killed as equivocal.

In Dickens's writings, women and men alike meet that death—a punishment all the more troubling because of the way that gender differences are maintained on the gallows. In "Lying Awake," a piece he wrote for *Household Words* in 1852, he recalls the Mannings's execution and contrasts their

"dangling" forms: "the man's, a limp, loose suit of clothes, as if the man had gone out of them; the woman's, a fine shape, so elaborately corseted and artfully dressed, that it was quite unchanged in its trim appearance as it slowly swung from side to side." Maria Manning's "artful" appearance on the gallows is itself a mark of her transgressive womanhood. With gender difference mapped onto Victorian London and women associated with the private realm, her shapely corpse seems as unfeminine as it does grisly as it slowly swings in the public view.

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3

Sexes and the City

As you will see in this lecture, Dickens and his fiction are key to understanding how Victorians imagined, and partly realized, London's divisions into public and private spaces. They will also help you grasp the role that gender played in that spatial segregation as it was envisioned and actually put in place. However, Dickens's importance in these matters doesn't simply lie in his idealizations of domestic life. Rather, it stems from his willingness to question as well as represent the opposition of private and public and the polarized conceptions of sexuality and gender on which that opposition depends.

Separate Spheres

The divide between private and public in Victorian culture reflects the ideology of the separate spheres. That cultural belief was based on Victorian conceptions of sexual difference—traits thought to be "natural" to the members of each sex. The system identified women as selfless figures "naturally" concerned with the well-being of others and best suited for domestic life and the private realm. By contrast, men were taken to be unsympathetic beings, driven by "inborn selfishness" and calculation.

The separate spheres ideology emphasized the feminine "need" for privacy and protection from the self-interest and strife that defined the masculine sphere. In so doing, it helped to justify the sexual double standard and women's exclusion from higher education and professional life. Simultaneously, it "explained" the "inveterate profligacy of men" as natural to them, including hypocrisy and faithlessness.

This ideology also shapes Dickens's depictions of Victorian London. His portraits of the city and its divisions and boundaries reflect widely held beliefs about the strength and aggression of men and the virtues and vulnerabilities of women. In his fiction, he often dramatizes the dangers posed to delicate women who enter the public realm, suggesting that they don't belong there and had best stay away. In one of the most dramatic scenes from *A Tale of Two Cities*, for example, Lucie Manette attends the trial of Charles Darnay at the Old Bailey, London's central criminal court. A Frenchman, Darnay is charged with treason against the British government; he'll be drawn and quartered if the jury finds him guilty. Lucie had been in Darnay's company briefly, during a trip to England from France. For that reason, she's forced to answer questions about the prisoner's behavior despite her "dread of the [courtroom] scene, and … her pity for [Darnay]."

Darnay himself stands in the prisoner's dock. Dickens uses him to hyperbolically represent what it means to appear in public. "Eager faces strained round pillars and corners, to get a sight of him," Dickens writes, and "spectators in back rows stood up, not to miss a hair of him; people on the floor of the court laid their hands on the shoulders of the people before them … to see every inch of him." Darnay responds to his situation bravely. Pale yet "self-possessed," he silently testifies to his manhood.

Unlike Darnay, Lucie struggles to withstand the public gaze. That's not because she's charged with a crime but, paradoxically, because of her very purity. Lucie's obligated to testify in court, yet Dickens makes it clear to us that she doesn't belong on the stand. Instead, she rises from her seat to answer questions, linking her arm through her father's. In so doing, she shows her need for privacy, shelter, and support. The witness box is no place for a lady, Dickens suggests. He reinforces Lucie's genteel womanhood with the pitying way in which she answers questions about Darnay. She's often reprimanded by the judge for her compassion. Given her womanly feeling, it seems apt when she faints and is carried out of the courtroom to recover.

The Public Stage of London

A site of public scrutiny and exposure, the courtroom at the Old Bailey serves as a microcosm of London for Dickens. It suggests the particular dangers posed to respectable women by life in the city. Among Victorians, these dangers were a widely shared, often sexualized source of cultural anxiety.

Dickens imagined London's streets as a public theater in which men were entertained by the women who happened onto its stage. "If two men stop in the street to look at any given object, or even to gaze in the air," he explains in *Sketches by Boz*, "two hundred men will be assembled in no time," knowing that there will soon be "some absorbing object in view." In this particular sketch, the objects in question are two teenage prostitutes "gaudily" dressed. They provide a show for the crowd that's gathered to watch them brought into the police office, the younger of the two "weeping bitterly" and trying to hide her face from the spectators. Her efforts to protect herself from exposure mark what remains of her womanly virtue. Nonetheless, adopting the persona of "Boz" as he writes this piece, Dickens seems to join the men in the crowd—and to subject both young women to the intrusion of his own gaze. He both recognizes the plight of the young, weeping woman and exploits her vulnerability.

Representing London as a public stage, Dickens recognizes that it's a class privilege to keep wives and daughters from appearing in its footlights. Fathers and husbands can only do so if their resources permit. Writing from a middle-class perspective, Dickens repeatedly imagines the moral threat posed to working-class women forced into the public realm by economic

necessity. He and his fellow novelists used the allegedly "fallen" figures of prostitutes to dramatize the destructive effects of the marketplace and its economic relations on those thought to be naturally suited to private life and the intimate family circle.

The "Public Woman"

In his fiction, Dickens introduces us to an array of female characters who support themselves by working in London. Vulnerable figures, they're the middle- and working-class daughters of failed or inadequate male providers. They retain their virtue and respectability despite their need for paid work: Amy Dorrit is an example in *Little Dorrit*, as is Jenny Wren in *Our Mutual Friend*. The child of a middle-class man imprisoned for debt at the Marshalsea Prison, Amy goes out to work as a seamstress for wealthy women in their London homes. Working-class Jenny Wren is a dolls' dressmaker who caters to affluent children and their parents. As Dickens presents them, both win our admiration for their enterprise and integrity.

However, the novelist gives tragic form to the public lives of working-class women as well, such as in *Oliver Twist*, when he portrays Nancy, forced into prostitution in London. He associates her with "the streets" and insists that her life has "been squandered" there. According to historians, however, Dickens's depictions of Nancy and other such figures conflict with the social realities of his day. Most weren't "tragic" figures, seduced, betrayed, and fallen. Rather, they entered their occupation for economic reasons, in response to fluctuating conditions in the job market. According to historian Judith R. Walkowitz, they stayed connected to "general working-class life" instead of becoming outcasts, with sex work "a temporary solution to their … difficulties."

As a novelist, Dickens subordinated historical accuracy to literary effect, using topical concerns to achieve his artistic aims. The "public woman" proved no exception to this rule, and Dickens uses that figure for comic as well as tragic ends. For example, when Elizabeth Cluppins takes the stand at the Guildhall in the breach of promise trial in *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens exposes the pleasure she takes in appearing in the public eye. Mrs. Cluppins seizes her chance for greater exposure, making public what should remain strictly private and essentially telling the court that she is pregnant. At a time when discussions of pregnancy were taboo in mixed company and pregnant women were said, at most, to be "in an interesting condition," Mrs. Cluppins flaunts her sexuality, violating the rules of feminine decorum.

In Dickens's novels, Cockney women aren't the only ones who revel in London's spotlight. Ambitious middle-class wives do so as well, particularly those involved in philanthropic causes, such as those tied to Exeter Hall. The hall was located on the Strand in central London and provided a public stage for the evangelical movement and the antislavery campaign. Philanthropic projects were often run by unpaid workers and required self-sacrifice and compassion. Aligned with female virtues, philanthropy seemed to offer a way for middle-class women to enter public life in Victorian London unscathed.

However, in his journalism from the 1840s, Dickens mocks those who do so. Satirizing this new type of "public woman," he describes them "[going] about, and exceedingly roundabout, on the Exeter Hall platform." He develops this critique in *Bleak House*. The female philanthropist Mrs. Pardiggle fails her family by insisting that her children join her in her civilizing mission. She takes them with her to distribute tracts to London's "heathen" population, invading

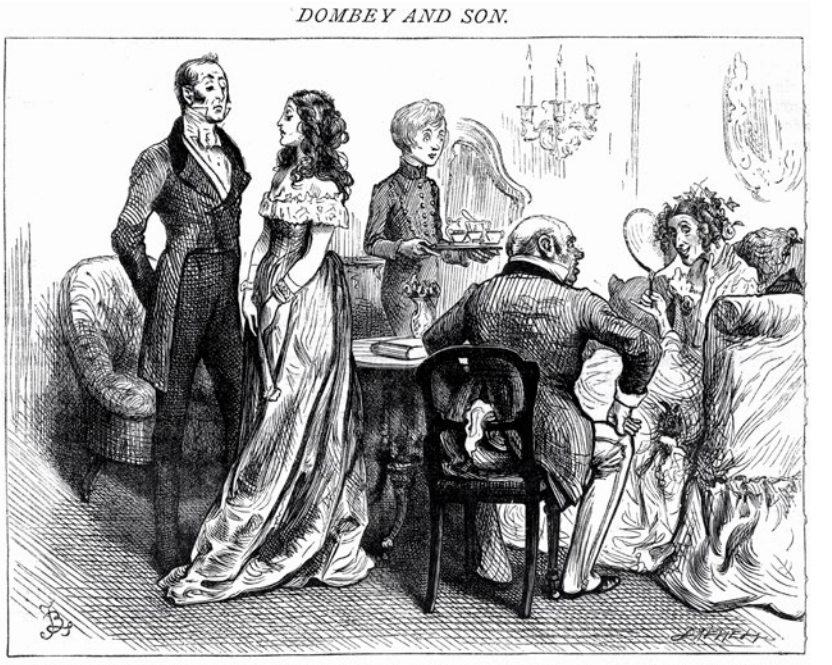
working-class homes with her family in tow. She turns her own offspring into savages "ferocious with discontent," adding to the problem she seeks to correct. She proves to be "a woman of business" rather than a caring mother. Known for her "rapacious benevolence," she lives by market principles and performs good "by wholesale," Dickens writes, "dealing in it to a large extent."

Business

Business is a male domain in Dickens's London and the marketplace a site of competition and self-interest. As much a mode of masculine behavior as it is a specific location, "the market" takes numerous forms in Dickens's fiction. The business firm, the counting house, the bank, the courts—they're all places and structures in which men engage in a struggle for power, money, and success. These places include the private male clubs that were an important feature of life in Victorian London, barring entry to women and freeing married men from the "femininity" that "constrain[ed]" them in their family circle, as historian John Tosh puts it.

As Dickens develops his critique of market relations, places of business are scenes of exploitation, cruelty, and deception. In what's probably the best-known example, Scrooge bullies his clerk Bob Cratchit. He gives him low wages for long hours of work in a counting house that Scrooge barely heats. With variations, this dynamic between a firm's principal and his subordinates plays out repeatedly in Dickens's fiction in scenes in which London's business is conducted.

Dombey and Son provides perhaps Dickens's most extended treatment of London's business world and its ethos of self-interest. One of the novel's main subplots centers on James Carker, Dombey's business manager and right-hand man, who plots against his employer. In their struggle for domination, Carker seeks to humiliate Dombey by seducing Dombey's wife, Edith. Edith rejects Carker's advances, but her own marriage shows how market relations corrupt the private sphere. A young widow badly in need of money at the novel's outset, Edith sells herself to Dombey and then resists his control, comparing herself to a rebel slave.



"WITHERS THE WAN, AT THIS PERIOD, HANDING ROUND THE TEA, MR. DOMBEY AGAIN ADDRESSED HIMSELF TO EDITH."

Dickens develops the connection between wife and slave by locating the offices of Dombey and Son "just round the corner" from the East India Company on Leadenhall Street, in London's financial district. He uses the juxtaposition to suggest that the firm oppresses people on a global scale. Its import-export business makes its profits from the colonial subjugation that's central to British enterprise.

Yet if market relations can corrupt what should be a domestic refuge from the commercial world and transform a wife into a rebel slave, so domestic ideals can infiltrate the realm of business and make philanthropists out of merchants. In *Dombey and Son* and elsewhere in his fiction, Dickens treats the boundary between private and public as a permeable one. He questions and, at times, undermines the opposition of the separate spheres and challenges the gender norms and expectations tied to them.

In *Dombey and Son*, Solomon Gills and his nautical goods shop, the Wooden Midshipman, provide a counterpoint to Dombey and his firm, though both places of business are located in London's financial district. Gills transforms his business into a home instead of treating his home as a place of business as Dombey does. Young Florence Dombey takes refuge there rather than with her unfeeling father in moments of crisis.

Escapism

The heroine's need to flee or escape from her home and seek refuge in the world beyond is a recurring theme in Dickens's fiction. It's one of the primary means through which he challenges his reader's faith in the doctrine of the separate spheres, even though he ultimately restores his heroines to the private sphere. In *Little Dorrit*, for example, Amy's home is imprisoning in a literal sense. She lives in the Marshalsea Prison with her father, whom she serves selflessly.

While Amy embraces the role of domestic angel, Dickens suggests her need to escape from its confines. Not only does she work outside her home, but she also takes refuge in the public world of London, enjoying the freedom and anonymity it grants her. Dickens acknowledges the dangers that Amy faces in the world outside the prison gates, however. He dramatizes a night during which she and her friend Maggy are locked out of the prison and forced to remain out on the streets until morning. Their frightening late-night encounter with a young prostitute, who describes herself as "a poor lost creature," conveys the threat posed to women who've lost the shelter of hearth and home.

Yet Dickens counters these dangers by describing the pleasure that Amy takes in walking back and forth on the bridges that cross the Thames. Like the young prostitute she and Maggy encounter, Amy walks the public thoroughfares of London. But unlike her, Amy retains her innocence throughout. Her ability to do so links private and public, much as the bridges span opposing banks of the Thames. This suggests that women and men alike need mobility and freedom and can inhabit both "shores."

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4

Growing Up like Nell and Oliver

The Old Curiosity Shop, in which the young heroine, Little Nell, dies, is a staple of Dickens studies. It captures a truth about Dickens and his child protagonists. As you will learn in this lecture, by centering his novels on vulnerable children and describing the world through their eyes, he engages his readers, sways their emotions, and adds force to his social critiques. He allows you to see London in a heightened way—through a lens of bewilderment and fear.

London's Street Children

In 19th-century England, the vast majority of English children were born to working-class families and expected to earn their keep from an early age. Throughout his writings, Dickens underscores the ignorance of London's street children, some of them abandoned. He represents them as homegrown savages in a country that claimed to be highly civilized. He heightens his social criticism by trying to imagine what London—the heart of the British Empire—looks like from their point of view.

"There he sits," the narrator of *Bleak House* says of homeless Jo, in a "stony corner" by Blackfriar's Bridge, "munching and gnawing" some food scraps he's been handed. Jo looks up "at the great Cross on the summit of St. Paul's Cathedral." Yet "from the boy's face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the great, confused city; so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach." As Dickens makes clear, Jo understands nothing of Christianity and its principles. Illiterate and unschooled in religion, he's "stone blind and dumb" to all written language. Dickens equates the boy's privations to physical disabilities that leave him in "utter darkness." Appearing "scarcely human," Jo's overlooked by nearly everyone.

Shortly before his father's imprisonment for debt in 1824, 12-year-old Dickens was put to work at Warren's Blacking Factory off the Strand in London, pasting labels on jars of shoe blacking. His sense of the degradation of that employment underlies his depictions of child protagonists forced to earn their keep or compelled to make profits for the adults who have charge of them. Many of those children perform labor under abusive conditions, including Oliver Twist. Before he's apprenticed to the local undertaker, the workhouse boy barely escapes being "sold" to Mr. Gamfield, the chimney sweep, whose trade put the lives of small boys at risk.

In Dickens's time, romantic conceptions of childhood often set the city and the country into opposition and tied innocence and virtue to rural life. Thus, life in London seemed inimical to childhood. Could boys and girls living among urban dangers and vices be protected from corruption? If so, how? Which children would escape exploitation, which would not, and why?

Child Exploitation

As Dickens and other Victorians knew, the exploitation of children in London included child prostitution. In fact, Dickens began writing *Oliver Twist* in 1837, 2 years after the London Society for the Protection of Young Females and Prevention of Juvenile Prostitution was established. Because of Victorian mores, Dickens couldn't represent or discuss sexual matters explicitly in his writings. However, it seems clear from the emotional pitch of *Oliver Twist*—and the discussions, among the characters, of the various threats posed to Oliver—that the author has child prostitution in mind when he portrays the young pickpockets in Fagin's den. According to this reading of *Oliver Twist*, Fagin is a pimp as well as a receiver of stolen goods.

Whether or not the threat is sexual in his depictions of London's children, Dickens foregrounds the dangers of their corruption. He dramatizes moments in which children who live in London get lost in the city or those from villages and towns find themselves there, at sites that disorient and threaten them. For example, when Oliver tries and fails to escape from Fagin and his fellow thieves, he's forced to accompany Sikes on a robbery and finds himself at Smithfield, London's cattle market. Dickens floods us with details, simulating Oliver's experience and overwhelming us, too. We hear

> the whistling of drovers, the barking of dogs, the bellowing and plunging of beasts, the bleating of sheep, and grunting and squeaking of pigs; the cries of hawkers, the shouts, oaths, and quarrelling on all sides, the ringing of bells and roar of voices … from every public-house; the crowding, pushing, driving, beating, whooping, and yelling.

To remind us of Oliver's innocence, Dickens contrasts the boy's distress at the scene with the callousness of Sikes. A hardened and brutal man, Sikes "elbow[s] his way through the thickest of the crowd," dragging Oliver behind him. He gives "little attention [to] the … sights and sounds which so astonished the boy." The implication is that Sikes is leading the innocent child to a figurative slaughter—to the spiritual death that Dickens associates with the Fall of humankind from an original state of grace. This threat has hovered over Oliver from the time he arrived in London's outskirts and was taken in hand by another boy "about his own age."

This boy, the Artful Dodger, has the "airs and manners" of a man and wears a coat that "reache[s] nearly to his heels," turning up the cuffs "to get his hands out of the sleeves." As his clothing suggests, the Dodger has an adult's knowledge of London and its fallen ways, and he speaks a language foreign to Oliver. The Dodger's slang disguises his criminal intentions, but it also reveals his playfulness, reminding us that he's only a child after all.

For Dickens, play was essential to childhood, and Victorians concerned with the well-being of children recognized its importance. Under the leadership of David Laing, an Anglican minister in London, a group responded to that need by establishing the Playground and General Recreation Society in the mid-1850s. Dickens supported their work.

Fagin's den

In *Oliver Twist*, Fagin exploits the boys' need to play when he trains them as pickpockets. Dressed in a suit covered with pockets, Fagin encourages the boys to surreptitiously take objects from them and parodies a wealthy gentleman on his guard against thieves. He entertains Oliver and praises his skill at the game, using his natural childhood "instinct" against him. However, the boy fails to understand the game's meaning and remains innocent. He's shocked when he finally realizes that the other boys are pickpockets. The truth's revealed to him once he sees them "go to work" at a London bookstall and steal a gentleman's handkerchief. When Sikes brings Oliver on the robbery expedition, the boy vows to die rather than commit a crime.

The explanation for Oliver's innocence against all odds lies in his lineage, which is revealed part way through the novel. Though illegitimate, he proves to be a child of the middle class. His "gentle" character and moral resilience are inborn. Dickens often uses his fiction to satirize those who equate good birth with virtue, but class identity functions as a moral shield in Oliver's case. Most frequently in his novels, Dickens suggests that London's poor and vulnerable children can only be saved from injury or corruption through interventions by charitable institutions or kind individuals. Even while Oliver stands his own moral ground in London's underworld, he's ultimately removed from it through the benevolence of Mr. Brownlow, with help from Rose Maylie and the prostitute Nancy.

Child Rescue

Dickens's tales of "innocence preserved" in London can strike readers as contrived and sentimental, and critics sometimes treat the pathos of his child heroes as comic. However, taking a closer look at Dickens's fiction, the benevolent saviors of poor and abandoned children come to faintly mirror the adults who exploit them. This pattern seems closer to the gothic than the sentimental, and it asks us to consider the possible ties between philanthropy and self-interest.

You see this pattern emerge in *Little Dorrit*, when Dickens depicts a visit to the Foundling Hospital, located on Guilford Street, near his home in the late 1830s. Established by Thomas Coram in 1739, the Foundling was a refuge

for abandoned children—specifically, for the first-born children of unmarried mothers. Once in their teens, the children were hired out as apprentices and domestic servants as they prepared to support themselves in life.

In *Little Dorrit*, Mr. and Mrs. Meagles take home a young girl from the Foundling, feeling for the parentless child. They "playfully" change the name given to her at the Foundling, Harriet Beadle, to Tattycoram. However, rather than treating her as one of their own children, they employ her as lady's maid to their daughter Pet, hoping to quell what they see as her passion and pride. For her part, Tattycoram comes to see her rescue as a source of inequity and shame. Emphasizing that she's "younger than her young mistress," she refuses to stay in the household and "see [Pet] always held up as the only creature who was … cherished and loved."

Instead of acknowledging these social inequities, Dickens treats the girl's allegations as a type of temporary "madness" and reconciles her with Mr. and Mrs. Meagles in the end. However, feelings of injury such as hers aren't always dismissed that easily in Dickens's fiction. When doubts arise about the motives or actions of those rescuing children from London, they sometimes ring true, with readers left to judge the rights and wrongs of the case.

Dickens provides what's likely his most troubling instance of child rescue in *Great Expectations* in telling the story of Estella's separation from her birth mother and subsequent adoption by Miss Havisham, all of which is orchestrated by Mr. Jaggers, the famous barrister. Determined to make a name for himself, Jaggers agrees to defend Estella's mother, Molly, against a murder charge, believing she's guilty. He accepts the case on one condition: Regardless of the trial's outcome, Molly must give up any claim to her 2-year-old daughter.

On a first reading, Jaggers seems benevolent enough: He sees a chance to save a child and seizes it. Yet he relishes his power over Molly. Under the guise of giving her shelter after her acquittal, he makes her his housekeeper and forces her to display, to his guests, her strong hands—the weapons she allegedly used to strangle her victim—thereby "taming" her. Moreover, when he agrees to defend Molly, he has a second client: Miss Havisham, "an eccentric rich lady" who's hired him to find a girl for her "to adopt and bring up." Given Estella's fate, Jaggers's "rescue" resonates with irony. Vengeful Miss Havisham raises

the girl to become a heartless beauty who'll break men's hearts, yet Estella is the one who's damaged, marrying a man as abusive as anyone in Molly's orbit could be.

Jaggers's tale leaves us wondering what it means to "save" a child from an impoverished London life, who has a right to do so, and whether self-interest can be distilled out of "the milk of human kindness," which too often is tainted or "pumped out dry," as Dickens notes in *Dombey and Son*. In suggesting that those trying to "save" poor children may unwittingly hurt them or knowingly use them for their own ends, Dickens seems to reflect on his own work as a novelist—on the way he employs vulnerable children in his fiction. He profits from the children whose sufferings he depicts in his novels, even as he identifies with them and bemoans their fate.

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5

London's Sublime Wilderness

Dickens is best known as a writer who focuses on "the built, human-made world"—most notably, the built world of London. Yet as Robert L. Patten observes, he also "pays tribute to … Nature" in his fiction—in part, to reveal what he and his contemporaries had lost and sought to regain. In Dickens's fiction, as this lecture will discuss, characters sometimes discover what seems to be an Edenic state of nature. They do so by leaving London for the English countryside, where the beauty and serenity of nature are defined against the dirt and tumult of the city.

Cultivating Nature in the City

The opposition of country and city—the virtues of the first and the vices of the second—is a familiar trope in 19th-century literature and in Victorian culture. In the countryside, a "wealth of scenic beauty" provides the antidote to the "dirty thoroughfare[s]" readers have left behind, as *Routledge's Guide to London and Its Suburbs* states in 1870.

Dickens proves most original in his depictions of nature when he questions this trope or turns it on its head, exploring the rural dimensions and possibilities of London life. By finding or cultivating nature within the metropolis, Dickens's characters give license to their imaginations. They build community with friends and strangers, and they sometimes gain access to a spiritual realm.

In the decade before Dickens's birth in 1812, the London Horticultural Society was established. It helped to popularize gardening among members of middle- and upper-classes. However, even city dwellers in "humble circumstances" could cultivate nature, Victorians noted, with "window-gardening ... within reach of all who have a roof to cover them." Indeed, Londoners with little means sometimes transform the urban into the rural in Dickens's novels, on roofs as well as beneath them, through their ingenuity and skill.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Mr. Riah, identified by Dickens as "an old Jewish man" living in poverty, builds "a little garden" retreat for himself and his friends in the midst of the city. The garden sits on the rooftop of a counting house in the parish of St. Mary Axe, east of St. Paul's Cathedral. This retreat is all the more valuable to the friends who gather there because of the trying circumstances in which each one of them is placed: Riah is subject to the anti-Semitism of his employer, Jenny Wren is physically disabled and often in pain, and Lizzie Hexam is persecuted by two men who claim to love her and from whom she seeks to escape.

For Dickens, the natural world and its cultivation could liberate Londoners, even within the city's most confined spaces. In his hands, we see London not only as a garden but also as a wilderness, in part through his metaphoric language. In an article entitled "Arcadian London," he plays with the idea of London's wildness by depicting the city during what Victorians called "the

long vacation"—the period from August through October, when fashionable Londoners left town. Wandering "extensive tracts of the Great Desert," as he terms the fashionable West End, he feels "reviving within [him] that latent wildness of the original savage" and attributes similar "instincts" to other Londoners who've been left behind.

The "wilderness" of London was not simply a metaphor. Dickens and his contemporaries could find vestiges of natural wilds near their homes—in what remained of London's primeval state, such as in Epping Forest. At times, Dickens wandered Hampstead Heath alone "to think over" his works in progress. He claimed to need London's streets to write, but those streets sometimes led him to fields and woods, where he also found inspiration.

London's "Breathing Places"

At a time of deadly cholera outbreaks and fears of miasma—the air thought to be a source of dangerous contagion—Victorians often compared the metropolis to a human body. Its green and public spaces functioned as the "lungs of London," as popular guidebooks put it. In a place largely congested with "dirt and filth," the parks were "breathing places" for "metropolitan millions, in the heart of the city." They had what Victorians considered "the utmost [sanitary] value." These areas were necessary to the health and well-being of Londoners. They also provided a source of entertainment and pleasure to its inhabitants.

In *Great Expectations*, John Wemmick, law clerk to Mr. Jaggers, uses his private garden to play at being lord of the manor. By cultivating the natural world, he fuels his playful fantasy that his small cottage in Walworth is a grand castle. Although its grounds are negligible, they include a bower, raised on the margin of "an ornamental lake," which is "approached by such ingenious twists of path that it took quite a long time to get [there]." The top of the cottage is "cut out and painted like a battery mounted with guns." The home itself is surrounded by a moat "four feet wide and two deep," crossed by means of "a plank" that serves as a bridge and that Wemmick "hoist[s] … up" to "cut off … communication" with the outside world. The clerk "carr[ies] out" his "idea of fortifications" by keeping "a pig … fowls and rabbits" at the back and growing salad greens and cucumbers.

Like Wemmick's private grounds in *Great Expectations*, London's public parks were green works of art, "laid out with trees, shrubs, [and] flower-plots." They combined nature with culture. "Large sums are ungrudgingly laid out upon them," one writer explained in 1862, and "they are jealously guarded from encroachment." Dickens himself worked to save London's natural world from encroachment. When Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest were threatened with enclosure, he published articles defending the claims of the general public to the "beautiful wilderness" as "common land" and argued against its appropriation as private property.

The "free open space" was especially valuable to working-class people who lived and worked in unhealthy sites, without the luxury of their own lawns and gardens. Servants employed in London sometimes paid a penny a week

to working-class associations to explore Epping Forest on their one day off, while the very poor did their best to get there at least once a year, when the blackberries were ripe.

The benefits rendered by public forests and parks were political as well as physical, Dickens suggested, since they helped to defuse class resentment among the poor. This view may well have been shared by Parliament, since the government spent 130,000 pounds to create Victoria Park in East London in the 1850s "for the resort of the swarming population" of slum dwellers from "Whitechapel, Spitalfields, and Bethnal Green." Regardless of how much money was spent on such transformations—on putting the natural world to the best use of Londoners, however that might be understood—Dickens reminded his readers of nature's own power.

Dickens and Nature

Dickens set the action of his novels on or by the Thames River. Following the Thames inland from its estuary in Kent, he creates scenes of drownings and near-drownings on stretches of the tidal river in London, such as by a wharf "on the Surrey [or south] side" of the shoreline, opposite the Tower. Here, Daniel Quilp meets his end in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. A villainous dwarf, Quilp falls into the river by his "little wooden counting-house," and "the strong tide filled his throat, and bore him on, upon its rapid current." Nature's animosity toward Quilp seems clear. He comes upon "the hull of a ship" and tries to reach up to it, but "the resistless water bore him down … and driving him under it, carried away a corpse." The irony of Dickens's metaphor—the drowning of the "amphibious" Quilp—underscores the limitations of human beings as well as their ties to the creatures around them.

Dickens's writings often focus on the animals living in London, including wild creatures, pets, and exotic species displayed at the Zoological Gardens. In a place that testified to Victorian ingenuity and greatness, the novelist acknowledged the ties between humans and beasts, as did his contemporary Charles Darwin. Darwin's groundbreaking work, *The Origin of Species*, was first published in 1859, the same year in which *A Tale of Two Cities* appeared. Dickens responded by publishing three articles on Darwin's theory of evolution in his journal *All the Year Round* from 1860 to 1861. These works point to Darwin's understanding of natural variation and natural selection

and the idea of "coadaptation," with different species flourishing by means of their interdependence and mutual, if unwitting, support for one another. For Dickens, London's natural world was characterized by just such an interdependence among living things and between these organisms and the geological or inorganic.

Those critics who focus on Dickens and the environment, often termed "eco-critics," sometimes complain that the novelist fails "to appreciate … the non-human world on its own terms and for its own sake." Nonetheless, Dickens proves keenly sensitive to the creatures living with and around human Londoners, from Bull's-eye, the dog cruelly abused by thief Bill Sikes in *Oliver Twist*, to the talking raven Grip in *Barnaby Rudge*. Whatever the real capacities of all such creatures, Dickens tends to anthropomorphize them in his fiction. He does so not only for his own comic ends but also to lend force to the claims of the natural world—claims for our admiration, protection, and respect.

What Dickens perceives as the connections among Londoners—humans and nonhumans alike—helps him to foreground the problem of cruelty to animals. This was an issue that he publicized in his depictions of the city's abused workhorses and, in particular, the horrible treatment of the livestock brought to the city and herded through the streets on their way to Smithfield Market. "I came into Smithfield," Pip tells us, recounting his first day in London, "and the shameful place, being all asmear with filth and fat and blood and foam, seemed to stick to me."

Pip tries to "rub … off" the filth "by turning into a street where [he] saw the great black dome of Saint Paul's bulging at [him] from behind a grim stone building," only to learn from a bystander that the grim building is Newgate Prison. Juxtaposing what was then a site of executions with the slaughterhouse nearby, Dickens again connects the human and nonhuman. As he and his contemporaries perceived it, animal cruelty was only one example of the degradation humans imposed on nature in London, a site of filth and contamination.

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6

London Fog

In the eyes of the Victorians, London was “the greatest city in the world”—a place of “colossal proportions.” Two and a half million people lived there in 1851. However, the city’s population generated more than 9.5 million cubic feet of refuse per day. The smoke of the city’s coal fires, burning millions of tons every year, could be seen “as far as Reading,” more than 30 miles distant. When the weather was calm and windless, the fires cast “London in darkness even at midday,” guides warned would-be visitors. As this lecture discusses, it’s no surprise that Dickens frequently refers to the smoke, filth, and mud of London in his novels, as well as the city’s “uproar.”

Primordial London

In *Bleak House*, "tens of thousands of … foot passengers" slip and slide about London's streets every day. Trying to make headway, they "add … new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud," the dirt "accumulating at compound interest." This ever-growing "wealth" of dirt and mire characterized London as a modern, industrial city. However, it also seemed primordial in Dickens's eyes. He conveys this point in the opening scene of *Bleak House*. In the first paragraph, the modern calendar gives way to the Jurassic age:

> London. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, 40 feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. … Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city.

Here, winter's onset is signaled by falling flakes of soot rather than snow. By means of such images, Dickens conveys the reality of life as he experienced it in the badly polluted London of his time. Its streets were "the dirtiest and darkest … that ever were seen in the world."

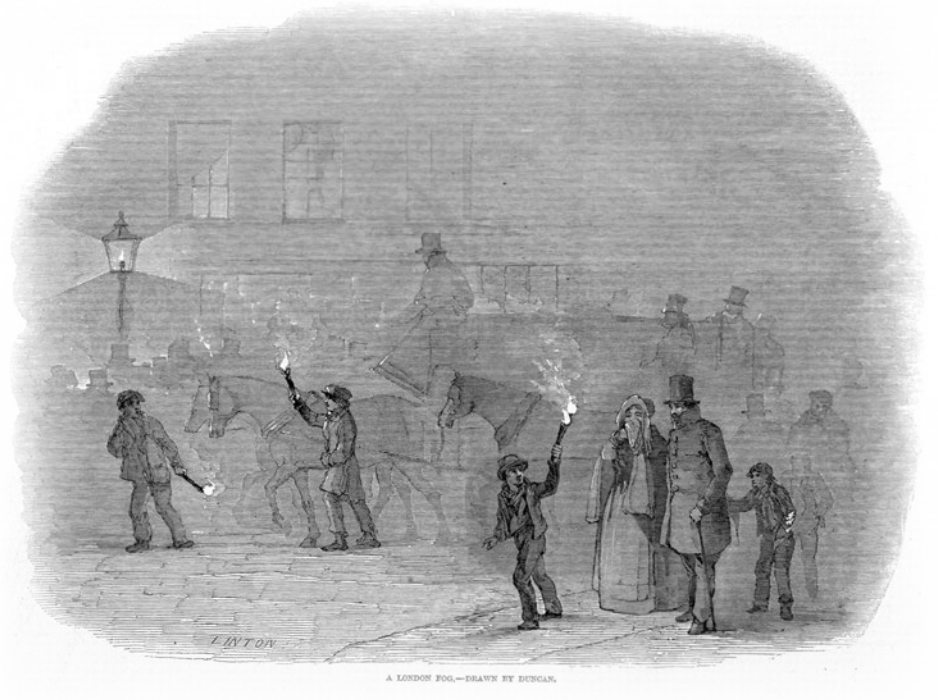
London's Urban Pollution

Dickens often ties urban pollution to England's uncivilized and fallen state. For example, he depicts the industrial north in his 1854 novel *Hard Times*. He draws on a disparaging stereotype of the Native American to characterize the defilement of the place he calls Coketown. Built out of brick, covered in toxic soot, and named for the refined coal used to produce steam power, Coketown

is "unnatural[ly] red and black," Dickens writes, "like the painted face of a savage." In London itself, the fog was tainted with industrial pollution and the smoke of residential coal fires, heavy with particulate matter and toxins in a mix unique to the city.

In the third chapter of *Bleak House*, Esther Summerson arrives in London from Reading, where she has been attending school. She finds that "the streets [are] so full of dense brown smoke that scarcely anything [is] to be seen." She asks Mr. Guppy, a law clerk, if there's a "great fire" nearby. "Oh dear no, miss," he tells her, "This is a London particular"—that is, a fog particular to London.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens describes the corporeal effects of "a foggy day" in the city. What he identifies as "animate London" is "blinking, wheezing, and choking," going about their business "with smarting eyes and irritated lungs." These effects aren't surprising when you consider that the



A LONDON FOG.—DRAWN BY DUNCAN.

fog carried with it the smoke from London's chemical industries. Factories that produced or processed lead, gas, lime, and an array of toxic chemicals operated close to people's homes, as did varnish and dye makers. The "acid gas" released by London's chemical works, with other "noxious fumes," discolored all of the metal objects in the vicinity, including kitchen utensils in lodgings nearby. These industrial toxins led to high rates of illness and death, as did the chronic contamination of water supplies with sewage.

While London's fog obscured visibility, the polluted city assaulted all of the senses, particularly the sense of smell. In the summer of 1858, Londoners were plagued by what came to be known as the Great Stink—a terrible stench emanating from the river. Victorians were alarmed by the smell because of their fears of miasma. In their view, the Thames had become "absolutely pestilential." A major source of drinking water was now also a primary source of disease.

In the mid-1850s, visual images of a mythic Father Thames had appeared in popular magazines such as *Punch*. They depict him with his scepter in hand but crowned with filth and debris. Bloated animal carcasses float nearby. Dickens lent verbal support to such visual images. An article that his periodical published in 1850 on Thames drinking water called attention to the river's contamination by what it termed "the black contents of common sewers, and the refuse of gut, glue, soap, and other nauseous manufactures, to say nothing of animal and vegetable offal, of which the river is the sole receptacle."

Defilement of the Thames

Two decades before the Great Stink made the issue of Thames pollution inescapable for Londoners, Dickens had already called attention to the ways in which the river was defiled at human hands. In *Oliver Twist*, he describes the neighborhood surrounding Jacob's Island, on the south bank of the Thames, across the river from the docks at Wapping. A damp slum, it had open sewers that emptied into the river. Its tanneries used dung to process leather. To Dickens in the 1830s, the neighborhood of Jacob's Island, with its slimy inlet called Folly Ditch, stood apart in its defilement. Its condition was all the more striking because it was "wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass" of Londoners, he explained.

Home to the poorest of the poor and occupied by "unemployed labourers of the lowest class," Jacob's Island linked poverty to environmental degradation. As Dickens saw it in the 1830s, the most "offensive sights and smells" were the lot of the disenfranchised, who lived "in rooms so small, so filthy, so confined, that the air would seem too tainted even for the dirt and squalor which they shelter." With his sense of environmental injustice—his grasp of the ties between poverty and the worst forms of pollution—Dickens may have felt that the Great Stink of 1858 had one advantage: It made Londoners of all social classes aware that Thames pollution was everyone's problem. In articles published in Dickens's weekly journals, writers compared the Thames to the Styx, the river separating the living from the dead in ancient mythology.

Victorians often spoke of London's "waterside pollutions." In so doing, they referred to the state of the people as well as the river. Those living in London could become as tainted as their surroundings. Prostitution and opium dens corrupted those living and working by the Thames shoreline, just as the "dirty industries" contaminated the river. Dickens conveys this point in his portrait of Martha Endell, a prostitute whom he pictures standing by the river in *David Copperfield*. David and his friend Mr. Peggoty follow Martha

through Westminster, down to the banks of the Thames, between the iron bridge and Millbank Penitentiary. They hope she will lead them to Emily, Mr. Peggoty's niece. However, they soon realize that Martha intends to drown herself, as prostitutes in Victorian London were thought to do in substantial numbers, driven by shame and despair.

As David describes the scene, the degraded river seems a fitting place for a suicide. Martha stands on the shoreline near a burial site from the time of the Great Plague. The place has become an industrial graveyard, scattered with "carcases" of man-made waste. David observes that "the whole place … looked as if it had gradually decomposed into that nightmare condition, out of the overflowings of the polluted stream." The prostitute, in her "ruin," becomes a human correlate of London's degraded natural world. As Martha puts it, she is "fit" for the tainted river. She compares her own sexual fall to the degradation of the Thames. Like the figure of the prostitute, Dickens suggests, London's natural world has been corrupted and betrayed by those who use it for their own selfish pleasure.

In his public speeches, Dickens made explicit what his portrait of Martha suggests: London's tainted environment posed a spiritual as well as a physical threat to its residents. Not only did it endanger them with disease and contagion, it also threatened to strip them of their religious beliefs. People surrounded by "material filth" couldn't grasp the "immaterial existence" of the soul.

London's Social and Moral Pollution

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens draws on the motif of the Stygian Thames and develops its complex meanings. The work opens as Gaffer Hexam and his daughter, Lizzie, navigate their skiff on the polluted river, "fishing" for human corpses that are afloat. "In luck again?" Gaffer is asked by Rogue Riderhood, a rival boatman who sees him with a body in tow. In a polluted city peopled by scavengers and opportunists, one person's "luck" is another's death or calamity. Salvation is nowhere in sight.

Dickens uses irony to brilliant effect as he sets out to convey to his readers London's environmental and moral decline. He identifies, as a source of great financial value, the dust heaps that make up the Harmon family

fortune. Inherited by the Boffins, an elderly couple who worked for old John Harmon, the heaps are man-made mountains of trash and excrement. Various characters sift through them in their search for money and other treasure.

You can identify two "obsessions" in *Our Mutual Friend*: the dirty Thames, with nearly a third of the novel set on the river, and the Harmon dust heaps. Both river and mounds are emblems of "modern industrial London"—its waste and debris—and they help to reveal the moral taint and "social corruption" of the city and those living there. In large part, Dickens attributes the taint of his characters and their environment to self-interest and the unbridled quest for wealth. An illustration of the principle of accumulation, upon which capitalism depends, the Harmon dust heaps grow and grow. By associating waste and excrement with money or treasure, Dickens "highlight[s] the moral bankruptcy of … [his] society." Its members "devote" themselves to making money and to pursuing their own self-interest, and in the process, as Michelle Allen writes, they "immerse" themselves "in filth."

Dickens captures the social and moral pollution of his Londoners in various ways, such as when the Thames boatmen empty the pockets of corpses they fish from the river—their concern for the dead solely material. In *Bleak House*, the fog suggests the opacity and confusion of the legal system; its courts are ineffective and unjust. In Dickens's lifetime, the Court of Chancery heard cases involving wills and trusts. In *Bleak House*, these often prove interminable, particularly the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which involves several of the novel's main characters. The case goes on for decades, and in the end, legal costs swallow whatever remains of the original estate. It's no surprise that the parties to Chancery lawsuits feel as if they're lost in a tainted fog, with the court a polluting force that "blight[s] lands in every shire." A metaphoric fog veils truth, justice, and compassion, obscuring the vision of Dickens's characters, who follow their "dark benighted way" as best they can.

In short, the opacity of the London fog helps Dickens address legal and social as well as environmental abuses. It foregrounds the hampered vision of those he depicts. In his writings, he suggests that we need to emerge from our fog. That means broadening our perspectives, rethinking our values, and reconsidering how we perceive and treat one another as well as the natural world.

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7

Engineering London

To Victorians, engineers were heroic figures—at times, nearly godlike. Charles Dickens includes engineers in his novels: Daniel Doyce of *Little Dorrit* is one example. Creative, pragmatic, and determined, they seemed able to achieve any goal. Celebrated engineers were transforming London into the modern city we know today, including Isambard Brunel, who built the first tunnel under the Thames, and Robert Stephenson, who brought the railway to London. By means of such feats, they not only modernized the capital city and showcased English innovation but also remedied problems that threatened the metropolis and its expansion. Some of these problems were part of the natural environment, such as the periodic flooding of the Thames. However, as you will see in this lecture, most were those that Londoners themselves had created and that worsened over time—problems of sewage and pollution, crowds and congestion, infectious disease, and the growth of slums.

Bazalgette's Sewers

Between 1830 and 1870, London was transformed at the hands of engineers. Rail lines were built both above and below ground, encircling and cutting through the city. Bridges were added across the Thames, and older ones replaced. Slums were cleared to make room for broad avenues and viaducts. The river itself was embanked, while an extensive sewer system replaced the cesspools long used to collect human waste. To the Victorians, these monumental projects testified to the ingenuity and might of the British. Their engineering gave material form to what Dickens termed the "law of human progression," with Britons at the forefront of progress.

You can see how engineers sought to tackle the problems created by London's human congestion by turning to the government inspector Alfred Dickens, a younger brother of Charles, and what he found in West Ham: He discovered that poor tenants were crowded into "wretched" houses let out in separate rooms and "obliged" to draw their water from ditches that doubled as cesspools. Open sewers, "horribly filthy and offensive," ran through the place. These were "stagnant, and filled with refuse of the foulest description." They formed what he deemed a "large and filthy evaporating surface" for producing "miasma" and spreading disease.

The problem was made worse by West Ham's location. It lay just beyond the bounds of the area of London protected under the Metropolitan Buildings Act, which prohibited construction of structures for what Victorians termed the "offensive trades." Exempt from a range of regulations that applied to areas closer to the heart of London, the parish was home to "naptha making, oil boiling, varnish making, [and] printers' ink making." The miasma thought to rise from open sewers and ditches combined with industrial "fumes of … noxious gases" to create an especially toxic mix.

Alfred proposed several "remedial works": "a proper system of … drainage" for the district, "an improved water supply," and "a system of sewers." Trained as a civil engineer but schooled in the sanitary movement, Alfred approached the problems facing those living in squalid conditions in ways that were typical of the time—shaped by the miasma theory of disease. What Londoners most badly needed, it seemed, were fresh air and clean water.

As the journalist Henry Morley wrote in 1854, "what London wants" and "must, sooner or later, come to have … may be [easily] told": "good drains." These would let sewage escape from homes quickly and, by containing and minimizing miasma in enclosed pipes, prevent "another plague of London." To this end, the Metropolitan Board of Works—London's new drainage authority—was established in 1855. Its chief engineer, Joseph Bazalgette, designed a network of main sewers and pumping stations, more than 80 miles in all, that ran parallel to the Thames on both sides and eventually dumped the city's sewage downriver, to be carried out by the tide.

For human waste, Londoners had long relied on cesspools or cesspits, with the refuse carried off by workers called "night-soil men." Faced with cholera outbreaks in the 1840s, which were wrongly blamed on "foul air," a Commission on Sewers abolished London's cesspools, some 30,000 in all, flushing their contents into the Thames. Making one giant cesspool of the river, they triggered yet another cholera outbreak in 1848 and 1849, which killed nearly 15,000 Londoners. It was left to Bazalgette to systematically channel sewage underground, through the new system, discharging it downstream, east of Central London. The outgoing tide then flushed the city's sewage into the ocean. Without understanding the cause of infectious disease—a discovery made by John Snow in the mid-1850s—Bazalgette nonetheless helped to eradicate it.

The Triumph—and Issues—of the Railway

Engineering projects weren't solely a cause for celebration among Victorians. At times, they suggested the danger of hubris or mismanagement, especially when they failed in some notable way. They also underscored all that was sacrificed in the name of progress. In London, much was lost in the quest for the modern. Whole neighborhoods were razed to construct the railways, and the natural contours of the Thames disappeared as the river was artificially embanked. Londoners of various callings had no choice but to give up their homes and their ways of life because of these transformations.

In his novels *Dombey and Son* and *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens dramatizes these losses. His fiction reveals his ambivalence about the engineering triumphs that characterized his time and place and shows his willingness to satirize ideas of progress in general. His response to the transformation of London is complex. At times, he combines his characteristic exuberance of description with a sense of irrevocable loss. His portrait of the neighborhood known as Staggs's Gardens in *Dombey and Son* provides a telling case in point.

The railway was among the most celebrated achievements of Victorian engineering. It enabled the swift transport of coal and other goods as well as passenger service. More profoundly, it altered the landscape and changed the way people lived their lives, transforming how they thought about time and space. By the 1840s, the train had supplanted the long-distance stagecoach, which remained the primary means of travel for characters in Dickens's novels.

The arrival of railways in London in 1836 fueled Dickens's imagination. It made him feel that time could be suspended and distances collapsed—"that queer sensation born of quick traveling." In his 1851 *Household Words* piece entitled "A Flight," he suggests that the railway has worked a type of magic, simulating winged flight and "realizing the Arabian Nights in these prose days." Yet in *Dombey and Son*, the coming of the railway to London is more menacing than magical. "The first shock of a great earthquake had, just at that period, rent the whole neighbourhood to its centre," Dickens tells us of Staggs's Gardens, a working-class area in Camden Town.

> In short, the yet unfinished and unopened Railroad was in progress, and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilization and improvement.

Dickens's reference to "civilization and improvement" is clearly ironic here. Rather than advancing civilization, the railway "earthquake" reduces Staggs's Gardens to a chaotic and primeval scene—a landscape that seems volcanic and brings us back to Earth's earliest days. Yet this place of hot springs and fiery eruptions is wholly artificial. It's an unsettling version of the engineered. Its steep hills are "unnatural," its chaos and disorder manmade. Rather than enabling a "mighty course of civilization and improvement," the coming of the railroad reenacts our Fall.

"Staggs's Gardens was regarded by its population as a sacred grove," the narrator tells us. However, the railway has a "withering" effect, and "the Staggs's Gardeners" lose their Eden, albeit one that's scrappy and working class. When characters try to return there later in the novel, they learn that "there was no such place. It had vanished from the earth," replaced by "tiers of warehouses," "railway hotels," and "railway streets and buildings." All of these operate on "railway time." It was "as if," Dickens writes, "the sun itself had given in."

Social Engineering

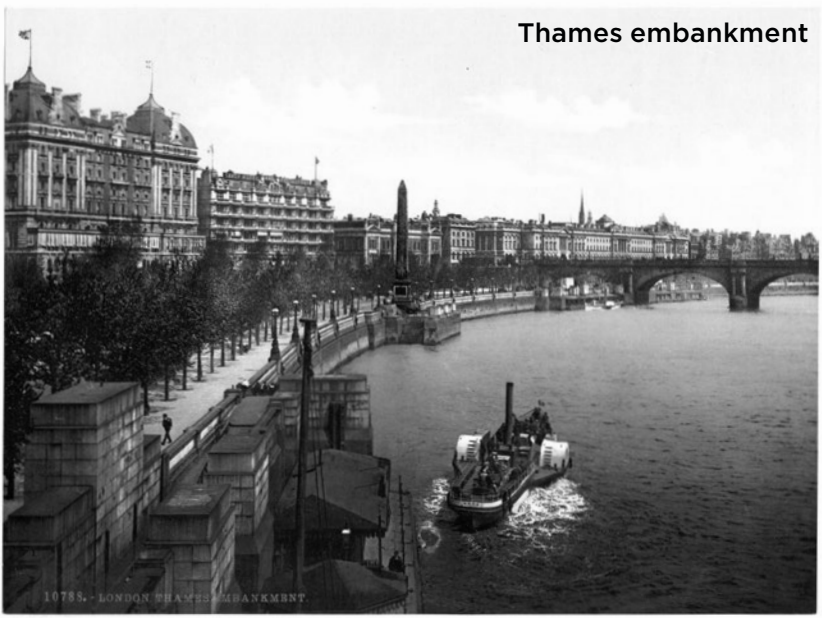
The engineering of London's infrastructure served as a form of social engineering. Improvements were purposefully designed to clear poor areas perceived by officials as threatening or criminal in nature. Dickens advocated for London's clearances, at least to some extent. He saw them as necessary evils that would safeguard public health and promote social change.

In effect, slum clearances brought Dickens's advocacy for the poor into conflict with his embrace of progress as he sought to justify "the social costs of modernization." So, too, did the embankment of the Thames. In 1865, construction began on the Victoria Embankment—the section of the project on the left (or north) bank of the Thames. Completed in 1870, the Victoria Embankment ran from Westminster Bridge to Blackfriars Bridge—a solid river wall of granite 8 feet thick, 40 feet high, and more than a mile in length. Beneath its broad roadway, it housed a main sewer line in one tunnel and water lines, gas pipes, and telegraph wires in another. Beneath these, the new Metropolitan District Railway ran parallel to the river. In the end, what had been the muddy tidal shoreline of the Thames became "nearly 1 billion tons of sculpted concrete, brickwork, and granite" at a cost well over 1 million pounds, according to writer and critic Jules Law.

Planned from the late 1850s by Bazalgette, the Thames embankment was meant to achieve several ends. In combination with London's new sewer system, it would help to purify the river as it flowed through the city, housing one of the main sewage lines. It would control the Thames and its tidal swings, preventing erosion, and it would enhance the capital by streamlining traffic and creating dozens of acres of new public land. The engineering of the embankment symbolized a new regulation of nature.

The embankment also promised to counter the unruly character of urban life, which had long been associated with the shoreline and its disreputable "floating population." Access to the river would now be restricted and controlled. The members of London's working class were encouraged to imitate their social betters by spending their Sundays strolling on the new promenade.

Dickens praised the embankment of the Thames. In an 1865 letter to a Swiss friend, the novelist described it as "a really fine work, and really getting on," as was the "great system of drainage"—Bazalgette's sewer project. What Dickens doesn't mention in his letter but dramatizes in *Our Mutual Friend*, his work in progress at the time, was that the Thames embankment also "displaced an entire riverside economy," as Jules Law puts it. For thousands of people, the transformation of the riverbanks put an end to their livelihood and way of life. By making the riverbanks inaccessible, the public works project appeared to violate the long-held belief that the Thames and its flowing water "naturally" belonged to everyone, even as it promoted the public good.



Thames embankment

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens identifies the Thames as the means of sustenance for those in the waterside community, existing on the fringes of society. It's the source of their "meat and drink," he notes. He dramatizes a way of life that, like many others along the shore, would become a "dead business" once the embankment was underway. As Law argues, Dickens "chronicles the fate—death or migration—of those who have traditionally made their livelihood on or by the river, while hinting at whole new kinds of investment … for those who know how to capitalize on the river's transformation." The latter include bankers, insurers, contractors, and engineers.

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8

London Past, Present, and Future

Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* was first serialized weekly from April 1840 to February 1841, and it reflects the near obsession with history among Victorians, along with an expanding market for very old things. That obsession included an interest in "deep history" as it was told through geology, paleontology, and archeology. These were developing fields of inquiry in the 19th century. As discussed in this lecture, as more of the city was engineered by Victorians, more evidence of the distant past was unearthed and exposed to public view.

THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP.

Old and New London

For Dickens, history was written, first and foremost, in the streets of London. A walk through any of London's districts was bound to take you backward and forward in time—often within a single block. Dickens exploited this fact as a journalist and fiction writer. He cast himself as a time traveler in London's streets, using his real and imagined experience as a pedestrian to describe the city and to offer his political points. In his journalistic piece "Night Walks," for example, he travels from the present day at Waterloo Bridge to an earlier period of time at Newgate, the medieval prison rebuilt after the Great Fire and the Gordon Riots of 1780. "Touching [the] rough stone[s]" of its walls, he remembers those unjustly hanged there before England's "bloody [penal] code" was reformed.

In passages such this, Dickens represents London as a city haunted by its past. London's history was evoked in sites such as Newgate, and it "smelt of blood," as one Victorian barrister put it. By walking back through history, Dickens could highlight his own, more equitable present and call attention to the advances achieved through legal reform. So, Dickens often contrasted old and new London in his novels, a theme that helped him dramatize what had been gained and lost by modern Londoners. This is central to *Barnaby Rudge*. Dickens sets that historical novel during the Gordon Riots, a time of anti-Catholic violence and the lawlessness of the mob.

In 1775, when the novel's action begins, the contrast between city and country was much less pronounced than "modern Londoners would … believe," Dickens tells us. "Though only six-and sixty years ago," he writes in 1841, "a very large part of what is London now had no existence. … There had sprung up no long rows of streets connecting Highgate [in London's north] with Whitechapel [in its east], no … palaces in the swampy levels, nor little cities in the open fields." "Then, as now," he continues, neighborhoods were "parceled out in streets." But "there were gardens to many of the houses, and trees by the pavement." Fields and farmhouses "were nigh at hand" and "nature was not so far removed or hard to get at, as in these days."

In Dickens's view, this older, more "natural" London had an originality since lost in the modern city. Critics use the phrase "urban picturesque" to describe the aesthetic, which valued unexpected "juxtapositions" in architecture, and "diverse forms." Dickens provides an example when he describes the house of his hero, Gabriel Varden, in a passage that ties the uniqueness of that building to his own artistic constructions in prose.

Varden's home was "not … very straight, not large, not tall; not bold-faced, with great staring windows," Dickens writes. "A shy, blinking house," it had

> a conical roof going up into a peak over its garret window … like a cocked hat on the head of an elderly gentleman with one eye. It was not built of brick or lofty stone, but of wood and plaster; it was not planned with a dull and wearisome regard to regularity, for no one window matched the other, or seemed to have the slightest reference to anything besides itself.

Identifying this building as a symbol of London's old style, Dickens personifies the structure. He uses its unique "personality" to criticize modern conformity and to flaunt his own "inimitable" style.

Dickens idealizes certain features of an older London in *Barnaby Rudge*, but he also criticizes its rougher ways. Less developed than the modern city, it was much more dangerous as well. London was "infested" by footpads, highwaymen, and thieves. The very fields and green lanes that "belted" the city, and that Dickens values for the health and well-being of Londoners, made it easy for criminals to escape pursuit.

For Dickens, 18th-century London seemed lawless, though its violence was double-edged. On the one hand, law-abiding citizens were terrorized because of a lack of effective policing and little concern for public safety. On the other hand, criminals guilty of minor, nonviolent crimes were subject to the brutal violence of unjust penal laws. Dickens provides a powerful example in *Barnaby Rudge*. He foregrounds the fate of the mother of Hugh, the illiterate hostler at the Maypole Inn. She is convicted "for passing bad Notes" and hanged with half a dozen others in front of a pitiless crowd when her son is 6 years old. Though the parent and child are arrested on different grounds, years apart from each other, they share the same fate in a system of unequal justice.

London Snuff

Dickens wrote *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, his two historical novels, at a time when archeologists and antiquarians were up in arms. In the face of rapid changes made to London and its infrastructure, they protested that the material record of the city's history was being destroyed. Charles Roach Smith protested that "city improvements" were obliterating the relics and structures of the distant past.

At times, Dickens echoes these concerns, blaming the disappearance of London's old landmarks on what he satirically calls "the advance of civilization" and the "march" of improvement. For example, in *The Pickwick Papers*, he takes a nostalgic view of the coaching inns of old England, which were rapidly disappearing with the development of railways. However, for Dickens, London's past was ineradicable, whatever changes might be made to the city.

The past was present in the very air that Londoners breathed—if only in the form of ancient dust. Carried in the breeze, it penetrated the pores of the skin just as it was inhaled in the air and swallowed in the water, as Dickens claims in *The Uncommercial Traveller*. In a chapter called "City of London Churches," Dickens recalls a year in which he spent every Sunday visiting the old churches of the district known as "the City"—the site of what was once medieval London. Entering a church with "a mouldy tower" and dusty font, and settling into a pew, he realizes that he is "taking a strong kind of invisible snuff." It is composed of "the decay of … wood, cloth, stone, iron, earth" and "dead citizens in the vaults below." "Half choked" by the dust at first, he "soon accustom[s] [him]self" to it, discovering that he "[can]not possibly get on without [the dead]."

Dickens often conjures up the ghosts of London, where "vast armies of [the dead] would overflow" the city's boundaries if only we could see them. In "Night Walks," he invites us to consider "what enormous hosts of dead belong to [the] old great city." Given the disappearance of these "vast armies" of the dead, London appears to be a "City of the Absent" to Dickens—so he titles another chapter from *The Uncommercial Traveller*.

Yet Dickens has the power to make the absent seem present. In his view, ancient ruins seemed to demand his creative intervention. In *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, his last, unfinished novel, Dickens refers to Giovanni Belzoni, an early archeologist who explored the pyramids of Egypt in the 1810s. With Belzoni as his model, Dickens "excavates" the past, metaphorically digging among London's ruins in his writings and puzzling out their meanings for himself.

Dickens's Literary Excavations

In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens treats Bleeding Heart Yard, a poor neighborhood in Holburn, as if it were a site overdue for excavation. Home to the Plornishes and other working-class families, the Yard dates from "the days of William Shakespeare." Dickens compares the decaying yard, with its "faded glories" and "relish of ancient greatness," to the pyramids of Egypt and its residents to the "Arabs of the desert" who "pitch their tents among the fallen stones." Over the centuries, modern London has risen all around it. Thus, to access the Yard, visitors descend one story "into a maze of shabby streets." The Yard seems almost subterranean, as Roman London is.

In Bleeding Heart Yard, Dickens gives us "a geological image … of the urban landscape," as critic Virginia Zimmerman notes—a "stratified … space" in which each layer represents "a distinct epoch" in London's history. Dickens unearths that history, charting the Yard's decline from what was once a wealthy estate with a "Bleeding Heart" on the owner's coat of arms. It's become a cluster of tenements, subdivided and sublet to house as many people as possible. Despite their struggles, Dickens ennobles the residents. He emphasizes their creativity and community and their kind treatment of one another. For example, Mrs. Plornish takes in the Italian immigrant John Baptist Cavalletto after he's run down and injured by a mail coach in a London street.

For these characters, London's ruins are the grounds for a more promising future. In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens "excavates" the submerged histories of his characters as well as London's buried history. He connects seemingly unrelated figures and discovers true identities by uncovering suspect financial schemes, long-lost genealogies, and suppressed birth records. While such revelations are common to Dickens's novels, they're linked to specific, antiquated sites in *Little Dorrit*, such as to the Clennams' decaying house on Upper Thames Street in "the City," the oldest portion of London.

Family heirlooms—in some instances, family members—seem like ancient relics that require the scrutiny of archeologists to be properly understood. Mrs. Clennam herself is one example. Stone-like in her lack of feeling, she has "the impenetrability of an old Egyptian sculpture," the narrator claims. Throughout the novel, Arthur struggles—and fails—to discover her ancient meaning. It's left to the titular Little Dorrit, among others, to assume the role of archaeologist and crack Mrs. Clennam's hieroglyphic code.

Unearthing History

Like so many of his characters, Dickens "unearthed" his own personal history in walking London's streets and revisiting the sites of his childhood, such as the area near the river where Warren's Blacking had stood. For Dickens, London was a text in which he could read his life story—and, much more broadly, the history of England. When he considered the city, its promise and pitfalls, he could imagine alternative chapters yet to be written.

In *A Christmas Carol*, the "Ghost of Christmas Future" envisions the years yet to come for Ebenezer Scrooge after two other ghosts have reviewed the man's present and past behavior. In a similar way, Dickens envisions possible futures for his fellow citizens. He helps them picture London's potential glory as well as its possible collapse. London's fate could mirror that of ancient Rome if the English failed to remedy a range of social wrongs and abandon their self-interested ways.

Dickens's views were shaped, in part, by Thomas Macaulay, a historian and Whig politician whose ideas resonated with his own. In his writings, Dickens quoted from an essay in which Macaulay provides an apocalyptic vision of London. The historian pictures a future "traveler from New Zealand … in the midst of a vast solitude, tak[ing] his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's." This passage turns the tables on the British. Their capital city lies in ruins, like ancient Rome. The scene is observed by a figure whom Victorians considered savage, yet who (in Macaulay's vision) proves cultured and ascendant in the centuries to come—so history repeats itself, Dickens warns.

For Dickens, such visions served as moral parables for the British. His essay "On an Amateur Beat" suggests as much. Here, he watches poor children fighting over a coin in the mud and imagines their traces discovered by the members of a future race:

> If this mud could petrify at this moment, and could lie concealed here for ten thousand years, I wonder whether the race of men then to be our successors on the earth could, from these or any marks…infer…the existence of a polished state of society that bore with the public savagery of neglected children in the streets of its capital city, and was proud of its power by sea and land, and never used its power to seize and save them!

It's crucial that the fossils Dickens describes in this passage, and that mark the extinction of the English people, are formed by homeless children who reveal all that is "savage" and inequitable about Victorian London and the "polished" nation it represents. Critical of the gap between rich and poor—the failure to relieve want and to enlighten ignorance—Dickens suggests that London's magnificence is built on injustice.

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9

Pleasures and Pains

In the 19th century, London was known as "the capital of pleasure." To Dickens and his contemporaries, the theater was the primary reason why. Both a cultural hub and a "realm of the senses," the West End theater (or "pleasure") district brought theater, music, and art into conjunction. Throughout his life, Dickens was an avid theatergoer and the personal friend of celebrated actors, theater managers, and theater owners. For him, the pleasure of seeing a first-rate tragic performance lay in its emotive and intellectual power, which he saw captured in the visual arts as well. In light of the pleasure he found in the arts, and the theater especially, it's no surprise that he includes memorable scenes from the London stage in his sketches and fiction, as you will see in this lecture.

The Pleasure and Pain of Theater

In his works, Dickens depicts productions in a wide array of venues, from high to low. In so doing, he often transforms what ought to be tragic material into grist for his comedy mill. In *Great Expectations*, for instance, Pip learns that Mr. Wopsle, the clerk from his old village church, has come to London to pursue acting. Wopsle stars as Hamlet in a "small metropolitan theatre," and Pip attends the opening night. He takes great pleasure in the failed performance because it turns the tragedy into a burlesque. Pip "feel[s] keenly" for Mr. Wopsle, who's "hooted" by the audience. However, he recounts, "I laughed in spite of myself all the time, the whole thing was so droll."

Dickens brings us backstage in *Little Dorrit* as well, when the heroine, Amy, visits the theater where her sister, Fanny, appears as a dancer and their uncle plays the clarinet. Their conversation halts when Fanny and the other women are called to perform, and Amy hears "music and … dancing feet." When they return, each "out of breath," they put on their shawls and "mak[e] ready for the streets," reminded that they're due back at work by 11 the next morning. Like this, Dickens makes clear that pleasure is an industry in London.

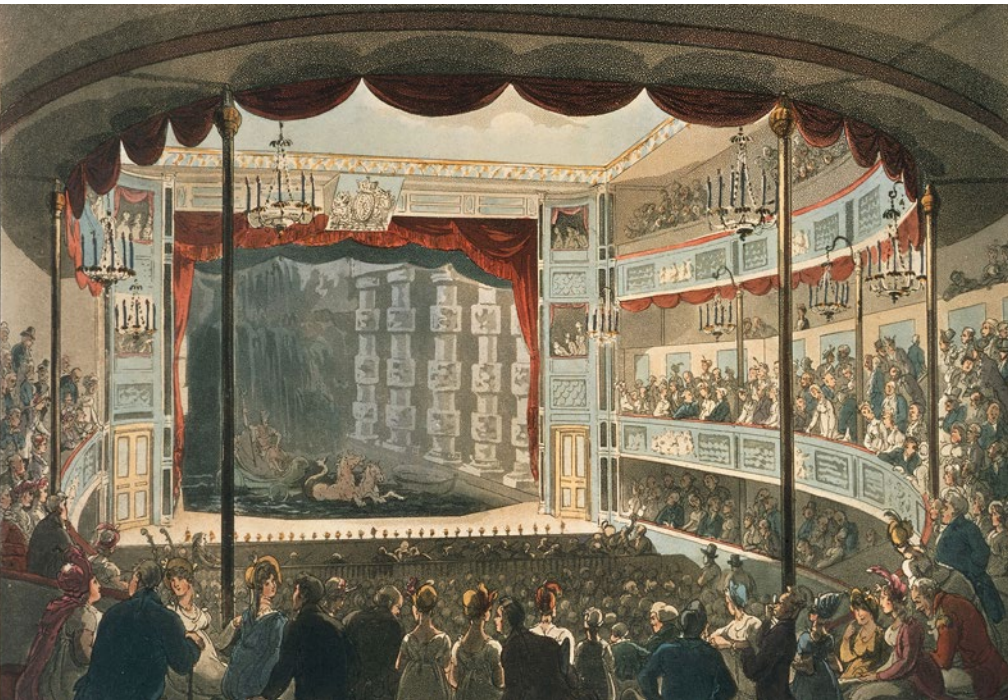
Actors, dancers, and other performers work hard for their wages, and "the stage" is one of the many areas in which class boundaries are reinforced. In *Little Dorrit*, Amy makes this very point. She has a "picturesque ideas of Covent Garden … where there was a mighty theatre, showing wonderful and beautiful sights to richly-dressed ladies and gentlemen." However, she also understands those sights to be "for ever far beyond the reach of poor Fanny or poor uncle." The poverty of "poor Fanny" and "poor uncle" is cultural as well as financial.

In portraying actors, dancers, and musicians as workers laboring for wages, Dickens links London's pleasures to class dynamics, inequities, and pains. It's a subject he often considers in relation to audiences and performers and one he explored all the way back in his earliest works. In a piece on "Astley's"—where equestrian and circus spectacles were staged—Dickens contrasts the pleasures of the audience with the downtrodden lives of the performers. In the ring, the riding master "boast[s] night after night of his splendid fortune" and the "heiress who loves him." All the while, he's thinking of his low wages, his dreary flat, and his unemployed wife, an ex-dancer who's "in the family way."

Working-Class Entertainment

Instead of seeing plays at Covent Garden or Drury Lane, Dickens's cockneys enjoy the pleasures of Greenwich Fair, with its military bands and "wild-beast shows." Away from the "throng," a "humble … mechanic" finds it pleasant just to "linger … on the grass," having walked "the paved streets" all week long. He's one of many workers who enjoyed the "open air amusements" provided by "the Lungs of London."

Among the well-to-do in London, these pleasures had to be defended. In 1836, when *The Pickwick Papers* was first running, Dickens published, under the pseudonym "Timothy Sparks," a pamphlet titled "Sunday Under Three Heads." In it, he responds to a bill that sought to prohibit working-class enjoyments on Sundays. He defends the right of workers to their "scheme[s] of pleasure" on the 1 day in 7 they have for leisure, whether in London's parks or in other spots with "fresh air and green fields." He argues that, were the British Museum and the National Gallery to be opened on Sundays, their exhibits would "tend … to [the] enlightenment and improvement" of "the people."



Dickens celebrates working-class entertainments in his sketches and fiction while also arguing that "high culture" should be accessible to the poor, who would benefit from its entertainment and instruction. In "Shakespeare and Newgate," an article he coauthored for *Household Words*, he points to the success of Sadler's Wells Theatre in Islington as an example. Long a venue for "equestrian performances" and "water dramas," and known for its raucous audience, the theater came under the management of Samuel Phelps in 1844. Working with the police, Phelps barred drunkenness, fights, and "foul language," staging *Macbeth* in place of the sensational *Jack Ketch*. Establishing "a good Theatre in … unpromising soil," Phelps provided "sound rational amusement" to those who need it, Dickens argues—an alternative to the "low, sensual enjoyments" that offer "relief from [the] realities" that oppress the poor.

The "enjoyments" that Dickens considered "sensual" and "low" linked London's pleasures to its pains—to sufferings that were physical, social, and economic. Dangerous pleasures put those who enjoyed them at risk. As Judith R. Walkowitz explains, "the pleasures of London life" were double-edged, perhaps most notably those supplied by sex workers, who were perceived as a menacing "source of contagion." Those caught in London's pleasurable snares faced spiritual and physical corruption and financial collapse. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, for instance, Little Nell's grandfather is addicted to gambling. He gradually loses all his money, gets further into debt, and places himself and his granddaughter into the power of the villainous Quilp.

The Pleasure and Pain of Eating

Not all of the sensual pleasures that London offered seemed pernicious to Victorians. In his fiction, Dickens takes great relish in depicting scenes in which characters eat out and revel in their food. These scenes capture a sense of enjoyment that's social as well as corporeal, while also celebrating an institution characteristic of the city—the "slap-bang shops" in which Cockney patrons satisfied their hunger. These places were cheap dining houses in which credit wasn't given to customers. As one slang dictionary from the time explains, "what is had must be paid down with the ready slap bang, i.e., immediately."

In *Bleak House*, the cash-strapped Tony Jobling enjoys a meal at Mr. Guppy's expense at a "dining-house, of the class known … by the denomination Slap-Bang." We watch as Jobling, after days of privation, is "made a man again" through the stages of their "banquet." His pleasure is clear as the waitress brings "a pile of plates and flat tin dish-covers" so high that it resembles "the tower of Babel," and he "makes … a speedy end of his plate of veal and ham." At Guppy's suggestion, he "take[s] another," followed by a dish of summer cabbage, a marrow pudding, and a Cheshire cheese.

In staging this "epic meal," as critic David Trotter calls it, Dickens conveys the sights and sounds as well as the tastes of a London slap-bang. He captures, to comic effect, what it's like to dine in such a place, with its "clatter of crockery, and … rumbling up and down of the machine which brings the nice cuts from the kitchen." Dickens had gained this knowledge as a 12-year-old boy, living in lodgings when his father was imprisoned for debt. Providing for his own meals on weekly wages of 6 shillings, the boy was sorely tempted by food he couldn't afford. For Dickens, the idea of a "magnificent" beef dinner or a slice of "special" currant pudding was linked to his childhood privations. His description of dining "magnificently" as a hungry boy ties the pleasures of the city to his sufferings.

The Pleasure and Pain of Intoxication

Dickens more explicitly pairs fleeting pleasures with pains when he turns from scenes of eating out in London to those of drinking, both in squalid pubs and in the "gin palaces" that started to appear in London in the 1830s. The very phrase "gin palace" captures the tension between pleasure and pain: It contrasts the opulent decor of these bars with the cheap alcohol sold to impoverished patrons.

Dickens links gaiety with misery when he describes an evening's entertainment at The Three Cripples, the pub favored by Fagin and his cohort near Saffron Hill in *Oliver Twist*. He describes the "boisterous" drinking at a "free and easy" (or singalong), as the performers and their admirers "apply … themselves" to their "glasses of spirits and water." He writes, "Drunkenness in all its stages, [was] there, in [its] strongest aspect, and women, some with

the last lingering tinge of their early freshness almost fading as you looked." In scenes such as this, misery and degradation, especially those of young sex workers, give way to "joviality," if only for a few hours.

From beginning to end of his career, Dickens represented the dangers of alcoholism. In "The Stroller's Tale," an interpolated story in *The Pickwick Papers*, he deftly captures the false pleasures that drinking produces and the real misery that it creates by describing the drunkard as he last appeared on stage, "in all the absurdity of a clown's costume." The "deformity" of "his bloated body and shrunken legs" is "enhanced a hundredfold by [his] fantastic dress" and "the thick white paint with which [his] face [is] besmeared." What should be a figure of fun is revealed in its real guise, as a "spectral figure" from "the Dance of Death."

Dickens begins his last, half-finished novel in a similar way—portraying an addict and contrasting the pleasures of intoxication with its damaging effects. He opens *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* in an opium den in East London, where John Jasper, a respectable choirmaster, smokes the drug. The novel's first paragraph depicts Jasper's opium dream, an alluring vision of clashing cymbals, flashing scimitars, and "thrice ten thousand dancing-girls."

As Jasper gradually awakens, the pleasures of the East become the pains of East London. "He is in the meanest and closest of small rooms," the narrator reveals, and "lies, dressed, across a large unseemly bed," alongside "a Chinaman, a Lascar, and a haggard woman." This last is the opium dealer. Placing the English choirmaster among "heathen" and "savage" bedfellows, Dickens uses the image of the racial "other" to signify Jasper's fall. Whether Jasper's addiction is the cause or the symptom of his tainted condition, it ties the "civilized" Englishman to the "Chinaman," who "wrestles … convulsively … with one of his many Gods, or Devils … and snarls horribly."

Dickens uses such racist stereotypes to place Jasper's corrupt pleasures in the context of British imperialism. They suggest the "contagion" of the West by the East. Smoking opium grown in British India, and doing so in London, the heart of the empire, Jasper exhibits an "unclean spirit of imitation" that raises broad questions about colonization, its painful history, and its moral and political effects. Simultaneously, Dickens foregrounds another habit to which "civilized" Britons seem addicted: that of blaming colonized peoples for their own savagery and excess.

It's telling that the pleasure Jasper finds in smoking opium is always prefaced by feelings of trepidation and guilt. He dreams, first, of "a hazardous and perilous journey" that ends "miserably" in crime. Based on what is known of Dickens's plans for the novel, that "journey" is Jasper's intended murder of his nephew Edwin Drood. Yet when Edwin does vanish, Jasper blames Neville Landless, a partly Eastern figure recently arrived in England from Ceylon, modern-day Sri Lanka. The guilty pleasures of the opium den express Dickens's anxieties about the empire in the 1860s, following the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 in British India.

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10

The Heart of Empire

The literary motif of “reverse colonization” refers to the threatening penetration of a “savage” colonizing force into civilized London. Bram Stoker and H. G. Wells popularized the theme in the 1890s in *Dracula* and *The War of the Worlds*, respectively. However, Dickens anticipated the theme nearly 30 years earlier in his last, unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Central to that work, and several of his other writings, is the idea of London as an imperial city that’s vulnerable to invasion from the East. Seen as the heart of the empire, London testifies to Britain’s greatness, yet it also reveals the empire’s vulnerability to decline and fall. In this lecture, you’ll consider this motif and its meaning for Dickens after considering Britain’s imperial rise and its impact on Victorian London.

British Nationalism

By the mid-19th century, the British empire was a vast domain, covering territory in Asia, Australasia, Australia, North and Central America, and the Caribbean. A Londoner through and through, Dickens followed colonial events and developments and, as the editor of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, published hundreds of columns focused on the empire over 20 years, such as on British India and its administration. Dickens's views of the empire were equivocal: He defended and criticized it by turns.

While his novels are set in London, their characters sometimes travel to British colonies. They go there for varied reasons, yet each ties the heart of the empire to its periphery: Crimes committed in London are expiated in New South Wales in Australia, as convicts are transported to the penal colony. Men who've been unsuccessful in London come into their own in colonial settings, through shipwreck, heroism, and hard work. Others fail in the colonies as they had in London, such as Oliver Twist's half-brother, Edward Leeford, incapable of reclamation and a villain throughout.

Dickens places London in opposition to the colonies but also develops parallels between them. In both cases, he suggests that neither one can be understood alone. Victorians often justified British expansion on the grounds of civilization and "progress"—moral, religious, and technological. Advocates for empire-building argued that colonial growth meant the enlightenment and improvement of uncivilized cultures and lands. Depending on his aims in a particular work, Dickens might endorse or challenge this view. In *Oliver Twist*, he questions it by comparing the New Poor Laws that starved London paupers to West Indian slavery, only recently abolished in British possessions. However, "The Perils of Certain English Prisoners," set in British Honduras and coauthored with Wilkie Collins, serves as an allegory for the Sepoy Rebellion in India and what Dickens depicts as the God-given authority of the English.

Victorian guidebooks often described London in a nationalistic strain. It was the center from which British "enlightenment" emanated. Dickens satirizes such assumptions in *Dombey and Son* in representing Mr. Dombey's view of his mercantile firm and its global importance. "The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in," the narrator declaims, "and the sun and moon were made to give them light." As critic Anthony Chennells observes of this passage, it grants cosmic proportions to London's centrality, challenging the

grandiose claims and "hubris" of imperial thinking. By the time of Dickens's death in 1870, critics and advocates of empire alike agreed that "the very air" Londoners were breathing had a "savor of imperialism," as one journalist put it. It was as ubiquitous as London fog and, in the eyes of its critics, nearly as damaging.

London's Empirical Significance

Whether beneficial or harmful, London's significance as the center of Britain's "burgeoning empire" was continually displayed for Victorians. It took material form in the monumental architecture of the city, much of it constructed in Dickens's day. Public structures were designed to suit "the capital of a worldwide empire" and convey "imperial grandeur" by drawing on the styles of past empires. For example, the British Museum was constructed in the 1840s, using both "the Grecian-Ionic" and "Grecian-Doric" styles. Its "great portico," completed in 1847, was embellished with figures "representing the progress of civilization" and suggested that the British Empire was at the front.

British Museum

Within many of these monumental buildings, the empire itself was put on display in exhibitions for which the capital city was famous. Britain's global power and reach were celebrated, most memorably in the Great Exhibition of 1851. Held in Hyde Park and housed in the Crystal Palace, it gave visitors a view of raw materials and products from the colonies while also providing maps, charts, and dioramas of far-flung possessions.

London's significance to the empire was also captured at sites such as Trafalgar Square, named for the British victory over Emperor Napoleon in 1805. Lord Horatio Nelson's Column was placed at its center, and heroes of British India were commemorated nearby. Imperial London was also on show at less obviously monumental places, such as at the Regent's Park Zoo, opened to the public in 1846. Its exotic, caged creatures served as symbols of the "imperial enterprise."

London's public and private gardens featured exotic plants and palm houses. These showcased what historians consider "botanical imperialism," transporting visitors to "imagined torrid zone[s]." Dickens makes use of this theme when Oliver Twist has escaped to the home of the Maylies from Fagin's den and enjoys the "delicious perfume" of the jasmine, a plant brought to England from the East in the 17th century.

While monuments, zoos, and gardens captured London's imperial status, it was also conveyed in less tangible and visible ways, through subtle, everyday signs of global preeminence: in the delivery and speed of the global news that Londoners received, for example. The news agency Reuters was headquartered at London's Royal Exchange. It relied on international telegraph cables linking the imperial capital to the rest of the world and transmitted "'empire' news" from Asian ports to the London papers via cables in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. Dickens advocated "for encircling the world with land and sea telegraphs." As an article that he published in 1862 argued, "telegraphic communication with our colonists" in Asia and Africa was "an urgent political and commercial necessity."

Colonial Influx

The British Empire was palpable in the energy of London and left its "savor" in the air. It permeated everyday life, shaping culture and habits. To understand how it did so, you need only consider that by the 1850s, curry had become a staple of London life. To prepare these dishes, London cooks needed high-quality curry powder, which they could purchase at the Asian markets that had opened by the mid-1800s on Leicester Square and Regent's Street. As historian Lizzie Collingham puts it, curry powder was the essential ingredient in "bringing India" to London—at least in a culinary sense.

Of course, an influx of people also brought India to London in the Victorian period. As historian Shompa Lahiri explains, it included five main groups: "students, princes, soldiers, ayahs [or nursemaids] and lascars." The latter were South Asian sailors, most of them Muslim, who arrived and worked at the London docks, lodged in the East End when ashore, and proved essential to Britain's global trade. The number of Indian servants and sailors in 19th-century London was much higher than that of Indian students.

English families returning from India brought Indian servants with them, particularly ayahs, or nursemaids, who numbered in the hundreds in London by the early 1880s. Discharged or abandoned by employers, or else escaping abuse, dozens could be found living in any one of the cheap lodging houses of Limehouse in the 1850s. The plight of destitute Indian servants unable to find work came to the attention of the India Office in London in the late 1860s, with "900 destitute Asiatics" reported to be "wandering about the streets" every year, according to Rozina Visram. As for the lascars in the merchant service, by 1855, authorities estimated that 10 to 12,000 were serving "in the East Indian, Chinese and Australian trade," half of whom came to the United Kingdom every year.

Dickens acknowledges this colonial influx in a number of his novels, though most of the characters he includes go unnamed. For example, *Dombey and Son* includes Major Bagstock's servant, a figure known only as "the Native." The major is a retired army officer who served in the East and West Indies, likely including Bengal, and he continually abuses his Indian servant. Dickens uses the treatment suffered by "the Native" to suggest the dehumanization of those subject to colonial rule in British India and to a type of indentured servitude in London.

Imperial Issues

London was the hub of imperial administration and a site of colonial departures and reflected Britain's global reach. However, it also absorbed a return flow, as Britons came home from the colonies and colonized peoples arrived on England's shores and made their way to London. To champions of empire, this inbound movement illustrated Britain's power.

For Dickens, this wasn't simply a cause for celebration. On the one hand, he suggested that London may be threatened by arrivals from the East and what he viewed as a source of "contagion." On the other hand, colonial subjects and goods arriving in London provided evidence of crimes and abuses committed in empire's name. They suggested that imperial "contagion" begins at home and that a retribution or "cure" may ensue. These revelations take subtle form in Dickens's fiction, conveyed via minor details that go largely unnoticed and unremarked by his characters. One example is provided in *Great Expectations* by Abel Magwitch and his brand of tobacco.

Magwitch himself has been wronged by the injustice of England's legal system. Sent to the penal colony in New South Wales for the term of his natural life, he wins release and makes a small fortune there. In coming back to London as a "returned transport," he'll forfeit his life if he's apprehended. While Magwitch is a victim of the colonial system, he points to another, more sweeping form of victimization when he arrives at Pip's London lodgings and takes his tobacco from his pocket to smoke. Identified as the "Negro head" brand, this imperial commodity silently points to the genocide of Australia's aboriginal people, who were displaced and hunted down by the British colonists who arrived and settled there. As critic Elaine Freedgood argues in her influential reading of *Great Expectations*, Dickens repeatedly "refers to this tobacco by name" and thereby "memorialize[s] a people who were very nearly destroyed by white settlement."

Dickens's recognition of imperial crime isn't always this silent or oblique, however. As he knew, the British Museum served as an emblem of the empire and displayed what some considered imperial loot. He alludes to imperial theft in his 1851 article "On Duty with Inspector Field," in which the Scotland Yard detective includes the museum's galleries in his beat. Dickens describes him policing the museum's antiquities and looking at the foreign objects with suspicion but also imagines London thieves and pickpockets

hiding among the ancient works of art. In effect, he conflates London street crime with imperial theft in the far reaches of the world. Thus, while he describes Inspector Field as "suspicious of the Elgin marbles," Dickens suggests that it may be more fitting to suspect the imperialists themselves.

In analyzing Stoker's *Dracula*, Stephen Arata traces the motif of "reverse colonization" and argues that it turns the tables on the English in retribution for imperial crimes—for draining the colonies of their lifeblood, in effect. In his own way, Dickens makes this point in his last, unfinished novel.

The Mystery of Edwin Drood opens with the threat of Eastern "contagion," as John Jasper, the English choirmaster, comes to resemble the "savage" lascar as the two figures smoke opium in East London. However, the novel soon changes course. As Dickens knew, the British were implicated in the opium trade, forcing Indian farmers to cultivate the crop and then smuggling it into China in exchange for tea. It's not surprising, then, that he vividly depicts the wrongs suffered by his Ceylonese characters, one of whom is unjustly framed for murder. Their surname—"Landless"—suggests the injuries they've suffered at British hands.

When Dickens died in June 1870, midway through writing the novel, he had brought Neville Landless to London to study law. Neville's pursuit ties him to the South Asian law students whose numbers rose toward the end of the Victorian period but also to Indian litigants who sought justice in London courts, believing—naively—that "only in the heart of the empire … would they be able to obtain … redress" for wrongs they'd suffered in "land suits" back home, as Shompa Lahiri puts it.

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11

Legal London: Expense, Anxiety, Injustice

A law clerk, a shorthand reporter, and a novelist, Dickens knew legal London and made it his own, as he did virtually all of London. His knowledge of the place was extraordinary. “Having been [there] two years, I thought I knew something of [the] town,” George Lear recalled. “But after a little talk with Dickens I found that I knew nothing. He knew it all from Bow to Brentford,” east to west. As this lecture will show, Dickens’s experience in the legal field proved invaluable to his detailed accounts of the system in his writings.

Dickens and Legal London

In the middle of Dickens's last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Neville Landless arrives in London and begins to study law. Neville is from Ceylon—now Sri Lanka—and in the plans Dickens drew up for the story, he gives Neville and his twin sister Helena a "mixture of Oriental blood." In Dickens's hands, the mixed race of the Landlesses, as well as their surname, points to the abuses of British colonialism on their South Asian island. The Landlesses are recently arrived in England and subject to racist treatment in Cloisterham.

As a law student, Neville takes up residence in Staple Inn, originally one of the 10 Inns of Chancery and part of the area known as "legal London." The Inns of Chancery are now defunct. With the Inns of Court, they were "the great institutions of the English legal profession." Studying law in Victorian London was a sedentary occupation, and we see Neville poring over his books, annotating passages, and "working away." He has become a law student, at least in part, at the urging of Septimus Crisparkle, one of Dickens's heroes and a Church of England clergyman. Given his circumstances—the unjust persecution he suffers and the loss of property suggested by his name—his decision to study law may be fueled by his sense of injury and a desire for redress.

Some biographers attribute a similar motive to Dickens as a prospective law student. As a 22-year old parliamentary reporter, he contacted the Steward of New Inn, asking if he was eligible to rent chambers there: He "intend[ed] entering the bar, as soon as circumstances [would] enable [him] to do so." David Parker surmises that he may have been driven by the memory of his father's imprisonment for debt 10 years earlier, the role lawyers played in that process, and the desire to "beat … them by joining them" as the son of a former prisoner.

Centering several of his novels in legal London, Dickens sets many scenes in courtrooms and in the Inns of Chancery and Inns of Court, where lawyers do their work and clients suffer at their hands. He shows that justice can be elusive, whatever one's case may involve. He learned that lesson firsthand at various points—most obviously, when he was a child and his father was imprisoned but also when he had found success as a novelist and sought to protect his copyrights against literary pirates: While he won his Chancery case, he had to pay the costs.

Legal Injustice

Dickens's belief that enduring "great wrongs" was better than suffering the "wrong[s] of the law" might serve as the motto of *Bleak House*, his best-known legal novel. As the narrator warns of the Court of Chancery in the opening chapter, "Suffer any wrong that can be done you, rather than come here!" *Bleak House* focuses on a Chancery suit to which several characters are parties, whether they like it or not—the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which involves "a Will, and the trusts under a Will." Yet by the time the novel begins, the case is "about nothing but Costs."

From start to finish, Dickens foregrounds the injustice of the legal proceedings and legal practice involved in the case, which subject hopeful clients to exploitation, ruin their lives, and ultimately consume the estate in legal costs. As he describes it, the case has become a self-perpetuating system that has nothing to do with the real matter at hand. Rather than trying to determine if a newly discovered will is a "genuine document" that would resolve the case, the lawyers are busy with "difficulties, contingencies, masterly fictions, and forms of procedure" in the "great cause." As the narrator puts it, "the one great principle of the English law is to make business for itself."

From the first generation of plaintiffs to the last, all those involved in the case suffer from its workings. John Jarndyce, the guardian of the novel's heroine and the current Jarndyce in the story, recounts the case's devastating effect on Tom Jarndyce, his great uncle, who was driven to suicide after "poring over the wicked heaps of papers in the suit, and hoping against hope to disentangle it from its mystification and bring it to a close." His experience is echoed toward the end of *Bleak House*, when Richard Carstone, a "ward in Jarndyce" born into the suit, dies when it "lapses and melts away."

The parties in Jarndyce aren't the only characters involved in soul-crushing Chancery suits. For example, Mr. Gridley tries to address the Lord Chancellor about his suit "at the close of [each] day's business." However, he can't "be made to understand that the Chancellor is legally ignorant of his existence after making it desolate for a quarter of a century." Dickens alludes here to the highly circumscribed ways in which evidence could be presented in Chancery cases: "not directly from contestants of causes" but only in writing submitted by legal counsel.

The Law of Equity

That these maddening cases involve the Court of Chancery is ironic given the original purpose of the Law of Equity that was administered by that court. It was developed in the 15th century in response to the inflexibility of English common law, as the king and his chancellor sought to remedy grievances that the established legal system could not and act on "conscience" instead of strict rule. What evolved into the Court of Chancery would consider circumstances, draw on equitable maxims or principles rather than common law precedent, and thus ease the constraints of common law with decisions that seemed just or fair. Applied mechanically, legal rules sometimes led to injustice, but the Law of Equity could show discretion. Thus, it was considered to be "anti-legal" and "opposed" to the law by some legal theorists and jurists.

As critic Simon Petch explains, the Law of Equity didn't simply supplement common law but was seen to "subvert" and "correct" it by issuing "judgment[s] undirected by precedent." In fact, Dickens used this "subversive" aspect of the Law of Equity to his own advantage when he chose to separate from his wife, Catherine, in 1858, the year after a divorce court was established at Westminster Hall and civil divorce became possible. As a divorce would require an admission of adultery, Dickens sought a deed of separation, which his solicitor submitted to the Court of Chancery. The deed effectively subverted common law by suspending its workings in his marriage. Countering the common law principle of "coverture," the deed—a contract agreed to by both parties—stipulated that Catherine Dickens was, in effect, "sole and unmarried," though common law still recognized her as the novelist's wife.

While the Law of Equity had been meant to offer remedies or "equitable relief" to claimants that common law couldn't provide—to mitigate its severity with fairness—it often proved more burdensome and unjust in practice than common law itself. This was partly due to a shift in focus from questions of fairness to those of finance, as Chancery became the London tribunal for business dealings and commercial institutions.

The Court of Chancery

With the growth of England as a commercial country in the 18th and 19th centuries, contracts became more complex, as did financial systems and legal structures. This change was reflected in the expense and delay for which the Court of Chancery was notorious among Victorians. In *Bleak House*, Dickens gives a brilliant fictional form to what had already become a central issue among reformers. He emphasizes the darkness of Chancery, always "a nocturnal place" in his novel, as critic Julian Wolfreys points out.

In the mid-19th century, the Court of Chancery was the focus of commission investigations, debate, and reform. Critics blamed its malfunction, in part, on the way it generated profits for those involved in its procedures, with "Chancery officials deriv[ing] their … income from court fees rather than salaries" and lawyers growing rich on ever-expanding and corrupt "court procedure[s]," according to critic Kieran Dolin. In *Bleak House* and elsewhere in his fiction, Dickens exposes the legal system as an economic machine—an industry that generates profits for the few at the expense of the many. He dramatizes the many ways in which lawyers drum up business, encouraging suits that that imperil plaintiffs as well as defendants.

In *The Pickwick Papers*, most famously, Dodson and Fogg encourage Mrs. Bardell to pursue her breach of promise suit against Mr. Pickwick. When he refuses to pay the damages levied by the court, knowing himself to be innocent of the charge, she proves unable to pay their legal fees and, like Pickwick, is locked up in the Fleet Prison. Moreover, Dickens gives Gothic dimensions to the profit motive in characterizing Mr. Vholes, Richard Carstone's solicitor in *Bleak House*. Represented as a vampire who feeds off his clients, Vholes "swallow[s] the last morsel of [his] client" as the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce comes to its sudden end.

Suitors and plaintiffs aren't the only ones exploited by this system; so, too, are legal laborers ill-paid for their work. As Dickens reminds us in describing Gray's Inn in *David Copperfield*, the functioning of the courts requires a range of labor that's made visible only by its paraphernalia: "pounce, parchment, red-tape, dusty wafers, ink-jars, brief and draft paper, law reports, writs, declarations, and bills of costs," for example. Behind these items are figures such as "Nemo"—Latin for "no one"—the law writer in *Bleak House*

who spends his days copying documents for solicitors for scant pay. Nemo's namelessness suggests his exploitation by lawyers, judges, and the legal system.

Mr. Snagsby, the law stationer, is another cog in the legal machine. The narrator itemizes his goods at length. He deals in "blank forms of legal process," we learn, and Dickens's list of the articles offered for sale by Mr. Snagsby is so long that it gets our attention—all the more so because we're told it's incomplete. It reminds us of all of the people we don't see in the novels, such as those who tie up legal documents with red tape. Though we hear of these tools of the trade and not the people who use them, their work sets the stage for the barristers performing in Dickens's courtroom scenes, including Mr. Jaggers and Mr. Stryver at the Old Bailey in *Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, respectively.

THE PREROGATIVE COURT, DOCTORS' COMMONS.

Dickens's Legal Experience

From his earliest work to his last, Dickens ranges among the law clerks, law writers, stationers, solicitors, barristers, and judges—those who peopled the law offices, chambers, and courtrooms in his day. From the court known as Doctors' Commons in *Sketches by Boz* to the Police Court at Clerkenwell in *Oliver Twist*, among other courtrooms in his fiction, Dickens roams through legal London in his imagination, drawing on his knowledge of the place. He knew many of these courtrooms at first hand, as he did the Inns of Court and the shops and back lanes of legal London, having worked in or near them since he was 15 years old. As a lawyer's clerk at Gray's Inn in 1827 and 1828, he ran errands for solicitors and senior clerks, and he learned about the Law of Equity and common law.

Biographer Michael Slater points out that Dickens's entry-level job at Ellis and Blackmore allowed him to absorb "the habits and … talk of the men … who made their living from the law" and to learn the "gradations of lawyers' clerks," their ways and aspirations. That knowledge shapes his comic treatment of Potter and Smithers, law clerks in *Sketches by Boz*, as well as his more fully developed portraits of Mr. Guppy in *Bleak House*, among other such characters.

Dickens had taught himself shorthand in 1828 and used it the next year as a freelance shorthand reporter in Doctors' Commons. Five separate courts sat there; its ecclesiastical and maritime cases were based on canon and civil (or Roman) law, and its lawyers were known as proctors and advocates. This was an antiquated system that James Steerforth in *David Copperfield* describes as follows: "It's a … place, where they administer … ecclesiastical law, and play all kinds of tricks with obsolete old monsters of acts of Parliament … dug up, in a fossil state, in the days of the Edwards."

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12

Dickens's Own London

In *Great Expectations*, Mr. Jaggers, the London lawyer, appears in a small village in Kent. He's there to deliver some startling news to the novel's protagonist, Pip, a blacksmith's apprentice. "The communication I have got to make," he announces, is that Pip "has great expectations." He "will come into a handsome property … and be brought up as a gentleman" in London. Within a week, Pip has left his village for the big city, sure that his fortune will be made "on a grand scale." However, he has a lot to learn: that gentlemen can't be readily made, that success often proves elusive, and that you have to work hard to make your way through life. Yet, as you will learn in this lecture, Dickens himself found greatness in London and did so, in part, by dreaming big, even after the disappointments and shame that marred his boyhood.

Dickens's Early Moves

Dickens's story is one of steep upward mobility—of determination and effort, combined with sheer brilliance. You can read it in the series of homes he occupied in London over nearly a half century. From neighborhoods in Camden Town and the Borough to those near Regent's Park and Russell Square, his changing addresses speak to his childhood hardships, his ambition, and his remarkable success as a writer. Simultaneously, several homes he rented or paid for in and around London also reveal more equivocal aspects of his life and remind us that the domestic ideals of his fiction often conflicted with the complexities of his own conduct. These include places he rented for Ellen Ternan, the young actress who became his mistress.

During the novelist's first 14 years, his family lived at 14 different addresses, including in Camden Town, at 16 Bayham Street. John Forster describes it as "about the poorest part of the London suburbs" at the time. There were coal wharfs on the Regent's Canal, which ran through part of the area. The novelist later used the place, with its "dung hills, and dust heaps," as a model for Staggs's Gardens in *Dombey and Son*.

At the close of 1823, the family moved to Gower Street North in Somers Town, a working-class area. The move seemed at first to signal improving times for the Dickenses, as the novelist's mother, Elizabeth, hoped to open a girls' school in their building. Unfortunately, her scheme failed, and the family finances were soon in a dire condition. Twelve-year-old Charles was sent to work at Warren's Blacking factory, where he pasted labels on pots of shoe blacking, and his father was imprisoned for debt at the Marshalsea.

In the autobiographical fragment that he composed in the late 1840s, Dickens recalls the shame he felt as a 12-year-old because of his degrading work and his father's fall from grace. His account of his lodgings during the months when his father was jailed is an important part of that story. He lived, first, in Camden Town, on Little College Street, with several parentless children, in the home of Mrs. Roylance, a family friend. He then moved into a "back-attic … in Lant-Street, in the borough," near the debtors' prison.

On his father's release, the family moved from Camden Town to Hampstead and then to Somers Town, where they settled at 29 Johnson Street at the end of 1824. They remained there for 3 years. During that time, the teenage Dickens went to school at Wellington House Academy in Camden Town. However, his studies ended abruptly when his father failed to pay the rent, and the family was once again on the move. As John Dickens sought to evade creditors, his eldest son found work at the law firm of Ellis and Blackmore.

In the few years that followed, the family often "moved house," and Charles sometimes lived apart, in rooms close to the *Morning Chronicle* office on the Strand, where he worked as a parliamentary reporter. When his father was once again threatened with arrest in 1834, Dickens found lodgings for himself and Fred, his next youngest brother, at 13 Furnival's Inn. The building, on High Holborn, had apartments and a hotel and dated from 1818. Among the places that he'd lived since leaving Chatham, this was the first in which he could take pride. In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens describes its "snug chambers," and in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, he conveys its many comforts. Living at Furnival's, he had no need to deceive others about where he lived. It was a suitable place for friends and associates to pay their calls.

Dickens's Changing Fortune

In February 1836, the publishers Edward Chapman and William Hall proposed that Dickens provide the text for a series of comic drawings of a cockney sporting club. These were to be drawn by a well-known illustrator, Robert Seymour. Seymour committed suicide soon after Dickens was engaged by the publishers, and the project became Dickens's own *Pickwick Papers*. In the end, he was paid the remarkable sum of 2,000 pounds for the 20 monthly parts that launched his career.

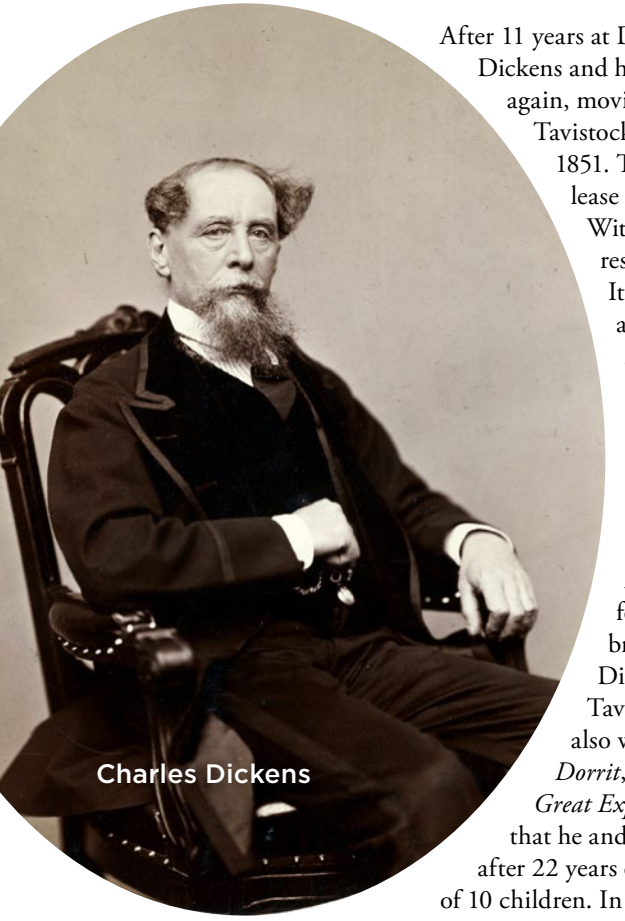
After their marriage in April 1836, Charles and Catherine lived at Furnival's. One year later, they moved northeast with their infant son Charley to 48 Doughty Street, now the Charles Dickens Museum. Their new house marked Dickens's ascent into middle-class affluence and respectability. It was located on a private road, gated at each end, with access granted by a uniformed porter. There were sleeping quarters for servants on the top floor of five, and

a cook, a housemaid, a nurse, and a manservant were on the staff. There, Dickens entered into the life of a successful London author. He finished *Pickwick* and wrote *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. He also entertained friends, associates, and family members.

With an expanding social circle of writers, actors, and artists, the novelist enjoyed the many pleasures of the city. An avid theatergoer, he recorded a host of performances he attended, most often at Covent Garden. With Catherine, he attended private dinners and evening parties. He and Forster ventured into the countryside on horseback. In August 1838, Dickens signed an agreement to rent a stable on nearby Doughty Mews, and the next year, he hired William Topping as his groom. These details convey his growing "prosperity and status," scholar David Parker tells us, since the way people got around London was an important class marker. At Doughty Street, Dickens was able to purchase a proper horse-drawn carriage.

After the birth of two more daughters, Dickens found larger quarters two miles west, at 1 Devonshire Terrace, Regent's Park, on the north end of High Street, Marylebone. He and his family lived there until the summer of 1851. During that time, Catherine gave birth to 6 more of the couple's 10 children, and her husband wrote several of his major works—from *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* to *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield*, with *A Christmas Carol* in between.

Devonshire Terrace was considered a "handsome" residence by visitors; its large garden was yet another sign of Dickens's rising class status. The house faced York Gate at Regent's Park and was shielded from the road by a brick wall, its privacy a mark of class privilege. Dickens reveled in what he jokingly termed its "excessive splendor." He enjoyed "spending big" and wanted his home to be a showplace. During his years at Devonshire Terrace, he enhanced its luxuries, installing mahogany doors, Italian marble mantlepieces, and a soundproof study door. The sheer materiality of his domestic world is captured in an inventory of Devonshire Terrace dating from 1844. The list includes hundreds of items, including the library's "yellow silk damask curtains" along with more than 1,700 volumes on its shelves. It testifies to Dickens's embrace of his commodity culture and to the role that London played in purveying these goods.



Charles Dickens

After 11 years at Devonshire Terrace, Dickens and his family sized up yet again, moving to Tavistock House, Tavistock Square, in November 1851. The writer secured a 45-year lease on the Bloomsbury home. With 18 rooms, it was his residence for nearly a decade. Its schoolroom doubled as a theater, where the novelist and his amateur acting troupe performed. Their private theatricals became "events" in literary London and were reviewed in the London press. At least one, *The Frozen Deep*, was reworked for the professional stage, bringing Ellen Ternan into Dickens's social orbit. At Tavistock House, Dickens also wrote *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, *A Tale of Two Cities,* and *Great Expectations*. It was also there that he and Catherine parted ways after 22 years of marriage and the birth of 10 children. In fact, Dickens pressured Catherine to leave their home and family.

Having purchased Gad's Hill Place in 1856, Dickens made it his permanent home in 1860, but he always had a London home at his workplace. From the late 1850s onward, he also had clandestine homes in and around London, which he obtained for the use of Ellen Ternan and himself. These discoveries reveal the dualities that characterized the lives of Victorians, as social realities conflicted with touted ideals. It was widely understood that respectable men in London sometimes maintained two households, one "legitimate," the other not.

London, a Magic Lantern

Dickens's writing process was so thoroughly tied to London that any problems he had with writer's block could be solved by a long walk through its precincts. He discovered just how important London was to his imagination when he first tried to write a novel far from home. In 1846, he leased out Devonshire Terrace and moved to Lausanne, Switzerland, with his family for the year. Hard at work on *Dombey and Son* that summer, he found himself struggling to finish the second monthly number. "Without that magic lantern," as he put it, he found the "toil and labour … immense!!"

The metaphor that Dickens uses here to describe London—that magic lantern—helps to explain the inspiration he drew from the city and his creative "need" for its crowds and streets. The magic lantern was an early type of image projector that used a light source, a mirror, and glass plates to cast figures on a screen. It produced what Victorians called "dissolving views," transforming one image into another by briefly merging them. This technique seemed to carry viewers forward and backward in time.

Understood as a magic lantern, London made visual magic for Dickens, heightening and transforming his perceptions and illuminating his thinking and writing. The cityscape and the crowds, shops, and streets seemed to merge figures and objects, dissolving them one into another. They brought strangers into conjunction, as if to connect what was purely random. Both ancient and modern, the city modeled ways to merge past, present, and future for Dickens, enabling him to defy chronology and the force of plot.

While Dickens's metaphor for London suggests his creative debt to that magic lantern, it also points to the ways in which his own imagination and writings illuminate the city and the ways we perceive it. Millions of readers "know" the place through its depiction in his fiction. Social historians use his characters to categorize London's class types. They describe a social spectrum that ranges from "Dombey … down below Silas Wegg," as historian Geoffrey Best puts it.

In his own day, too, Dickens impacted the ways in which London was seen, understood, and modernized. Young Queen Victoria famously learned about the worst parts of the city and their "squalid vice" by reading *Oliver Twist*. Urban planners invoked the portrait of Jacobs' Island and Field Lane in that novel when proposing to clear London's slums in the 1840s, appropriating his

fiction to suit their ends. As Joanna Hofer-Robinson shows in her study of Dickens's "afterlife" and its role in urban development, his legacy is material as well as literary and "traceable in London's built environment."

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Chronology

1812	Charles Dickens born on February 7 at Mile End Terrace, Landport, Portsmouth, to John and Elizabeth Dickens
1815–1817	Moves with family to London, to Sheerness, and to Chatham, with John Dickens's changing postings as clerk at the navy pay office
1821–1822	Attends Rev. William Giles's school in Chatham
1822	Moves with family back to London
1824	Sent to work at Warren's Blacking Factory warehouse; father incarcerated for debt at the Marshalsea Prison (February 20–May 28)
1825–1827	Attends Wellington House Academy
1827–1836	Works as law clerk and shorthand reporter
1830	Obtains British Library reader's ticket
1833	First sketch, "A Dinner at Poplar Walk," published in *The Monthly Magazine* (December 1)
1833–1836	Sketches published in various newspapers and magazines
1836	Marries Catherine Hogarth (April 2); publishes *Sketches by Boz* in volume form
1836–1837	Serial publication of *The Pickwick Papers*
1837	First of 10 children born
1837–1839	Serial publication of *Oliver Twist*
1838–1839	Serial publication of *Nicholas Nickleby*
1840–1841	Serial publication of *The Old Curiosity Shop*
1842	First American tour

1843–1844	Serial publication of *Martin Chuzzlewit*
1843	Publication of *A Christmas Carol*
1846–1848	Serial publication of *Dombey and Son*
1849–1850	Serial publication of *David Copperfield*
1850–1859	Conducts weekly journal *Household Words*
1852–1853	Serial publication of *Bleak House*
1854	Serial publication of *Hard Times*
1855–1857	Serial publication of *Little Dorrit*
1856	Purchases Gad's Hill Place, Kent
1857	Meets Ellen Ternan
1858	Commences public readings; separates from Catherine
1859–1870	Conducts weekly journal *All the Year Round*
1859	Serial publication of *A Tale of Two Cities*
1860–1861	Serial publication of *Great Expectations*
1864–1865	Serial publication of *Our Mutual Friend*
1865	Staplehurst rail crash (June 9)
1867–1868	Second American tour
1870	Serial publication of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (6 of 12 monthly parts completed)
1870	Dies on June 9; is buried at Westminster Abbey