

Notes

Introduction

1. The only other book-length studies of Ackroyd published so far (at the time of writing) are Laura Giovannelli's *Le vite in gioco: le prospettive ontologica e autoreferenziale nella narrativa di Peter Ackroyd*, and Susana Onega's *Peter Ackroyd and Metafiction and Myth in the Novels of Peter Ackroyd* (to which I have not been able to refer due to its having been published after the completion of this study). Full details are given in the Bibliography.
2. The title of *The Diversions of Purley* is taken from an uncompleted work, *Epea Pteroenta: or, The Diversions of Purley*, by John Horne Tooke (1736–1812). Two volumes were published, in 1786 and 1805 respectively. The work puts forward a theory of language, and is written as a discussion between four interlocutors which, often satirically and in anti-Lockean vein, takes philosophers to task for overlooking the fact that the basic purpose of language is to communicate ideas swiftly. Tooke further argues that philosophers, grammarians and philologists have frequently erred in misunderstanding the structure of thought and the structure of language as being similar. As part of his own playful practice, and as a gesture against Utilitarianism, Tooke speculates, often hilariously, about possible etymologies and verbal declensions, shit, shot and shut, for example, all being related.

Laura Giovannelli mentions this source, suggesting that Ackroyd's use of the title foreshadows what she terms the 'bisogno quasi psicologico' [quasi-psychological necessity] on the author's part for finding precursors in the literary tradition' (Giovannelli 1996, 11 n.1). Susana Onega attempts to make a connection between Tooke's approach to language and that of Ackroyd's poetic practice (which is itself influenced by the 'language' poetry of John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara, amongst others), by arguing that Ackroyd's use of Tooke's title 'might be taken to function as a warning to the reader that he feels as free as John Horne Tooke to create his own wildly speculative and meaningless patterns' (1998, 22).

London Lickpenny is the title of an anonymously authored poem (c.1405), which addresses questions of simony and the abuse of wealth. A satirical poem, its first-person narrative concerns a Kentish man who comes to court to regain his lost money, and attempts vainly to be heard in the judicial system. A critique of this system, the poem also offers a fascinating view of medieval London.

Why these borrowings on Ackroyd's part? Fascinating as both works are in their own right, it is difficult to tell, given that the poetry seems to owe little to either in terms of direct intertextual reference. The subjects – the city and language – and the frequently satirical styles of both may be read as principal concerns in Ackroyd's writing but here the relationship ends, and, as we shall argue, it is precisely this kind of allusive game with which the author seduces the critic and reader.

Full details of both works are given in the Bibliography.

3. Of text in its broader sense, Derrida has commented, 'a text ... is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns the limits assigned to it so far' (1991,

256–7). This is an important remark, even more so in the context of discussing Peter Ackroyd. It is important to understand Ackroyd's novels operating as a differential network and a fabric of traces, even as they themselves, in their performance of the city of London for example, perform the city as its own differential network. See the chapter on London, below.

4. The *Plato Papers* has subsequently been published (1999) and is discussed in brief between Chapters 4 and 5.
5. The epigram is that of a character from *Daniel Martin*; the narrator continues, appositely for the purposes, and in the context of, this introduction, to point out that '[i]t had been no good pointing out that all language, even the most logical and philosophical, is metaphorical in origin ...' (339).
6. I am borrowing knowingly from the conversation between academic Rowan Phillips and film-maker Spenser Spender in Peter Ackroyd's first novel, *The Great Fire of London* (89).
7. See the discussion below in Chapter 1.
8. I am borrowing here, playing on, certain formulae, opening gambits, used by Jacques Derrida in a recent publication (1997, 11), where the question being asked is not asked merely concerning a defined subject (for as the formula suggests the definition is not yet arrived at); instead, the question is being raised by the arrival of the subject. Play raises the question itself, as well as raising the stakes in the textual game.
9. Significantly – or not? – the number seven is a mystical number for Doctor Dee, as it is for Nicholas Dyer, in *Hawksmoor*. To what lengths do Ackroyd's labyrinthine patterings extend, or are we merely being led up the garden (of forking) path(s)?
10. Doing the police in different voices is, of course, Sloppy's particular talent, in *Our Mutual Friend*, and not, as is implied here, the ability of anyone from *Little Dorrit*. Interestingly, however, the line concerning mimicry is appropriated, not by Ackroyd, but, spookily enough, by the film of *Little Dorrit*, made a number of years after *The Great Fire of London* was written.
11. 'In fact' is, in fact, a playful phrase of Ackroyd's, as one reviewer has noted. When it appears, the reviewer tells us, you come to learn, almost instinctively, not to trust the alleged 'truth' you are about to be told.
12. See the discussion of Ackroyd's play with allusion and reference in the chapter on poetry which follows.
13. On the comedic dismantling of genre, and other comic effects, see James R. Kincaid, 'Throwing Pies at the Dean: Comedy, Power, and Institutional Practice' (1996, 5–12).
14. To what extent may it be said that the murders are based on the Jack the Ripper murders, when the murders in *Dan Leno* are those not only of prostitutes but also of a Jewish scholar and a family living on the site of the Ratcliffe Highway murders (a grisly event which, today, is equally 'historical' and 'literary', inasmuch as it is known principally through Thomas de Quincey's own highly gothic textualized account)? Keating's review typically – typically, that is, of reviews searching for the family likeness – seeks to suppress the most obvious of differences, if only so that it can push its theory of playful resemblance, precisely in order to become frustrated by the textual game.
15. A number of reviews of *Dickens* are worth mentioning in passing, specifically those by William H. Pritchard, Malcolm Andrews, Garry Wills and Kenneth S. Lynn (full details of which are given in the Bibliography). Lynn's is curious in that it hardly ever discusses Ackroyd's approach to his subject outright, giving tacit approval throughout to the biography, especially as he reads it countering the 'agenda' of

Marxist interpretations of Dickens's texts. For the most part, the reviewer decides to reiterate in précis form some of Dickens's habits and attitudes, while alerting the reader in a vague fashion to various aspects of Victorian life which Dickens's own life suitably exemplifies. Reading askew, it is as if Lynn does not know exactly what to say of this biography and so chooses to avoid saying much of anything, directly (1991).

Pritchard's review (1991) is ambiguously titled 'The Exaggerator'. The title is ambiguous because it may be that it refers either to Dickens or Ackroyd or, equally to both. A largely favourable review, it points to Ackroyd's 'boldness and extravagance' (1991, 301). While Ackroyd's fictional interludes are found to be intrusive, they nonetheless contain 'some revealing moments' (1991, 302). Ackroyd's accounts of the novels are, when compared with previous biographers' treatments (notably those of Edgar Johnson and Fred Kaplan), received favourably.

The stumbling block for Pritchard comes, however, over the (ab)uses of, for him as for Kincaid, the too-frequent, rhetorical question, and the 'disfiguring rhetoric ... of sequences of terse, often one-word sentences sent out in unconvincing imitation of the opening page of *Bleak House*' (1991, 303, 304). The reviewer cannot believe that the use of rhetorical questions is accidental, but is at a loss to explain it. Both objections are levelled, then, at the aesthetic context and determination of particular writing practices. In both cases, it may be that a question of play, of parody, is involved. If no young writer should ever attempt to imitate Dickens, at least 'straight', then it may be that camp exaggeration may well be one way to engage and play with the Dickensian. Dressing up as a caricature of Dickens, or dressing Dickens up as one of his own caricatures, is not the same as trying to imitate Dickens, and pantomimic irony may well, in this context, be the sincerest form of flattery. Whatever the case may be, ultimately Pritchard's review is approving and there is no doubt sufficient generosity of spirit to overlook the perceived flaws.

Garry Wills finds little to like and demonstrates none of the ambiguous generosity of either Kincaid or Pritchard. The initial adjective used to describe the biography is 'unbuckled' (1991) and he is almost wholly annoyed by the text, despite that '[f]or long periods Ackroyd's breathless and accumulative approach works surprisingly well' (1991). He finds Ackroyd's guesswork exasperating, while the book itself is frequently 'sloppy, repetitive, coy, self-conscious ... poorly written ... [with] sententious asides, flip moralizing, [and] unearned generalizations'. Full of 'bloat and verbiage', the book is a 'baggy monster'. Unlike Kincaid, Wills finds the estranging suppositions about the Dickens-Ternan relationship unconvincing and weakly argued, and is annoyed – unreasonably it seems – by the fact that Ackroyd 'erases his own effort [to produce meaning] with the conclusion: "The fact is that in the end it [in this example the meaning of food in Dickens's texts] might be said to stand for anything or everything"' (1991). It is this very same uncertainty which Kincaid applauds in the biography. Though not as bad-tempered as a Martin Dodsworth, Wills is nonetheless so unambiguously disdainful of Ackroyd's ludic strategies that his review comes across as bad-tempered and lacking in any sense of what might be going on.

Finally, at the other end of the critical spectrum, is Malcolm Andrews's appreciative and positive review, from *The Dickensian* (1992, 43–5). Not finding the lack of dates a problem, Andrews admires the vivid, 'nearly seamless narrative' (403). He points out something observed by many of the reviewers, that the reader's 'stamina is severely tested', but then compares this with any attempt to keep up with Dickens's walks and suggests that the reader experiences 'a sense of the driving

energy and restlessness of the book's subject' which 'is surely part of the book's purpose' (403). Ackroyd delivers details with 'almost Dickensian prodigality' (403). That 'almost' is telling, because it acknowledges the gap between the assumption of a role and naive imitation, which many of the reviewers either dislike or, as in the example of Wills, miss altogether. Unlike Pritchard, Andrews does not find the strange and estranging punctuation a problem but, instead, sees it as a formal device which reproduces and plays out Ackroyd's desire to eschew the conventional aspects of biography. He also admits to Ackroyd's 'zest for the innumerable and proliferating contradictions within his subject' (404), concluding with a generosity matched only by what he sees as Ackroyd's own spirit, that the complaints of other reviewers seem paltry in comparison with the achievement of *Dickens* (405).

More than anything, these reviews and others all reveal the deep division over the reception of this biography and the fact that the question of whether *Dickens* is to one's taste is, in the final analysis, the only question which can be raised. What is interesting is that, where the biography is castigated, the reviewer almost inevitably appears obliged to resort to criticism which verges on *argumentum ad hominem*; the singular exception to this is James Kincaid's review which is itself ambiguous, and which struggles so hard with *Dickens* that it deserves the space given to it in this introduction, partly because it is readable as assuming in part some of the qualities of the biography itself.

16. Once again, there is the sense of play here, because Ackroyd is playing with his own fictional recreations as well as with historical figures. There is a simultaneity of projection and invention, performance and mimicry at work, which is unsettling precisely because it seems to be effected so seriously, while playing for laughs at the same time. Such simultaneity of characterization is stressed by Ackroyd repeatedly in *Dickens* where Dickens is the most anxious *and* the most humorous of men, the most curmudgeonly and the most generous. A personality may contain such paradoxes of course. Inadvertently then, the reviews of the biography that are the most troubled have become pulled into the game in some fashion, by seeing it as the best of biographies and the worst of biographies, while not always seeing that Charles Dickens can be the best of writers and the worst of men.
17. See the discussion of camp in the following chapter on Ackroyd's poetry.
18. As mentioned before, seven has a mystical significance in both *Hawksmoor* and *Dee*. Whether the seven interludes are part of this mystical pattern, or merely seven interludes, is not for me to decide. Critics with an interest in numerology may wish to make something of this.
19. Other reviews by Ackroyd, which may be of interest, are those of *The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Volume Two: 1912–1918* (*New York Times* 27 March, 1988), *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* (*New York Times* 12 November 1995), *Perfume* (*New York Times* 21 September, 1986), along with a brief article, also from the *New York Times* (1 November 1987), entitled 'Oscar Wilde: Comedy as Tragedy'. Virginia Woolf is revealed as a rare kind of reviewer, one who, while seeking some version of herself in what she reads, nonetheless treats each work with the respect singularity demands, avoiding the imposition of some aesthetic theory (unlike Pound and Eliot, as Ackroyd points out), and demonstrating, in the process, that she not only loves literature but also has a 'comic spirit'. Morton N. Cohen's biography of Carroll has for Ackroyd 'a delightful oddity' about it, and the sentences have a Wonderland-like quality: 'a distressing but endearing habit of falling over one another like playing cards'. Patrick Süskind's novel, *Perfume*, is 'a genuine historical fiction ... primarily concerned with the contemporary world ... [it] is a meditation

on the nature of death, desire and decay'. This comment is itself worth remembering as a reflection, or meditation, on Ackroyd's own creative process, as is the following comment, also from the review of *Perfume*, and made, significantly enough, after Ackroyd has compared Süskind's work with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: '... certain writers are drawn to the past precisely in order to explore ...[their] interests; history becomes, as it were, an echo chamber of their own desires and obsessions. But this cannot be conveyed by some easy trick of style: the generally debased standard of historical fiction springs from the fact that most novelists think it sufficient to create approximately the right "atmosphere." But the important things are the details.' The novel retains 'the strength of a fable'. Finally, the article on Oscar Wilde insists on the doubleness of Wilde, his Apollonian and monstrous qualities, which, Ackroyd argues, were the signs of the extent to which Wilde embodied the 'obsessions' of his age, and which, more dangerously, made him such a telling critic of that epoch. For Ackroyd, Wilde was a true 'modern'.

What is important in each of these reviews and commentaries is that Ackroyd responds to the complications and strangenesses of his subjects' identities, while bringing out even further the strangeness, so that not only do the books in question have powerful estranging features, but so too do their subjects, whether fictional or historical. Each piece of journalism provides a glimpse of a different Woolf, a different Dodgson, a different Wilde; the review of Patrick Süskind's novel offers the reader a fascinating insight into Ackroyd's own sense of the practice of historical fiction and its function, as well as suggesting a way of reading Ackroyd himself.

20. This remark is double-edged in its play; for, on the one hand, Ackroyd presents to us humour as the suspect package, ticking like a pantomime crocodile, while, on the other, he offers us wit as the bomb disposal expert, dismantling the technology of destructive force which is institutionally approved.

1. The Poetry of Peter Ackroyd

1. 'Making is, in Greek, *poiesis*', as Heidegger reminds us in his '...*Poetically Man Dwells...*' (1971, 214). From Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin's line which serves as the title of the essay, it is possible to indicate a direction for a reading of Ackroyd's poetry-as-archive. In such a reading, it can be suggested that the archive serves also as the construction of the dwelling of common identity, a shared identity whereby 'we' connect through the acknowledgement of the allusions as fragments of historical and cultural identity, handed down, transformed, communicated and translated. Ackroyd's poetry is therefore not merely playful for its own sake, but plays with the very conditions by which we seek to connect in order to transmit the sense of the constructedness of subjectivity. What Ackroyd's poetry 'makes' is the self as the ruined sum of its allusory references and excerpts.
2. See Susana Onega on this poem (1998, 8–10). She draws out convincingly the connections and allusions not only to Yeats, but also to Wordsworth's 'The Tables Turned'.
3. Connecting Ackroyd to Ashbery, to a certain Ashbery at least, is common among the reviewers and critics (as is referred to in this section of the chapter), and leads in part, through a misunderstanding of Ashbery as 'postmodernist' rather than as 'modernist', to the similar misreading of Ackroyd as also 'postmodernist'. However, if it is

necessary to trace such lineages, then perhaps it is worth reading Ackroyd's own account of Ashbery's modernist poetry, alongside that of Frank O'Hara in *Notes for a New Culture* (NNC 128ff.). Ackroyd's account reads Ashbery as a poet who, despite his modernism and the concern for a poetic language that ' "says" nothing' (130), still 'retains an overriding poetic voice' (NNC 133). In contrast to the adherence to 'voice' which Ackroyd reads in Ashbery's text, J. H. Prynne and Denis Roche are considered for their insistent interests in written language, in the employment of a multiplicity of discourses, and in the uses of fragmentation as an exploration of the surfaces of poetry (NNC 132–6). Whether one wishes to pursue family resemblances between Ackroyd and other poets or not, his readings of Prynne and Roche are suggestive of ways in which to comprehend his own poetry, rather than through the frequent comparison to John Ashbery.

4. Omega attempts to tease a reading of the poetry which places 'The Goldfish Sonata' from *Ouch* (later 'the hermaphrodite...'; *DP* 60) biographically in relation to Ackroyd and his father. The reference to the father is, she says, 'possibly a reference to Ackroyd's own father, the painter Graham Ackroyd, who separated Ackroyd from his mother shortly after his birth' (1998, 14). Whether or not this reading is convincing, the poem, with its images of gay fellatio, spilled semen, words as 'pillars of salt', dead art, the isolation of the poet and the desert station, all seem to suggest end-points, cul de sacs, the impossibility of continued or connected lineages.
5. See Alan Sinfield: 'Art is a space where femininity is permitted, and that permission limits its dissidence. The case may be different in camp, drag, and lesbian butch/femme role-playing, where categories of gender and sexuality are more provocatively juxtaposed' (1994, 198). Sinfield's sense of containment with regard to what art allows is important here, and in general for Ackroyd's work, at least as far as the negative criticisms of his writing go. For, it is as if, aware of the possibilities for disruptive play which the rule book of aesthetics allows, Ackroyd appears to push at the rules, to combine parody with camp, with irony and dead-pan, so that the reviewer or critic is never able to decide on what the text seems to be getting up to, or away with. Sinfield cites Andy Medhurst's argument that postmodernism's play with identity is merely a game that allows straights to catch up with camp (Sinfield 1994, 200). It is perhaps the other way round with Ackroyd, and one of the reasons for the constant misrecognition, mis-reading, of his work as postmodern. The use of this normative but outrageously vague academic label is a sly act of making Ackroyd safe, domesticating him and giving him an identity, albeit one which is multifaceted. For, 'postmodern' relies in its use as a definition on popular culture aestheticization, where citation and meaninglessness are the only available gambits, in a safely depoliticized arena of self-referential artistic endeavour.
6. On the subject of gender-identities and sexual confusion, Eliot's poem has as one of its principal characters, the hermaphrodite Tiresias, the 'old man with the wrinkled dug's' (l. 228), and, while little could be said to be directly camp in *The Waste Land*, from certain perspectives, much of 'Sweeney Agonistes' is markedly so, especially at the point when Krumpacker utters the following lines: 'Yes London's a little too gay for us / Don't think I mean anything *coarse*' (Eliot 1974, 129), when, of course, he does, doesn't he? It is this momentary dalliance with vulgarity and crassness which seems to play in Ackroyd's writing, and which is so frequently given voice in his comic characters in the novels, such as the Lenos, or Harriet Scrope, in *Chatterton*, or Augustine Fraicheur, in *First Light*.

The camp vulgarity is a quality belonging to many music hall artists and comedians connected to the music hall tradition, especially in London, as discussed in the

body of the chapter, above, where campy and cross-dressing frequently go hand in hand, as in the example of Dan Leno, one of the characters in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. The characters of Eliot's unfinished 'Sweeney' owe as much to music hall as they do to camp sensibility: on the influence of music hall on 'Sweeney Agonistes' see Ackroyd in his biography of Eliot (*TSE* 105, 145–8).

Also of interest of course is that, in the echo of the barmaid, Ackroyd is borrowing or alluding to a moment when Eliot 'performs' a female voice. Elsewhere in his poetry, Ackroyd has occasion to borrow another of Eliot's female impersonations, when, in 'the novel', the unidentifiable narrator remarks '...the self fades and flickers; we read novels late into the night' (*DP* 28), recalling Marie's comment in *The Waste Land* that 'I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter' (l. 18; Susana Omega elaborates on the complex web of allusions to Eliot in 'the novel' 1998, 17–18). And, as already mentioned in the discussion of 'among school children', Ackroyd gestures in the briefest of manners toward that other famous moment of female impersonation in English literature, Marvell's 'The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn'.

A focus for a future study of Ackroyd, which discusses the possible connections between issues of sexuality, gender, class, theatricality, performance and masquerade in the context and setting of London presents itself through a complex of inter-related characters, some of whom have already been mentioned briefly in this note. In addition to these, in *The Great Fire of London* there is Sir Frederick Lustlambert, whose profile is reminiscent of Punch (*GFOL* 51), while there is also the character of Rowan Phillips, the gay Canadian Cambridge don and Dickens expert, who is asked to write the script for Spenser Spender's film of *Little Dorrit*, and who has a brief affair with working-class Londoner Timothy Coleman. Obviously, there are the interrelations of the issues of sexuality, class, masquerade and performance to be found throughout *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*.

Already mentioned from *First Light* is gay antiques dealer Augustine Fraicheur, who directs an amateur company's production of Eliot's *The Family Reunion*. Joey and Floey Hanover, once music hall favourites, bear close examination, especially Floey's often vulgar malapropisms, and Evangeline Tupper, a 'senior civil servant in the Department of the Environment' (*FL* 10), and caricature lesbian. In *Chatterton* there is the melodramatic Harriet Scrope, lesbian and novelist who screams exclamations while making a sandwich (*C* 37), the curious, theatrical Lenos, antique dealers, and Pat, the gay companion of Mr Joynson, who is first encountered wearing a leopard-skin leotard (*C* 51).

Goosequill is obviously developed from the music hall comedic Londoner (*Milton in America*), while the Catholic settlement of Mary Mount is highly theatrical. Most directly involved in the theatrical, along with issues of cross-dressing, is *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, while the darker sides of theatricality and ritual in London are explored in both *Hawksmoor* and *The House of Doctor Dee*. In *English Music*, the narrator Timothy Harcombe and his father, Clement, are both working-class 'theatricals'.

Music hall and working-class theatre in London are discussed in *T.S. Eliot* (particularly in relation to Eliot's composition of 'Sweeney Agonistes'; see above), throughout *Dickens*, in *Blake*, while *The Life of Thomas More* not only emphasizes the development of theatrical tradition in the city, but also the generally theatrical nature of London society in the early modern period, commenting also on the entertainments written by More, in which his family were forced to participate. As Ackroyd suggests in the final interview in this collection, there is not only an interrelated cultural history of

- camp and theatricality in London, London, and, more especially, Londoners, are all too frequently and inescapably camp *and* theatrical. There is always the element of masquerade and performance amongst the working class.
7. The extent to which this 'voice' has a particular London, if not, English currency, and that it has extended into the shared cultural consciousness, has recently been given coincidental expression in the *Sunday Times* (Robert Harris, 'Blair's third way to elected leadership', 20 September, 1998, no. 9082), in its coverage of what it refers to somewhat archly as *l'affaire Lewinsky* (which I would also argue is readable as delivered with a somewhat camp intonation). In four pages of coverage of the Clinton-Lewinsky investigation, one journalist, having recited some of the details of Kenneth Starr's findings, utters the remark 'titter ye not'. The phrase, as those with research interests in camp will no doubt recognize, comes from the patter of comedian Frankie Howerd, who would also, just prior to putting his own tongue quite firmly and literally in his cheek, comment in all apparent innocence on his audience's laughter: 'big titters, little titters'. Indeed.
 8. See, for example, Ackroyd's own discussions in his *Dressing Up*, which pays particular attention to theatrical transvestism (see Ch. 5 'Transvestism as performance', 89–139). Masquerading and theatrical performative play with normative identities is discernible across his work, whether expressed through camp or 'stagy' characters in the novels, or through the interests of the various biographies' subjects, as is discussed in note 6, above.
 9. On the subject of titles, see Susana Onega (1998). Reading the titles, she asserts that, on occasion, 'they obscure, rather than illuminate the meaning' of the poem, while, at other times, titles seem to be opposed ironically to the poem's content, as in the case of the poem 'Country Life', which, she argues, concerns itself with 'the alienation of life in the city' (7). Onega also points to the way in which Ackroyd will either drop titles or include them where none had previously been in successive reprintings of the poetry (8), and there is, she suggests, 'a willed unrelatedness and opacity' to Ackroyd's titular practice (8). Most frequently, however, Ackroyd will provide a title for a poem which previously had none in an earlier manifestation, by taking the first few words of the first line, and making these the title with a triple dot ellipsis.
 10. These are: 'country life' (7–8), 'and the children ...' (11–12), 'This beautiful fruit ...' (13), 'my own ...' (15), 'only connect ...' (21–6), 'the cut in ...' (27), 'the novel' (28), 'In the middle ...' (30), 'there was no rain ...' (31), 'how did it ...' (34), 'out of the ...' (36–9), 'The extreme heat ...' (40), 'madness ...' (41), 'the room is ...' (43), 'opening ...' (45) 'the secret is ...' (47), 'you do the best ...' (50), 'and then ...' (59) 'The great Sun ...' (64), 'The little tune ...' (65), 'watching the process ...' (67), 'love falls' (72). All page references are to the poems as they are reprinted in *The Diversions of Purley* and not to their earlier publications.
 11. Those texts on which Vasseleu draws specifically are Derrida's 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy', in *Margins of Philosophy* (1982, 207–72) and Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985). Irigaray, discussing Plato's cave, argues for the need to distinguish between artificial and natural light, on the distinction that the artificial light, in this case a fire, is a representation of the sun, a mime, translation or projection, always already a metaphor, a figure of detour and delay (245–6). Derrida also distinguishes between lights, forms of light, in 'On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy' (1993c, 147–8).
 12. The Lacanian *point de capiton* is described by Slavoj Žižek as the 'theory ... of the phallic signifier as the signifier of lack' (1989, 154). Žižek discusses the Lacanian

reading of subjectivity as part of a response to what he describes as the poststructuralist critique of Lacan's theory, which he summarizes as arguing that Lacan, in positing such a theory, is attempting to 'master and restrain the "dissemination" of the textual process' (154ff.). The problem immediately is not so much whether Lacan's assertions or Derrida's responses (cited by Žižek) are more or less correct. I am interested here with the 'I-effect' and its reading or misreading, specifically as that concerns the performative 'I' in the text of Peter Ackroyd.

Bruce Fink provides a particularly lucid discussion of the *point de capiton*, translated by Fink as 'button tie' (1997, 93–5). Fink suggests how the arrest of the play of language, the play between 'language and meaning (reality as socially constituted), between signifier and signified, that will never break' (93), arises specifically as the child's response to the prohibition of the father. Significantly, however, Fink's discussion does not rely on the dialectical and polemical opposition in Žižek's assertion of the *point de capiton* against so-called poststructuralist objections. Fink argues that 'there is no true anchoring here, strictly speaking, since an anchor suggests an unmovable terra firma to which something is attached' (93). He continues: 'Rather, the result of the paternal metaphor is to tie a specific meaning to particular words ... without regard to an absolute referent' (93–4). Thus Fink makes available a textured or structural moment of meaning or stasis within the structure of language, which, while not being absolutely fixed or unshakable, is nonetheless foundational and operates within the textual structure or the structure of language because, on the one hand, it operates as though it were unshakable, absolute, and, on the other, and perhaps more importantly, is accepted as such by the addressee, in the Lacanian case, the child. The operation of 'I' is analogous, at least in terms of the reader's comprehension and misrecognition of it. 'I' is a moment of temporary, illusory fixity which reading teaches us is constant or has some signifying relationship to the signified of the speaking subject, the author or fictional character, whom we assume – or are taught to assume – is a more or less consistent unity.

13. On the play with authoritative status which the utterance or inscription of I effects, see Nicholas Royle on Derrida's use of 'I' (1995, 162–8).

2. The Styles of Peter Ackroyd I

1. It is interesting to note Lodge's yoking together of two critical works, one from within the academy by Harold Bloom, about as far in as it is possible to get, and the other from outside. Ackroyd's 'polemical' work comes under attack for many aspects of style similar to Harold Bloom's work, notably its apparently overarching debt to the style of 'French structuralism' and its obscurantist prose (which Lodge often assumes as the sign of stylistic equivalence). Despite its being a polemic, *Notes* is castigated for, amongst other things, seeming to be a parody of structuralism, being selective in its historical examples, of playing fast and loose with language, and of being rhetorically sinister, whatever that may mean. Given Lodge's curiously, though predictably pedantic, Anglo-Saxon distaste and his efforts to pick Ackroyd up over his use of words, one wonders whether Lodge imagines Ackroyd quite literally writing the book with his left hand for the purposes of obscurity. Also telling of Lodge's native insecurity is the fact that he criticizes Ackroyd for suggesting an alternative beginning for modernism with the Age of Reason, historically prior to the then institutionally recognized beginnings of modernism at the end of the nine-

teenth century. Lodge's review is nothing so much as pompous in its pedantry and achieves a sort of middle-brow high-fallutin-ness (if such a paradox is possible, and with the English I've no doubt it is) which is telling about the degree to which Ackroyd's critique of Anglo-Saxon modernism provides a palpable hit, for all its selectivity and minor flaws. Had Lodge's pedantry been of a different sort, he might have given attention to the first word of the title: *Notes*. With its musical tenor, recalling the synesthetic effects of Ackroyd's poetry and anticipating *English Music*, the music of the spheres of Dr Dee, and the Music Hall songs of *Dan Leno*, the term also, and, most obviously, implies annotations rather than fully-fleshed – if Lodge will forgive me mixing my metaphors – prescriptions which, as that 'for' suggests, gesture towards, sketch out a possible route on the way to a 'New Culture'. The title itself of course reads parodically, and therefore politically, by seeming to invoke obviously T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948). The *for* of the title is reminiscent also of translations from French of titles, where *pour* means both *for* and *towards*. Whichever way we choose to read it, *Notes for a New Culture* plays with critical and cultural expectations even before we open the book.

Not that Christopher Ricks bothers in his review to look at the cultural and critical expectations to any extent, happy as he is to criticize errors of fact (1976). Like Lodge, he gets greatly exercised over the essay, to the extent that he mixes his own metaphors (can an oasis in fact be buoyed up by a swell?) in criticizing the book's claims that its position is a somewhat isolated critical stance. However, this aside, Ricks never really engages the argument of the book, so annoyed is he at a number of egregious errors of fact and spelling. (Ackroyd was to correct these in the second edition.) Important, however, is the use to which the errors are put. For, as Brian Finney points out in his article on *Chatterton*, Ricks focuses on the mistakes as a way of avoiding a 'head-on' confrontation with Ackroyd's argument (Finney 1992, 242). What we can take away from this review is that, like Martin Dodsworth and David Lodge, Christopher Ricks is sufficiently disturbed by any challenge to English cultural assumptions. This is most tellingly shown when Ricks, criticizing Ackroyd's truly dreadful error concerning date correspondences between Tennyson and Mallarmé, recoils at 'that exclamatory put-down of my native land' (1976). This and Ricks's use of what he calls 'Anglo-French' are, quite possibly, intended to be funny; instead, these remarks sit there on the page like mother's cold rice pudding, unwanted at the Sunday dinner table.

2. T. S. Eliot's notion of 'Time present and time past' present in 'time future', and the latter contained in 'time past' (Eliot 1983, 189) may be said to be an important image for Ackroyd's own conception of time, as reviewers have, on occasion, noted. On the relationship between the text of Eliot and Ackroyd's work, see Omega (1998, 3, 9, 16–18, 20, 23).
3. Ackroyd has commented on a number of occasions on the importance of Catholicism as a submerged cultural trace in the construction of Englishness (as in the interviews in this book), most recently in the context of discussing London in an interview with Tim Adams, in 'A Life Sentence: London's Biographer', *The Observer* (1 March, 1998). See Omega on the significance of Catholicism, in her discussion of Ackroyd's *The Life of Thomas More* (1998, 77–9).
4. I take this term from a somewhat overlooked study by Leonard Orr, *Problems and Poetics of the Nonaristotelian Novel* (1991). The nonaristotelian novel is one which consciously avoids linear narrative progression and plays a variety of games with the temporal. It is not concerned primarily with organicist aesthetics, and neither is

- it overly concerned with issues of strictly logical development centred on plot and/or character. A brief survey of some of more negative reviews of Ackroyd's fictions demonstrate an implicit focus on Aristotelian-derived aesthetics as the model by which to judge whether Ackroyd's characters are 'believable', whether his plots seem too 'contrived', whether the whole is organically convincing or not.
5. François Gallix's article on *English Music* begins by alerting the reader to the intertextual tradition to which Ackroyd belongs through a description of Jorge Luis Borges' short story, 'Pierre Ménard, author of *Quixote*', as, 'probably', 'la limite extrême de l'intertextualité' (1997, 218).
 6. As the list of authors above shows, and as John Peck points out, 'the kind of novel' written by Ackroyd is equally, if not more so, the production of 'non-British authors' (Peck 1994, 442).
 7. Not only does the label 'postmodernist' ignore the historical instance of similar forms of writing having existed prior to the moment of so called 'postmodernism', the 'question of whether or not Ackroyd is a post-modernist novelist is in the end irrelevant' (Peck 1994, 450). John Peck makes a convincing argument for seeing Ackroyd's saturation of his works with literary echoes and references as being closer, in its ironic and sceptical performativity, to Joycean devices (1994, 450).
 8. See also Onega's discussion of Ackroyd's sense of the play in language (1998, 6–7).
 9. Laura Giovannelli makes explicit certain of the connections between Ackroyd's *Notes* and T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, which relationship she describes in terms of Harold Bloom's notion of the 'anxiety of influence' (1996, 12–13). Without going into the possible connections, it is perhaps important that we read the difference between the two titles. Ackroyd's is the more tentative of the two, speaking of 'a new culture'; Eliot's on the other hand, proposes to begin *the* definition, rather than one among many, of the existing culture.
 10. How exactly should we read, for example, Spenser Spender's comment to his wife that, if a line could be drawn between the churches of Nicholas Hawksmoor, this would form a pentangle? (See Onega 1998, 43, 48.) Are we meant to believe that Spender has discovered this, or that he has read, like Peter Ackroyd, Iain Sinclair's *Lud Heat*? Or that Ackroyd, even at this point in his career, already had the idea of writing *Hawksmoor*?
 11. Fires occur in a number of Ackroyd's novels. *Chatterton* and *Doctor Dee* both contain conflagration, as do *Hawksmoor*, which is generated partly and indirectly from the 'real' Great Fire of London, and *First Light*.
 12. The family name and the alliteration of Spenser Spender also suggest Stephen Spender, but this is not to say that we can take this any further than noticing the chance resemblance. Fancifully, it might even be noted that the name sounds like 'suspense suspender'; playfully, it promises to reiterate itself partially, but suspends itself from doing so, even as it might be taken to be a definition of the halting work of a mysterious narrative! Susana Onega also suggests the echo of the name of 'the founder of evolutionist philosophy Herbert Spenser' (1998, 28).
 13. T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, in *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (1963) (London: Faber, 1974: pp. 61–86), p. 65. Eliot's phrase is, of course, well-known, virtually a cliché for defining the city. An interesting coincidence, and probably nothing more, is that, while Eliot's poem begins with April, the cruellest month (as is equally well known), the chapter from which the description of the set is taken (Ch. 19, Part II) begins with the arrival of Spring in London (*GFOL* 105). Further chance 'cross-fertilization' between Ackroyd and Eliot may be read in Eliot's own citation of

Edmund Spenser, in 'The Fire Sermon'. The arrival of Spring causes the city to appear to melt at the edges, anticipating the unreality, blurring the representation, and this is described through parodic simile on Ackroyd's part, like 'frozen food which is placed upon a warm plate' (*GFOL* 105). As much as Ackroyd's simile sounds as though it might be a parody of some Dickensian description of the city, updated to the late twentieth century, it also serves to remind us of the meal shared by the 'young man carbuncular' and the 'typist home at teatime'. These are, it has to be said, no more than echoes, intentional or otherwise; standard intertextual referentiality (perhaps). We do not wish to pursue these any further, but merely alert the reader to their possibility, as an example of the extent to which the text of Peter Ackroyd is traced densely with numerous other texts.

14. Compare, for example, the appearances of Amy in *The Great Fire of London* with those in *Dickens* (*D* 107–12), in which, for example, Little Dorrit and Maggie chance to meet with the celebrated author, and conduct him to an interview with the father of the Marshalsea. Ackroyd's interest in fathers who fail in some manner finds a felicitous connection in both Dickens's own life and the Dorrit family.
15. Fun City first appears in Ackroyd's prose poem 'Across the street...' (*DP* 42), in which the proprietor is not Arthur but Joe.
16. Travesty, in the sense of burlesque or parody, is also implied here, as is the now rare noun *travestiment*, which predates transvestism, and also carries a sense of the theatrical and performative. Originally an alteration of dress or disguise, travesty has of course come to mean a derisive or ludicrous imitation of a serious literary work, to quote the OED. But then, at what level is the serious separable from the ludicrous, either in Wilde or Ackroyd?
17. For the reader with an eye to the intertextual, Ackroyd not only has Wilde – who is later to appear in a cameo role seated in the British Library, alongside Karl Marx and George Gissing, in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* – refer to Chatterton (*LTOW* 67), but also to Dan Leno himself (*LTOW* 117), whose ability to mimic 'the voice of a washer-woman or the strange gait of a variety actress' strikes the fictive Wilde as 'quite alarming' (*LTOW* 117). The labyrinth of casual connections which Ackroyd traces is seen in this example to be without immediate semantic purpose, other than to evoke the 'truth' of a certain milieu or cultural moment. However, given that Wilde is used to comment on another London celebrity, one whose own life was defined by dressing up, cutting a caper and doing a turn, we can at least acknowledge a recurrent play of tropes within the urban setting which speak of performance and the assumption of identities.
18. Nicholas Hawksmoor worked for and with Wren, but the design of his churches is significantly different from those of the other architect. The 'Church Building Act of 1711 was responsible for six marvellous Hawksmoor churches – St Alfege in Greenwich, St Anne Limehouse, Christ Church Spitalfields, St George-in-the-East (Stepney), St George's Bloomsbury and the City church of St Mary Woolnoth' (Porter 1994, 124).
19. The theatrical metaphors used by Hollinghurst are an important acknowledgement of Ackroyd's performance, even though, arguably, the reviewer intends them as a criticism.
20. The effect I'm describing here is a little like the play between Jane Austen's knowing parody of Ann Radcliffe's gothic novels in *Northanger Abbey* and those elements of Radcliffe's own fiction which tend, all too readily, to lend themselves to a parodic reading ahead of Austen's efforts. The question that begs to be asked is: is it possible to parody that which is already available to parodic discernment?

21. Swope, Janik and Luc Herman each address the issue of mystery in their essays (Swope 1998, 222; Janik 1995, 173; Herman 1990, 122).
22. Even the critical effort is sometimes aimed at explaining the past, inadvertently making the past more believable because explained at greater length. In an exemplary reading, Susana Omega addresses the dualism of Dyer's time between scientific rationalism and hermetic tradition (1991, 117–38). She focuses on Dyer's knowledge of the 'Scientia Umbrarum', an 'occult science developed out of neolithic, hermetic, cabbalistic and gnostic elements' (Omega 1998, 45).
23. It is perhaps worth mentioning that Ned, in his previous identity, was a printer in Bristol. Bristol is also the home of printer Samuel Joynson, who printed the historical Thomas Chatterton's verse, and who, in the novel *Chatterton*, will fake documents supposedly written by Chatterton. There is no other discernible connection to be made, except to observe how Ackroyd's fictions, once again, not only conflate and disjoint the supposedly separate identities of fact and fiction, but also appear to connect to one another. See Richard Swope's essay (1998) which discusses the character of Ned.
24. In looking for other connections it has been noted by reviewers that Dyer's servant's name is Eliot, as one possible connection to the poet, while, in *Chatterton*, where other references to Eliot occur, the poet Charles Wychwood's wife is named Vivien, although the resemblance between her and the first Mrs Eliot ends with the name, as both Dennis Donoghue and David Lodge are quick to point out in their respective reviews of the novel (1988). The question is, once more, are we to make anything of this? Is Ackroyd being anything more than playful through such allusions? More importantly, how are we to distinguish between playful play and serious play? How, indeed are we to read 'play' at all as it resonates between its innumerable and undecidable registers? We cannot: play destabilizes, ahead of the effort to read, any identity which we might seek to assign it. In displaying its play, play displaces.
25. Jean-Pierre Audigier gives an interesting account of Ackroyd's use of nursery rhymes in his 'L'Apocryphe selon Ackroyd' (1994, 139–50). He suggests that the use of rhymes belongs to the process of the erasing the distinctions between fiction and history. Nursery rhymes, argues Audigier, are at the 'heart of hermetic semiosis', they serve an apparently oracular function even while they themselves are articulated at the 'limits of non-sense', and are inscribed with a certain 'thematic violence' which is both archetypal and primitive (142). Audigier goes on to suggest that, in the form of the nursery rhyme, we find nothing other than a textual form which, in its infancy figures the playful collapse between fiction and history which is Ackroyd's principal concern (143). Audigier continues by considering Ackroyd's use of citation, arguing that citation always ruptures and displaces the idea of continuity (145).
The persistence of the nursery rhyme in the city echoes from *Hawksmoor* to *The House of Doctor Dee*, when Daniel Moore sings 'London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down' (HDD 17).
26. I have given the briefest paraphrase of Giovannelli's discussion, which runs as follows:

'In *Hawksmoor* la congiunzione fra I due mondi risulta, insomma, prorogata fino all'ultimo e annunciata da una serie innumerevole di parallelismi, che coinvolgono la dimensione spaziale, il frasario (nonostante lo *spelling* e la sintassi arcaicizzianti delle sezioni dedicato al passato), la gestualità, la distribuzione dei ruoli e persino dei nomi all'interno delle narrazioni. Gli eventi più importanti hanno

luogo nel quartiere di Scotland Yard e nei dintorni di un gruppo di chiese londinesi; frasi e dialoghi vengono spesso riecheggiate da voci anonime o individualmente rasmiglianti agli interlocutori originali, e comunque sempre accompagnati dalla riconoscibile 'musica' di sottofondo di ritornelli, proverbi e *children's rhymes*, intonati perennemente nelle strade della città.' (1996, 107)

27. Dust may be read as a trace in the sense given the word by Emmanuel Levinas. The trace is that signification of the other which is unconvertible into the same. The trace seems to signify yet cannot be translated, made part of the same, part of self-identity. The trace places us, Levinas argues, in a relationship with an immemorial past. The trace 'signifies beyond being' and 'obliges us' to acknowledge this (1986, 356). We cannot develop a fully Levinasian reading of *Hawksmoor* here, although we do gesture towards such a possibility at another time.

Interchapter

1. With the exception of the obvious citation from *The Waste Land*, and one other, all the lines come from texts by Peter Ackroyd. The other quotation is from a recent novel of Iain Sinclair's.
2. The discussion of the different aspects or interpretations of time owes much to Peter Osbourne's reading of time, especially his discussions of Paul Ricoeur's analysis of temporality and narrative in the four volumes of *Time and Narrative* (1984–8), in Osbourne's *The Politics of Time* (1995). Osbourne focuses specifically on Ricoeur's consideration of 'historical' as opposed to 'fictional' time, and reads exclusively from volumes 1 and 3. His discussion thus concerns itself primarily with 'philosophical' and not 'literary' issues. My interest here is with the perception of time and Ackroyd's narrative unfolding of temporal ludics, which, as I shall suggest, seeks to effect a collapse between the distinctions of historical and fictional time, while still retaining the sense of the complex relationship between personal and cosmological time as expressed through the act of narration.
Equally important on the subject of narrative and time has been Mark Currie's lucid and compelling analysis in *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998), particularly 'Narrative Time and Space' (73–113).
3. Compare the passages with those ending Chapters 11 and 12 of *Hawksmoor* (H 209, 217), where the speaking subject confronts time and eternity as the hiatus in the narrative of the self.
4. See in the chapter following the discussion of the final pages of *English Music*, which, in playing with figures suggesting circular closure and continuity, displace those very same figures. See also the discussion of *First Light* below, on the desire for narrative.
5. Marion Hobson's exemplary study, *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines*, is one of the few studies of Derrida's work to connect in a rigorous fashion issues of form and content. In the sections from which I am quoting (75–88) she makes the convincing case for Derrida's subversion of phenomenology, and I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to her discussion.
6. It is perhaps worth reiterating at this moment that Ackroyd is not a 'Derridean' or 'deconstructive' novelist, as Martin Dodsworth has claimed. As can be seen from a careful reading of *Notes for a New Culture*, Ackroyd's comprehension of the condition of writing and subjectivity stems as much from his reading of continental poetics and the modern tradition, from Mallarmé to Denis Roche, as does Derrida's.

3. The Styles of Peter Ackroyd II

1. Laura Giovannelli provides a brief, though thorough, biographical history of Thomas Chatterton and the fortunes of his publications (1996, 147–51).
2. 'The modern hero of Mr. Ackroyd's novel is a failed, doomed poet He has a precocious son and a splendid wife named, like [T. S.] Eliot's first wife, Vivien, but unlike that woman in virtually every respect' (Donoghue 1988).

'The chief good guy is a youngish unpublished and unemployed poet, Charles Wychwood, with a wife, Vivien (the name of Eliot's neurotic first wife, though there the resemblance ends – Vivien Wychwood is a simple soul, with an uncomplicated devotion to her husband), and a young son, Edward' (Lodge 1988).

'Charles sees nothing wrong with what he considers a perfectly natural act of literary appropriation. In fact he opens his preface to his planned book on Chatterton: "Thomas Chatterton believed that he could explain the entire material and spiritual world in terms of imitation and forgery ..." (126). How fitting that Charles's defence of plagiarism should itself be a double act of plagiarism. In the first place the opening of Charles's sentence has been lifted verbatim from the catalogue to the exhibition of Art Brut at the art gallery where Charles's wife, Vivien (cf. Vivien Eliot, works (109–10)' (Finney 1992, 253).

3. That 'Poor Tom' is a disguise for an illegitimate son has a number of complex resonances for Ackroyd's work as a whole, in the context of the constant return to the subject of fathers and sons, heritage and inheritance, whether culturally or biologically. This is not so much a case of standard intertextual referentiality as it is an acknowledgement that, to paraphrase Jacques Derrida's well known phrase, there is no outside-the-text.
4. We might perhaps ask, without too much impertinence, if the figure of Scrope is not one possible transvestitic performance of Ackroyd himself, dressing himself as his comic other, given that he readily admits to borrowing from other writers, other styles, other periods.
5. Meredith dresses up in the guise of another, although the transvestism is of an historical, rather than gender-bending variety.
6. Leno clearly can be read as anticipating Ackroyd's eighth novel, *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* as Susana Onega points out (1998, 34), as well as the historical figure of Dan Leno (George Galvin), the cross-dressing comedic star of late Victorian music hall. The figure thus seems to suspend the seriousness of critical inquiry for the name inscribes an aporetic moment of undecidability between the possibility of intertextual meaningfulness, and yet one more chance example of random chatter. The oscillation here makes it impossible to decide, except on the undecidable.

An important study of the perceived threat posed by music hall is that by Dagmar Kift (1996). Although it makes no mention of Dan Leno, it does provide an excellent study of the late Victorian context of music hall, especially in London, in Chapter 7 (135–54).

7. Derrida discusses the syntagm 'my death' in the essay 'Finis' (1993a, 1–42), beginning with the question: 'Is my death possible?' (21ff.)
8. The assumption that it should 'add up' is a reviewing assumption based on the kind of algebraic formula that if Peter Ackroyd = Peter Ackroyd, Peter Ackroyd is therefore not John Grisham; or Patricia Cornwall; or, to put that another way, Ackroyd is read as a 'serious' or 'weighty' or 'intellectual' novelist, one who writes the 'novel of ideas' (as opposed to the novel without ideas); therefore, Peter Ackroyd must add up

- to something, or Peter Ackroyd is letting the reader down by not playing the game of being himself.
9. At one moment, Timothy Harcombe recalls how his father had always begun his shows at the Chemical Theatre by singing 'Jerusalem': '... and now whenever I hear "Jerusalem" the swelling voices take me back' (*EM* 3).
 10. We have placed 'Leavisite' in scare quotes as a means of signalling that Leavis was, himself, merely one privileged agent in the discourse of a certain Englishness and not its originator. His articulation of an English tradition found a ready audience and gained ground so comparatively surely and quickly because the sense of Englishness articulated indirectly by Leavis through his criticism was, during the post-war period, a significant voicing of a desired construction of national identity. This sense of identity, and the qualities which inform the sense of self, predates the critic and which had suffered a series of assaults and uncertainties in a post-Victorian world. As a highly schematic sketch, we might provisionally suggest that, in a national cultural context, the isolation of the English self finds exemplary articulation in Matthew Arnold's 'To Marguerite – Continued' and 'Dover Beach' (Arnold 1979, 129–31, 253–7), the former stressing that isolation, the latter the desire for continuity, from Sophocles and the 'Sea of Faith' to the present moment of self-reflection; and both of which, in turn, are responded to, more or less indirectly, in at least two modernist instances: in E.M. Forster's longing desire to 'only connect', (1910; 1983), and in Eliot's *The Waste Land* (once more), when that cited voice remarks "'I can connect nothing with nothing'" (1974, 74). From Dover Beach to Margate Sands, this at least is a tentative 'connecting the dots' in the delineation of a particular Englishness, which it becomes the mission of English criticism to firm up and affirm, where 'only connect' becomes not an elegiac longing so much as an occasionally strident command.
 11. Bunyan is more complicated than this suggests, even if his reception and interpretation is not. Ackroyd points to Bunyan as a figure of what he calls the 'first modernism' in English culture, in *Notes for a New Culture*. Bunyan is described as constructing a 'counter-mythology ... of the Word which counters the rational and transparent discourse of the first modernism' (NNC 41). As Ackroyd goes on to suggest, Bunyan, like Blake after him, conceived of himself as a traditionalist, 'more profoundly orthodox than [his] contemporaries' (NNC 41).
 12. As a measure of Timothy's selectiveness and Englishness, the reader may choose to compare it with a list offered by T.S. Eliot in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*: 'It includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wenslydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar. The reader can make his own list. And then we have to face the strange idea that what is part of our culture is also a part of our *lived* religion' (1948, 30). There is a selectivity at work here which seeks to present a unified national cultural identity, which begins and ends with 'highbrow' events and tastes, while neatly containing working-class tastes and entertainments. As Ackroyd points out in his biography of Eliot, it is difficult to tell from *Notes* whether Eliot is using the term 'culture' in a neutral sense or whether it is a diagnostic tool (*TSE* 292). This ambiguity is similar to the dual impulse of liberalism and conservatism identified above in the work of F. R. Leavis, and may well be yet another marker itself of Englishness. The point is that Timothy's selectiveness is wholly predictable within various versions of cultural definition.

13. 'La bambina rincuorata dalla musica melodiosa del nuovo *bird* (O, per meglio dire, *Byrd*) non può, naturalmente, chiamarsi altro che Cecilia' (1996, 238).
14. *First Light* also plays with the possibility of meaning, but rejects this as anything other than the reader's desire to find a pattern in its final page: 'Once this region was thought to form the outline of a face in the constellation of Taurus. He smiled at his shadow. But the Pleiades contains three hundred stars in no real pattern' (*FL* 328). Even this comment is not stable, however, for, recounted by the narratorial voice in the final chapter, these words first appear as a remark of astronomer, Damian Fall, in the opening chapter (*FL* 4). See the following chapter on this novel.
15. Phrases concerning beginnings and ends can be found in most of Ackroyd's novels, not to mention the more general concern with questions concerning genesis and eschatology, and their narrative interchangeability.
16. Milton's experience or vision may be compared, not too fancifully, with that of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. Milton's moment of revelation leads him to the desire to 'exterminate all the brutes', to recall Kurtz once more (Conrad 1995, 84). Interestingly, – no more than chance perhaps? – there are readable other possible connections. Marlow's description of the Russian looking like a harlequin (1995, 87), escaped from a 'troupe of mimes' (1995, 90) and being dressed in motley, in 'particoloured rags' (1995, 90), is comparable partly with the description of Ralph Kempis' and the Catholics' dress:

His clothes had been made of some stuff that was brown holland probably, but it was covered with patches all over, with bright patches, blue, red, and yellow, – patches on the back, patches on the front, patches at the elbows, on knees; coloured binding round his jacket, scarlet edging at the bottom of his trousers; and the sunshine made him look extremely gay and wonderfully neat withal, because you could see how beautifully all this patching had been done.

(Conrad 1995, 87)

'Fellow of sanguine humour. Face very large and ruddy like a bowl of cherries. Beard as red as the tail of a fox Frock-coat of blue, with a green band around his waist. And on his head, oh Lord, a hat of white felt with some feathers sticking from it.'

(MA 165)

'They are wearing clothes, sir, as brightly coloured as the drapers' livery. But it is not exactly London dress. Nor is it exactly Indian. It is somewhere betwixt the two.'

(MA 165)

The male inhabitants, Indian and English alike, were dressed in the strangest mixture of striped breeches, wide shirts and feathered caps.

(MA 183)

It may also be worthwhile remembering that Conrad's novel was the original source for an epigraph for T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. While Pound on that occasion dissuaded Eliot, the poet would use the line 'Mistah Kurtz – he dead' as the epigraph for the later poem, 'The Hollow Men' (1974, 87). On clothing as part of the carnivalesque aspect of *Milton in America* see below.

17. On the subjects of *anamnesis* and the blindness of memory, see Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind* (1993, esp. 45f.)

18. While Ackroyd's Milton no doubt intends to use 'vulgar' in a wholly pejorative sense, the original meaning of the word was simply 'the common people' or the 'common tongue', the vernacular.
19. See Barker's discussion of Milton's *Areopagitica* (1984, 41–55), which, as Barker points out, is a key text in the shift from the essentially collaborative production of play-texts, to the 'individual production' (50) of the written text, signed in the name of the author. Also, as Barker suggests, Milton's text, despite its overt expression against censorship, speaks decisively on self-discipline as a controlling factor in the formation of modern subjectivity (46–7). Ackroyd's Milton may not be the John Milton who wrote *Paradise Lost*, but he is somewhat similar, albeit in a highly schematized form, to the Milton who wrote the *Areopagitica* in 1644. As an expression of the 'privacy' of communion between the individual and God, and also as a rejection of otherness, given specific form in the examples of Judaism, Catholicism, and Paganism, see Milton's anti-episcopal essay 'Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline' (1641; 1979, 77–111). Both this and *Areopagitica* were written, ironically for this discussion of *Milton in America*, while the historical John Milton could still see. However, while the historical Milton does describe Rome as the 'womb and center of Apostacy' in 'Of Reformation', thereby holding certain views in common with Ackroyd's Milton, he differs significantly from the novelist's creation, not least in his understanding of the necessity – at least in principle – for heterogeneity in the body politic, as this remark shows: 'And because things simply pure are inconsistent in the masse of nature, nor are the elements or humors in Mans Body exactly *homogeneall*, and hence the best founded Common-wealths, and least barbarous have aym'd at a certaine mixture and temperament, partaking the severall vertues of each other State ...' (1979, 105–6). That Ackroyd's Milton is then a 'cartoon Milton', to recall John Clute's definition, and markedly dissimilar from the historical Milton is not in doubt. It would be well, however, not to measure the possible similarities and differences as a means of assessing the 'reality' of Ackroyd's Milton, but, rather, to read him as a figure through whom Ackroyd addresses particular issues.

Chance connections allow the reader to speculate that one of the shaping influences on Ackroyd in the composition of his Milton was Ezra Pound's view of the poet, whom the latter disliked for 'his asinine bigotry, his beastly hebraism, the coarseness of his mentality' (Pound 1954, 238).

20. From this definition of carnival as mobile in its intermixing effects, it is possible to suggest that Peter Ackroyd's work is, generally, carnivalesque, in its combinations of high and low, of profundity, erudition and camp comedy. Certainly it is the deformity of form's purity in Ackroyd's texts which causes the most problems for any number of his reviewers.
21. Omega usefully compares the settlers' and Indians' clothing, with the descriptions of dress in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1998, 75).
22. On the distinction between the classical and grotesque bodies, see Stallybrass and White (1986, 21–22).

4. Writing the City

1. Unfortunately, none of *Secret London*, which is due to be published in 2000, was available at the time of writing this chapter.
2. On the unstable and ineffable nature of the city in writing, see my *Writing London: The Trace of the Urban Text from Blake to Dickens* (1998), in which London's resistance

to comprehension and its determination of the shapes of writing in the nineteenth century are discussed.

3. Sinclair's writing on, and of, the city is shaped within a more restricted range of concerns than is Ackroyd's. Principally, Sinclair's comprehension of the city is that of the 'psychogeographer', the writer or artist whose work is shaped according to the understanding of the psychic or spiritual persistence of similar events which recur on the same sites within the city. Ackroyd's writing may be said to belong on occasions to the psychogeographical, as, most obviously, with *Hawksmoor*, which, Ackroyd acknowledges, is informed and influenced by Sinclair's *Lud Heat*. Also, the psychogeographical element is evident in novels such as *The House of Doctor Dee* and *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, where, in the latter, violent, often ritualized murders occur, again and again over the centuries, within a few square miles of London. However, Ackroyd's writing does not restrict itself to the psychogeographer's interests, and is, arguably, just as concerned with issues of economic power in the city or the importance of popular entertainment in the psychic and material history of London. Almost all Sinclair's novels deal extensively with the city's occult history in one form or another, but the least oblique of his publications, and the one which directs the interested reader to other psychogeographers, is *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997). On the relationship between writing, the city, and spectrality, see my 'The Hauntological Example: The City as the Haunt of Writing in the Texts of Iain Sinclair' (1998, 138–58).
4. The phrase 'pierce or move his infant breast' echoes, arguably, with resonances of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*. Similarly, the concluding words – 'landscapes of his imagination' (D 21) – of the chapter from *Dickens* cited above, recalls the line from *Jerusalem*, 'My Streets are my, Ideas of Imagination' (Ch. 2, Plate 34).
5. Of course, Ackroyd adds to the urban grafting in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, by having the murder of a family take place on the same site as the 'real' Ratcliffe Highway Murders. One might also add to this potentially endless equation 'The Cadaver Club' by Iain Sinclair, which cites both Ackroyd's novel and De Quincey's essay on 'Murder', as well as managing to include John Dee, T. S. Eliot, and Oscar Wilde (Sinclair 1997, 331–71).
6. Ackroyd's Gissing chooses the term 'crepuscular', which is echoed in Nicholas Meyer's review of the novel, quoted in the first paragraph of this chapter. Far from suggesting any possible connection between the two journalists, the recurrence does indicate in a simple manner the way in which the city dictates the acts of writing concerning it.
7. We might note one further brief resonance between *Dickens* and *Dan Leno*. One of the early literary influences on Dickens is noted as being George Colman's *Broad Grins*, 'a rather ghastly collection of verse stories' (D 65), in which there was one story, 'The Elder Brother', a London narrative which so struck Dickens in its description of Covent Garden, according to John Forster, that Dickens was compelled to compare Colman's verse with the reality of the market. In *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, one of Elizabeth Cree's most successful transvestite performances is as 'The Older Brother' (DLLG 151f.)
8. Readers might compare the descriptions of London street life in the biography of More, with the following stanzas from *London Lykpeny* (Ackroyd cites l.66 in the biography, as an authority for his own depiction), noting particularly, the author's use of street traders' cries, acknowledgement of which can be found not only in *More* but also in *Blake* and *Dickens*. Also worthy of note, in the first stanza, are the

exotic mix of fruits and spices, which support Ackroyd's contention in *Thomas More* that medieval London would have borne a greater resemblance to a *souk* or middle eastern bazaar, than to the modern day city (see the discussion of this in the chapter):

In to London I gan me hy;
 Of all the lond it beareth the prise.
 'Hot pescods!' one gan cry,
 'Strabery rype, and chery in the ryse!'
 One bad me come nere and by some spice;
 Pepar and saffron they gan me bede, Clove, grayns, and flowre of rise.
 For lacke of money I might not spede.

Then into Chepe I gan me drawne,
 Where I sawe stond moche people.
 One bad me come nere, and by fine cloth of lawne,
 Paris thred, coton, and umple.
 I seyde there-upon I could no skyle,
 I am not wont there-to in dede.
 One bad me by an hewre, my hed to hele:
 For lake of money I might not spede.

Then went I forth by London Stone
 Thrwghe-outy all Canywiky strete.
 Drapers to me they called anon;
 Grete chepe of cloth, they gan me hete;
 Then come there one, and cried 'Hot shepes fete!'
 'Rishes faire and grene,' an othar began to grete;
 Both melwell and makarell I gan mete,
 But for lacke of money I myght not spede.

Then I hied me into Estchepe.
 One cried, 'Ribes of befe, and many a pie!'
 Pewtar potts they clatteryd on a heape.
 There was harpe, pipe and sawtry.
 'Ye by Cokke!' 'Nay by Cokke!' some began to cry;
 Some sange of Jenken and Julian, to get themselves mede.
 Full fayne I wold hadd of that mynstralsie,
 But for lacke of money I cowld not spede.

(1996, ll. 65–96)

9. As if to suggest the never-ending process of writing the city, each year a new quill is placed in the hand of the statue of John Stow.
10. This phrase is also chosen as the subtitle of this section of the chapter on the biographers as a definition of Ackroyd's own writing of the city. Ackroyd might thus, once again, and in a different fashion, be understood as writing himself into the 'tradition' of urban writing.
11. See, for example, the words put teasingly in Dee's mouth: 'I take up the pages which the canting beggar gave to me in the garden, but can see only a certain kind of curious writing in the English tongue. There are the words "house" and "father",

all closely inscribed, but in the gathering darkness I can read nothing more. So I light my candle and watch its fire. As the darkness is lifted the wax is consumed: the substance does not die but is transformed into flame. This is the final lesson. By means of that fire the material form of the candle before me rises into its spiritual being. It has become a light and a shining within this poor shambling room, my library' (HDD 79). Arguably, it is possible to read this passage as a certain gathering or a pulling together of numerous threads throughout the novel, some of which are discussed in the body of the chapter. Although Dee lights his candle, what remains of the text is left unread, as the two words in proximity, reproduced in Dee's discourse, are left to resonate. Ackroyd plays with the reader here in a number of ways, as he has Dee consider the transformation of material into flame, or light, or, perhaps, spirit which, in turn, illuminates. So, we might say, the material of the past comes to illuminate the identity of Matthew Palmer, the text of Peter Ackroyd, and the perception of the city. However, light not only emanates from some other place, it illuminates the self, as Palmer comes to recognize that which is projected onto him and that which is within him.

12. It is tempting to read this remark of Palmer's in the light of the critics' shared sense of flatness in the character of the policeman Hawksmoor, and that of his part of the narrative in *Hawksmoor*, already discussed. As suggested above, Hawksmoor is flat because he is such a literary cliché trapped within a genre notable more for its adherence to formula than for form-breaking departures. Palmer is a researcher of course, and so the statement has a certain local sense, in that he does produce a few words from within himself from time to time. But, importantly, he is also inscribed, his being or identity is written, not only by Ackroyd, but also by the city, its histories and narratives, to which he belongs. His identity is formed by the city, as is that of John Dee, who says 'I am of London though I was born elsewhere' (HDD 96).
13. For information about the 'peculiar' history of Clerkenwell, see the final interview with Peter Ackroyd in this volume (conducted in Clerkenwell), in which Ackroyd discusses the area, some of the details of which are also to be found in *The House of Doctor Dee*.
14. Piranesi is cited or otherwise mentioned in both *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (see in this chapter below) and in *The House of Doctor Dee* (HDD 43–4).
15. A useful future study of *The House of Doctor Dee* might consider the possible relationship between the Piranesian elements in Ackroyd's descriptions of buildings and the city and his adoption of the text of Paracelsus as a discourse on the construction of the body, put into the mouth of John Dee.
16. On the figure of light, and for an example of a certain play on Ackroyd's part between the figural and the literal, see note 11, above, and the passage quoted there.
17. Light is central to Dee's hermetic, alchemical discourse, and figures of projection and illumination recur throughout his thoughts on hermetic practice, often in relation to questions of spirit and being (HDD 75–8).
18. The correspondences hinted at by Ackroyd are dissonant because, as suggested elsewhere in this book, connections and symmetries are never exact in the novelist's writing, only apparently so. Connections are hinted at but fall into ruin, or are otherwise always already broken, fragmentary. Apparently mirrored images are only approximate, and there is always a degree of distortion in Ackroyd's play of structural resemblances.
19. The name of the passage allows Ackroyd to provide the reader with historical material pertaining to the area, while also hinting at possible imaginative links across

the centuries. In this passage and the one which follows, Matthew speculates that, although the Priory of St John of Jerusalem had long since vanished, the stones had been reused to build houses in Clerkenwell, and might even have been used to build his house. Then, looking at a neon clock, he recalls how sadastra, a stone greatly prized in the fourteenth century, would glow momentarily upon being broken open, likening the glow to that of the neon. This begins his meditation on the history of the area, leading to a memory of 'a multitude of voices' being heard in a telephone, and a dozen television screens glowing in a shop window, all with the same picture (HDD 40–1). In what is one of the more remarkably unsettling passages in an often disorienting novel, Ackroyd weaves together the haunted sense of the city which merges the significance of the proper name and the spectres who return via its inscription, while connecting this concern with the question of materiality. While Matthew dismisses the technology as 'all delusion, a trick of the cinematographer' (41), there is a sense here that Ackroyd is toying with possible connections between spectrality and tele-technology, which have been opened to discussion by Derrida in a number of texts, not least *Specters of Marx* (1994) but also in passing in 'Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone' (1998), and in a more sustained fashion with Bernard Steigler in *Échographies: de la télévision. Entretiens filmés* (1996). Iain Sinclair also connects spectrality to technology and, in particular, the technology of surveillance in London, in *Lights Out for the Territory* (1996).

20. Prior to Ackroyd's apostrophe, Dee, having heard the words of Matthew and Daniel concerning the 'bridge of light', follows the two men until they enter 'a great house', which from its description we know to be the house inherited by Matthew Palmer (HDD 274). At this moment he encounters a 'child [who] stood on the threshold', who speaks of the projection of a light lasting a thousand years (HDD 274). Compare this image of the child standing on the threshold of the structure with the closing image of *Hawksmoor*: 'and I am a child again, begging on the threshold of eternity' (H 217).
21. On the limits of reading and the movement between materiality and the question of spirit, see note 11 above, and the passage cited there.
22. The phrase 'mystical city eternal' is doubly resonant. It echoes with the sound of Blake's 'four-fold city eternal', and thus suggests Ackroyd's biography of Blake, while it also catches at the phrase 'the Eternal City', which is commonly used to name Rome. As Jennifer Bloomer points out in passing, Freud has recourse to the phrase 'the Eternal City', with the archaeological and architectural layers of Rome in mind, when he seeks to describe the structure of the mind (and not, as Bloomer says, the brain; 1993, 72). Freud also draws on this phrase in seeking to analyse the persistence of Rome in his dreams (1991, 282–6; esp. 285, where Freud says he discovered the way in which his 'longing for the eternal city had been reinforced by impressions from my youth'). Freud's analogy between the structure of the mind and that of the eternal city or, as Ackroyd has it in a more Blakean manner, the city eternal, suggests the possibility of a more sustained reading of *The House of Doctor Dee* in which it would be possible perhaps to pursue the structural correlations between the question of human identity and that of the city in relation to the idea of the unconscious. If the folds and weaves of the city figure various repressed narrative strands spatially and, especially, across time, their return to Matthew Palmer is significant, in as much as they come to provide Matthew with a sense of self-awareness. As Juliet Flower MacCannell has pointed out to me, and for which I am most grateful, Lacan also alludes to both the Eternal City and Freud's analogy in 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis' (1977, 30–113).

As one final note on the question of the eternal city, and perhaps as a pun on Ackroyd's part, an anonymous tramp asks Matthew Palmer, 'Do you bing Romewards?' (HDD 267).

23. The legend of the Golem has it that the creature was created of clay in 1580, in the city of Prague, by Rabbi Yehuda Lowe, or Judah Loew ben Bezalel. A creature brought to life by inscription, only ten letters were needed for its formation. Elie Wiesel provides a narrative account of the Golem in his *The Golem: The Story of a Legend* (1983), to which I am indebted.
24. For the purpose of reference, there are fifty-one chapters in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, which have the narrative strands divided amongst them as follows:

Third-Person	Trial extracts from the <i>Illustrated Police News Law Courts and Weekly Record</i>	Elizabeth Cree	John Cree British Museum Ms. Ms. 1624/566
Ch. 1	Ch. 3	Ch. 4	Ch. 7
Ch. 2	Ch. 8	Ch. 13	Ch. 14
Ch. 5	Ch. 10	Ch. 17	Ch. 18
Ch. 6	Ch. 12	Ch. 20	Ch. 22
Ch. 9	Ch. 16	Ch. 25	Ch. 27
Ch. 11	Ch. 23	Ch. 31	Ch. 29
Ch. 15	Ch. 26	Ch. 38	Ch. 33
Ch. 19	Ch. 32	Ch. 40	Ch. 46
Ch. 21	Ch. 47	Ch. 42	
Ch. 24	Ch. 44		
Ch. 28			
Ch. 30			
Ch. 34			
Ch. 35			
Ch. 39			
Ch. 41			
Ch. 43			
Ch. 45			
Ch. 48			
Ch. 49			
Ch. 50			
Ch. 51			
<i>The Morning Advertiser</i>			
Ch. 37			

There appears to be no discernible significance to the division of the chapters.

25. The article 'Romanticism and Crime', attributed to Gissing by Ackroyd, appears to be invented. Attempts to locate it in any of the existing published bibliographies, either in print or on website, have failed. This approximates Ackroyd's invention of Wilde's journals in *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*, so that the reader is confronted with a fictional article, which is journalism and not a work of fiction, supposedly written by a fictional version of an author whose 'reality' is not in question, in which an equally 'real' work by another historical figure is cited. Thus, as a figure for the condition of the city's textuality, we recognize how a text can appear within an imagined text which itself is cited in a novel, the existence of which we can

verify because we have it in our hands. Such a labyrinthine and ludic gesture is indicative of the lengths to which Ackroyd goes in attempting to convey the spirit of London as he understands it, while also placing him in a textual tradition from Cervantes (at least) and Sterne, to Borges and beyond.

26. Questions of gender and the disturbance of identity are raised, either directly or obliquely, throughout *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. Solomon Weil is literally dis-membered, his genitals cut off and placed in the *Talmud*. 'Dressing up' in one form or another is a persistent interest in this novel, to the extent that most identities are read as being staged. As with the example just given, the court is viewed as a form of theatricality, while connections are made between stage and Roman Catholic church ritual. The detective inspector in charge of the case is revealed, late in the narrative and quite incidentally, to live in private with his gay lover. Both Elizabeth Cree and Dan Leno dress as men and women respectively when on stage (Elizabeth carrying on the practice of cross-dressing when off-stage), and there is much discussion throughout the novel by Elizabeth of the theatrical tradition of cross-dressing. At her trial, Lizzie corrects her impression of the judge, from thinking he looked like 'Pantaloon in the pantomime', to arrive at the judgement that the only part fit for him to play would be the Dame (DLLG 209). John Cree frequently draws on theatrical metaphors in his journal to describe both the murders and the city: 'I was a mere tyro, a beginner, an understudy who could not appear on the great stage without rehearsal. I had first to perfect my work in a secret hour, stolen from the tumult of the city ...' (DLLG 26; see also 60, 62). Elizabeth, upon first entering a theatre, finds a greater 'truth' in the staged representation of London, than in its reality: 'eventually the curtain was pulled aside ... it revealed a London street scene which, in the flickering gaslight, seemed ... the most wonderful sight in the world ... here was a picture of the Strand ... but how much more glorious and iridescent ...' (DLLG 18–19). The difference between John Cree's journal and Lizzie's impressions is that, in the former's accounts, theatricality always remains merely metaphorical. For Elizabeth Cree, however, theatricality, dressing up, the assumption of staged personae and the event of masquerade are the truth of the city and its inhabitants. Identity, Elizabeth recognizes, is assumed and not essential.
27. The remark of Babbage's is taken from *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: A Fragment*, 2nd ed. (1838). The treatises were 'sponsored by the will of the eighth Earl of Bridgewater, the Rev. Francis Henry Egerton FRS' (Campbell-Kelly 1989, 5). Despite its title, Babbage's was not one of the 'official' treatises, but a response to William Whewell's *Astronomy and General Physics*. The passages from which Babbage's remark is extracted are instructive:

If man enjoyed a larger command over mathematical analysis, his knowledge of these motions would be more extensive; but a Being possessed of unbounded knowledge of that science, could trace every minutest consequence of that primary impulse. Such a Being, however far exalted above our race, would still be immeasurably below even our conception of infinite intelligence.

But supposing the original conditions of each atom of the earth's atmosphere, as well as all the extraneous causes acting on it be / given, and supposing also the interference of no new causes, such a Being would be able clearly to trace its future but inevitable path, and He would distinctly foresee and might absolutely predict for any, even the remotest period of time, the circumstances and future history of every particle of that atmosphere.

Let us imagine a Being, invested with such knowledge, to examine at a distant epoch the coincidence of the facts with those which His profound analysis had enabled him to predict. If any slightest deviation existed, He would immediately read in its existence the action of a new cause; and, through the aid of the same analysis tracing this discordance back to its source, He would become aware of the time of its commencement, and the point of space at which it originated.

Thus considered, what a strange chaos is this wide atmosphere we breathe! Every / atom, impressed with good and with ill, retains at once the motions which philosophers and sages have imparted to it, mixed and combined in ten thousand ways with all that is worthless and base. The air itself is one vast library, on whose pages are forever written all that man has ever said or woman whispered. There, in their mutable but unerring characters, mixed with the earliest, as well as with the latest sighs of mortality, stand for ever recorded, vows unredeemed, promises unfulfilled, perpetuating in the united movements of each particle, the testimony of man's changeful will.

(Babbage 1989, 36)

Taken as a general statement of principal, it is tempting – is it not? – to read in this statement not only Ackroyd's comprehension of temporality, but also his approach to the construction of narrative, at least certainly with regard to the majority of his novels. Babbage's emphasis on the invisible, written record of the air, as opposed to the possible echo of voices, allows us to speculate, albeit tentatively, on Ackroyd's playful admixture of 'historical reality' with fictional narrative, of word and world. Furthermore, Babbage's comment on the ability to 'read' future events sheds light on temporal movement in more than one direction in novels such as *Hawksmoor*, *The House of Doctor Dee*, *First Light*, *Chatterton* and, of course, *Dan Leno*. Finally, Babbage's speculative fancy predates any notion of the postmodern, thereby allowing us once more to challenge the definition of Ackroyd's text as postmodernist in its playfulness.