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# Ruins, Memory and Identity in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* and *Dombey and Son*

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**Abstract**

This paper seeks to understand the relationship between ruins, memory and identity in Victorian London, and to explore ideas about the presence of classical and urban ruins that altered the way the Victorians experienced space and time in the mid-nineteenth century. The ruins were not only fragments from the past but also a fundamental part of the Victorians' identities, and they played a significant role in shaping the narratives of mid-Victorian fiction. Dickens' novels offered a wide range of literal and metaphorical representations of memory, ruined sites and selves linked with material ruins and the process of ruination in the metropolis and in Europe. In *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), for instance, the memory of the Marshalsea Prison haunts the narrative of the novel both in England and on the Continent. The image of the prison is a part of Dickens's childhood-self and he reconstructs this space by looking back to some thirty years earlier with a delicate storyline of 'a fragile' child. In *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), Dombey's house as a symbolic ruin is a key to the discovery and exploration of the lost bond among family members through the sense of place and memory. In the two novels, memories and personal failures are compellingly described in line with deserted and/or collapsed houses used both as material and symbolic ruins to describe the vanishing hopes of the characters and their final failures.

**Key Words:** memory, identity, ruins, Little Dorrit, Dombey and Son.

The city of progress and reconstruction in the nineteenth century, London included seemingly contradictory spaces such as ruinous slums, graveyards, and deserted houses. Charles Dickens extensively used these ruinous spaces in his narratives of the city and urban poor. His novels offered a wide range of literal and metaphorical representations of memory, estrangement and ruined sites and selves. Whilst Dickens sought consolation by sublimating classical ruins far from the gloomy and despaired vision of London, his narratives of the city life demonstrated how "ruins transgress[ed] and subvert[ed] the everyday encounter" of the Victorians with space and place (Trigg, 2009, p. xxv). Ruins symbolised the Victorians' difficulty of detachment with a dominant past and the establishment of clear boundaries between the modern and the conventional. The ruins in the city also "threatened constantly to obstruct the project of improvement" and signalled "the image of the ruin of the future" (Nead,

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2000, p. 10). In this sense, ruins addressed the fragmented and modern selves of the Victorians, who were trying to hold on to the new and the idea of progress in order to find "solid foundations for [their] lives and historical identities" (Donskis, 2006, p. 438).

Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1846-48/2001) and *Little Dorrit* (1855-57/1987) dealt with various forms of ruins that reflected his ambivalent approach to aesthetic, modern and romantic views. The worlds of these novels "are confused and horrific, riddled with deaths and mysteries", and they are "wastelands of ruins and the ruined" (Thomas, 1987, p. 88). In these novels, besides the changing topography of the city, the inhabitants experience financial, moral and spiritual difficulties, and their attachment to the past does not hinder an ultimate failure. Their ruined lives and memories from the past, therefore, seem to be linked with material ruins and the process of ruination. However, the response of the city to ruination and destruction was not always a disadvantageous one, for it also opened a new path for creativity and advancement following the Industrial Revolution and the Railway Boom. For instance, the construction of the railways at Staggs's Gardens in *Dombey and Son* suggests that both destruction and construction are taking place; but it also generates fragments of ruins in this process. Alongside the ruinous spaces in London, Dickens wrote Roman ruins in his narrative of *Little Dorrit.*[1] His growing interest in classical ruins was closely linked to his subsequent visits to the Continent and his personal observations on the relics of the past. Unlike his previous novels, he made use of diverse continental settings such as Switzerland, Venice and Italy on the Dorrits's long voyage in the novel.

In *The Aesthetics of Ruins* (2004), Robert Ginsberg defines ruins as "the irreparable remains of a human construction that, by a destructive act or process, no longer dwells in the unity of the original, but may have its own unities that we can enjoy" (p. 10). This approach allows us to articulate on their peculiar features of being active and continuous as a creation of historical actions, nature or human experience. Although Ginsberg's priority is demonstrating the joyful and refreshing aspect of the ruin as an aesthetic unity, he also elaborates other vast possibilities of ruins from different aspects. In this sense, it is significant to consider how ruins generated new meanings and possibilities in Dickens's novels by liberating the matter from its form, the form from its function, the function from its purpose, and by demonstrating how the aesthetic value of the ruin altered its representation in Victorian London. Through this liberation, the destruction of the structure reveals an "unexpected identity" of the substance: the form in the ruin destroys its original meaning and function and the order is replaced by the incongruity of the ruin as it is often linked with out-of-placeness, anomaly, ambiguity and uncanniness; as a symbol, the ruin preserves a community's identity as its meaning is "greater than the stone" and "the site"; and its originality produces a fresh aesthetic experience with its surprising unity of the past and present (Ginsberg, p. 10). Therefore, although ruins are generally considered a symbol of destruction they also "signify triumph of life over death" and creativity over destruction (Donskis, 2006, p. 434).

Regarding the relationship between memory, ruins and identity, this paper focuses on the sense of belonging and the sense of home as an intimate place where our "fundamental needs are heeded and cared", and as "an elusive and personal" place situated "in the deep recesses of memory and yield intense satisfaction with each recall" (Tuan, 1977, p. 141). In *Space and Place*, Yi Fu Tuan suggests that although forming an attachment to a place takes time, "the quality and intensity of [our] experience matters more than simple duration" (p. 198). By experience, I mean the sensation and perception of a place as well as an emotional and thoughtful/conscious experience of the place. Considering memory as a key component of

[1] Apart from *Pictures from Italy*, Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) is the only other novel that is comparable in this respect since it tells the story of the French Revolution.

identity, I read the Marshalsea prison as an intimate place of memory- functioning like a home- for Little Dorrit, whose attachment to the prison suggests a growing sense of belonging to the place, while it has a reverse effect on her father as an adult traumatised by his imprisonment. Dissimilarly, in the absence of his family, Mr Dombey's house transforms into a ruin –a place drained of meaning, 'only to be accessed by affective memory through its components and remaining furnishings' (Tuan, 1977, p. 144). Whereas the Bleeding Heart Yard in *Little Dorrit* stands for a ruinous site resisting change and contemporary ideals of the Victorians, classical ruins in Italy function as stimulants of affective and involuntary memory of the Marshalsea Prison, which haunts the narrative of the novel both in England and on the Continent.

## Classical Ruins

Alongside the ruinous spaces in London, Dickens wrote Roman ruins in his novels. Dickens's growing interest in classical ruins was closely linked to his subsequent visits to the Continent and his personal observations on the relics of the past. Unlike his previous novels, Dickens made use of diverse continental settings such as Switzerland, Venice and Italy on the Dorrits' long voyage in the novel. This was partly due to his journeys abroad, his observation of the landscapes and cities, and his visits to the sites of historical antiquities. Dickens visited Italy, Switzerland and France from July 1844 to February 1847 for the first time and he made a second visit between 1853 and 1856, spending almost half his time in France (Slater, 2009, pp. 207-241). He recorded his impressions and observations in his letters during his stay in Italy between 1844-45 and his second visit in 1853; and his travel sketches book entitled *Pictures from Italy* was published in 1846 (Burgan, 1975, p. 394). This book provides details of the sublime landscapes, his impressions of the past and ruins of the Roman world. He was both fascinated with the sublime nature and repulsed by the gloomy yet grand view of the artefacts. When he visited Pompeii, for instance, he called this place the "new City of the Dead, with its dark smoke hanging in the clear sky"; and mused upon "how much more awful and impressive is it, viewed from the ghostly ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii!" (Dickens, 1846, p. 243).

The Victorians were interested in the classical ruins in Europe, especially after the rediscovery of Pompeii in 1748. The town was turned into a tourist site observed by the travellers who faced the past and were reminded of the end of civilisations like their own; and yet Pompeii displayed the paradoxical persistence of the past lingering in the present. This created a picturesque image for observers like Dickens, who mused upon the uncanny presence of "the Destroyed and the Destroyer" in *Pictures from Italy* (1846):

> through the ruined temples of Jupiter and Isis, over the broken house with their inmost sanctuaries open to the day, away to Mount Vesuvius, bright and snowy in the peaceful distance; and lose all count of time, and heed of other things, in the strange and melancholy sensation of seeing the Destroyed and the Destroyer making this quiet picture in the sun. (p. 243)

The passage of time, therefore, was spatially represented and manifested itself in the form of frozen bodies and traces of their everyday lives from two thousand years ago. In Pompeii, Dickens admitted, it looked as if "the course of time had been stopped and there had been no nights and days, months, years and centuries, since" (Dickens, 1846, p. 244). Besides, he admitted that "the horror and oppression of its presence [was] indescribable", which reveals an abject moment of recognising the impossibility of detachment from the past, fear of death and future of civilisations (Dickens, 1846, p. 245). However, Italy was not a completely novel concept since it had already been a subject for the eighteenth century pastoral, Gothic and

romanticism by Byron and Shelley, who wrote about its beautiful and fertile lands (Vescovi et al., 2009, p. 9). The ruins of classical antiquity had been described by English historians such as Gibbon, who was inspired by *The Ruins of Capitol in Rome* and wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776). Later, in the early twentieth century, the ruins of the Parthenon temple on the Acropolis in Athens inspired Arnold Toynbee to start working on his twelve volumes work, entitled *A Study of History* (1961).

In Dickens's novels, the reader finds a classical and romantic view of ruins in Europe, too. For instance, Mr Dorrit and his family in *Little Dorrit* travel abroad after his release from the Marshalsea prison and they visit Switzerland, Venice and the Roman ruins in Italy. The characteristic rhythm of their voyage oscillates between attraction and repulsion; they are amazed by the beauty of the nature and repelled by poverty and moral degradation. In fact, on his visits to the continent, Dickens was interested in moral concerns and the harsh physical conditions of towns and local inhabitants as he travelled. For instance, in Naples, he was struck by the depravity of the people rather than the sublime nature and wrote in his letter to Forster that: "The condition of the common people here is abject and shocking. I am afraid the conventional idea of the picturesque is associated with such misery and degradation that a new picturesque will have to be established as the world goes onward" (qtd. in Burgan, 1975, p. 395). In another letter, he was musing on "the miles of miserable streets and wretched occupants, to which Saffron Hill or the Borough Mint is a kind of small gentility, which are found to be so picturesque by English lords and ladies; to whom the wretchedness left behind at home is lowest of the low, and vilest of the vile, and commonest of all common things" (Burgan, 1975, p. 395-396). As William Burgan suggests (1975), it is clear from the letters of Dickens that "he set out on his travels with certain expectations and measured various sights against these expectations in a conscious, unblushing way" (p. 394). He compares London with cities in Italy on poverty in *Pictures from Italy*:

> Let us not keep too studiously out of view the miserable depravity, degradation, and wretchedness, with which this gay Neapolitan life is inseparably associated! It is not well to find St. Giles"s so repulsive, and the Porta Capuana so attractive. A pair of naked legs and a ragged red scarf, do not make all the difference between what is interesting and what is coarse and odious? (Dickens, 1846, p. 251)

Furthermore, Steven Marcus calls attention to Dickens's "fresh awareness and anger" and disapproval of the utter depravity and filth in contemporary Naples and cruelty in the European past, "what might be called the historical present- that is, the persistence in the present of oppressive conditions inherited from the past" (1965, pp. 303-305).

In addition, a description of the degeneration of the landscape is mentioned in *Little Dorrit*; when the family approaches Rome they can observe this change "spatially rather than temporally…and in Rome ruin and stagnation are the only principles" (Zimmerman, 2008, p. 156):

> The period of the family's stay at Venice came, in its course, to an end, and they moved, with their retinue, to Rome. Through a repetition of the former Italian scenes, growing more dirty and more haggard as they went on, and bringing them at length to where the very air was diseased, they passed to their destination. A fine residence had been taken for them on the Corso, and there they took up their abode, in a city where everything seemed to be trying to stand still for ever on the ruins of something else—except the water, which, following eternal laws, tumbled and rolled from its glorious multitude of fountains. ( Dickens, 1846, pp. 511-12)

The repetition of former scenes in Italy evokes no excitement in the travellers and the gradually degenerated landscape eventually takes them to the ruins of the Roman city, frozen in time.

Despite the stasis and decay penetrating the city, it still continues to exist on the ruins of something else, a culture and civilisation from the past that lingers in the present with its materiality and fragmentary existence. However, the water still flows and nature resists transformation, time and the extinguished civilisations. Does that mean that Roman ruins signify "a failure to progress, a failure also demonstrated by just about every character in the novel?" (Zimmerman, 2008, p. 156). Unlike the unchanging and progressive quality of nature, the Dorrits' voyage is far from being "a progressive journey" for it does not lead to anywhere whilst traveling across the Alps towards Italy.

## The Marshalsea Prison

Dickens's perception of classical ruins is closely interconnected with the memories of the Marshalsea prison and the past of the Dorrits amongst the picturesque landscapes. In this regard, his section explores the haunting influence of the Marshalsea prison on Dickens, Amy (Little Dorrit) and Mr Dorrit. The image of the Marshalsea prison in *Little Dorrit* primarily haunts Dickens's memory as it is a part of his childhood-self and he reconstructs this space by looking back to some thirty years earlier with a delicate storyline of "a fragile" child, in 1855. London is described as "a place of imprisonment" where the city takes "the shape of [Dickens's] fears" (Ackroyd, 2002, p. 7). This representation of London by Dickens shapes and alters our understanding of space as a place of guilt and misery. Even the ruin and artefacts are sufficient to bring back his memory of the place, as he states in the introduction of the novel; and this is where he challenges the power of this place. In Chapter 6, entitled "The Father of the Marshalsea", the prison is introduced as follows:

> Thirty years ago there stood, a few doors short of the church of Saint George, in the borough of Southwark, on the left handside of the way going southward, the Marshalsea Prison. It had stood there many years before, and it remained there some years afterwards; but it is gone now, and the world is none the worse without it. It was an oblong pile of barrack building, partitioned into squalid houses standing back to back, so that there were no back rooms; environed by a narrow paved yard, hemmed in by high walls duly spiked at top. Itself a close and confined prison for debtors, it contained within it a much closer and more confined jail for smugglers. (Dickens, 1987, p. 57)

In this passage, Dickens makes a "spatial adjustment and directive" and informs the reader about the recent demolition of the evil place (Edgecombe, 1996, p. 69). However, this is not a historical novel, as it has neither "a tone of progressive relief [n]or regretful nostalgia", for its presence in the past can still be felt within the remains of the prison and the familiar acquiescence and personal memories shape its reconstruction in the narrative (Edgecombe, 1996, p. 69). Instead, Dickens creates an alternative spatial content in London by narrating the past, since "the same space cannot have two different contents" to represent a historical sequence in reality (Freud, 1929). By re-articulating and narrating the Marshalsea prison, Dickens disclaims the sorrow and danger, which he recognised as a threat when he was a young child when his father had been imprisoned in the same place.

In *Little Dorrit*, the picturesque landscapes of the Continent such as "the gorges of the Simplon, its enormous depths and thundering waterfalls", and "the descent into Italy, the opening of that beautiful land" are described as sublime for they seem unreal and indescribable (Dickens, 1987, pp. 463-64). In nature, even the Marshalsea prison seems unreal, "because Amy cannot imagine it continuing in the old way without her father" (Burgan, 1975, p. 401). However, she is aware of the fact that "the prisoners [are] still lingering in the close yard, that

the mean rooms [are] still every one tenantes, and that the turnkey still st[ands] in the Lodge letting people in and out" (Dickens, 1987, p. 464). Nature is transformed into an indescribable or un-representable object, and the bewilderment and perplexity of Amy describes a sublime moment, which cannot exist with the evil. The vast continent presents a new world that she was not aware of when she was in the Marshalsea prison. As they proceed, however, they come across "white villages and towns on hill-sides" that are "lovely without, but frightful in their dirt and poverty within" (qtd. in Burgan, 1985, p. 401). As Burgan notes, "everywhere there are signs of lingering autocracy and abortive revolution, an army of occupation making barracks of palaces, 'and showing to the mind like hosts of rats who [are] (happily) eating away the props of the edifices that supported them'" (Dickens, 1987, p. 401). In her letter to Arthur Clennam, Amy describes the difficulty of detaching from the past despite the beauty of these places:

> It is the same with all these new countries and wonderful sights. They are very beautiful, and they astonish me, but I am not collected enough—not familiar enough with myself, if you can quite understand what I mean—to have all the pleasure in them that I might have. What I knew before them, blends with them, too, so curiously. For instance, when we were among the mountains, I often felt as if the Marshalsea must be behind that great rock; … I often look up at the stars, even from the balcony of this room, and believe that I am in the street again, shut out with Maggy. It is the same with people that I left in England. (Dickens, 1987, pp. 469-470)

In this passage the past blends with the present and everything reminds Amy of her days spent in the prison. Her longing for happiness in her past and desire to see Arthur Clennam prevent her taking pleasure from the sublime beauties of classical ruins and landscapes. Instead, the ruins and nature take the shape of the places in London where she has memories. In Rome, "the evidence of decay is uncontested by any metamorphosis, real or apparent" (Burgan, 1975, p. 401). There, the Marshalsea prison becomes a part of the surrounding city with its connection to the past and decay. Amy even takes pleasure in gazing the ruins and considers them as fragments of her life in the prison and the love she is yearning for:

> Little Dorrit would often ride out in a hired carriage that was left them, and alight alone and wander among the ruins of old Rome. The ruins of the vast old Amphitheatre, of the old Temples, of the old commemorative Arches … besides being what they were, to her were ruins of the old Marshalsea—ruins of her own old life—ruins of the faces and forms that of old peopled it—ruins of its loves, hopes, cares, and joys. Two ruined spheres of action and suffering were before the solitary girl often sitting on some broken fragment; and in the lonely places, under the blue sky, she saw them both together. (p. 612)

Archaeological images of the "old Rome" in the novel work as "the reclamation and restitution of the past" with their concrete presence (Edgecombe, 1996, pp. 65-72). They also reveal an unchanging timeline that reminds her of "the more things change, the more they stay the same" (Edgecombe, 1996, p. 72). However, Amy uses these materials of antiquity to "bring back the deleted past, and so to nourish and sustain her soul" (Edgecombe, 1996, p. 72).

Although Mr Dorrit gains his freedom, Dickens (1987) describes his failure to adapt the new life of the wealthy; and once being a poor but respected man, Mr Dorrit dies after being traumatised by the haunting memories of the prison. In a moment of delirium in Italy, Mr Dorrit is preoccupied with the memories of the Marshalsea, as follows:

> Ladies and gentlemen, the duty—ha—devolves upon me of—hum—welcoming you to the Marshalsea! Welcome to the Marshalsea! The space is—ha—limited—limited—the parade might be wider; but you will find it apparently grow larger after a time—a time, ladies and gentlemen—and the air is, all things considered, very good. It blows over

> the—ha—Surrey hills. Blows over the Surrey hills. This is the Snuggery. Hum. Supported by a small subscription of the—ha—Collegiate body. In return for which—hot water—general kitchen—and little domestic advantages. Those who are habituated to the—ha— Marshalsea, are pleased to call me its father. I am accustomed to be complimented by strangers as the—ha—Father of the Marshalsea. Certainly, if years of residence may establish a claim to so—ha—honourable a title, I may accept the—hum— conferred distinction. My child, ladies and gentlemen. My daughter. Born here!'
>
> (Dickens, 1987, p. 636)

As this passage elaborates, he cannot distinguish between illusion and reality, and his spirit is highly troubled by the fresh images of the prison. His past interferes with his present experiences and his inability to detach himself disrupts his sense of reality and identity. Even before his mental breakdown, Mr Dorrit suffers from a greater anxiety during his short trip from Rome to London, for investment in the Merdle enterprises. His overreaction against Young John, the son of the turnkey of the prison, when they first meet after his release confirms his failure to accept his past and desire to preserve a distance between social classes. Furthermore, it suggests an absolute boundary emerging between the rich and the poor established on financial power and respectability, which casts out those do not belong to the upper classes. As William Burgan argues, this is an illustration of the "interdependence of moral and aesthetic values" and he is influenced by this dilemma implicitly after his release from the prison (Burgan, 1975, p. 407). Moreover, Mr Dorrit's mood swings and his hope to marry Mrs General imply his subconscious efforts to overcome his fears destroying him. His long voyage to the Continent rather than staying in London- and his insistence on having a completely new life is another manifestation of his struggle to overcome his past life and fears. In fact, both Mr Dorrit's and Amy's characters and their ultimate failure to adapt to the outside world signify the power of spatial concerns, shaping and transforming identities that cannot be comprehended without their past experiences.

## The Image of the House

Ruination took place not only in the city and Roman antiquities, but also in the lives of the Victorians, whose gradual degradation and failure changed the course of their lives. There is a huge difference between "living among the ruins and being ruined oneself" for the latter means living "on the margins" and the ruin can function as a way of preserving cultural identities (Gabriel, 2015). In Dickens's novels, places of habitation are usually used as a symbol to describe the vanishing hopes of the characters and their final ruination. In *Dombey and Son*, for instance, the life of Paul Dombey is gradually ruined following the death of his wife and his young son (Paul Jr), for whom he invests all his hopes for a better future. Although Mr Dombey remarries after his first wife's death, he is not loved by her second wife Edith, who eventually runs away with Carker, a manager at the firm. Once Carker is gone, Mr Dombey is incapable of managing the business and fails in both his private life and business life. His bitter disappointment after the loss of Paul Jr and his financial ruin are described through the image of "a ruined house" in Chapter 14:

> It is a great house still, proof against wind and weather, without breaches in the roof, or shattered windows, or dilapidated walls; but *it is a ruin none the less, and the rats fly from it*…At last it is all gone. Nothing is left about the house but scattered leaves of catalogues, littered scraps of straw and hay, and a battery of pewter pots behind the hall-door. The men with the carpet-caps gather up their screw-drivers and bed-winches into

> bags, shoulder them, and walk off…None of the invaders remain. *The house is a ruin, and the rats fly from it.* (Dickens, 2001, pp. 871-77) [Emphasis added]

The image of the grand house with fragments of objects left inside, no longer a "home", suggests the power of the ruin to change the function and meaning of a place. The house doesn't serve its purpose as a place to live in and its matter, form and function are liberated from its subservience to purpose. The ruined house excludes any living beings and becomes a repulsive space, which even "the rats fly from", as repeatedly mentioned. The narrator acknowledges it to be a ruin and describes the process of removal of furniture with careful attention. However, the ruined house becomes timeless for it means much more than a useless heap of stone for Mr Dombey, whose memories are still vibrant and powerful. His memories hold this place in one piece and give it a nostalgic new meaning and value. It is a place where he confronts his fears and disappointments, and leaves his pride outside of the walls of "his cell":

> And the ruined man. How does he pass the hours, alone? "Let him remember it in that room, years to come!" He did remember it. It was heavy on his mind now; heavier than all the rest. "Let him remember it in that room, years to come! …He had shed so many tears here, long ago, that he was less ashamed of his weakness in this place than in any other—perhaps, with that consciousness, had made excuses to himself for coming here. Here, with stooping shoulders, and his chin dropped on his breast, he had come. Here, thrown upon the bare boards, in the dead of night, he wept, alone—a proud man, even then; who, if a kind hand could have been stretched out, or a kind face could have looked in, would have risen up, and turned away, and gone down to his cell. (Dickens, 2001, pp. 882-885)

The house, therefore, symbolises his confrontation with his loneliness, melancholy and horror. With the loss of meaning in his life represented by an empty house, memories and fragments of ruins, he loses his hope, power and his family, all of which make him who he is. Even the rooms of the house look changed and he views the house from a new perspective he had not known before. His emotional state is influenced by the ruinous condition of the house and he cannot tolerate any ambiguities, or instability:

> He wandered through the rooms: lately so luxurious; now so bare and dismal and so changed, apparently, even in their shape and size. The press of footsteps was as thick here; and the same consideration of the suffering he had had, perplexed and terrified him. He began to fear that all this intricacy in his brain would drive him mad; and that his thoughts already lost coherence as the footprints did, and were pieced on to one another, with the same trackless involutions, and varieties of indistinct shapes. (Dickens, 2001, pp. 884-885)

This indicates the potential of the ruins to challenge boundaries by changing our habitual relationships with the places we inhabit, as Mr Dombey experiences. His house becomes a space to which he is only emotionally attached by his memories of his family and hopes for future. As the meaning and purpose of this place have altered, so the matter, form and function of the house gain a new identity, presence and experience, which he finds difficult to accept or understand. Without any furniture and the people he used to love, the house looks "bare and dismal and so changed" even in "shape and size" to him. His sufferings and new perspective only increase his anxiety and make him more vulnerable to the power of memory and his sense of guilt in the novel.

Furthermore, the collapse of Mrs Clennam's house in *Little Dorrit* is a powerful symbolic interpretation of the ruin as it addresses uncovered mysteries and the failure of their beholder. After his arrival in London, Arthur Clennam observes the suspicious behaviour of his mother, who keeps secrets about her family and her husband's death. As in London, Mrs

Clennam's house is impenetrable and full of mysteries Arthur cannot understand because of his mother's uncommunicative and secretive attitude. Rigaud blackmails Mrs Clennam but she refuses to confide in her son, who is concerned for her well being. Once Mrs Clennam rises from her wheelchair and leaves the house to find Little Dorrit seeking her forgiveness, the old house collapses and kills Rigaud in a dramatic scene:

> In one swift instant the old house was before them, with the man lying smoking in the window; another thundering sound, and it heaved, surged outward, opened asunder in fifty places, collapsed, and fell. Deafened by the noise, stifled, choked, and blinded by the dust, they hid their faces and stood rooted to the spot. The dust storm, driving between them and the placid sky, parted for a moment and showed them the stars. As they looked up, wildly crying for help, the great pile of chimneys, which was then alone left standing like a tower in a whirlwind, rocked, broke, and hailed itself down upon the heap of ruin, as if every tumbling fragment were intent on burying the crushed wretch deeper…There, Mrs Clennam dropped upon the stones; and she never from that hour moved so much as a finger again, or had the power to speak one word…she could move her eyes and faintly express a negative and affirmative with her head, she lived and died a statue. (Dickens, 1987, pp. 793-94)

The sudden collapse of the house signifies its inability to accommodate secrets and a hidden past any more and its eventual fall symbolises the failure of Mrs Clennam herself. The loud noise, the choking and blinding dust storms and great piles of chimneys bury "the crushed wretch deeper" as if punishing the old woman for her misdoings. The personification of the house with fragments falling on Mrs Clennam's body increases the effect of this symbolic punishment. The ruin functions as a purifier for her sins and it removes her presence from the earth. Strangely, thereby, it brings justice by destruction and death. After this incident, the diggers continue digging the whole night to find two buried bodies by "by flaring pipes of gas", digging deeper and deeper, "shovelling, and carrying away, in carts, barrows, and baskets" without stopping (p. 794). They finally find "the dirty heap of rubbish that had been the foreigner before his head had been shivered to atoms, like so much glass, by the great beam that lay upon him, crushing him" (Dickens, 1987, p. 794). The foreigner"s body is crushed and is described as matter, consisting of rubbish and atoms; therefore, it does not hold the unity of a human body any more. He becomes a part of the ruin itself, whereas Mrs Clennam's body remains "a statue". As the examples of Mr Dombey and Mrs Clennam suggest, the empty, deserted or collapsed house alters its function and purpose as a dwelling space; and as a ruin its new fragments, forms and structures gain new meanings with its incongruity. The destruction of the house reveals the richness and materiality of ruin that locates it between "nature and artifice" and claims for its own "integrity, autonomy and independent worth" (Ginsberg, 2004, pp. 1-2). And as a symbolic ruin, it is a key to the discovery and exploration of the lost bond among people through space and memory, as Mr Dombey experiences.

## Bleeding Heart Yard

In *Victorian Babylon* (2000), Lynda Nead notes that "modernity was being built upon the images of the ruin" and ruinous spaces in the Victorian era (p. 215). In this sense, Bleeding Heart Yard in *Little Dorrit* is represented as a place built upon the ruins of the past; yet, at the same time, it lacks a meaningful connection and relationship with the new inhabitants. The place carries some "relish of ancient greatness" and a character, inhabited by the poor (Dickens, 1987, p. 135). In time, this place is told to have greatly changed both "in feature and fortune", however, it has a connection with the past with its "two or three mighty stacks of chimneys,

and a few large dark rooms", and a legend of romantic love story that had an unhappy ending" (Dickens, 1987, p. 135). The meaning and features of this place do not match with its present poor dwellers as a temporary accommodation. The tenants live on the ruins of the past, and the landscape also implies the physical "otherness" of the Yard and the dwellers. The factory of Daniel Doyce "beating like a bleeding heart of iron" reminds us of the changing context in urban space and has juxtaposition with the legend that gives the place its name (Dickens, 1987, p. 135). The mystical and imaginative story of the Yard has been misplaced with the noise of "metal upon metal", whilst the temporary inhabitants occupy the old houses and redefine its meaning and context (Dickens, 1987, p. 135). As an inhabited space, this place has been transformed but it still carries the relics of the past, which hinders a complete re-definition with its fragmented characters and architecture. It is a liminal space for the inhabitants since there is no real and meaningful connection between this place and the dwellers. In Chapter 12, "Bleeding Heart Yard" is introduced as follows:

> In London itself, though in the old rustic road towards a suburb of note where in the days of William Shakespeare, author and stage-player, there were Royal hunting-seats…Bleeding Heart Yard was to be found; a place much changed in feature and in fortune, yet with some relish of ancient greatness about it. Two or three mighty stacks of chimneys, and a few large dark rooms which had escaped being walled and subdivided out of the recognition of their old proportions, gave the Yard a character. It was inhabited by poor people, who set up their rest among its faded glories, as Arabs of the desert pitch their tents among the fallen stones of the Pyramids; but there was a family sentimental feeling prevalent in the Yard, that it had a character. (Dickens, 1987, p. 135)

The "ancient greatness" of the Yard gives a character to it; yet, it is inhabited by the poor who set up a new life on the fragments of the past, they are not familiar with. The analogy between Arabs living among the stones of the Pyramids and the dwellers of the Yard emphasises this irony in the Bleeding Heart Yard. At the same time, the topographical difference is emphasised and the rising ground about Bleeding Heart Yard establishes a boundary between this place and its neighbourhood. In addition, its name originates from a love story associated with longing and murder:

> the legend of a young lady of former times closely imprisoned in her chamber by a cruel father for remaining true to her own true love, and refusing to marry the suitor he chose for her. The legend related how that the young lady used to be seen up at her window behind the bars, murmuring a love-lorn song of which the burden was, "Bleeding Heart, Bleeding Heart, bleeding away," until she died. (Dickens, 1987, p. 135)

The poor living in the Bleeding Heart Yard do not actually belong to this place for they are temporary dwellers and have to pay their rent regularly to remain there. Throughout the novel, Mr Panks frequently visits this place and collects the rent for Christopher Casby. Later in the novel, however, he discharges himself from his service and accuses him of being "a philanthropic sneak" and "a shabby deceiver" (Dickens, 1987, p. 800). Deceiving others and selfhood is a noteworthy theme frequently mentioned in the novel, in the private to public spheres considering Mrs Clennam's secret, Mr Merdle"s financial ruin and suicide, and Mr Panks's resistance as stated above. The characterisation of this place as the "Bleeding Heart Yard", therefore, indicates both the present and past conditions and the sufferings of its inhabitants having no real or meaningful connection with this or any other places. Nevertheless, the inhabitants project their fear of the "outcast" and foreigners who comes to the Bleeding

Heart Yard, which might be understood as a way of disclaiming any threats to their public selves:

> It was uphill work for a foreigner, lame or sound, to make his way with the Bleeding Hearts. In the first place, they were vaguely persuaded that every foreigner had a knife about him; in the second, they held it to be a sound constitutional national axiom that he ought to go home to his own country...They believed that foreigners were always immoral; and though they had an occasional assize at home, and now and then a divorce case or so, that had nothing to do with it. (Dickens, 1987, p. 302-303)

Their approach towards foreigners as non-English or non-British and their fear of "others" intruding boundaries of their neighbourhood and dwellings suggest an implicit awareness of their own estrangement in this Yard, where they maintain no connection to the past or the place they inhabit. In "Strangers to Ourselves" (1989), Kristeva suggests that "the foreigner lives within us; he is the hidden face of our identity" and "by recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself" (p. 264). The dwellers of the Bleeding Heart Yard disclaim awareness of their difference, since if they acknowledge themselves as foreigners they will have to accept their rootlessness and disconnection with the place. Therefore, despite their encounter with a stranger, whom they can perceive with their senses, they refuse "fram[ing] within [their] consciousness" (Kristeva, 1989, p. 286). This also explicates the association of immorality, crime with foreigners and outcasts, that is, a sub-conscious effort to mask their fear, mistakes and insecurities in the Yard. The difficulty of identifying themselves with the place and the shadows of the past raise new questions about their ability to embrace transformation and the outsiders. Therefore, with the examples of Staggs's Gardens, Tom-all-Alone's and Bleeding Heart Yard, Dickens connects and complicates the meaning and function of ruins as sites of progress and destruction, decay and death, otherness, and a quest of a meaningful identity and society in Victorian London.

Briefly, this study suggests that classical and urban ruins were not only fragments from the past but also a fundamental part of the present and identities of the Victorians; and they played a significant role in shaping Dickens's fiction. Dickens was interested in classical ruins, the sublime beauty of nature and the relics of ancient civilizations on the Continent. In particular, he paid attention to the paradoxical existence of filth, poverty and sublime nature and felt both repulsion and fascination, a similar feeling he felt for London, too. Memory and identity are intimately associated with ruinous images of the house in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* and *Dombey and Son*, by addressing the sense of belonging and the lost bonds among the family members. The image of the Marshalsea Prison has a reverse effect on Little Dorrit and Mr Dorrit, since for Amy it is a "home" as a child of the Marshalsea, whereas her father it is a place of disgrace and imprisonment. Mrs Clennam's house, on the other hand, functions as a locus of secrets and guilt, and it is ultimately destroyed. Dissimilarly, Bleeding Heart Yard highlights the fragmentary existence of the place as an ancient relic and the difficulty of establishing a meaningful relationship between the place and its dwellers. Ruins and memory, thereby, seem to be essential parts of the Victorian identity with their relation to the past, the present, and ruinous spaces such as classical ruins, the Marshalsea prison, the image of the house, and the Bleeding Heart Yard.

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