

## Synthesis: an Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies

Ap. 8 (2015)

History and Contemporary Literature



### Spatialising Early and Late Modernity: Representations of London in Peter Ackroyd's *The House of Dr. Dee* and *Hawksmoor*

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doi: [10.12681/syn.16213](https://doi.org/10.12681/syn.16213)

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## **Spatialising Early and Late Modernity: Representations of London in Peter Ackroyd's *The House of Dr. Dee* and *Hawksmoor***

Christine Harrison

### **Abstract**

Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985) and *The House of Dr. Dee* (1993) are examples of a distinctive British form of contemporary experimental historical fiction, and through representations of London they explore the popular dimension of early modernity, showing how the capital's spaces both embodied and produced multiple modernity, as well as the unsung pre-modern allegiances that critiqued modern forms. While the novels' respective Renaissance and post-Restoration settings allow them to explore different stages in the development of both London modernity and resistant forms, their juxtaposition of early and late modern narratives establishes a compelling parallel between early modern and late twentieth-century London. Both sets of narratives also stage a shift away from modern forms towards inherited pre-modern allegiances, connecting this to a new relationship with the capital's inheritance of pre-Reformation and Gothic built space, as well as an equivalent tradition of London writing, one in which Ackroyd's novels themselves participate.

The renewed popularity of the historical novel in Britain over the last thirty years is reflected by the considerable space that has been devoted to the genre in recent studies of contemporary British fiction.<sup>1</sup> As some of these studies have also noted, historical fiction in Britain today is not a singular entity but comprises a number of distinctive sub-genres. Although these sub-genres have been variously defined, the novels of Peter Ackroyd, one of the most prolific writers of historical fiction in Britain today, are usually identified as postmodern texts, and most of Ackroyd's critics, including Susana Onega, Allison Lee and Frederick K. Holmes, have described them in terms of the still-dominant paradigm of literary postmodernism, historiographic metafiction.<sup>2</sup> However, Ackroyd himself has repeatedly rejected the postmodern labelling of his work, instead

stressing the pre and early modern precedents for his practices of genre-mixing, pastiche and intertextuality, as well as his poetic approach to history,<sup>3</sup> and this response also highlights the possible influence of past traditions on other reputedly postmodern contemporary historical novels.

In addition, there are aspects of Ackroyd's fiction that clearly do not fit Linda Hutcheon's international postmodern paradigm. For example, like many other contemporary British novels, Ackroyd's texts suggest that some access to a meaningful past is possible despite its inevitable textual mediation, while Hutcheon stresses "the relative *inaccessibility* of any reality that might exist objectively" (*Poetics* 141). Equally important is the fact that Ackroyd's fiction not only critiques dominant social and cultural forms but also outlines possible alternatives, whereas Hutcheon maintains that historiographic metafiction cannot move beyond internal subversion to develop effective models of agency (*Politics* 168). Due to elements such as these, Ackroyd's novels have figured prominently in the studies of critics like Amy Elias, Geoffrey Lord and Aleid Fokkema, all of whom have set out to define a distinctive British form of contemporary experimental historical fiction, one in which continuing commitment to the representation of the past combines with a self-conscious awareness that the discursive identities of fiction and history, as well as the fragmentary nature of the historical record, forestall a full or objective account.<sup>4</sup>

If the past is seen as at least partially accessible, then a writer's choice of historical settings becomes important since representation of different areas of the past will create distinctive forms of dialogue with the present. While Ackroyd's fiction displays a variety of historical settings, a significant cluster of novels examines the stretch of time between the late fifteenth and early eighteenth centuries, a dimension that has received scant critical attention despite its exploration by a plethora of contemporary British writers, including Rose Tremain, Jeanette Winterson, Maria McCann, James Robertson, John Fowles and Lawrence Norfolk.<sup>5</sup> Since dialogue between the early modern past and the present is central to such fiction, the following paper will examine two novels in which Ackroyd underlines this exchange by juxtaposing an early modern with a late twentieth-century narrative, as well as staging a number of crossings between them; *Hawksmoor* intertwines the first-person narrative of a post-Restoration architect and Satanist, Nicholas Dyer, with a third-person narrative focussing on a series of murders in the 1980s, while *The House of Dr. Dee* interweaves the first-person narrative of an Elizabethan magus, John Dee, with that of the twentieth-century researcher who inherits his house.<sup>6</sup>

Ackroyd's comments on *Hawksmoor* reveal an important reason for his attraction to the early modern dimension: "I was most intrigued by that period at the end of the seventeenth century when the 'New Philosophy' (which one might define, in shorthand, as embodying scientific rationalism and a belief in human progress) seemed about to displace a set of older and more complex cultural allegiances" ("On Hawksmoor" 379). Of course, these comments are almost as relevant to *The House of Dr. Dee* as to *Hawksmoor* since the former's hermetic focus allows Ackroyd to examine an important precursor to the New Philosophy, one that reveals its origins not in an "inviolable identity" but "the dissension of other things" (Foucault 79). However, neither novel confines exploration of emergent modernity to scientific methodologies and philosophical ideas. Instead, both represent the beginnings of modernity in terms of multiple economic, political and cultural forms, as well as showing how these were experienced in different ways by a variety of social groups. As such, they are paradigmatic of recent British experimental historical fiction which has explored the early modern dimension.

Just as noteworthy is such fiction's focus on opposition to emergent modernity, and Ackroyd has emphasised this aspect of *Hawksmoor* by describing how the older "cultural allegiances" which the New Philosophy sought to displace, "vigorously tried to resist the threat" ("On Hawksmoor" 379). In mapping these and other resistant pre-modern forms, both *Hawksmoor* and *The House of Dr. Dee* not only refute the hegemonic myth that the appearance of modernity ushered in a new world, "freed by rational thought from the mysticism and influence of the past" (Lord 133). They also harness the critique of modernity central to such resistance, as well as representing the aforementioned forms as a fascinating source of possible alternatives.

By additionally focussing on the late twentieth-century inheritance of both pre-modern forms and multiple modernity, the two novels establish a compelling parallel between the early modern past and late modern present, suggesting that growing contemporary pressure on modern forms has created a climate analogous to that at their emergence. Although the same parallel is evident in certain other contemporary British and Irish novels, including John Banville's *Science Trilogy*, Rose Tremain's historical fiction and Marina Warner's *Indigo* (1992), what distinguishes *The House of Dr. Dee* and *Hawksmoor* is their delineation of both pre-modern forms and modern structures through representations of London, the combination of early and late modern London settings highlighting how social and cultural forms are communicated via space through time. The two novels also concentrate on particular districts and buildings within the early and late modern capital, establishing these as nodal points for the aforementioned communication; in *The House of Dr. Dee*, the focus is

Clerkenwell, site of the various historical forms of Dr. Dee's house, while *Hawksmoor* explores the districts around the Thames, where Dyer erects his churches and two sets of murders occur. However, these spaces are not only represented as embodiments of pre-modern and/or modern social and cultural forms. They are also shown to shape such forms and thus illustrate Ackroyd's conception of material space as a creative force as well as a social product, one which both novels thematically explore.

This sense of material space recalls the ideas of Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1974), and both Ackroyd and Lefebvre possess a spatial understanding of time as well as a temporal understanding of space.<sup>7</sup> Lefebvre's tripartite conception of (temporal) space also provides a useful tool with which to examine Ackroyd's representations of London in *The House of Dr. Dee* and *Hawksmoor*. In addition to "spatial practice" (the organisation and uses of material space), Lefebvre describes space as comprising mental conceptions and lived experiences of space (38-39); while Ackroyd's novels explore conceptions of space by tracing the mental maps of architects, geographers, scientists, historians and detectives, their first-person narratives allow them to perform lived experiences of London.

Also pertinent to both novels is Lefebvre's idea of "the dialectical relationship" between "the perceived, the conceived and the lived" (39) since Ackroyd's texts trace multiple interconnections between spatial practice, conceptions and experiences of space. However, despite the importance assigned to both conceived and experienced space, this paper will argue that the novels represent spatial practice as the ultimate shaper and embodiment of social and cultural forms, as well as the principal vehicle for their communication through time.

### **Renaissance London: Challenging emergent modernity**

The late sixteenth-century capital of *The House of Dr. Dee* is represented as a complex mix of inherited pre-modern and emergent modern spaces, both of which are shown to shape and be shaped by a variety of socio-cultural forms. For example, like the medieval city of *The Clerkenwell Tales*, the walled inner city of *The House of Dr. Dee* comprises a dense agglomeration of timber-and-thatch houses amidst a labyrinth of narrow streets, a space which forces rich, middling and poor together in "a social mishmash" (Porter, *London* 57), thus embodying as well as continuing to mould the city's ancient levelling traditions and communal customs. A number of the capital's surviving medieval sacred spaces also maintain some of their pre-Reformation functions, thus testifying to a certain continuity of Catholic culture, and Catholic beliefs are further manifested and perpetuated by some Londoners' experiences of space as

imbued with spirit. However, Dee's description of "an old ruined monastery" underlines the recent loss of much inherited medieval spatial practice (74), and the "destruction and disturbance from the recent purges" also signal the waning powers of a Catholic sense of sacred (or absolute) space, as well as a related respect for the past (95). Linked to the aforementioned losses is the expansion of commercial spatial practice in Ackroyd's late sixteenth-century capital, a development indicative of the beginnings of modern capitalism, and the resulting increase in commodities is also connected to the tendency of more fashionable Londoners to experience space as visible surface.

Ackroyd's late sixteenth-century Clerkenwell reveals a similar spatial and socio-cultural mix to London as a whole, and Dee's house acts as an emblem of both the district and wider city; its labyrinthine structure, like that of the capital's streets and medieval churches, reflects and perpetuates a pre-modern sense of "the priority of the original mystery" (Lefebvre 240), and there is a further connection to medieval sacred space in that the house was once part of the nunnery of St. Mary, a past echoed in the religiosity of its latest female occupant, Dee's wife. However, like Mrs. Dee, the house is now the private property of a man, and further modern forms, as well as their gender bias, are simultaneously embodied and shaped on its upper floors, where the proto-modern spaces of a male scientist's laboratory and study are located.

The character of Doctor Dee is integrally connected to the mix of pre-modern and modern spaces in his house, Clerkenwell and late sixteenth-century London, and he stresses how the city has shaped him by characterising himself as "of London" (96). Most importantly, Dee is the novel's principal representative of the mixed forms of Renaissance Hermeticism, and his "London seal of Hermes" directly links the English variant of this movement to the late sixteenth-century capital (65). Keith Thomas has accounted for Hermeticism's popularity by pointing to the gap left by Catholicism's official demise, for Hermeticism, like Catholicism, conceived the world as full of spirits whose powers might be directed through specific rituals (764). By conducting such rituals in the spaces of his Clerkenwell home, Dee also underlines how this side of Hermeticism was shaped by London's inheritance of pre-modern spatial practice.

However, Dee's "chamber of demonstration" is very different from the communal (female) spaces his house once comprised (181), for this room is "closed and locked to all comers" except Dee and his assistant, Edward Kelley, both of whom desire to keep its priceless treasure for themselves (183). While the locked room clearly symbolises a modern sense of (male) sexual possession, Dee's belief that he can use the room to "know" and "perform all" highlights the Faustian hubris of the magus (147,190).<sup>8</sup> It is

such modern aspects of Hermeticism, shaped and reflected by the modern spaces of Ackroyd's late sixteenth-century city, which also prevent Dee from experiencing pre-modern sacred space in spiritual terms despite his conception of space as full of occult forces; when directed to a ruined medieval hermitage by his father, Dee fails to apprehend the spiritual gold to be discovered there, seeing only 'an old ruined wall where there was nothing but dirt and rubbish to be found' (102).

Dee's father does not share his son's spiritual blindness, and his 'seeing' is linked to the pre-modern cultural forms which simultaneously underpin his attacks on Dee's modern pride, materialism and ambition. However, the visionary experiences that characterise the father's final hours are also inextricable bound to late sixteenth-century London's inheritance of pre-modern spatial practice, for they all occur within the spaces of a ruined medieval monastery, where the pre-Reformation tradition of holy dying is still maintained.<sup>9</sup> *The House of Dr. Dee* thus suggests that just as pre-modern sacred space can only be fully experienced by those with "eyes to witness it" (255), such an experience depends on continuing contact with an inheritance of concrete pre-modern spaces.

While Dee's dismissal of his father's visions provides another illustration of his superficial modern experience of space, the noise he hears on his father's death signals a residual pre-modern experience of space. This experience gains ground in his psyche in the second part of the novel; while its development is initially triggered by the guilt Dee feels on attending a play about a father's death, thus testifying —like similar scenes in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*— to the powers of dramatic space, it first attains psychic dominance in 'The City' (205-218), where it is described as the father's gift since it not only exemplifies the father's way of seeing but also embodies Dee's lack of filial affection.

'The City' is additionally the climax of *The House of Dr. Dee*'s critique of modern forms, and this critical pre-modern experience of space attains further force from its performance within the novel. Meanwhile, the chapter's London focus emphasises the capital's role in the development of modernity, as underlined by the mergence of the late sixteenth and late twentieth-century cities, a product of pre-modern sacred time rather than postmodern experimentation. The resultant compound modern city is a dark hellish place, a representation of modern London clearly indebted to both T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" and William Blake's *Songs of Experience*, as highlighted by a wealth of intertextual references.

However, what is distinctive about Dee's visionary experience of modern London is that each modern form is tightly bound to a particular built space, thus highlighting the

interdependence of space and form. For example, modern capitalism is tied to the Royal Exchange, while modern science is yoked to the “strong house of sorrow” which is the modern scientist’s laboratory (206). As for the modern legal system, this is harnessed to the spaces of Whitehall, and Whitehall is also the residence of Ackroyd’s Elizabeth I, whose chamber provides the setting for a grotesque autopsy. Since the queen’s power anticipates that of the modern nation state, her actions reveal how this state depends on “violence directed towards a space” (Lefebvre 280), in this case the space of a citizen’s body.

The psychic effects of Dee’s vision are heightened by his representation as one “who helped to build this city” (210), and his self-questioning is furthered by recognition of Kelley’s duplicity and his own inability to save his dying wife. The resultant reawakening of Dee’s love for his wife allows him to identify with her pre-modern experience of space in ‘The Garden’ (247-257). However, while the enacted vision of ‘The City’ is the climax of *The House of Dr. Dee*’s critique of (London) modernity, the performed vision of ‘The Garden’ introduces alternative values, tying loyalty, gentleness and love to concrete spaces of nature that convey these values through time.

The significance of concrete space is stressed once again in the novel’s last chapter, where the destruction of the top floors of Dee’s house facilitates his conclusive break with all modern socio-cultural forms. However, the product of this break, a final and enduring pre-modern experience of space, does not involve nature even though it expresses similar values to ‘The Garden.’ Instead, it is a visionary experience of London but one that is very different to ‘The City’ despite its equally strong links to the capital’s material spaces, links that testify still further to the powers of inherited pre-modern spatial practice for those able to apprehend them. That Dee has now become such a ‘seer’ is indicated by his recognition of the glory and beauty of the city around him, qualities he had previously projected onto a nostalgic ideal of a “long-buried and long-forgotten London” (154). Of course, this city also embodies Dee’s changed psyche and thus binds him to other London ‘seers’ through time, a link reiterated in modified Gothic form in *Hawksmoor*.

### **Post-restoration London: Dominant modernity in question**

Unlike the Renaissance city of *The House of Dr. Dee*, the early eighteenth-century capital represented in *Hawksmoor* is dominated by modern spaces, which are linked to a large number of social and cultural forms. For example, the commercial spaces of modern capitalism now extend far beyond the city walls, and the wealth of goods on sale testifies to London’s central role in the global expansion of this economic system.



Meanwhile, “smoking Factors” signal the beginnings of modern industrialism (48), and both the capital’s commercial and industrial spaces, as well as its many clubs and coffee-houses, are connected to the New Philosophy, which is shown to both shape and reflect a dominant geometric conception of spiritless space, just as the empiricist slant of the London Enlightenment is linked to a dominant experience of space as visible surface.

While Ackroyd has stated that “the fifteenth-century city was closer to contemporary Marrakesh than to any version of post-Restoration London” (*The Life*, 16), *Hawksmoor* contains a special focus on the early eighteenth-century capital’s inheritance of pre-modern spaces, as well as the social and cultural forms they continued to embody and shape. For example, Dyer refers to post-Restoration London’s medieval churches and ruins, and he stresses that despite grand schemes for rebuilding the city after the Great Fire (1666), the centre is still a labyrinth of “winding crooked passages” (48). Tied to this spatial practice is a conception of space as host to sinister forces, as well as an experience typified by Mary Crompton’s sighting of “the Divil” in “Old Gravill Lane” (93), and both these spaces also illustrate the newly prominent dark side of London’s pre-modern socio-spatial inheritance, a shift that *Hawksmoor* attributes to the ruinous effects of modern “mercantile culture” (Ackroyd, *London* 391), particularly as manifested in the poorest districts of the city.

While Ackroyd’s John Dee both embodies and shapes the modern-pre-modern mix of a still-unified London, the characters of Christopher Wren and Nicholas Dyer simultaneously reflect and mould the respective modern and pre-modern aspects of a socially and culturally divided capital, divisions that are also shown to be “stamped upon the topography of the town,” as well as generated by this topography (Porter, *London* 117). Dyer is *Hawksmoor*’s principal voice of pre-modern cultural forms, and their newly prominent dark side is stressed by his pagan-inspired belief that Satan is lord of a fallen world. While the locations of Dyer’s churches and his humble background tie these forms to the old central city and ‘ruined lanes’ of the new East End (94), the novel’s representative of Enlightenment, Christopher Wren, illustrates the connections between enlightened culture and the genteel residential districts of the new West End, for as Dyer notes, it is only occupants of “snug Bed-chambers” (like Wren) that are wont to “call the Fears of Night meer Bugbears” (49).

Although Wren’s and Dyer’s relative social and professional status emphasises the dominance of modern forms and subordination of pre-modern ones in post-Restoration London, it is Dyer rather than Wren who is both the central character and narrator of *Hawksmoor*’s early modern narrative, thus signalling its mission to recover

stories excluded from the hegemonic narrative. It is also through Dyer that the novel accesses the contemporary critique of modernity expressed by threatened pre-modern forms. For example, Dyer highlights the terrible effects of modern capitalism and industrialism on many Londoners. Despite recognition of the new fearlessness and energy associated with certain enlightened forms, he also accuses the New Philosophy of dismissing spiritual realities since these “cannot be found by Mathematick demonstrations” (102), and he anticipates Nietzsche’s refutation of the foundational claims of modern reason by arguing that it “changes its Shape almost in every Man” and hence can be used to support any “Folly” (145).<sup>10</sup>

Wren’s dismissive responses to Dyer’s critique also indicate the Enlightenment’s lack of self-critique. Indeed, there is only one episode in the entire novel when Wren displays a rather different outlook, and this episode also testifies to the richness of a pre-modern experience of space, as well as the powers of pre-modern spatial practice. During Wren’s and Dyer’s visit to Stonehenge, Dyer employs all of his senses in a full spiritual and emotional experience of this pre-modern sacred space, while Wren’s modern geometric conception of space initially shapes his solely visual apprehension of the ancient stones, thus supporting Lefebvre’s contention that in modernity “representational space disappears into the representation of space” (398). However, while leaning against one of these stones, Wren has a most un-rational vision of his son dead (61), as if the stone has momentarily created a huge shift in his sensibility, allowing a deeply buried pre-modern experience of space to fleetingly come to the fore.

While this episode underlines the productive force of material space, the powers of spatial practice are most fully communicated through Dyer’s representation of his architectural project. Indeed, his awareness of these powers has determined his decision to become an architect, and he asserts that his London churches, embodiments of his world-view as well as emblems of the districts that shaped it, not only “lead you into a darker world” but will also carry this world into future times (102), an argument confirmed by their powerful presence in *Hawksmoor’s* late modern narrative.

In his review of Pierre de la Ruffiniere du Prey’s *Hawksmoor’s London Churches: Architecture and Theology*, Ackroyd argues that the historical Hawksmoor combined pagan with Christian elements in his London churches (314). Six of Dyer’s churches are modelled on the corresponding buildings of Hawksmoor,<sup>11</sup> and these churches also contain many pagan elements, which simultaneously embody and express the pagan aspects of Dyer’s dark pre-modern world-view. Most noteworthy is their emphasis on cryptic space since it was the cryptic component of medieval and earlier Christian

sacred space which was inherited from Pagan sacred structures (Lefebvre 276). St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Anne's are also purposefully constructed over a pagan temple and Saxon burial site respectively. They thus harness and re-assert the social and cultural forces still inhering in eighteenth-century London's underlying pre-Christian and early Christian spaces, as highlighted by Dyer's claim that the powers of the "massive Necropolis" underneath St. Anne's 'will come to adhere in the Fabrick of this new Edifice' (62)

Meanwhile, the urgency of Dyer's project can be explained not only by the spatial and socio-cultural competition represented by Wren's Palladian architecture but also by Wren's attitude to unearthed pre-Christian structures, which he regards as "Rubbidge" to be discarded (144). For Dyer is aware that resistance to modernity can only gain enduring force through manifestation in space, and his comparison of his architecture to a written narrative suggests that he sees his own story as another aspect of this spatial resistance (205). This is confirmed during his dramatised exchange with the fashionable architect John Vanbrugghe, itself an example of pre-modern genre-mixing, for here he explicitly links his "huge lushious Style" to pre-modern traditions (176).

The aforementioned connection between written and built space reaches a climax in Dyer's representation of his last church, Little St. Hugh, since this is the only building that is a purely fictional construct not inspired by Hawksmoor's churches. It is here that Dyer also appears to partake in an eternal dance which resembles that in 'The Garden' of *The House of Dr. Dee*, but which is just as fully tied to enduring London spaces as *Dr. Dee*'s final chapter. However, there can be no idealised ending to *Hawksmoor*'s early modern narrative since the novel's affirmation of a pre-modern worldview is tempered by the darkness and despair associated with its eighteenth-century Gothic form, just as Ackroyd's critique of the London Enlightenment is mediated by limited appreciation of its optimism, energy and usefulness, features noticeably absent from the late modern narratives of both *Hawksmoor* and *The House of Dr. Dee*.

### **Late twentieth-century London: Contesting modernity again**

In the late twentieth-century capital represented in *Hawksmoor* and *The House of Dr. Dee*, modern spaces and socio-cultural forms are even more dominant than in Ackroyd's early eighteenth-century London although the roots of this hegemony are underlined by the statue of Wren that stands at the city's heart. Like its built inspiration, this capital is "a mighty engine of finance, banking and insurance" (Porter,

*London* 466), an identity that *Hawksmoor* in particular ties to the glass-clad corporate blocks of the City, which illustrate the geometric, phallic and optical components of abstract capitalist space (Lefebvre 285-87). Meanwhile, ubiquitous neon signs and advertising hoardings embody and perpetuate a consumer culture that has turned even London's oldest buildings into commodities. All the aforementioned spaces are also bound to a dominant modern experience of space as visible surface, while the subjection of London's material spaces and its citizens' bodies to modern machines indicates the continuing hegemony of a modern conception of spiritless space.

Within such a context, pre-modern spaces, whether inherited from pre-Christian, medieval or post-Restoration London, can achieve only vestigial status, and hence inherited pre-modern spatial practice is described as "incongruous" (*Hawksmoor* 155) or compared to a "lost creature" (*The House* 16). However, this spatial practice, as well as related socio-cultural forms, is nevertheless a focus in the two novels' late modern narratives, which partake in Ackroyd's project to dispel the amnesia of contemporary English society ("London Luminaries" 348). For example, both texts highlight the still-labyrinthine form of the central city, connecting this to an inheritance of ritual activities. *The House of Dr. Dee* also explores both direct traces and palimpsest expressions of pre-Reformation sacred space, especially as manifest in the latest form of Dee's house, tying these to an inherited Catholicism which "never did wholly fade" (Ackroyd, *Albion* 174). Meanwhile, *Hawksmoor* examines the contemporary capital's inheritance of eighteenth-century Gothic spaces, particularly as manifest in Dyer's churches, linking these and their poverty-stricken locations to a continuing tradition of ritualised crime.

Although inherited pre-modern conceptions and experiences of space are shown to be just as vestigial as the London spatial practice with which they are associated, they are also a focus in both novels. In *The House of Dr. Dee*, they are attributed to a few esoteric societies and homeless people, who understand and readily respond to the "interior life and reality" of spaces like Dee's house (42). The homeless are a more prominent presence in *Hawksmoor*, but here they are wandering tramps rather than hostel dwellers since only these most deprived and despairing of Londoners conceive and experience space in dark Gothic terms, an inheritance which attracts them to Dyer's churches, as well as activating the buildings' full powers. Equally prone to such conceptions and experiences are the most fearful and depressed members of a second group, the children that roam the central city streets, and these children are also strongly drawn to Dyer's vision-inspiring churches.

As for the two novels' major twentieth-century characters, these are Londoners who initially embody the balance between modern and pre-modern spaces and socio-cultural forms in Ackroyd's representations of the contemporary capital. Detective Hawksmoor is characterised as a scientific descendant of Wren since his "understanding of each case" depends on "close observation and rational deduction" (152), thus involving a modern geometric conception and visual experience of space. However, there are a few well-concealed aspects of Hawksmoor's character that also link him to Dyer, as underlined by textual echoes and their mutual attraction to the same gloomy spaces along the Thames.<sup>12</sup> For example, Hawksmoor believes that certain places can provoke "a malevolence...quite without motive" (116), and he occasionally has visionary experiences of resonant spaces, as when the streets of central London conjure up "the image of a mob screaming to be set free" (114). Although Matthew Palmer also has occasional visions, particularly around his Clerkenwell home, his work as a researcher involves him in the same modern methodology of detection as Hawksmoor, and hence he tries to either rationalise such experiences or explain them as ghostly haunting, an interpretation equally tied to a modern conception of space, for "when matter is regarded as the primary reality, spirit in whatever manifestation can only make itself known in intrusive demonic form" (Cavaliero 227).

However, later developments in the lives of both Hawksmoor and Palmer put their initial attachment to modern spaces and socio-cultural forms under considerable strain, a strain with wider social implications given the characters' emblematic functions; while Hawksmoor's rational empiricism fails to solve a series of murders that occur in or around Dyer's churches, Palmer realises that despite his profession, he has formed no clear picture of his troubled childhood or his latest research subject, John Dee. This strain re-activates the critique of modernity central to the two novels' early modern narratives, a process grounded in Hawksmoor's and Palmer's residual attachments to pre-modern forms; Hawksmoor now argues that the world may not operate according to rational laws of cause and effect and he doubts that omniscience is possible, while Palmer is able to recognise that Dee's modern fantasy of godlike creation (the homunculus) is "an image of sterility and fake innocence" (*The House* 178).

Under the pressure of this critique, dominant modern spaces and socio-cultural forms eventually collapse in the psyches of both characters, a process represented as symptomatic of the wider social breakdown of modern structures. This clears the way for formerly vestigial psychic spaces and socio-cultural forms to come to the fore, a

process which also forges new, enabling ties to London's inheritance of pre-modern spatial practice. Palmer is able to apprehend the spiritual and emotional aspects of his mother's garden, and he is subject to many visions of the pre-modern spaces he increasingly frequents, particularly the ancient lower floors of his house, where he often glimpses a similarly transformed Dee. Meanwhile, Hawksmoor now openly asserts a Dyer-like conception of space, stating that he "can go into a house and feel if a murder has taken place there" (199). He too is subject to many visions, especially of the areas around Dyer's churches, where he sometimes glimpses the figure of Dyer.

In addition to tracing such socio-spatial developments and linking them to early modern precedents through narrative crossings, both novels attempt to show how pre-modern spaces and socio-cultural forms may be better suited to late twentieth-century (London) realities than modern ones, thus indicating Ackroyd's position in the reason/mystery debate, which he argues is as relevant today as it was in the early modern past (qtd. in Herman 14). For example, Hawksmoor is finally able to 'solve' the mysterious murders because his newly prominent Dyer-like conception and experience of space allow him to understand the powers Dyer's churches have exerted over victims and murderer alike, while Palmer's newly dominant conception and experience of space help him find peace in a "world with love" (*Dr. Dee* 246), as enacted in his new bond with his mother, an echo of the transformed Dee's relationship with the spirit of his wife.<sup>13</sup>

These enabling developments also pave the way for Hawksmoor's and Palmer's final immersion in visionary experiences of London space, experiences whose sacred (or absolute) time enables the characters to fully encounter Dyer and the transformed Dee, while their performance in written space results in the mergence of the novels' early and late modern narratives. Of course, Hawksmoor and Palmer also encounter many further figures in the novels' respective visionary denouements, and by including himself in their number, Ackroyd signals his own identification with the world-view these figures share; when the third-person narrative shifts to first-person at the end of *Hawksmoor*, Ackroyd implicitly joins the dancing figures which include both Dyer and Hawksmoor, while he takes a walk with Dee in 'The Vision' of *The House of Dr. Dee*. Of still greater significance are the novels' final assertions of the powers of spatial practice, upon which the workings of sacred time are shown to depend; in *The House of Dr. Dee*, the figures in 'The Vision' can only come together through London's inheritance of pre-modern spatial practice, while the dance of *Hawksmoor* is so firmly bound to the spaces of Little St. Hugh that the dancers 'looked past one another at the pattern which they cast upon the stone' (217). Of course, this stone is fictional rather than real, but

this fact merely confirms the equivalent powers both novels attribute to written and built space.

### **Conclusion: alternatives in built and written London space**

In the same way that the visionary endings of *Hawksmoor* and *The House of Dr. Dee* shed new light on the groups and individuals who through time have shared a now socially vestigial pre-modern world-view, so many of Ackroyd's biographies and essays illuminate figures he sees as expressing and shaping a similar world-view in literature. These include contemporary authors like Michael Moorcock, Angela Carter and Iain Sinclair, as well as writers of the past like William Blake, T.S. Eliot and Thomas More, and Ackroyd has stressed the pre-modern elements of this group's work by crediting them with a 'powerful sense of the sacred', which he links to "the latent Catholicism of the English race" ("London Luminaries" 350). As underlined by intertextual references to many of these authors in *Hawksmoor* and *The House of Dr. Dee*, Ackroyd sees his own writing as part of this same literary tradition.

Just as the endings of both novels also confirm the overriding importance of spatial practice in shaping and perpetuating a particular world-view, so Ackroyd's essays and biographies root the aforementioned literary tradition in the concrete spaces of London; Ackroyd repeatedly refers to its practitioners as "London luminaries" or "Cockney visionaries," maintaining that "a particular London spirit has formed them" ("London Luminaries" 347). Both *Hawksmoor* and *The House of Dr. Dee* suggest that this London spirit is bound not to the capital's modern spaces but rather to its inheritance of pre-modern spatial practice. This also explains why such spatial practice is the subject of some of Ackroyd's critical writings; essays like "Manifesto for London" and "Ours to Keep: A Pocketful of Ry" express his "long-standing fear for the loss of spaces that are not completely subject to the flow of capital" (Link 517-18), hence stressing the need to protect and reinvigorate London's inheritance of pre and early modern spatial practice, a message that is just as pertinent to the postmillennial global city as it was to the capital of the 1980s and 1990s.

Although *Hawksmoor* and *The House of Dr. Dee* additionally explore the critique of modernity linked to pre-modern spatial practice, as well as related conceptions and experiences of space, their endings focus on the alternatives that inherited pre-modern spaces and socio-cultural forms might proffer. Ackroyd thus establishes yet one more connection to Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, for this study is informed by "the project of a different society" (Lefebvre 419), one in which a "differential space" overcomes modern divisions in the individual and social body, as well as in human

needs and knowledge (Lefebvre 52). While Lefebvre represents “differential space” as new, he also argues for the rehabilitation of “underground, lateral, labyrinthine -even uterine or feminine realities” (201), thus indicating the important role that pre-modern spaces play in his transformative project.

Although the Gothic form of such spaces in *Hawksmoor* explains why they are not represented as an unmediated ideal, *The House of Dr. Dee* directly links them to the redemption of the late modern capital. In the novel's final lines, Ackroyd urges Dee to “help me to create another bridge across two shores. And so join with me in celebration. Come closer, come towards me, so that we may become one. Then will London be redeemed now and for ever” (277).

While the image of the bridge indicates how *The House of Dr. Dee* is itself a vehicle for the communication through time of pre-modern conceptions and experiences of space, as well as the socio-cultural forms they shape and embody, it also recalls Palmer's earlier vision of a bridge of shimmering light across the Thames, one activated by a space along the river where many bridges have indeed stood. As such, it stresses that the embrace of inherited pre-modern conceptions and experiences of space must be combined with a new appreciation of the city's inherited pre-modern spatial practice. This final emphasis also underlines the difference between Ackroyd's two novels and postmodern explorations of 'the city as text', suggesting that *The House of Dr. Dee* and *Hawksmoor* anticipate the 'more grounded vision' of much postmillennial London fiction (Groes 221).

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<sup>1</sup> See Bentley; Bradford; English; Lane; Connor; Gasiorek.

<sup>2</sup> See Onega, *Peter Ackroyd*; Lee; Holmes.

<sup>3</sup> See Ackroyd, “I think after More” and Ackroyd in Onega, “Interview.”

<sup>4</sup> See Elias; Lord; Fokkema.

<sup>5</sup> I have employed Richard Bradford's term “dimension” to refer to areas of the past that are “too broad and elastic to be termed ‘periods’” (91).

<sup>6</sup> While the historical character of John Dee is inspired by the historical John Dee (1527-1608), that of Nicholas Dyer is inspired by the historical architect Nicholas Hawksmoor (1654 - c.1715), a figure whose namesake is the central character in *Hawksmoor*'s late modern narrative.

<sup>7</sup> See Lefebvre (219) and Ackroyd, “London Luminaries” (343).



<sup>8</sup> The early modern Faust legend is a major intertext in *The House of Dr. Dee*, and Dee is first connected to Faust through the resonant space of the tree from which Faust was supposedly taken away by the Devil.

<sup>9</sup> On the medieval hospital and the rituals of holy dying, see Rawcliffe.

<sup>10</sup> See Nietzsche (36).

<sup>11</sup> This is evidence of Ackroyd's debt to Iain Sinclair's *Lud Heat* (1975), which describes how Hawksmoor's six London churches supposedly create an occult force field.

<sup>12</sup> Both Hawksmoor and Dyer work at the same location, live in the same district and have an assistant called Walter Payne, while Dyer's landlady, the monopolylinguist Mrs. Best, closely resembles Hawksmoor's neighbour, Mrs. West.

<sup>13</sup> Palmer's mother is associated with Dee's wife from the beginning of the novel, and as Susana Omega notes, her link to the "world with love" is "symbolised by the splendid sunflowers growing in her garden" (*Peter Ackroyd* 62).

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