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DICKENS QUARTERLY

1

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Volume XX Number 1

### ARTICLES

- Gareth Cordery: Public Houses: Spatial Instabilities in *Sketches by Boz* and *Oliver Twist* (Part One) 3  
Michael Hollington: Dickens and Kafka Revisited: the Case of *Great Expectations* 14  
Leon Litvack: Images of the River in *Our Mutual Friend* 34

### REVIEWS

- Rick Allen on David Parker: *The Doughty Street Novels* 56  
Grahame Smith on Jerome Meckier: *Dickens's Great Expectations*  
*Misnar's Pavillion versus Cinderella* 60  
Joel J. Brattin on *The Letters of Charles Dickens* on CD-ROM 63  
David Paroissien on Michael Slater: *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Dickens*; on Joel J. Brattin and Rodney G. Obien, eds. *Illustrating Dickens* \* 66

- THE DICKENS CHECKLIST — Danny Siegel 72

- NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS 78



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## IMAGES OF THE RIVER IN OUR MUTUAL FRIEND<sup>1</sup>

LEON LITVACK

(The Queen's University of Belfast)

According to the OED, the word "image" may refer to the optical appearance of a reflected or refracted object; it can mean form or semblance; it can also denote an idea, conception, or representation in the mind of the perceiver. Pondering these definitions can facilitate an exploration of the instances where the river appears in *Our Mutual Friend*, in order to demonstrate how and why it can embody complex — often contradictory — meanings, in a multivalent text that is dark in its conception, panoramic in its observation of English society, and which contains some of Dickens's most powerful effects.

It is obvious from the novel's famous opening that the river will figure largely as an entity in *Our Mutual Friend* (fig. 1); Dickens writes:

In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames, between Southwark Bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in.

The figures in this boat were those of a strong man with ragged grizzled hair and a sun-browned face, and a dark girl of nineteen or twenty, sufficiently like him to be recognizable as his daughter. The girl rowed, pulling a pair of sculls very easily; the man, with the rudder-lines slack in his hands, and his hands loose in his waistband, kept an eager look out. He had no net, hook, or line, and he could not be a fisherman; his boat had no cushion for a sitter, no paint, no inscription, no appliance beyond a rusty boathook and a coil of rope, and he could not be a waterman; his boat was too crazy and too small to take in cargo for delivery, and he could not be a lighterman or river-carrier; there was no clue to what he looked for, but he looked for something, with a most intent and searching gaze. The tide, which had turned an hour before, was running down, and his eyes watched every little race and eddy in its broad sweep, as the boat made slight head-way against it, or drove stern foremost before it, according as he directed his daughter by a movement of his head. She watched his face as earnestly as he watched the river. But, in the intensity of her look there was a touch of dread or horror.<sup>2</sup>

This passage, like many of the early ones relating to riverside scenes, appears in manuscript without the multitude of cancellations and interlinear additions that characterize the holograph of this late work. From the outset Dickens seemed sure of his conception, and wrote more fluidly at these points in the narrative.

The Thames is central to the city's — and the country's — commercial life; it integrates the urban space, and is shared by all (Miller, *Charles Dickens*, 286). It is vital to London's metabolism, for the capital depends upon the river for both its lines of supply and its waste disposal; it thus becomes the "mouth and anus of the English body politic" (Fleishman, 118). As the novel is set in Dickens's present, his readers, in identifying where Hexam, the "roused bird of prey" scavenged the river (OMF 1.1), were asked to recall the new London Bridge, opened in 1831, as opposed to the old London Bridge, situated 180 feet further downriver (fig. 2). Dickens knew the old bridge well: he crossed it daily to get from Warren's Blacking Warehouse at Hungerford Stairs to his lodgings in Lant Street.

The riverside world fascinated Dickens. As he recalled in the Autobiographical Fragment, when he was employed at Warren's he played on the coal-barges and explored the Adelphi arches, those subterranean chambers or vaults in the vicinity of the Strand, which were open to the street on one side, and lapped by the Thames on the other (Forster, 31). In Dickens's adulthood, however, access to the riverside grew more restricted, particularly with the construction of the Victoria and Albert Embankments in the 1860s, which facilitated east-west travel in London, and placed tight controls on river approaches and traditional rights of way. Some of the original stairways leading to the Thames were thus shifted inland; landings were permitted only at fixed points, which were illuminated and carefully watched.

As Dickens's narrative progresses, the riverside focus shifts eastward (fig. 3), in the steps of Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood, as they proceed to Gaffer Hexam's house to inquire about the body:

The wheels rolled on, and rolled down by the Monument and by the Tower, and by the Docks; down by Ratcliffe, and by Rotherhithe; down by where accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed from higher grounds, like so much moral sewage, and to be pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk it in the river. In and out among vessels that seemed to have got ashore, and houses that seemed to have got afloat — among bowsprits staring into windows, and windows staring into ships — the wheels rolled on, until they stopped at a dark corner, river-washed and otherwise not washed at all, where [Charley Hexam] alighted and opened the door. (OMF 1.3)



Fig. 1: Marcus Stone, "The Bird of Prey"; illustration for first monthly number of *Our Mutual Friend*.

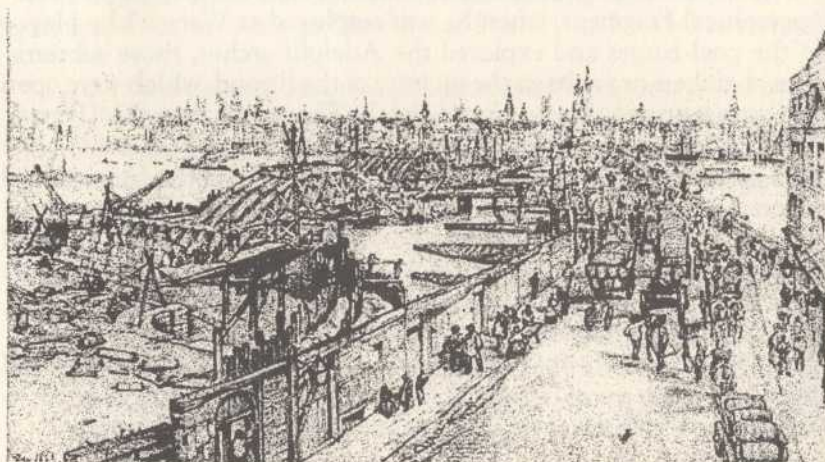


Fig. 2: Edward William Cooke, R.A., "Works of the new London Bridge, and roadway of the old bridge, taken from an upper window at the corner of Tooley Street" (1826). This pencil sketch depicts Borough High Street, leading directly onto the old bridge. In Dickens's day the most memorable feature of old London Bridge was the series of stone recesses, in which he places David Copperfield, "watching the people going by" on his morning journey from the King's Bench prison to Murdstone and Grinby's (*David Copperfield*, chapter 11). The small shops on the left of the High Street have already been demolished, leaving only their boarded-up facades as a safety barrier. The centres for the first two arches of John Rennie's new London Bridge (completed in 1831) are visible on the left. By kind permission of the Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.



Fig. 3: The Limehouse region, from *Stanford's Library Map of London and its suburbs* (1862), sheet 12. Historical sites which may be accurately identified include the business premises of Dickens's godfather, Christopher Huffam, in Garford Street (1), and Huffam's house, in Church Row (2). Approximated sites of fictional locales include the Hexams' house (3), Riderhood's abode (4), and the Six Jolly fellowship Porters (5). By kind permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland.

The dwelling is in the dockland region, east of the Tower of London, in the Ratcliff area. The Hexams lived in one of the disused windmills that fronted the Thames before the construction of the embankments. It is in the adjacent region, "deep and dark in Limehouse Hole, among the riggers, and the mast, oar and block makers, and the boat-builders, and the sail-lofts" (OMF 2.12) that the establishment of Rogue Riderhood is found. Strictly speaking, Limehouse Hole was a feature not of the shore but of the Thames: it was a stretch of deep water caused by tidal scour, once found at this bend in the river, and useful for turning ships, as well as for anchoring barges so that they did not go aground at low tide. Limehouse derives its name from the lime kilns which existed there from about the fourteenth century, and burnt the supplies of chalk brought from Kent, to form quicklime, a key ingredient in mortar. Dickens knew Limehouse well: as a boy he often visited his godfather, Christopher Huffam, a well-to-do rigger, ship's chandler and contractor, who had his shop in a part of Garford Street which is now covered by wharves; Huffam's house was nearby, in Church Row (now Newell Street).

In addition to these sites, which are relatively identifiable for readers familiar with the Limehouse region, Dickens conceived of the waterside public house frequented by Hexam and Riderhood: the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters. It is there that Wrayburn and Lightwood make their way on the night of Hexam's death (OMF 1.14); it is also the scene of Riderhood's recovery, after he is nearly drowned in the river (OMF 3.3). There was debate among Dickensians in the first half of the twentieth century concerning which of the public houses in this area was the original of the Porters (see Humphreys; McNaught; Young; Moreland, 83; Younger, "Thames-Side Taverns"; and Addison, 103). The availability of visual images has been crucial to this debate. One possible model has been identified as The Bunch of Grapes, (now The Grapes, in Narrow Street, Fig. 4), which, from the riverfront side, recalls Dickens's description in the text:

The Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, already mentioned as a tavern of a dropsical appearance, had long settled down into a state of hale infirmity. In its whole constitution it had not a straight floor, and hardly a straight line; but it had outlasted, and clearly would yet outlast, many a better-trimmed building, many a sprucer public-house. Externally, it was a narrow lopsided wooden jumble of corpulent windows heaped one upon another as you might heap as many toppling oranges, with a crazy wooden verandah impending over the water; indeed the whole house, inclusive of the complaining flag-staff on the roof, impended over the water, but seemed to have got

into the condition of a faint-hearted diver who has paused so long on the brink that he will never go in at all. (OMF 1.6)



Fig. 4: Arthur Moreland, *The Grapes*, Narrow Street, Limehouse, from *Dickens Landmarks in London* (1931)

If, however, we scrutinize other circumstances in the novel, the identity of the original becomes a problem; indeed Dickens might not have had one specific original in mind. The fact that there was a ladder leading to the riverside entrance complicates matters for the feasibility of raising Riderhood's all-but-drowned body to the upper level in book 3, chapter 3. Dickens confirms that the fictional Porters had a causeway and landing place, whereas the actual Grapes did not (Young, 122). Such considerations allow for the introduction of other prototypes, including *The Two Brewers* and *The Prospect of Whitby*, both in Wapping (see Young).

"Topography" may be defined as the art or practice of graphic and exact delineation, in minute detail, of the physical features of a place (Miller, *Topographies*, 3). Dickensian topographers naturally turn to visual representations — particularly photographs — in an attempt to enhance authenticity by technical reproduction. Walter Benjamin argues:

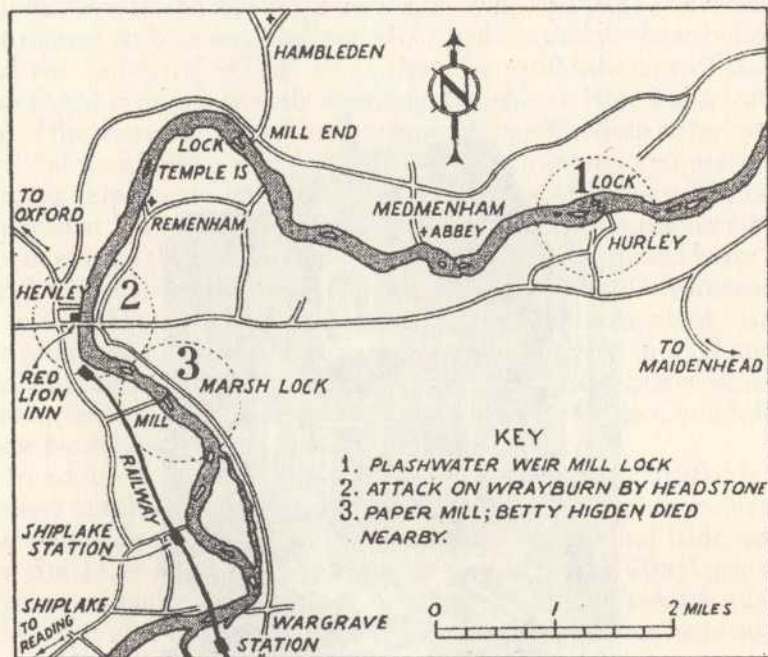


Fig. 5: "Henley and District to illustrate *Our Mutual Friend*," in T.W. Hill, "Notes to *Our Mutual Friend*," *Dickensian* 53 (1927): 207. Hurley, marked as number 1 on this map, is claimed to be the site of the original for Plashwater Weir Mill Lock, where Riderhood has secured employment as a lock keeper (OMF 4.1). Marsh Mill (number 3) is the most likely original for the paper mill where Lizzie Hexam found employment, and near which Betty Higden died (OMF 3.8). The attack on Wrayburn by Headstone took place on the tow-path near Henley (OMF 4.15), marked as number 2. Henley is also the site of the Anglers's Inn, where Wrayburn stayed, and was later nursed by Lizzie; the original for it was the Red Lion Inn, where, in a 'darkened and hushed room', the couple are eventually married (OMF 4.11). By kind permission of the Dickens Fellowship.

In photography, process reproduction can bring out those aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye yet accessible to the lens, which is adjustable and chooses its angle at will. And photographic reproduction, with the aid of certain processes, such as enlargement . . . can capture images which escape natural vision.

He adds that technical reproduction can "put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself" (214), such as in a journal article; photography, when used as a contextualizing accompaniment to literary critique, can serve to privilege the mimetic process, which is removed from the original presence and, through the power of wide dissemination, engenders a permanence that transcends fleeting cognisance acquired, perhaps, on a Thames riverside cruise.

Cartography also facilitates claims for authenticity. In 1947, the critic T.W. Hill, as part of his "Notes to *Our Mutual Friend*," employed a map, "specially drawn for *The Dickensian*," to identify the riverside locations referred to later in the novel, all up-river, over thirty miles from London (Fig 5). Cartographical theorists note that maps may omit or distort elements of the landscape, either through deliberate misrepresentation or through flaws inherent in the reproductive process (see Harley and Monmonier). Cartographic consumers should, therefore, question the personal, political, and ideological motivations of the mapmaker who employs cartography to facilitate claims for authenticity. In figures 3 and 5 there appears to be a consummate desire on the part of the proponents — that is, Hill and the author of the present essay — to make the map "sweat" and "strain" (Wood, 1) to demonstrate that riverside locations in *Our Mutual Friend* correspond to knowable physical features of the landscape. In each case conclusions were reached after close textual scrutiny, personal visits to the area, and, given the material available in Dickens House, with the aid of photographs. To make the map mean what they want it to, mapmakers create and manipulate a cartographic code: a set of "conventional signs" (Miller, *Topographies*, 6) which permits the transmission of information in a form that is simultaneously comprehensive and comprehensible. The cartographer can fix a region within designated borders, adjust the map's scale, introduce iconic symbolism (for example, a cross to represent a church), transportation routes such as roads and railway lines, or change the projection, in order to produce an individually tailored semiotic system; thus "human artifice" influences the "creation of the representation" (Board, 671), to ensure that the map becomes the territory.

The reliability of photographs must have been a central conviction of T.W. Tyrrell and Walter Dexter, who established the Tyrrell Collection in Dickens House. This archive, assembled between the 1890s and



Fig. 6: Marsh Mill, near Henley. Photo from the Tyrrell Collection; by kind permission of Dickens House.

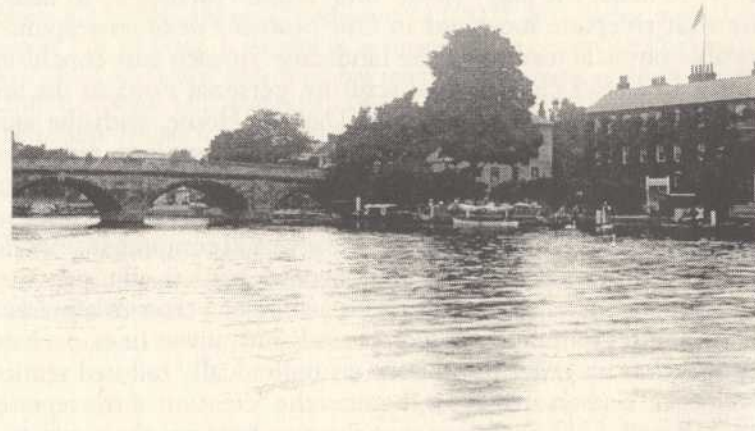


Fig. 7: Henley: river view of the Red Lion Inn. Photo from the Tyrrell Collection; by kind permission of Dickens House.

1920s, features 5,000 photographs and 2,000 magic lantern slides of Dickensian locations; many of the photos were taken by Tyrrell, and by Dexter, who authored several landmark topographical studies, including *The London of Dickens* (1923), *The England of Dickens* (1925), and a host of articles in *The Dickensian* in the 1920s. The aim of Tyrrell and Dexter was to record the “reality” of locations, at a time closer to Dickens’s than our own. In his elegiac study of photography, *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes denies that the Photograph (a word he capitalizes) is a “copy” of reality; rather, he holds, it is “an emanation of *past reality*,” and that, from a “phenomenological viewpoint”, the “power of authentication exceeds the power of representation” in the photograph (88–89). It is as a “certificate of presence” (Barthes, 87) that the Tyrrell Collection has power and relevance. Consider, for example, the potential for correspondence between this image of Marsh Mill (Fig 6), and the description of Betty Higden’s “journey’s end”:

There now arose in the darkness, a great building, full of lighted windows. Smoke was issuing from a high chimney in the rear of it, and there was the sound of a water-wheel at the side. Between her and the building, lay a piece of water, in which the lighted windows were reflected, and on its nearest margin was a plantation of trees. (OMF 3.8)

Textual evidence might also be used to assess the relevance of Henley’s Red Lion Inn (Fig 7); it has, for example, the requisite “patch of inn lawn, sloping gently to the river,” for the purposes of Lizzie’s landing the boat containing the injured Wrayburn (OMF 4.6). More interesting, perhaps, is the supposed site of the attack on Eugene, a “retired place,” near to where a “pleasure-boat” lay “moored there among some stakes” (OMF 4.6). The photograph in Dickens House (Fig 8) is identified on the reverse as “Scene of the attack on Wrayburn”; Dickens is not, however, so specific as to allow — or encourage — such topographical specificity. These examples from *Our Mutual Friend* highlight the drawbacks of a purely mimetic critique; it is, nevertheless, self-evident that Dickens meant for his readers to be “streetwise” (Miller, *Topographies*, 105), and to recall specific locations, occupations, and circumstances connected with the Thames for verisimilitude: that is, to connect the literary work to a specific historical and geographical time. They were also meant to share a recognition of the flavors, smells, and even dangers of riverside life.

Most guides to Dickensian locales were published between about 1876 and 1940, when there was an unmistakable zeal for topographical investigation (see Parker). It was — and still is — feasible to undertake *London Rambles*, “*en Zigzag*,” with Charles Dickens, as recommended in



what we are looking for. Then, if possible, unearth a tavern which conforms or did conform in essentials necessary to identification. (123)

Meticulous textual scholarship, which in this case allows literature to become "law-making" (Miller, *Topographies*, 83), is ignored at the peril of the twenty-first century critic; yet as the chronological distance from Dickens's day increases, commentators compensate by making greater allowance for the novelist's independent imaginative conception, informed by what he saw around him, but not limited to it in every detail. It is important to recall that Dickens's work in particular does not conform to the documentary demands of mimetic realism: he does indeed draw inspiration from the stuff of everyday life, but his characters are not seen performing their full range of daily activities. For example, his male protagonists, with the exception of David Copperfield, are not seen at their daily work. Also, Dickens's writing has a distinct quality of "literariness": by drawing elements of plot from, for example, fairy tale, allegory, Shakespeare, and melodrama, and imbuing them with complex imagistic patterns, with coincidence, exaggeration, the grotesque, the Gothic — and, above all, humour — it may easily be perceived that he is not a realist writer. The complex amalgamation of the fictional and the factual is captured by Chesterton, who protested against both "the man who could prove that Micawber never lived, and the man who could prove in what particular street he lodged" (1). Dickens did not mirror nature, but, according to Trezise, created a "second nature", a "popular language" or "series of word paintings which do not compete with reality but assimilate it" (162).

Though Dickensian characters are "surrounded and circumscribed" by their physical environments (Miller, *Topographies*, 105), literary criticism has clearly moved on some way since topographical studies constituted a major area of Dickensian critique; when Ada Nisbet published her survey of Dickens criticism in 1964, she judged the quest for what she called "antiquarian titbits" to be "of minimal value to the scholar" (86). Such judgments are severely limited, particularly given the contribution made by enthusiasts to Dickens studies (see Andrews). Nevertheless when Dickens "fell into the hands of the professionals" in the 1940s (Westland, 208) critics greatly expanded, particularly beyond the confines of mimetic realism, the ways in which the novelist's work could be read. By the 1950s and 1960s Nisbet notes that a new set of terms became associated with Dickens's work: imagination, fantasy, poetry, symbol, myth, and archetype (87). Some of these words are used specifically in connection with *Our Mutual Friend*; Edgar Johnson claims that the novel is "*The Waste Land* of Dickens's work"; he adds: "Like that poem, it resorts to the realm of myth." He describes the

Thames as "a river sweating tar and waste, bearing a flotsam of debris in its muddy waters. Once a symbol of the renewal of life, the waters themselves are sullied with the muck of the dust-heaps, infecting their purity in loathsome solution" (1043–44).

The concept of the symbol is particularly germane to a discussion of images of the river. The word derives from the ancient Greek idea of the *symbolon*, which involved breaking a mark or token in two, and giving the halves to two individuals, who would confirm some commitment when the two pieces were again joined together. In a literary context, a symbol signifies an object or event which, in its turn, signifies something, or has a range of reference beyond itself. Definitions of literary symbols (Leitch et al., 672–74; Miller, *Topographies*, 145) often recall Coleridge's observations in *The Statesman's Manual* (1816), where he states that a symbol is organically unified, fusing the particular and the general, or the "Temporal" and the "Eternal" (Coleridge, 30). Many symbols are public or conventional; their significance is determined by a particular set of cultural circumstances, in which the interpreter knows and understands the conventional code governing meaning. Religion, of course, frequently employs symbolism to aid understanding, and the Bible emphasizes the symbolic resonance of "river" — a word used more than 120 times in various texts, mostly to refer to the Euphrates, the Nile and its tributaries, the Tigris, and the Jordan. Biblical rivers are frequently used to indicate geographical boundaries; they also appear in the contexts of irrigation, drinking, fishing, bathing, healing, transportation, and defense. Rivers are also places of theophany, baptism, and prayer. Dickens and his readers were clearly attuned to biblical references, and the novelist himself displayed a marked preference for the Christian Scriptures over the Hebrew ones. He is sparing in his overt biblical references in *Our Mutual Friend*, and none of them relates directly to any biblical rivers in the Scriptures; nevertheless there are a number of key parallels between Dickens and the Bible in the symbolic uses of the river, particularly in connection with prosperity and tragedy, life and death, baptism, resurrection, and healing. Indeed it is possible to perceive a biblical theme at the center of the novel: that all life comes from the ocean, and returns to it, thus connecting human beings with their past, and with their mysterious origins in the depths of that past (Miller, *Charles Dickens*, 312–13).

Dickens never intends the symbol to have purely religious associations. It embodies the broad outlines of human nature: emotional and physical vitality; natural rhythms; physical labor, with its attendant skills and strengths; seriousness of ambition or purpose; as well as meaningful knowledge of death, and therefore of life (Garis 229). The multivalent nature of such a symbol may be appreciated by reference to David Simpson's 1982 study of the ethics of perception, entitled *Fetishism and*

*Imagination*, in which he attempts to tease out the blurred cultural, moral, ethical, and religious uses of potent images and symbols in Dickens, Melville, and Conrad. He develops a Romantic idea, concerning the mind's potential for misrepresentation and disagreement in its habitual operations, in order to demonstrate how "reality" is impermanent, and a construct, a function of "habit and disposition" depending for its conception on an interaction between sense data, mechanics of the brain, and social and individual idiosyncrasies (40). He cites Coleridge's definition of the symbol, emphasizing the Romantic writer's interest in the making of meaning as a living process. Simpson advocates that any contemplation of the symbol should also involve awareness and experience of self-consciousness (xiii). Using anthropology, theology, political economy, psychoanalysis, and theories of sexuality, he demonstrates how the mind does not render mirror images of the world of substances around it, but rather uses a "selective process" to assemble certain images into wholes (9). Simpson also argues that the symbol does not have an autonomous generic identity; rather, "it must be assessed in light of its use and the effect on a community of its users" (66). Such statements are germane to Dickens's conception of the river: different elements are brought together, in order to render a complexity which expands the potential for the symbol to embody several — sometimes conflicting — ideas simultaneously.

The river symbol is not new for Dickens in this novel; it had been used to good effect in, for example, *Little Dorrit*; but it has ramifications that make it a more cogent and bearing symbol than it had ever been before (Engel, 139). This point is illustrated to good effect in the 1998 BBC dramatization of *Our Mutual Friend*, in which development of the film's complex plot is held together by a train of references to the Thames (Figs 10–12). Indeed as Swinburne pointed out in 1902, the river may be seen as the "real protagonist" of the novel (34), but, like John Harmon, it adopts several identities. It is undeniable that many of the riverside incidents cited above are associated with death, and it is interesting to note that deeds of extreme violence in the novel occur in the vicinity of the river; yet it is also, for some, the locus of affirmative events: a means of escape to new life or a more peaceful existence.

The case of John Harmon, the novel's prime example of fluidity of human personality, is a useful example of how the river serves as the agent for both death and rebirth. At the actual and metaphorical center of the novel, in book 2, chapter 13, he meditates on his previous experiences; after setting out his original motives for donning a disguise (that is, to withdraw from an economically-motivated arranged marriage to Bella), he forces his memory to recapture the sensations of being drugged and thrown into the river:

'I cannot possibly express it to myself without using the word I. But it was not I. There was no such thing as I, within my knowledge.

'It was only after a downward slide through something like a tube, and then a great noise and a sparkling and crackling as of fires, that the consciousness came upon me, "This is John Harmon drowning! John Harmon, struggle for your life. John Harmon, call on Heaven and save yourself!" I think I cried it out aloud in a great agony, and then a heavy horrid unintelligible something vanished, and it was I who was struggling there alone in the water. (OMF 2.13)



Fig. 10: (l to r) Dominic Maffham as Mortimer Lightwood, Steven Mackintosh as John Harmon, and Paul McGann as Eugene Wrayburn, in the BBC's 1998 adaptation of *Our Mutual Friend*. By kind permission of the BBC Picture Library.



Fig. 11: Keeley Hawes as Lizzie Hexam, in the BBC's *Our Mutual Friend*. By kind permission of the BBC Picture Library. In the background may be seen the warehouse shoreline, which featured not only in the atmospheric opening sequence, and provided the backdrop for much of the riverside action. The BBC production designers built the set from scratch at Cardiff docks, after scouring 7,000 miles of English coastline and tidal river estuaries, looking for the right spot. They transported Gaffer Hexam's hut from Shepperton Studios (where the interior scenes had been filmed) and dropped it into place at the water's edge, using a huge crane to lift it over the set. The whole construction and shooting process had to be planned around the tides, which varied from lapping within a few inches of the floorboards, to leaving several metres of glutinous black mud at low tide.

The imagery here is replete with the well-known psychoanalytic symbols of the trauma of birth, and firmly links the river with the creation of life.



Fig. 12: David Morrissey as Bradley Headstone (foreground) and David Bradley as as Rogue Riderhood (background), at Plashwater Weir-Mill Lock, in the BBC's *Our Mutual Friend*. By kind permission of the BBC Picture Library.

It is interesting to compare the case of Harmon with that of Eugene Wrayburn, who, in order to marry Lizzie, must experience the violence, brutality, and corruption of river life. The vicious attack on him by Headstone represents the death of Eugene's old life, and the possibility of his regeneration (see Sanders, 140–42). After the attack Eugene is, of course, in a precarious situation, moving between consciousness and unconsciousness, life and death, while lying in a room with "the river outside the windows flowing on to the vast ocean." To his friends the vacillations resemble the "frequent rising of a drowned man from the deep" (OMF 4.10). The BBC adaptation highlights the religious nature of this regeneration through production design: Wrayburn is arrayed in white, and a cross is suspended over his bed. The scene emphasizes the idea that the river has a sacramental character, enunciated as both

baptism and marriage; it supports A. O. J. Cockshut's view, that Dickens was impressed imaginatively by the symbolism associated with sacramental doctrines (176). Yet given the expansive, living potential of the river as symbol in fiction, the BBC drama demonstrates how films inevitably render symbols more overtly than texts, because the symbolic intent must be understood in the time it takes to view the image. Despite the drama's expansiveness, Dickens's use of the river is, as has been shown, much more subtle than the adaptation would suggest.

The river adopts many identities in *Our Mutual Friend*. The physical reality on which many of Dickens's settings are based confirms, on one level, that "the river is the river is the river" (Lucas, 340). Topographical, photographic, and cartographic endeavors are still useful, though scholars and enthusiasts need to be aware of their limitations in penetrating the darker recesses of Dickens's world. They articulate, structure, and transmit knowledge in ways that seem empirical, but are in fact limited, because they assign extraordinary value to limited physical space. The perception of symbols necessitates fluidity — rather than fetishism — in the individual and social imagination; the process encourages expansiveness and reappraisal in relation to external phenomena, and fosters the development of shared understanding. If, as Michel Foucault observes, the "anxiety of our era" has to do "fundamentally with space" (23), then this discussion opens up possibilities concerning the river in *Our Mutual Friend*, and encourages us to ponder more closely the range of meanings applied to this endlessly fascinating, constantly changing spatial entity.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to my colleague Brian Caraher for his assistance on the subject of symbolism, and to my doctoral student Nicholas Dunlop for fruitful discussions on cartography.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1865) Book 1, Chapter 1. All subsequent references will appear in the text, in the form of book number followed by chapter number, thus: OMF 1.1.

<sup>3</sup> The MS of *Our Mutual Friend* reads "ships."

<sup>4</sup> MS reads "water."

<sup>5</sup> T.W. Hill was a prolific scholar and, at various times, Secretary, Treasurer, and Vice-President of the Dickens Fellowship (Staples, 148).

<sup>6</sup> Allbut's epigraph reiterates the words of Captain Cuttle in *Dombey and Son*: "When found, make a note of."

<sup>7</sup> T.S. Eliot was drawn to *Our Mutual Friend* for the original epigraph to the first part of *The Waste Land*.

<sup>8</sup> Coleridge's original impetus was to demonstrate the uniquely symbolic unity of the Bible as a sacred text; but later commentators have assumed (probably mistakenly) that he intended his comment to define the general nature of a symbol as also used in secular literature.

<sup>9</sup> Simpson, 9. Indeed Simpson's primary focus in relation to Dickens is on character: he argues that fetishism "occurs when the mind ceases to realize that it has itself created the outward images or things to which it subsequently posits itself as in some sort of subservient relation" (xiii). Dickens, he holds, stands as the critic of fetishized imagination, in which attention is fixed on an isolated part or attribute, "removed from the dialectic of reprocessing, growth, and the general reciprocal construction of outer and inner" (58). Characters are thus reduced to figures, attributes, or names, and because of fixations they reify themselves into examples of phallicism, a constituent feature of many accounts of fetishism.

<sup>10</sup> MS reads "God."

<sup>11</sup> Cockshut adds that Dickens's being impressed is "entirely different" from accepting the doctrines themselves. Interestingly, the marriage service, as portrayed in the drama, is conducted in Latin — a situation which does not accord with contemporary Anglican practice of the 1860s.

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