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## City of Darkness vs City of Light – The Significance of Light in the Modern Metropolis with Dickens and Dos Passos

*Abstract: This paper examines the literary representations of two metropolises – London and New York with Dickens and Dos Passos respectively. It aims to establish the significance of light in the portrayal of modern cityscapes with these two writers by comparing and contrasting the two depictions. In doing so, it avoids simplifying the matter by abstaining from a historicist analysis, which would establish differences based on technical progress, rendering one city more illuminated than the other. Instead, it determines the role of light as a factor in its own right in the two analyzed urban representations revelatory of an evolution of modernity – from Modernity to Modernism. The comparison is effectuated by analyzing passages from Dickens's and Dos Passos's urban representations, the aim being to establish Dickens's position in the transitional period of modernity on the premise that Dos Passos is generally considered to be representative of high modernism and Dickens - occupying a central place in the Victorian Age.*

*Key words: modernity; modernism; light; city; metropolis; urban; representation; expressionist; space*

If we think of London at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and New York of the 20s of last century we might imagine comparing a sequence of stilted images from black and white photos and a dynamic color movie, the camera with which the movie has been shot rather lacking in technical precision with grainy textures, random flickering of the screen, and irregular pixels due to the rather bad screen resolution.

I would say that in view of the said above, Dickens and Dos Passos have performed enormous feats of bringing these photos to life done by one and of styling the metropolis in a *mélange* of cubic figures, expressionist and impressionist play with colors by the other, thus offering a multifaceted perception of the city in these two periods of time.

This paper examines the literary representations of two metropolises – London and New York with Dickens and Dos Passos respectively. It aims to establish the significance of light in the portrayal of modern cityscapes with these two writers by comparing and contrasting their urban depictions. In doing so, it abstains from a historicist analysis, which would establish differences based on technical progress, rendering one city more illuminated than the other. Instead, it determines the role of light as a factor in its own right in the two analyzed urban representations, revelatory of the evolution of modernity – from

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modernity to modernism, as well as establishes continuity between these depictions. The analysis is effectuated by means of examining the significance of metropolitan spaces as discussed by Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1991) and their relationship to light in a close reading of passages from *Dombey and Son* (1848), *Bleak House* (1853), *Great Expectations* (1861), *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) and *Manhattan Transfer* (1925).

When we think of the city of Dickens, we invariably evoke the spectral images of London (*OMF* 447) – enshrouded in smog, covered in soot and dust with its residents toiling and trudging their lives. Dark as the city colors may be, there is always a glimmer of hope in the city for renovation, improvement of the urban condition, a more meaningful implementation of representational spaces<sup>2</sup> (Lefebvre 33) as a lived experience by the dwellers of the metropolis. We can speak of the city of Dickens or *Dickensian* London as Dickens repeatedly and indefatigably recreated every moment of this lived experience by inhabitants of the big city in the simultaneity of the *now*, bringing the 19<sup>th</sup> century metropolis close to us so we can experience it sensorially, the way its inhabitants internalize it and externalize it as an imagined representational space, imbuing it with his sensibility, which constitutes an intermediary space locked in late Victorianism but also reaching out to Modernism.

Dos Passos, unlike Dickens, failed to remain in urban memory by giving a clear trademark name to his depictions of the modern city of New York, as he was occupied with applying *modernisms* from other, non-literary, forms of art to literature, thus arriving at *interdisciplinary* novels such as *Manhattan Transfer* and *USA*, which transcend arts and borrow freely from journalism, painting, sculpture, architecture and the cinema, as well as literary movements – naturalism. During the time when Dos Passos wrote his major novels, experimentation was the word of the day, and his bold experiments at portraying urban space through an assortment of art forms led to the adjective *protean* (Harding 11) describing best Dos Passos's achievement in his urban representations of New York.

I begin my examination of the representation of color with the two writers of my choice by discussing Paul's christening scene from *Dombey and Son*:

Little Paul might have asked with Hamlet 'into my grave?' so chill and earthy was the place.

The tall shrouded pulpit and reading desk; the dreary perspective of empty pews stretching away under the galleries, and empty benches mounting to the roof and lost in the shadow of the great grim organ; the dusty matting and cold stone slabs; the grisly free seats' in the aisles; and the damp corner by the bell-rope, where the black trestles used for funerals were stowed away, along with some shovels and baskets, and a coil or two of deadly-looking rope; the strange, unusual, uncomfortable smell, and the cadaverous light; were all in unison. It was a cold and dismal scene. (*DS* 66)

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<sup>2</sup> For detailed explanations of the terms: representations of space as conceived space, representational spaces as lived experience, spatial practice as perceived space, see pp. 33-47 in *The Production of Space* (1991).

This scene, like many others, from Dickens's depictions of representations of space – the church in this case, establishes a symbolic relationship between *container*<sup>3</sup> (the representation of space) and *contained* (the city inhabitant) in the metropolis by means of enhancing the ideology behind the given representation of space, distorting it or subverting it (in Dickens's later novels).

The church is supposed to be solemn and perhaps austere as a heterotopic<sup>4</sup> representational space for the religious city dweller<sup>5</sup> in its function of a mediator between him and God. The colors, with which it is depicted, however, suggest a certain unusual darkening of the mood: *dreary, grim, dusty, grisly, black* implying a funereal domination of its purpose – celebrating life and commemorating death, accentuating the latter. The different church attributes – the pews, the organ, the bell-rope seem to be randomly scattered in the interior of the church and lost in its space, so that their symbolic relationship to God is lost or broken. The accumulated effect of this arrangement of the church attributes is in unison as if in a complot against the city dweller. In this case the symbolic relationship between the two is one of death foretold. The dark premonition of Paul's death in the near future lies in the fact that while he is being christened, everything in the church seems to conspire against him suggesting not the beginning, but the forthcoming end of his life. The dominant colors of the attributes of this ecclesiastic space are ominous and they help create the effect of the *cadaverous light*, which puts the finishing touches to establishing *a cold and dismal scene*.

The *cold* and *dismal* are extended to a number of houses as city containers and their inhabitants as contained in their relationship to light: Mrs Clennam's house and Miss Havisham's house are two that illustrate this idea very well.

Here is a fine transition of the symbolic meaning of white as purity into the symbolic meaning of white as death in the portrait of Miss Havisham in the *Enough House*:

She was dressed in rich materials – satins, and lace, and silks – all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white ... [ellipses in quote] It was not in the first moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed. But, I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow. (*GE* 56)

The faded colors are an expression of the defunct symbols no longer operating in a society whose social code is in the process of being changed. The two prevailing ones are

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<sup>3</sup> The significance of *container* and *contained* is elaborated as a concept in Jean-François Augoyard's *Step by Step* (2007)

<sup>4</sup> A key work on heterotopias is Foucault's *Of Other Spaces* (1967) where he shows real sites to be "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted"(24), arguing that they produce spaces incompatible with one another: the church creating its own orderly sacred space alongside with its secular cultural space within the city as a tourist site.

<sup>5</sup> For the religious man, the sacred space of the church is the only real one (Eliade 25).

*white* and *yellow*, one being a byproduct of the other – a symbol of decomposition and decay.

The next passage examines Paul's (*DS*) romantic relationship to the river as a representation of space, which leads to a yet more promising place of realization of his dreams of escape from the stern and sterile cold world of the company "Dombey and Son" – the sea:

How many times the golden water danced upon the wall; how many nights the dark, dark river rolled towards the sea in spite of him; Paul never counted, never sought to know. If their kindness, or his sense of it, could have increased, they were more kind, and he more grateful every day; but whether they were many days or few, appeared of little moment now, to the gentle boy. (*DS* 244)

The lower river<sup>6</sup>, otherwise consistently equally *dismal* as the church, is yet again in unison with the exteriorization of Paul's reliving the external reality of the coldness of the strictly capitalist world of his father's company.

The river, thus, suggests a recurrent momentary transition of its being seen now as dark, now as golden, cold external reality being internalized, given dreamlike unreal qualities and externalized again into Paul's romanticizing the river. The perpetual movement of the river towards the sea creates in Paul a painful longing for escape. A more mature novel of modernity than *Oliver Twist*, where dreams come true, *Dombey and Son* stays close to a bleaker perception of urban modernity and modernism in its aesthetic representation as dreams remain nothing but dreams – an alternative urban universe offering a redeeming representational space for the oppressed by the metropolis, a function denied the *container* of the river as urban space in *Our Mutual Friend*, which makes a more uniform modernist treatment of this representation of space in its depiction in colors.

Another representation of space, revealing the invariable relationship of unison between *container* and *contained*, is the house. In the house of Dombey, Florence, in a similar manner to her brother Paul, attempts to mitigate the harshness of the city by internalizing the depressing house as an external reality, imparting to it a halo of dreamlike qualities and transforming the cold representation of company space into a representational space, which modifies the dismal house with a mollifying effect. As a result, the cityscape outside is transformed by more dynamic light, endowed with human motor functions contrasted with the stillness of the city inhabitant:

Sad and grieving was the heart of Florence, as she crept upstairs. The quiet house had grown more dismal since she came down. The sleep she had been looking on, in the dead of night, had the solemnity to her of death and life in one. The secrecy and silence of her own proceeding made the night secret, silent, and oppressive. She felt unwilling, almost unable, to go on to her own chamber; and turning into the drawing-rooms, where the clouded moon was shining through the blinds, looked out into the empty streets. The wind was

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed explanation of the significance of the lower river to color, see Mildred Newcomb's discussion in *The Imagined World of Charles Dickens* (1989:49)

blowing drearily. The lamps looked pale, and shook as if they were cold. There was a distant glimmer of something that was not quite darkness, rather than of light, in the sky; and foreboding night was shivering and restless, as the dying are who make a troubled end. Florence remembered how, as a watcher, by a sick-bed, she had noted this bleak time, and felt its influence, as if in some hidden natural antipathy to it; and now it was very, very gloomy. (*DS* 636-7)

The night is in harmony with Florence's evoked images and is an exteriorization of her turbulent feelings, impersonating human qualities. The play of dark and light colors, alternating in a fast sequence, corresponds to the pageant of images passing through her mind. The transition from the depiction of the restless night to Florence's evocations of images is so smooth that one is left with the impression that the night is, in fact, an exteriorization of Florence's polarized emotions connected to her father's house. The play of nuances of color in the examined passages from *Dombey and Son* is equally dynamic, contributing to creating our perceptions of Florence and Paul based on their daydreaming about better urban conditions. These dreams are often in a stark contrast with the bleak reality of the industrial metropolis, thus reducing its gravity as a *container* of depressing urban spaces.

Dickensian London is perhaps never more eloquent in its insistent use of drab colors than in the representation of the all-pervasive ubiquitous fog so common of the London of Dickens's times and so deeply ingrained in every representation of space there (the chancery) as well as in the functionaries (Lord Chancellor) *contained* in those spaces:

LONDON. MICHAELMAS TERM lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun... [ellipses in quote] Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls deified among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds. (*BH* 6-7)

The protean *mud* and *fog* from the passage above with the assistance of the all-permeating *smoke* and *soot* are the ultimate protagonists in control of the city of Dickens occupying all representations of space causing *the death of the sun* in an apocalyptic urban ecological disaster, a cataclysmic involutorial reversal to prehistoric forms of life

miraculously moving in the gray industrial metropolis (a reference to Darwin). The means by which Dickens achieves this effect is through accumulating the various transmogrifications of the four elements mentioned above, turning all social practice into an experience of physical survival in the polluted air and soil, thus creating a different urban planet exclusively based on their transformed equivalents, opposed to the four elements at the core of the creation of our planet as we know it.

It is descriptions like these that are the grounds on which S. Parker lays his claim that the Victorian city is a *city of dreadful night* (173). Dickens's urban representations, more often than not, render the urban spaces in control of protean forces of the industrial age, which lead to the dehumanization of the city inhabitants, their loss of spirituality resulting in equally bleak representational spaces as lived experience on part of the *haves* and the *have-nots*.

The protean city of Dos Passos, by contrast, makes use of many more urban elements, coming into contact with one another, invading urban spaces, thus disrupting them and turning them into an amalgam with indiscernible constituents, whereas with Dickens this *proteanization* of urban space can increasingly be seen in later novels such as *Dombey and Son*, *Bleak House* or *Our Mutual Friend*. The exploration of urban chaos and disorder in the continual demolishing of buildings, rebuilding areas and uncontrolled urban sprawl substantially delimits the capability of the representations of space of offering more varied and meaningful representational spaces for the inhabitants of the modern city of New York.

The urban spaces thus subjected to continual invasion into each other and collision with one another lead to cityscapes marked by a perceived shortage of "congenial places" (Crunten 85) and pronounced distortion of colors, a visual aesthetic admission of the fact that nothing in the world's second biggest metropolis is the same as it was before.

If juxtaposed, depictions of urban wilderness, containing construction work in progress in the urban representations of the two, will show meaningful differences in their preference of color. With Dickens, as the following passage shows, bright light has to be produced by the consumption of energy resembling that of burning fire as in the times when the Earth mountains and lakes were formed:

There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. Hot springs and *fiery* eruptions, the usual attendants upon earthquakes, lent their contributions of confusion to the scene. Boiling water hissed and heaved within dilapidated walls; whence, also, the *glare* and roar of *flames* came issuing forth; and mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way, and wholly changed the law and custom of the neighbourhood. (*DS* 74) (*italics mine*)

Conversely, if no such energy is consumed, Dickens's London is typically the *black, shrill, gritty* city under oppressive unbroken *leaden canopy* of sky (*OMF* 153) characteristically in unison with the mood of its inhabitants, the dark colors also consistently describing the continual city expansion (*OMF* 231). In his discussion of Lewis Mumford's application of "Abbau" as a process of destruction necessary to urban development, Efraim Sicher in *Reanimation, Regeneration, Re-evaluation: Rereading Our Mutual Friend* (2010), concludes that in his last novel it is in "the quasi-apocalyptic self-

destruction (“Abbau”) that Dickens seeks moral redemption and social renewal.” (43), that is only the city itself as an organism can attain to its own purification, metropolitan (human) pollution invariably related to the predominant shades of the gray and black in the portrayal of the metropolis.

By contrast, Dos Passos’s New York in a similar state of urban chaos, is capable of reflecting light due to its distinctive serene blue skies exuding indifference, usually at variance with the state of mind of its residents, who interiorize the reflected light of the sun on city objects relating it to their dreams of glamor and societal advancement, thus imparting it additional brilliance as demonstrated by Bud Korpenning’s perceptions of Broadway:

With a long slow stride, limping a little from his blistered feet, Bud walked down Broadway, past empty lots where tin cans *glittered* among grass and sumach bushes and ragweed, between signs of billboards and Bull Durham signs, past shanties and abandoned squatters’ shacks, past gulches heaped with wheelscarred rubishpiles where dumpcarts were dumping ashes and clinkers... (MT 21) (italics mine)

The internalization of the external reality of the metropolis with Dos Passos goes up a level and becomes part of the narrative as nothing in the dynamics of the modern city of New York can suggest succession or precedence. One event does not follow from another, but just happens by itself alongside other events based on simultaneity. A clear distinction between Dickens’s piling up of nuances of the gray and dirty is Dos Passos’s usage of precise adjectives of color expressive of complex colors.

Light *goes* protean in the next description from *Manhattan Transfer*:

Sunday afternoon sunlight streamed dustily through the heavy lace curtains of the window, squirmed in the red roses of the carpet, filled the cluttered parlor with specks and splinters of light. Susie Thatcher sat limp by the window watching him out of eyes too blue for her sallow face. Between them, stepping carefully among the roses on the sunny field of the carpet, little Ellen danced. Two small hands held up the pinkfrilled dress and now and then and emphatic little voice said, “Mammy, watch my expression.” (MT 16)

Just like fog and mud infuse all urban spaces in the opening passage of *Bleak House*, here light seems to have a life of its own taking on motor functions and invading the urban space of a city apartment *streaming* and *squirring*. Then it gets dispersed and defragmented – *specks* and *splinters* of light. The sunlight also has the additional color nuance of being of a *Sunday afternoon* and contains dust expressed in the adverb *dustily*. The light colors in the passages are extended to the face and eyes of Ellen’s mother – the adjective *sallow* in contrast with the eyes being *too blue* accentuates the fact that the combination is unusual instilling the perception that Ed’s wife has an unhealthy complexion and is sick. Furthermore, the little girl’s dress is *pinkfrilled*, thus bridging shape and color. The carpet contains bright color spots, which are *sunny*.

Dos Passos’s exploration of color here goes to show that vacuity of meaning in the representational space of the city dwellers does not necessarily have to be related to dark, drab colors. One may attempt to paint the depiction above, and, if successful, what one will

get will be a modernist impressionist-expressionist-cubist painting, which would puzzle with its *mélange* or *collage* of modernist styles. The dazzling colors of the depiction lead to a loss of the contours as well as blurring the distinction between *container* – the room and *contained* – the city dweller, thus suggesting the lack of spirituality of the latter, having become a commodity just like the objects around them and the room containing them. The contrast of colors, where it exists (the blue eyes and sallow face), is a marker of sickness. The only thing bringing temporary relief in the scene above is the bright light itself until one realizes that it is synonymous with vacuity of meaning.

Bright light plays a very important role in regulating representational spaces as the following passage reveals:

It was black except for two strings of light that made an upside down L in the corner of the door. Ellie wanted to stretch out her feet but she was afraid to. She didnt [sic] dare take her eyes from the upside down L in the corner of the door. If she closed her eyes the light would go out. Behind the bed, out at of the window curtains, out of the closet, from under the table shadows nudged creakily towards her. She held on tight to her ankles, pressed her chin in between her knees. The pillow bulged with shadow, rummaging shadows were slipping into the bed. If she closed her eyes the light would go out. (MT 38)

In its function of deleting contours and masking absence of meaning, light remains the only thing that keeps darkness from taking over in a modernized stylish re-enactment of the Eloi fear of the dark when Morlocks are on the prowl looking for victims (*The Time Machine*, 1895), so Ellie keeps her fears away, fears of being vulnerable, alone and away from her father as a protector, who is caught in a whirlwind of odd jobs (an accountant by education) with varying shifts and is almost never home.

As city inhabitants lose their spirituality to objects, so the objects themselves as well as containers of urban space mingle with them, enter their lives and hence assume spirituality, also manifested in the passage with Florence interiorizing the night, which, once transferred to the objects, remains in fewer amounts with the city residents. The following passage is indicative of this idea:

The gaslamps tremble a while down the purplecold streets and then go out under the lurid dawn. Gus McNeil, the sleep still gumming his eyes, walks beside the wagon swinging a wire basket of milk-bottles, stopping at doors, collecting the empties, climbing chilly stairs remembering grades A and B and pints of cream and butter-milk, while the sky behind cornices, tanks, roofpeaks, chimneys becomes rosy and yellow. Hoarfrost glistens on doorsteps and curbs. The horse with dangling head lurches jerkily from door to door. (MT 38)

The state of being frost-burned has been conferred on to the street – *purplecold*. Day-breaking takes on the hue of garish yellow or red – *lurid dawn*, and in this unearthly portrayal of New York with *hoar-frosted* doorsteps and, *rosy and yellow* sky, the city dweller moves in an outworldly cityscape trying to scrape a living selling milk.



The next passage given in italics from the atmospheric introductions to chapters in *Manhattan Transfer* is an even louder example of light intermingling in social practice rendering the entire text bordering on intelligibility:

*Dusk gently smooths crispangled streets. Dark presses tight the steaming asphalt city, crushes the fretwork of windows and lettered signs and chimneys and watertanks and ventilators and fire-escapes and moldings and patterns and corrugations and eyes and hands and neckties into blue chunks, into black enormous blocks. Under the rolling heavier heavier pressure windows blurt light. Night crushes bright milk out of arclights, squeezes the sullen blocks until they drip red, yellow, green into streets resounding with feet. All the asphalt oozes light. Light spurts from lettering on roofs, mills dizzily among wheels, stains rolling tons of sky. (MT 94)*

The passage above explores the relationship between darkness and light in the interplay between the two in determining the parameters of urban and social space. The depiction refers to the city and to a steam-roller on the river. The representations of spaces have accumulated light during the day with the falling dusk and forthcoming darkness of the night causing the appearance of phosphorescing patches of urban space where social practices are still very much replete with activity. Light, therefore, has the function of establishing the urban spaces with the most intensive social practice. Unsurprisingly, these are *lettered signs* from roofs *spurting light*, *fire-escapes*, corrugated patterns of buildings, whose glowing contours are crushed by darkness, *windows blurting light* into the all-engulfing darkness, *asphalt oozing light*, etc. The protean light, filling every nook and cranny in the American metropolis in *Manhattan Transfer* during the day, lingering into the night scene above, is seen by William Sharpe in his work on New York at night – *New York Nocturne: The City after Dark in Literature, Painting, and Photography, 1850-1950* (2008) as an *eroticized* version of the city featuring a “landscape of light”, the city itself appearing to “drip with a pervasive omnidirectional desire” (221), thus rendering the residual display of diurnal social practices suggestive of performed sexual activities, increasing the palpable presence of life in the nocturnal metropolis as a living organism opposed to the persistent aura of death in control of the night city of Dickens.

Unlike Dickens’s treatment of light where the drab and gray dominate urban spaces during the day after which comes the impenetrable darkness of the night, bright light in the daytime with Dos Spassos resists the onset of night and impressionistically traces streaks of brightness into the all-encompassing dark. If subdued light with Dickens is there only to reveal bleak desolate cityscape, containing the city dwellers and restraining them so that their social practice is in unison with the urban colors, equally drab and gray or dark and lugubrious, with Dos Passos the exploration of light impacting urban spaces presents an infinitely brighter metropolis, where light simply stands for an expression of protean energy, which intermixes representations of space with the practitioners of the social practice of those spaces creating horrific representational spaces as lived experience, completely devoid of meaning, oftentimes in contrast with the purely aesthetic contemplation of the interplay of light and dark in the metropolis.

Had he chosen to use more colors in his depictions of London, Dickens might have arrived at a colorful portrayal of the river similar to the one made by Monet in *Fog on the*

*Thames* (1899-1901), which is an impressionist painting accentuating the fact that the objects are rendered indiscernible in it to the point that all that can be seen are very vague contours, the sun is lurid and the clouds around it are colored in thick green. The closest Dickens perhaps comes to an impressionist depiction of London fog is a *dabble* at shades of the brown, yellow and black in the following passage from *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) animated by the dynamics of iridescent colors:

Gaslights flared in the shops with a haggard and unblest air, as knowing themselves to be night-creatures that had no business abroad under the sun; while the sun itself when it was for a few moments dimly indicated through circling eddies of fog, showed as if it had gone out and were collapsing flat and cold. Even in the surrounding country it was a foggy day, but there the fog was grey, whereas in London it was, at about the boundary line, dark yellow, and a little within it brown, and then browner, and then browner, until at the heart of the City—which call Saint Mary Axe—it was rusty-black. From any point of the high ridge of land northward, it might have been discerned that the loftiest buildings made an occasional struggle to get their heads above the foggy sea, and especially that the great dome of Saint Paul's seemed to die hard; but this was not perceivable in the streets at their feet, where the whole metropolis was a heap of vapour charged with muffled sound of wheels, and enfolding a gigantic catarrh. (*OMF* 447)

Dickens's modernistic bent, however, was not for impressionism, but for another modernist movement as evidenced by two depictions of the city given below from his last two novels in which the dominant color is the insistent expressionist red. It is expressionist descriptions from *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) that create the sensation of inexpressible anguish and all-pervading horror in a gothic town, a dystopian place, Cloisterham (Rochester) standing between near death and afterlife with its dominant images of the cathedral and the cemetery. The night of the supposed murder of Edwin Drood recreates a monster through its reincarnation in an apocalyptic hurricane where there is one color that stands out against a background of protean murky-gray forces and it is the expressionistically accentuated *red light* anticipating Edward Munch's painting *The Scream* (1893), symbolically laden with insistent evocations of death and blood:

Not such power of wind has blown for many a winter night. Chimneys topple in the streets, and people hold to posts and corners, and to one another, to keep themselves upon their feet. The violent rushes abate not, but increase in frequency and fury until at midnight, when the streets are empty, the storm goes thundering along them, rattling at all the latches, and tearing at all the shutters, as if warning the people to get up and fly with it, rather than have the roofs brought down upon their brains. Still, the red light burns steadily. Nothing is steady but the red light. All through the night the wind blows, and abates not. But early in the morning, when there is barely enough light in the east to dim the stars, it begins to lull. From that time, with occasional wild charges, like a wounded monster dying, it drops and sinks; and at full daylight it is dead. (*MED* 171)

If more varied colors are to be seen in Dickens, they can be part of the natural spectrum of a thunderstorm where they are still expressionistically dominant in their intensity as illustrated in the following depiction from *Our Mutual Friend* (1865):

The thunder rolled heavily, and the forked lightning seemed to make jagged rents in every part of the vast curtain without, as Riderhood sat by the window, glancing at the bed. Sometimes, he saw the man upon the bed, by a red light; sometimes, by a blue; sometimes, he scarcely saw him in the darkness of the storm; sometimes he saw nothing of him in the blinding glare of palpitating white fire. Anon, the rain would come again with a tremendous rush, and the river would seem to rise to meet it, and a blast of wind, bursting upon the door, would flutter the hair and dress of the man, as if invisible messengers were come around the bed to carry him away. From all these phases of the storm, Riderhood would turn, as if they were interruptions—rather striking interruptions possibly, but interruptions still—of his scrutiny of the sleeper. (*OMF* 677-8)

Dickens, who has been compared to Thackeray by many with the conclusion that the former was always looking ahead, was undoubtedly on his path of becoming a modernist with a penchant for expressionism as evidenced in the excerpts from his last two novels. The descriptions above are also reminiscent of a number of cityscapes by Dos Passos where the red light dominates the city in a *mélange* of all nuances found in its spectrum intermingled with other colors suggesting the impossibility of the city to be painted in any colors known to the human eye.

To sum up, *Dickensian London* in reference to light is a dark, drab site with depressing representational spaces exercised by rich and poor alike, the former having lost their soul and humanity to the *evil* influence of industrial capitalism, the latter still resisting while preserving remnants of spirituality and humanity. They are resisting industrialism by abstaining from consuming it as much as the former, thus being endowed with lingering traits of humanity. The protean interaction of city inhabitants in expressionist representations of light-affected spaces is indicative of the fact that Dickens was on the path to modernism in his city depictions, his Victorian self, preserving the humanity of the city residents in a partial transfer of human characteristics to inanimate objects.

By contrast, the *Protean Metropolis* of Dos Passos is a much more *illuminated* place; this *illumination*, however, remains purely artificial whose only function is to render social contours indiscernible as if from photographic overexposure. The interaction of the three urban elements: city inhabitants, representations of space and light is indicative of high modernism with the metropolitan inhabitants completely assuming the characteristics of the inanimate objects, the latter taking on human traits, light being the vehicle for the enacted exchange and transformation.

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