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**MOBILITIES OF PRESENCE: THE
MOTIFS OF TIME AND HISTORY IN THE NOVELS OF PETER ACKROYD**

by

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SUMMARY

After a brief contextualisation, time and history are examined in Ackroyd's novels.

Chapter 1 examines postmodernism.

Chapter 2 explores history perceived as fact and as construct.

Chapter 3 investigates the dissolution of the distinction between history and fiction.

Chapter 4 analyses the development of 'originality' and the futile search for origin.

Chapter 5 examines the interchangeability of fiction and reality.

Chapter 6 studies theories on time, focusing on Einstein's theory of relativity.

Chapter 7 analyses the coexistence of the past and present, and the relativity of time.

Chapter 8 scrutinises the myth of 'mobilities of presence', which facilitates rejuvenation.

Chapter 9 considers the relation between time and space necessary for rejuvenation.

Chapter 10 looks at simultaneity and the eternal present.

It is clear that Ackroyd explores the mobilities of presence of historical and fictional characters, objects, and texts, thus showing that time is a web of simultaneously existing present moments.

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INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation an attempt will be made to gain some form of understanding of Peter Ackroyd's novels. Since no writer or reader can ever wholly escape the numerous, often disparate, influences stemming from the context in which he/she lives and writes/reads, it would be futile and meaningless to analyse texts in isolation. Ackroyd writes in a postmodern time and we, as readers, inevitably read in just such a time. A Victorian reader would be struck by other elements and would read from a perspective different to that of a postmodern reader. One has to select, and the selection is determined by one's frame of reference.

In this dissertation, I have selected time and history as focal points, since these are recurring motifs in Ackroyd's fiction. Both concepts have undergone a profound change in recent times and cannot be ignored by any reader, even less so by a reader situated within 'the postmodern condition' (Lyotard, 1979). I shall also look at what one could call 'mobilities of presence'; presence both in the sense of absence of absence, and as a term relating to the present moment. In selecting these concepts and in viewing them from a contemporary postmodern perspective (or perspectives), I do not wish to imply that Ackroyd's novels are postmodern in all respects. It would, in any case, be impossible to prove that they are/are not, within the length of such a dissertation. I merely wish to indicate that Ackroyd cannot completely escape the influence of postmodernism.

At this stage, I should like to postulate the possibility that Ackroyd transgresses the boundaries of postmodern writing by advancing a way out of the quagmire of fragmentation. He apparently offers a solution to the so-called postmodern crisis, by offering acceptance of the 'network of simultaneities', the network of connection of present moments, even if this network appears to be meaningless, confusing, and dreadful in the deepest metaphysical sense.

I shall trace Ackroyd's development of this 'solution' (a very temporary one) in his novels: from *The Great Fire of London* (1982),

which already contains some of the main ideas and motifs, albeit in an undeveloped form, to *Hawksmoor* (1985), a novel in which these ideas and motifs are perhaps most prominent and most clearly elaborated, to *Chatterton* (1987), where they recur, now combined with questions of originality - a highly temporal concept. Finally, I shall look at *First Light* (1989), where the same ideas are found in less explicit form than in, for example, *Hawksmoor*, but where all the previous explorations come to fruition. In *First Light* we are finally given a definition and explanation of time and existence in confusing times. It will be noted that I have omitted mentioning *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1983). The reason is that this novel is different from the others, especially in so far as the subject of this dissertation is concerned: it does not deal with 'mobilities of presence', a concept explored fairly extensively later on in the dissertation. I shall, however, mention *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* where it is relevant, specifically when dealing with history and the use of history in fiction (and the use of fiction in history), since these issues cannot be ignored in any study of this text. Ackroyd's most recent novel, *English Music* (1992), will regrettably not be included, since it was not available at the time of writing this dissertation.

My approach to Ackroyd's treatment of the motifs of time and history in his novels will not be chronological, although it might appear to be the most obvious method of analysis in the light of the preceding argument. I believe that a chronological approach to the elements I want to address in each of the novels would at best be tedious and boring. Instead I shall begin with a brief and cursory introduction to postmodern times and writing. I shall not, however, advance any 'original' definitions of postmodernism. My purpose is not to analyse postmodernism, but merely to provide the background or context from/in which Ackroyd's writing emerges, in order then to proceed with the proper subject of the dissertation as found in its title.

I shall deal separately (in so far as that is possible) with various elements in Ackroyd's fiction in two main sections: history and time. This division is obvious, but it is also artificial, because the two main motifs are closely related. Thus there will inevitably be, if not

repetition, at least interchangeability, in order to allow for a smooth flow of the argument. Under some of the major headings, that is, wherever it is advisable, I shall attempt to give a brief contextual introduction to the topic under discussion. The final chapter will be both a summary and an attempt to draw conclusions concerning Ackroyd's fictional view on the nature of time and history in contemporary times.

This dissertation does not offer a complete analysis of Ackroyd's fiction or of the selected motifs of time and history in these texts; similarly, it does not provide the only possible interpretation of these novels or motifs. Yet I believe that this dissertation has some value and relevance, specifically because so little (apart from reviews) has been written on Ackroyd's novels. I shall explore a few of the most obvious ideas in Ackroyd's fiction, at the same time relating these ideas and their treatment, where possible, to other relevant works of literature, criticism, and philosophy.

SECTION A: CONTEXTUALISATION

CHAPTER 1
POSTMODERNISM: AN INTRODUCTION

'Then I will die without fear?'
'You will not die in uncertainty.'
'Is that the same thing?'
'It is the same.'

(Hilsenrath, 1991:17)

'I realise, as I say this, that perhaps I use "modern" and "postmodern" in a different sense from that in which you and others use it. Well, this seems to me a very postmodern attitude - don't you agree?'

(Umberto Eco quoted by Breon Mitchell
in Calinescu & Fokkema, 1987:109)

'"Postmodernist"? Nothing about this term is unproblematic, nothing about it is entirely satisfactory.'

(McHale, 1987:3)

'Postmodernist ... inevitably calls to mind a band of vainglorious contemporary artists following the circus elephants of Modernism with snow shovels.'

(Charles Newman quoted in McHale, 1987:3)

As has been indicated in the general introduction, this chapter is meant to serve as contextualisation of Ackroyd's writing and the act of reading, both of which take place in a contemporary, postmodern world. In the course of the chapter attention will be given to the origin and meaning of the term, factors leading to its emergence, and some of its forms and characteristics.

Postmodernism probably originated in America, but it also has affinities to the French *nouveau roman*. It can be seen as both an international and an interdisciplinary phenomenon, ranging from architecture through the visual arts, music, literature and history, to the social and natural sciences, while bringing in contributions from several cultures beyond the anglophone world, and ignoring all boundaries or limits.

The term **postmodernism** currently designates at once an historical category and a systematic or ideal concept (Calinescu, 1987:4) or a period and a genre-concept (Bennett, 1988:32).

Unlike most other terms, for which there are numerous definitions all having something in common, nobody has actually managed to define postmodernism or postmodernisms. At most, theorists and critics have managed to describe some of the aspects, elements and characteristics covered by the term **postmodernism**, and the forms in which postmodernism manifests itself. Others have primarily described what postmodernism is not. Linda Hutcheon (1984:3) points out that most discussions of postmodernism are mainly concerned with the psychological, philosophical, ideological or social causes of the flourishing self-consciousness of our culture.

Randall Stevenson 'defines' **postmodernist** as

a term which appropriately indicates the development of several of its distinctive features either directly 'after Joyce', or as an extension of the work of other intermediary authors themselves strongly influenced by Joyce and his modernist contemporaries.

(1987:220)

This merely indicates the origin of postmodernism without actually

saying where it has led or what it is.

The same idea is expressed in the term itself, **postmodernism**, meaning something which came after, or followed on, modernism. Linda Hutcheon (1984:2) prefers to interpret the 'post' in 'postmodernism' as not meaning 'after' so much as an extension of modernism and a reaction to it. Arac (1987:285) also pays attention to the relation between 'modern' and 'postmodern' (implied by the prefix), suggesting that it remains wholly uncertain whether it is more a break or a continuity. Helmut Lethen quotes Ihab Hassan as saying that

[m]odernism and postmodernism are not separated by an Iron Curtain or Chinese Wall, for history is a palimpsest, and culture is permeable to time past, time present, and time future. We are all, I suspect, a little Victorian, Modern and Postmodern, at once.

(1986:235)

Yet, no matter how one chooses to see the prefix, as extension or intensification of modernism or as reaction to modernism, it still does not define postmodernism. Postmodernism is always described in opposition or at least in relation to something else, but it is never quite clear what that other pole is (Szegedy-Maszák, 1987:41-42).

This inability to discover a single, comprehensive definition of the term **postmodernism** might be owing to the fact that postmodernism has so many different manifestations. Bertens and D'haen (1988:7-8) identify four forms of postmodernism: an existentialist postmodernism (based on Heidegger's conceptions), an avantgardist postmodernism (prominent since the sixties), a post-structuralist postmodernism (concerned with theoretical questions), and a purely aesthetic postmodernism (which uses all the techniques associated with postmodernism, but which does not make any political or philosophical statements). The only aspects these phenomena have in common are those of origin and context.

I shall not attempt to succeed where so many before me have failed by trying to define **postmodernism**. It is, however, worthwhile looking at some characteristics of postmodernism.

Postmodernism is a direct consequence of the contemporary

Weltanschauung. A growing feeling of uncertainty about everything now characterises personal and public life, and this uncertainty is reflected in art and literature. If one views realism as an art form in which the artist strives towards a close reflection of reality, then postmodernism is realistic, since it deliberately attempts to embody the uncertainty of contemporary reality. Ihab Hassan expresses this feeling of uncertainty in the following way: 'We are, I believe, inhabitants of another Time and another Space, and we no longer know what response is adequate to our reality' (1975:53). Causality has been lost and existentialism has exerted its influence. Dread (a kind of fear where the object cannot be identified, or does not even exist) now begins disclosing humanity's 'primordial not-at-homeness' in the world (Spanos, 1987:16); yet not-at-homeness does not exclude 'being-in-the-world' (Spanos, 1987:215). Spanos further postulates that dread of nothing is also, and simultaneously, a 'dread of temporality, of historicity, of the absence of presence, that is, the differences that time always already disseminates ...' (1987:119-120).

The postmodern world view is the end-result of a long process of secularisation and dehumanisation.¹ The result of the negation of traditional views is a loss of everything which had, in the past, been definite. Everything has become fragmented, indeterminate, narcissistic, selfless, depthless, performative, unportrayable/unpresentable/unrepresentable, flexible, fluid, and in a state of flux. Even science, in the form of new physics, is now less stable in that it is based 'not upon "absolute truth", but upon us' (Zukav, 1979:63, emphasis in the original). Other characteristics of our postmodern time are decanonisation, irony, hybridisation, carnivalisation, constructionism, and immanence (Hassan, 1987a: 445-446). Inevitably, the result has been a loss of meaning. As Spanos puts it:

[The postmodern modes of comportment] have in common the uncertain ground of de-centeredness, of *diaspora*; the groundless ground of a 'fallen' world, in which the *Logos* has been dispersed.

(1987:31)

Spanos (1987:234), quoting Robert Creeley, describes this 'fallen'

¹ Since Dada also emerged from such conditions, there are certain parallels between Dada and postmodernism (Lethen, 1986:234).

state as a fall into time, into temporality, into finiteness, which is oriented not eastward, but westward, not upward but downward.

Deconstruction is a direct consequence of this feeling of uncertainty. Language and words have lost the ability to denote specific referents. Intertextuality is both a consequence of, and a contributing agent to, this state. Peter Porter (1990:974) refers to this aspect of intertextuality when he says that the 'twentieth century, with its urge to scholarly exegesis, has licensed its artists to weave their own imaginations into the masterpieces of the past' On the one hand, intertextuality arises from uncertainty in the form of an absence of definite, clearly defined and delineated borders between literary texts, and between fictional texts and the world of 'reality' as text. The latter constitutes a transgression of the borderline between fiction and non-fiction. On the other hand, the use of intertextuality as a literary technique has led to a further confusion of the above-mentioned borders and boundaries.

In a state of uncertainty (ontological or otherwise), where there are no longer fixed referents, it is only natural that an atmosphere of questioning will be created by attempts to find meaning and security somewhere. Thus Brian McHale describes the dominant (in the Russian Formalist sense) of postmodern writing as ontological in his essay, 'Change of Dominant from Modernist to Postmodernist Writing':

... Postmodernist writing is designed to raise such questions as: what is a world? what kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? what happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated? what is the mode of existence of a text and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects? how is a projected world structured? and so on.
(1986:60)

Postmodernism interrogates the habits of mind (or 'archival prejudices') inscribed by the past (Spanos, 1987:217).

An atmosphere of questioning has also been created in literature. Spanos (1987:195) sees **postmodern** as describing a literature that radically interrogates the authorising logocentric forms and rhetorics of the entire literary tradition culminating in modernism. Postmodern

literature questions these to retrieve and explore temporality, which these 'spatial forms' have repressed by exclusion or assimilation, and forgotten. Both deconstruction and intertextuality have arisen from the desire to find new relations between things, in the process giving them new meaning.

Metafiction, that is 'fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality' (Waugh, 1984:2), is another manifestation of this phenomenon. The fact that it asks questions about the nature of, and the relation between, fiction and reality clearly points to this quest for meaning and certainty. It is only natural to turn to the past (when norms were still stable and definite) in search of some kind of foundation. Therefore metafiction takes established forms, genres, and conventions as its starting-point. These constitute a firm basis, since they have been created with the passage of time and form part of history. These genres and conventions are then questioned. Paradoxically, however, the activity of questioning these aspects implies a debilitation of established conceptions. Because there can be no clear answer, established forms are actually subverted, and the result is uncertainty. As Ihab Hassan (1975:56) remarks, the dehumanization (or loss of self) of contemporary times requires the revision of the literary and authorial Self, evidenced in postmodernism by authorial self-reflexiveness and by the fusion of fact and fiction.

Yet postmodernism, metafiction, intertextuality, and related concepts need not lead only to uncertainty. As a result of the study and re-examination of the past, a new form of fiction can emerge which can reflect the *Zeitgeist* of uncertainty, and which can then clarify and in the process transform the uncertainty. Through making one aware of uncertainty by describing and explicating the postmodern condition, this form of fiction can help one come to terms with contemporary reality. But one must not forget that this new-found certainty is a form of synthesis, a synthesis which will, ironically, in time take on the role of thesis. A new antithesis will then inevitably be called for, which again implies change and uncertainty.

The preceding seems to suggest that any investigation of the nature of postmodernism is inevitably a *petitio principii*. Douwe Fokkema also cannot escape circular argumentation in his description of the motive behind postmodernism:

The primary motive of the Postmodernists, I would venture, is an aesthetic one: an attempt to create ways for an individual experience of independence - from where a reinterpretation of so-called reality can be undertaken, a reinterpretation that avoids fixation and tends to remain permanently ambiguous.

(1987:236)

Postmodernism is a means of finding certainty, of 'taking hold of the Nothing' (Spanos, 1987:43), but must remain ambiguous.

The same ambiguity and duality applies to intertextuality and metafiction, two of the techniques frequently employed in postmodern writing. When intertextuality (which also turns to the past and questions relations to find meaning) and metafiction are combined, all boundaries disappear and uncertainty becomes inevitable. Yet the erasure of boundaries paradoxically helps to establish the contiguity of the work of art or literature with the real world of the author and reader (D'haen, 1986:228).

Significantly, postmodernism is a mode of the many and not the one, of dispersal and not unity, of discrimination and not sameness. Douwe Fokkema identifies some of the devices of postmodern texts in his essay, 'The Semantic and Syntactic Organization of Postmodernist Texts' (1986:92-95). These can all be linked to the above-mentioned characteristics of the postmodern mode, for example, discontinuity, redundancy, duplication, repetition, interference of two stories within one text, duplication of action, of characters, of clichés, of the act of writing, multiplication of semiotic systems, of endings, of beginnings, of action without solution, enumeration, permutation, interchangeability of sections of text, permutations of text and social context, of fact and fiction, and permutation of semantic units. The essence seems to be non-selection; yet Douwe Fokkema (1984:55) makes the valid remark that consistent non-selection (indifference) does not seem to be a human quality. Postmodernists cannot help but select non-selection.

Although postmodernism inevitably seems to lead to confusion, it is also symptomatic of a relatively high level of cultural modification. Frank Kermode identifies three stages in cultural modification, all of which are true of postmodernism:

A desire to use the past denotes ... an evolutionary phase already quite advanced. To find patterns in historical time ... is yet another stage. And the assumption or understanding that finding such patterns is a purely anthropocentric activity belongs to a third phase.

(1967:56, emphasis in the original)

Hans Bertens (1986:47) identifies two modes of postmodern writing in his essay, 'The Postmodern *Weltanschauung* and Its Relation with Modernism: An Introductory Survey': one has given up referentiality and meaning (this non-referential mode includes self-reflexive or metafictional writing), another still seeks to be referential and sometimes even tries to establish local, temporary, and provisional truths. It is difficult to decide to which of these modes Ackroyd's novels belong. In that they can be seen as metafictional, they seem to belong to the non-referential mode. Yet, because almost everything depends on the reader's interpretation, some readers might feel that Ackroyd also gives truths or solutions, whereas others might reject this view. Whichever view one adheres to, this is the background against which Ackroyd writes and the reader reads.

SECTION B: HISTORY

CHAPTER 2
HISTORY AS CONCEPT

'It has been said that though God cannot alter the past, historians can; it is perhaps because they can be useful to Him in this respect that He tolerates their existence.'
(Samuel Butler quoted in Muir, 1978:95-96)

'The future is Certain
It is the Past that is Unpredictable.'
(Evita Bezuidenhout quoted by Uys, 1990:vi)

The concept of history has undergone a profound change with the passage of time. In this chapter I shall contrast the two main views of this concept, taking into consideration history perceived as fact as well as history seen as construct. I shall then proceed to look at the relation between history and fiction, both theoretically and in Ackroyd's novels.

History is usually regarded as a fixed and unchanging entity, dealing with fact. However, when subjected to the rigorous mode of questioning, referred to in Chapter 1, history is rendered less stable. Consequently, there has been a shift in the focus of contemporary history: discontinuity has come to replace continuity (Gossman, 1978:25).

The accepted view of what constitutes history is not necessarily the only view: there can be many descriptions of one event. Thus Hayden White (1973:332) remarks that for both Nietzsche and Burckhardt there were as many 'truths' about the past as there were individual perspectives on it. Through the rise of nationalist history and history as propaganda, it has become evident that 'Histories are full of things that are not so, just as fiction is full of things that are so' (Mink, 1987:183).

Because of the influence of their own frames of reference and despite all attempts at objectivity, historians select from the 'facts' they have before them. As a result, it is impossible for us to know history or the past in its totality from having read what is written in so-called histories. We can only know what the historians (un)consciously choose to let us know. As Besançon (quoted by Gossman, 1978:29) insists, what history produces is not unified or total knowledge of the past or of some fragment of it, but a *book*, a text. Narrative form in history, as in fiction, is an artifice, the product of individual imagination (Mink, 1987:199). Hayden White, however, apparently still tries to protect the objectivity of history at certain points in his writing. He believes that historians explain the past by uncovering 'stories' that lie buried in chronicles. Historians 'find' stories and fiction writers 'invent' them (1973:6 & 1984:2). Yet this does not preclude selection and subjectivity: historians must also

contextualise and interpret. Ackroyd is acutely aware of this, as can be seen from his biography of Dickens, where he attempts to 'dismantle the biographer's mask of objectivity' (Porter, 1990:974).

The assumption that history corresponds to what really happened, proves to be false: we cannot know whether an account is true, since we cannot compare it with what happened to see whether the two versions correspond. We can only make a sense of the past (White, 1986:448). Therefore history is not a reconstruction; it is only a construction or reproduction.¹ It is not like a jigsaw puzzle which is made to fit the picture on the box. Hutcheon (1986:307) prefers to call it a transformed trace of the past. History is not a privileged authority, but part of what Derrida calls '*le texte général*', which has no boundaries (quoted in Culler, 1986:130). It is furthermore not illuminating to distinguish history as true or as having a referent from fiction as imaginary or as not having a referent (Mink, 1987:19). All individual statements about the past may be true or false, but a narrative (history is a narrative) is more than a conjunction of statements, and in so far as it is more, it does not reduplicate a complex past. Mink's six characteristics of historiography reveal the subjectivity and relativity of historiography.²

¹ Jerome Brunner explores this idea that narrative recreates reality rather than refers to it in his essay 'The Narrative Construction of Reality' (1991).

² Mink's characteristics of historiography are:

a historians claim that they can give at least partial explanations of past events; yet they do not undertake to predict the future (1987:68)

b they can prove false a hypothesis about an historical event or period, without concluding that it is false in any other case or as such (1987:72)

c it is often necessary to 'relive' or 'recreate' in the imagination events which they investigate (1987:75)

d they do not adopt one another's significant conclusions unless they are convinced by their own inspection of the argument (1987:77)

e they agree that there are resemblances among complex events (for example, revolutions) but also insist that no two such events are identical (1987:81)

f they assume they have a potentially universal audience (1987:85).

Mink further mentions the uncertainty behind the apparent certainty of history:

... there is no denying that we regard the past, both within and beyond the limits of personal memory, as fixed, detailed and immutable. What's done is done, we say; you can't change the past. Of course our interpretations and state of knowledge may change, but either Caesar visited Britain or he didn't, although we don't know which.

(1987:93)

Thus, although history claims to be true, it is imaginative, which implies that it might be true, but cannot be proved true. Like novelists, historians have the responsibility of being 'makers of meaning' (Hutcheon, 1986:307, emphasis in the original). The stories that the historian and the novelist construct are not true or false, but rather more or less intelligible, coherent, consistent, persuasive, and so on (White, 1986:492 & 1987:54).

Furthermore, as the present changes, so does our view of history and consequently of the past. Certain 'facts' can be re-interpreted. R.G. Collingwood (quoted by Mink) actually regards this reinterpretation as a need or requirement:

The view that there is a history of the concept of history itself justifies anew the ancient maxim that each generation must rewrite history in its own way.

(1987:278)

Hayden White sees this view of numerous truths about the past, of historical pluralism (1986:484), as the 'life affirming view of history', since it postulates that there are as many visions of history as possible, as there are projects for winning a sense of self in human beings (1973:332).

The concept of circularity features in many discussions of history. According to Braudel, history - especially contemporary history - cannot escape from or ignore circularity:

The new economic and social history puts cyclical movement in the forefront of its research and is committed to that time span: it has been captivated by the mirage and the reality of the cyclical rise and fall of prices.

(1980:27)

Marx comments on the recurrence implied by this circularity at the opening of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*:

Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of

great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.

(in White, 1973:320)

As I shall indicate later, Ackroyd seems to suggest that they occur more often than twice. In Ackroyd's fiction, the result is mystery and uncanniness. In contrast to Marx, Michel Foucault in his 'Theatrum Philosophicum' believes that the circle must be abandoned as a faulty principle of return, because there is no centre, always decentring (in Spanos, 1987:188). This is a typically postmodern view (see Chapter 1). A circle is a closed structure which inevitably has a central point; postmodernism prefers openness and decentredness. Foucault apparently believes that there can be no return, since every moment is fleeting and transient in postmodern times.

The relative status of 'truth' in history is not only of importance to historians; it is also explored in postmodern literature. J.M. Kirsten (1987:415) remarks that one of the characteristics of postmodern rhetoric is a detotalisation of history (together with desublimation of rhetoric and decentralisation of the subject). The result is that continuity is no longer a paradigm for historical construction: we now find a discontinuous and heterogenous whole (Kirsten, 1987:415). The aim of postmodern writing is to expose one to 'the existential realm of history, where, divested of the patriarchal *Logos*, Nothing is certain' (Spanos, 1987:48).

The relation between history and fiction, a relation carefully explored by Lionel Gossman in his essay, 'History and Literature: Reproduction or Signification' (1978:3-39), is relevant in this respect. He traces the development of this relation from the time when history and historiography were a branch of literature (this remained valid for the practice of history until nearly the end of the eighteenth century). Then, at the same time that literature began to detach itself from rhetoric, history's epistemological basis of its ideal of impartially copying or representing the real was put in question. At this stage the old common ground of history and literature - the idea of mimesis and the central importance of rhetoric - had been gradually vacated by both. The result is that both modern historians and modern literary scholars now conceive of their work as exploration, testing, and

creation of new meaning. Yet Gossman concludes that

[f]or the historian ... rhetorical rather than poetic considerations remain paramount, and literature is still a craft or a skill by which the *dulce* can be joined to the *utile* Literary artists and historians are apparently much further apart both in their conception and in their practice of literature than they had been in the past. Indeed, the historian who conceives of literature in this way - as 'style' or as a means of adorning otherwise simple propositions - may bring history close to Literature ..., but he will be further than ever from the concerns of the contemporary literary artist.

(1978:39)

This is undoubtedly true; yet it becomes problematical in novels such as Ackroyd's where the reader can no longer distinguish between history and fiction. Fiction such as Ackroyd's leads one to the postulation that the historical or fictional nature of a work depends on the authorial intention. This does indeed look like a solution, for as Gossman says:

We may ... discover that while historians are striving to achieve maximum narrative coherency and to approximate to the forms of fiction, certain novelists are trying to undercut these very forms and conventions by an appeal to 'history'.

(1978:10)

In his appeal to 'history', Ackroyd employs both dimensions of historical writing identified by Matei Calinescu (1987:6): the historical dimension (which entails versatility and precision) and the synchronic dimension (which can discriminate, capture significant similarities and differences, and can reveal recurrences and surprising continuities in the historical flow).

From the above, it should be clear that history and fiction often overlap. At times, writers deliberately combine the two concepts, an activity which has given rise to the term 'historical novel'. Therefore Georg Lukács's overview of the development of history as concept and of the historical novel is relevant to any discussion of the relation between history and fiction. Lukács looks at the historical novel from a Marxist perspective and traces its development from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century.

Classical history and myth were already adapted in medieval times to

suit the particular needs of medieval society. These adaptations can be seen as 'precursors' of the historical novel. In the novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, historical themes are also to be found, but these, according to Lukács (1978:19), lack the specifically historical, that is, the derivation of the individuality of the characters from the historical peculiarity of their age.

Then, during the decades between 1789 and 1814, each nation in Europe underwent more upheavals than they had previously experienced in centuries. The quick succession of these upheavals makes their historical character far more visible than would be the case in isolated, individual instances. The effect of these upheavals, which occurred all over the world, was to strengthen the feeling that there is such a thing as history, that it is an uninterrupted process of changes, and that it has a direct effect upon every individual's life (Lukács, 1978:23). National history again became important. This tendency towards a conscious historicism reached its peak after the fall of Napoleon, at the time of the Restoration and the Holy Alliance. Lukács then looks at how this view of history is reflected in the novels of writers such as Sir Walter Scott and Balzac.

Lukács (1978:174) identifies 1848 as an important date which served as a watershed, since it signalled a change in class structure and, consequently, of the notion of history. Prior to 1848 history was seen as a form of progress, but after 1848, the notion of history changed to one of passive evolution, a notion which Lukács (1978:176) sees as basically a-historical, since it resulted in the disappearance of history as a total process. In its place remained a chaos to be ordered as one likes, because the past was seen as no longer having a relation to the present. Thus this second change in the perspective on history is radical: instead of affirming history, its intrinsic nature is destroyed. Historical novelists in whose work this changed perspective on history is reflected are Flaubert and Maupassant.

As it is natural for the concept of history to change after influential changes in the world itself, another change in the concept of history occurs in the post-World War II period, which was also a time of upheaval. The change in humanity's perception of history after 1848

is now taken one step further: history is no longer passive evolution; it becomes questionable in every respect and is surrounded by doubt, so that history virtually ceases to exist and is nothing but fiction. The historical novel now consists of a montage or combination of disconnected facts (Lukács, 1978:252). In this respect, Lukács (1978:271) looks at the German anti-fascist historical novel.

The last development in the historical novel Lukács deals with is the modern historical novel, which is written for the people about popular events. In this kind of historical novel, people play only a secondary role (Lukács, 1978:283). Lukács (1978:284) describes its aim as an attempt to portray the kind of individual destiny that can *directly* and at the same time typically express the problems of an epoch. Whereas the classical historical novel saw the past as the concrete prehistory of the present, the modern historical novel sees it as an *abstract* prehistory of *problems* preoccupying the present (Lukács, 1978:296). Lukács (1978:300) goes on to state that 'the important modern historical novels show a clear tendency towards *biography*' (emphasis in the original). This form of the historical novel owes its popularity to the wish to confront the present with great model figures of humanist ideals as examples and as forerunners of the great struggles of today. Lukács sees the following as important considerations for the biographical mode of the historical novel:

To create a really good historical portrait of an important figure one needs to show his personal singularity, his intellectual physiognomy, the singularity of his method, the objective significance of this method in the context of the most important movements which lead from past to future, at whose crossroads he stands and to whose development he has contributed in an original way - all of which must be shown in a very generalized ... form.

(1978:304-305)

He also identifies a tendency to turn the past into a parable of the present in the modern historical novel (1978:338).

In 1962 Lukács writes about the 'present crisis of the historical novel' (1978:64). Ackroyd's fiction can be seen as a reply to this crisis of uncertainty, as an attempt to overcome the crisis in a way relevant to contemporary society. His novels are also apparently a reaction to the modern historical novel, as described by Lukács, and

can be seen as postmodern, revisionist historical novels.

The postmodern, revisionist historical novel logically follows on the modern historical novel. Brian McHale (1987:90) identifies the following characteristics of the postmodern, revisionist historical novel: it revises the content of the historical record, reinterpreting the historical record, often demystifying or debunking the orthodox version of the past, and it revises and transforms the conventions and norms of historical fiction itself (these latter norms are discussed on p.86-89 of McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction*, for example, the official historical record may not be contradicted, either as far as individuals or world view is concerned; historical fictions must be realistic fictions, and so forth). One can have apocryphal history (of which *Chatterton* is an example: one moment the official version seems to be true and the fictional one false, the next moment the fictional version seems true and the official one false), creative anachronism, or historical fantasy (*Hawksmoor*, *The Great Fire of London*, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* and *Chatterton*) (McHale, 1987:90). In this kind of fiction, history and fiction exchange places: history becoming fictional and fiction becoming 'true' history (McHale, 1987:9). This refusal to recognise the conventional boundaries between fiction and history characterises all of Ackroyd's novels, not only in so far as the reader is concerned, but also where the characters are concerned.

In *The Great Fire of London* Spenser experiences this relativity of everything as an existential crisis:

Spenser did not want to be further confused: each time a new interpretation of *Little Dorrit* was sprung upon him, it subtly devalued his own and it took a conscious effort of will for him to reassert it.

(GF:85)³

No version or interpretation of the past (*Little Dorrit*) is necessarily

³ Page references to primary texts will be preceded by the following abbreviations to indicate the origin of the quotation:

GF: *The Great Fire of London*

LT: *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*

H: *Hawksmoor*

C: *Chatterton*

FL: *First Light*

closer to or further from the truth than any other.

Absence of history and the subjectivity of 'history' are important thematic elements throughout this novel. Thus, Laetitia, for example, thinks:

It was a mystery how it all got started in the first place.
(GF:15)

The past of London and of humanity cannot be known. Yet it is ever-present, even in 'blowsy, blown-up photographs of old festivals and street urchins' in a restaurant (GF:17). The past can only be known from certain information discovered in the present:

As the twilight settled over them [Rowan and Tim], they talked about this area of the great city, how it was that so many old things lay here, and how many had remained unknown or neglected. Only last year the ruins of a Roman temple had been discovered on a building site by the new post office building.

(GF:31)

From the last sentence it is clear that the past and the present can coexist simultaneously through matter (stone) in space.

History can be linked to people, for example, when Audrey says that she has a lot of history stored away in her head (GF:34). This remark implies not only the subjectivity of history, but also its transience - if she were to die, that history would be lost. Thus history is, in reality, vague and relative. Each character interprets it differently, for example, Rowan who emphasises the social uses of history (GF:85).

The relativity of history as well as the problematic nature of history as concept are central to Ackroyd's second novel, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*. Because they are closely related to Ackroyd's treatment of genre and of Wilde's life, these ideas will be discussed in the chapter dealing with the relation between the historical background and Ackroyd's texts (see Chapter 3).

Hawksmoor, Ackroyd's third novel, is not an historical novel in the usual sense of the term, although it apparently deals with supposedly historical figures and is partially set in the early eighteenth century. It indeed radically subverts the conventions of historical fiction (Lewis, 1986:9). This can already be seen in the

Acknowledgement at the beginning of the novel where Ackroyd says that the characters and events are entirely his own invention. He adds that 'this version of history is entirely my own invention' (emphasis added). This comment implies that history is not, and cannot be, objective: it can have numerous versions, and these versions can be inventions, which implies that they are not or need not be historically true. The tour guide in Chapter 2 also invents the history of the places she shows the tourists:

... her enthusiasm now diminished as she tried to recall more facts about the neighbourhood: and if I can't remember any, she thought, I'll just have to invent them.

(H:27)

The tourists, who obviously see these places for the first time, have no way of telling what the true history is and what is made up. They will trust their tour guide as we traditionally trust our historians, and believe whatever they are told to be the truth. Instead of calling *Hawksmoor* an historical novel, one could therefore rather call a part of the novel an 'historical pastiche' as Christopher Porterfield (1986:59) and James Melville (1985:681) do.

Dyer makes an important statement about history:

Let this suffice also: the Existence of Spirits cannot be found by Mathematick demonstrations, but we must rely upon Humane reports unless we will make void and annihilate the Histories of all passed things.

(H:102)

With this statement Dyer possibly implies that spirits exist, even though their existence cannot be proved. If we were, however, to ignore reports about them, they would - by implication - be erased from the human mind (collective unconscious) or history. Although they might then not be found in histories (of fact), it does not mean that they never existed or do not exist. Similarly, we cannot say that the process of reincarnation, rejuvenation or simultaneous being found in Ackroyd's novels (as discussed in Chapter 8) does not exist or cannot exist, just because it has not been recorded in history. Dyer's statement is, implicitly, criticism of history or historiography, in which certain things are selected and others omitted on the basis of their credibility (which is, after all, another highly subjective concept). *First Light* further explores this issue. People tend to believe things about the past that others tell them or that they read

in books. Thus Damian Fall says to Mark after Mark has told him about the tumultus:

Now that you have imagined it ... it has become true. I have to believe the story once it has been told
(FL:100)

Although certain people believe in history, it might merely be an interpretation which has become 'true' through common agreement.

In Dyer's eighteenth-century part of *Hawksmoor*, he falls prey to the interchangeability of the terms **fact** and **fiction**. He uses the terms **history** (which we see as a factual account) and **story** (which we regard as fictional) as if they were synonymous. Thus he says:

But to return to the Thread of this History
(H:9)

and:

If I were now to inscribe my own History with its unparalleled Sufferings
(H:11)

Later he also says:

... I shall return in the mean time to my *History* for which I will, like a State Historian, give you the Causes as well as the Matter of Facts. I never had any faculty in telling of a *Story*
(H:13, emphasis added)

Furthermore, before recounting an episode dealing with a gentleman traveller, Dyer refers to this episode as a 'Story' (H:94). After having recounted it, he calls it a 'history' (H:95). This discrepancy immediately leads to the question whether the difference between the terms is really as great as we often think, and even whether there is any difference between them. In Harrap's *Word for Word: A Dictionary of Synonyms* 'history' and 'story' are given as synonyms, which is how the Mints in *First Light* use them (FL:303). This is despite the fact that history has traditionally been associated with fact and story with fiction. If one can see **history** and **story** as synonyms, one can possibly draw the line through to **fact** and **fiction**. Because of the problematic nature of these concepts in Ackroyd's work and in the work of numerous other contemporary authors, such as Julian Barnes, A.S. Byatt, and Jeanette Winterson, it does in fact appear as though it would not be totally unfounded to postulate that fact and fiction become synonymous in postmodern writing. Louis O. Mink (1987:203)

believes that it is necessary to distinguish between history and fiction, for if the distinction were to disappear, fiction and history would both collapse back into myth and be indistinguishable from it as from each other. This is exactly what happens in much contemporary fiction and in Ackroyd's novels.

The five scattered syntactical fragments or *leitmotifs* spread throughout *Chatterton* capture most of the themes found in the novel, including that of the relativity of historical truth, which features in two *leitmotifs*. The first *leitmotif*, 'Oh yes, if this is real, this is him' (C:13, 17, 21, and 23), captures the impossibility of ever determining whether something, coming from the past, is real or not. Everything, including reality, depends on the conditional 'if'. The second *leitmotif*, 'Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent' (C:28, 30, and 36), can be applied to history (one version of the past). The implication is that we can never really know the past; we can only know subjective, fallible versions of the past - with the possibility that certain parts may have been concealed deliberately.

In *First Light* the subjectivity of history and of all versions of the past emerges in Mark Clare's thoughts when in Pilgrim Valley:

His eyes gleamed with his own romantic vision of the past
.....

(FL:8)

As a result of subjectivity, there can be no absolute truth. Later Mark's work is described as a 'reconstruction of the abodes of the dead' (FL:78). The *re-* indicates the interpretation and subjectivity involved.

While looking at an engraving in a book on Dorset, Mark mentions that '... perhaps this was how the landscape then was. Or perhaps, after the engraving was completed, this was the way it had become' (FL:34). We are made aware that nothing, not even a painting which is supposedly an imitation of reality, can be objective. Reality can even be changed by different perspectives on it, since we always interpret. As with the past, everything said about the tumulus is only conjecture and subjective interpretation (see the disagreement between Owen and Julian in FL:45).

It ought to be clear that characters in Ackroyd's novels are aware of the subjective fictionality of history. This realisation is also implicit in Ackroyd's formal use of history in his novels as will be indicated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND ITS RELATION TO THE TEXTS

'Always historicize!'

(Fredric Jameson quoted in Arac, 1987:261)

'The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot be really destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently.'

(Umberto Eco quoted by Calinescu, 1987:5)

'Where there is no narrative, there is no history.'

(Croce quoted in White, 1984:3)

This chapter focuses mainly on Ackroyd's use of actual historical background information in fictional texts. In the course of the chapter attention will be given to the historical information as found outside of, and within, the texts, in order to indicate how the linking of history and fiction causes the dissolution of the distinction between the two concepts.

Ackroyd's remark about the motivating force behind the structure and content of his recently published biography on Dickens is relevant to his works of fiction: he had become tired of orthodox, chronological biography (in Porter, 1990:974). Ackroyd still uses some biographical information but uses it in an unusual and unorthodox way, both in the biography and in the novels. By making use of a number of historical and biographical elements, Ackroyd achieves a completely different effect from that achieved by writers such as George Eliot. This is owing to the change in world-view and society in general, to the growing feeling of doubt and uncertainty characteristic of the twentieth century. Thus Brooker, et al. can say that 'In setting the novel [*Adam Bede*] historically ... George Eliot enhances the realism, the sense of a "fixed" knowable community whose perimeters are delimited by written history which, in this case, is the novel itself' (1986:77). In Ackroyd's work, the historical background leads to a kind of magical realism¹ and uncertainty. As a result, his novels are 'a network of intra- and intertextual cross-references' (Musarra, 1987:230).

By making use of history, Ackroyd can question existing fictional conventions, as fictional writing has done for centuries (Gossman, 1978:20). Even though there is a relation between the work of fiction and 'history', 'history' is merely there for 'situation' (Hutcheon, 1983:40); the work of fiction as such is autonomous (this word does not here imply an absence of openness or external relations; it merely

¹ Magical realism can be defined as a style of writing where there is tension between dream and reality, revealing the supernatural behind the natural. It portrays the improbable, inexplicable, and unexpected in a realistic manner. This style of writing is found in the fiction of writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, Salman Rushdie, Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier, Günther Grass, Italo Calvino, Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson, and John Fowles.

means that the text has a separate existence). Linda Hutcheon's (1986:301) term for texts such as Ackroyd's where the past is present, is 'historiographic metafiction'. Patricia Tobin also remarks that, if the postmodernist author is at all interested in the past, s/he rewrites or invents it:

In an ultimately unfathomable world, one should have the lucidity and good nature to salute all systems, including history, as obsessive mistakes.

(1978:206)

The postmodernists fictionalise history, but by doing so they imply that history itself may be a form of fiction (McHale, 1987:96). Ackroyd does this in all the novels, except *First Light*.

The influence of the past on the present, which is central to Ackroyd's oeuvre, can be seen in the title of *The Great Fire of London*, which seems to refer to the Great Fire of 1666. Immediately it calls forth images of the preceding plague and poverty. Consequently, the reader approaches the novel with a specific context in mind, that of the second half of the seventeenth century.

This expectation is apparently thwarted when one reads 'the story so far' (GF:3); apparently, because one would still keep the title in mind and try to relate it to the rest of the novel. It must have some relevance, after all. However, 'the story so far' is set almost two centuries later: *Little Dorrit* was written between 1855 and 1857, and is set thirty years earlier. The fact that the 'heading' does not begin with a capital letter seems to indicate that something has preceded it (Dickens's *Little Dorrit*) and that a continuing line can be drawn from the preceding or past text to Ackroyd's novel. Ackroyd almost always uses such a 'contextualizing' preface (Hutcheon, 1986:303), which has the function of historical situation and of simultaneous subversion. The implication is that the historical work is also fiction. Hutcheon (1986:303) calls these devices (prologues, footnotes, and so forth) paratextuality. They belong to history, but fiction here uses and parodically abuses them (Hutcheon, 1986:304).

The first chapter heading of *The Great Fire of London* is, once again, not written in capital letters: 'one' (GF:5). This section is also not set at the time of the historical Great Fire of London. Instead,

the time is apparently the present: the latter part of the twentieth century, another movement in time of approximately two centuries. Thus the reader is still unable to relate the title to the novel. Only in the second chapter does one find any indication of a fire, that is, in a television drama concerning firemen (*GF*:9). This drama could, however, not be about the historical Great Fire of London, since the red fire-engines would be an anachronism.

Once one has read through the entire novel, it becomes clear that the title does not refer to the Great Fire of 1666, but to a twentieth-century fire on the set of a film version of *Little Dorrit*. In this way *The Great Fire of London* is linked to both *Little Dorrit* and the Great Fire of 1666. Ackroyd links the present to two periods of time from the past, so that the past (the Great Fire of 1666 and *Little Dorrit*, which are significantly both mentioned at the beginning of one's reading of the novel) is made to exert an influence on the present (Ackroyd's text). The experience of the interaction between past and present is made concrete in a metafictional way in the reading process: our background knowledge of the title and 'the story so far' continually influences our interpretation of Ackroyd's novel. Even though one might not immediately recognise the significance of the title and 'the story so far', or realise what the relation between the past and the present is, one cannot escape the guiding and directing power of this 'frame of reference'. As Ackroyd says in *Dickens*: 'Thus does our knowledge of later events reflect our understanding of those which precede them, and in the beginning we see something of the end' (quoted in Gill, 1990:911).

One of the impulses of inspiration behind Ackroyd's novel would undoubtedly have been Dickens's novel, *Little Dorrit*. In the television programme derived from Ackroyd's biography, *Ackroyd's Dickens*, Ackroyd refers to points he has in common with Dickens: a fascination with London, especially with its darker side, early days spent in the vicinity of the old Marshalsea Prison, the gift of literary ventriloquism, and a prodigious capacity for work (in Porter, 1990:974). These probably led to Ackroyd's decision to write *The Great Fire of London*. The intertextuality between Dickens's novel and Ackroyd's novel is thus overt.

In the introductory part, 'the story so far', there are 'two errors of fictional fact' (Strawson, 1982:105), which Strawson points out: firstly, it is not Arthur Clennam who, with the help of Pancks discovers that William Dorrit is heir to a fortune; Pancks discovers this by himself; secondly, Little Dorrit and not Maggie is called Little Mother. Strawson also remarks that these errors are harmless, 'because most fiction is made from altered fact, and can be made from altered fiction too' (1982:105). Everything is relative and interdependent; everything 'connects'.

The Great Fire of London follows on the first part of *Little Dorrit*. Ackroyd replaces the second part of *Little Dorrit* with his own version: a contemporary narrative about the influence of Dickens's characters on supposedly real (within the fictive world of the novel) characters in the twentieth century. This narrative also, in part, concerns the making of a film version of *Little Dorrit* (such a film does, indeed, exist in our reality).

In a number of different ways *Little Dorrit* manages to creep into *The Great Fire of London* and into the lives of its characters. Ackroyd does what Spenser Spender did: 'Spenser had skilfully matched the old buildings with his own façades so that now the two were practically indistinguishable' (GF:157).

Audrey Skelton, who is naturally prone to daydreaming and the influence of fantasy worlds, is the first to fall prey to invasions of the past (*Little Dorrit*) into the present, when dreaming of being inside a prison and looking for her father who has spent all their money (GF:10). The relation to *Little Dorrit* is obvious. Ackroyd, however, is not satisfied with the obvious, and therefore complicates the relation between past, present, and future by adding that the prison 'was lit up by rows of brilliant lights' (GF:10). Audrey's dream is not only invaded by the past, but also by the future, as represented by the film set, built inside the old prison, of the film version of *Little Dorrit*.

The day after Audrey's dream, she consciously sets out turning herself into 'the neglected child of a rich father, now down on his luck'

(GF:31), by changing her hairstyle and clothing. She even allows this fiction to invade the reality of her relations and conversations with other people. She says to Rowan, whom she meets for the first time:

I wasn't always so poor, mind you. There was money in my family once upon a time. Oh yes.

(GF:32)

Audrey must now appear insane to those around her (Francis King (1982:42) calls it her 'growing schizophrenia'). Umberto Eco (in MaHale, 1987:57 & 86) calls this transmigration of characters (Little Dorrit) from one fictional universe to another or from reality to fiction 'transworld identity'.

The parameters of time are further confused by the next oblique reference to *Little Dorrit*. Spenser Spender, the film maker, suddenly remembers the line 'I never should have touched you, but I thought you were a child' (GF:11) without being able to trace its source. He only later remembers that it is the line spoken to Little Dorrit by a strange woman, and then decides to make a film of Dickens's novel. Yet Audrey Skelton has already dreamt of the film set for this film. The line, 'I never should have touched you, but I thought you were a child' comes from Dickens's novel but can be reinterpreted in terms of Ackroyd's oeuvre. In Ackroyd's novels one first has to become a child in order to transcend the boundaries and limitations of time. Once you are a child (or like a child), you can reach out through time and touch another (who is also a child or like a child). It would then be possible to say that Little Dorrit reaches out through time and touches Audrey, because Audrey has become like a child (GF:31). The whole concept of moving through time by becoming a child will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.

Like Audrey, Spenser also dreams about the past: he dreams that he cannot find a copy of *Little Dorrit* in the public library (GF:18). Whereas Audrey identified herself with, or became, Little Dorrit in her dream (although she does not know *Little Dorrit* and therefore cannot know where her dream comes from), Spenser's position is still that of the almost objective outsider. As one who has read *Little Dorrit* and knows the story, he dreams of the book as artefact. Audrey's subjective identification appears unnatural or even supernatural,

whereas Spenser's dream is perfectly natural. In both cases, however, the past manifests itself in the present through dreams.

Many characters in *The Great Fire of London* are strongly reminiscent of characters in *Little Dorrit*. Marion Glastonbury calls them 'reincarnations of his [Dickens's] grotesques; shades of the prison house, sent to haunt us' (1982:20). As Rowan Phillips (another party interested in Dickens and *Little Dorrit*) falls into a doze (a state between two worlds, those of sleep and wakefulness), a middle-aged woman, smelling strongly of stale food, sits down next to him (GF:21). When taking into account the other references to, and manifestations of, *Little Dorrit* in this novel, one cannot help but wonder whether this woman is the same woman, or a similar woman, to the one Little Dorrit and Maggie encounter when wandering about London at night, who then tells Little Dorrit that she would not have touched her had she not thought she was a child. This interpretation is, however, only a personal reaction to the novel as a whole. Whenever the characters' names are not Dickensian, they echo in other directions (Strawson, 1982:105): Spenser Spender's name, for example, makes implicit reference to Edmund Spenser and Stephen Spender. Glastonbury feels that these 'wisps of Victorian ectoplasm' are too frail to sustain the plot (1982:20), a criticism also levelled at Ackroyd by other reviewers.

Not only characters but also sites or buildings from *Little Dorrit* recur in *The Great Fire of London*, for example, when Rowan Phillips goes to St George's Church where Little Dorrit once sought refuge (GF:33) (in both cases the door is locked). A character in one novel can visit a building visited more than a hundred years earlier by another character in another novel: Rowan Phillips visits St George's Church and knows that Little Dorrit has visited this church in Dickens's novel. Little Dorrit is, however, a character in a work of fiction. Thus one fiction (seen as reality) can refer to another fiction (seen as fiction). In typically metafictional manner, the boundaries of past and present, fiction and reality, are further dissolved. St George's Church exists in 'objective reality'; it also exists in these two works of fiction. It would be possible for a real person to visit the church visited by the characters in these works of

fiction. Ackroyd exploits this possibility by making Rowan visit the church, with the result that the impression is created that Rowan is in fact a real person although he is, simultaneously, only a character.²

The same co-mingling of fiction and reality is found when Rowan and Tim visit the site of the original Marshalsea Prison, which provides a link between characters from *Little Dorrit* and *The Great Fire of London* (GF:25). They take on the role of real people visiting the prison and reading the notice that Dickens's work of fiction was set there. What is furthermore significant, is the fact that 'the prison was destroyed by fire ...' (GF:25). Suddenly the ending of the novel acquires new significance: events repeat themselves *ad infinitum*; fiction (the novel and the film set) follows reality (the fire which destroyed the actual prison).

Another reference to Dickens's novels, and another example of the influence the past exerts on the present, is found in the conversation between Iain StJohn Smart³ and Spenser Spender:

Do you remember when the British Theatre performed those Dickens novels, over a few months?

(GF:29)

People in the present consciously set out to revive the past through plays, through academic studies (Rowan's work (GF:19) and the books like *The Sacred Changeling: Themes of Reversal in 'Little Dorrit'* he is reading (GF:73)), and through films (Spenser's film).

The descriptions of certain institutions and their employees in Ackroyd's novel can be linked to some of Dickens's descriptions in *Little Dorrit*. The Film Finance Board (GF:52 and 155), for example, merely appears to be a slightly modified Circumlocution Office with Sir

² At the same time our lives are fictionalised - this is the familiar metafictional metaphor of life as a book.

³ The name Iain StJohn Smart is curiously suggestive of that of Iain Sinclair, a poet and novelist who has influenced Ackroyd's awareness of the stranger qualities of London's churches, and whose work involves issues similar to those in Ackroyd's novels. In typically postmodern manner, Ackroyd is mentioned in Sinclair's most recent novel, *Downriver* (1992:98).

Frederick Lustlambert as a present-day Barnacle. Strawson (1982:105) points out one significant difference: the Film Finance Board gets things done.

Ackroyd is fond of making minor characters from the past appear in the present or of placing their words in the mouths of other peripheral characters in the present. Thus the reader experiences a feeling of *déjà lu* without often being able to identify the source - a classic example of intertextuality. In *The Great Fire of London* the past is recreated in a television programme where a young woman, dressed in an approximation of Victorian costume, sings a sentimental ballad:

Who passes by this road so late?
Always gay!

(GF:68)

This is the theme tune of Rigaud. The narrator then remarks that 'the music from a juke-box collided with that from the television set, making an awkward counterpoint between the *fake* Victorian tune and the *real* contemporary one' (GF:68, emphasis added). This is what happens in the novel, or what the narrator would like us to believe happens in the novel. *The Great Fire of London* is the arena for the counterpointing of the fake Victorian tune (the fictional *Little Dorrit*) and the real contemporary one (the supposedly real world of *The Great Fire of London*).

Galen Strawson (1982:105) remarks of the structure of the novel that it is Dickensian: the characters' disparate lives are woven together, with the characters entering one by one, chapter by chapter. Peter Lewis (1986:8) refers to several strands beginning in parallel and gradually intertwining and coalescing, which is also Dickens's method and technique. In this way *The Great Fire of London* echoes *Little Dorrit* structurally and formally, although the latter is by far the longer work. Furthermore, certain phrases from *Little Dorrit* recur in Ackroyd's novel. The unpunctuated discourse of Rowan's colleague at High Table could be that of old Casby's daughter, Flora Finching (Strawson, 1982:105).

Generically, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* has been described in many different ways, all of which make reference to the relation

between Wilde's life and history, and Ackroyd's transformation of these. Descriptions range from 'a virtuoso exercise in literary empathy' (Church, 1984:20), 'an impersonation ... [which] purports to be Wilde's memoirs ... [and] brilliant pastiche' (Philip, 1984:518), and '... purports to be Wilde's journal ... [and] "diary"' (Mellors, 1983:27) to '... a journal' (Mesie, 1983:28 & Vogel, 1983:1500), to a 'journal-cum-memoir' (Lewis, 1986:8). *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* is all of these and, at the same time, typical postmodern fiction, since all descriptions of the text confuse rather than enlighten.

Once again, as in the previous novel, Ackroyd uses part of the (literary) past as the content of *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*. As can be seen from the title, the novel focuses on Oscar Wilde. It is written in the form of a diary kept by Wilde during the last four months of his life. In this diary Wilde records his present circumstances as well as those belonging to his earlier life. These past events are often 'invented' by Wilde: he changes the past (regardless of the truth) to suit his present needs and fancies. Thus it is clear that the novel has its basis in 'known fact' (Gilbert, 1983:24), even if fact refers to the fact that Wilde faked his past.

Ackroyd 'fakes' the biography of Wilde's last days, whereas Wilde, in turn, 'fakes' his past, which he also faked when it was the present:

I have played so many parts

(LT:3)

As Harriet Gilbert points out, Wilde inhabits the countries of both fact and fiction: 'the "fact" of him guaranteed by newspaper stories and (perhaps more safely) the transcript of a couple of trials; the "fiction" of him an autonomous myth, long since beyond his control, compound of genius and tragedy, heroism and martyrdom' (1983:24). Ackroyd has Wilde's friend, Bosie, say of the journal that it is 'full of lies' (Gilbert, 1983:24). A journal by definition purports to be true; yet this is apparently not the case. The result is a typically postmodern variation of the *mise en abyme*.

The relation between the past and the present is influenced by the novel. It is obvious that the past (the 'history' of Oscar Wilde) has

influenced the present (Ackroyd) and, as a result of this, the novel was written. Once the novel has been read, the reader will feel that another dimension has been added to his/her perception of Oscar Wilde (as established through prior experience of Wilde's own work and other works on Wilde). Since an added dimension implies influence and change, the past will have been changed by the present for the reader of *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*. The ability of fiction in the present to change fact in the past can be seen clearly from a question asked by Frank Longford: 'Is it [Ackroyd's novel] fair to Wilde?' (1983:26). He is forced to ask this question by the atmosphere of self-humiliation and self-pity found in the text.

At the same time, Wilde is now no longer merely a factive figure in history or reality, but also a fictive character in (the) story or fiction. It is difficult to say which Wilde is the more real, since both Wildes come to us through the writing of others. The fictive Wilde may be more real and believable to us than the factive Wilde, since in novels there is 'a willing suspension of disbelief', an aspect absent in supposedly factive accounts, because of the different reading conventions involved in different kinds of writing. The novel is written in such a way as to make it easier and more enjoyable for the reader to follow than is the case with histories of fact. Furthermore, it appears as if Wilde himself tells us about Wilde in this novel. In history, somebody else would narrate. Everything is set towards making the Wilde in the novel more real than the Wilde we come to know from history.

When examining the form of *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*, two elements come to the fore: it is, first of all, a novel; in the second place, it is written in the form of an autobiography. The term **novel** - taken in isolation - implies that the fictive and the fictional play a prominent role. This text is not only a so-called historical account: the imagination and the imaginative come into play. The presence of the imaginative does not necessarily imply the complete absence of fact. The term **autobiography** (or **biography** for that matter), on the other hand, apparently carries connotations of factuality rather than of fictionality. An autobiography purports to be a relatively detailed and true account of a person's life, written

by that person.

Yet one must remember that *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* is not an ordinary autobiography: the author is Ackroyd and not Wilde. Therefore it might perhaps be more fruitfully described as a fake autobiography or a biography. These descriptions would, however, not be unproblematic. A 'fake autobiography' would seem to imply that the text poses - illegally? - as the true account of Wilde's life written by the man himself. This is not the case; Ackroyd's name is on the cover and the title page. The presence of Ackroyd's name would seem to shift the argument in favour of the term **biography** with its connotations of a history of a certain person's life, written by another individual. Traditionally biography, together with the word 'history', imply factuality. One is again left with an argument which represents a circular movement. The text does not pretend to be a(n) (auto)biography, since it is also clearly a novel, even though it pretends to be an autobiography in a different sense of the word 'pretend'. The content is partially true and credible, yet the novel form belies this. The form of the text contains a contradiction within itself: is it fact or fiction?

The same applies to the content of the text. Nobody will deny that much of the text is factual, as can be seen from a biography such as P. Jullian's (1969). The *fabula* - as the reader can reconstruct it after having read *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* - is completely factual. Wilde was Irish-born, had a brother called Willie, had a sister who died early in life, had a father with dirty fingernails, went to Trinity College in Dublin, went to Oxford, was influenced by people like Mahaffy, Pater, and Ruskin, undertook a lecture tour to the U.S.A., had friends like Aubrey Beardsley, Sarah Bernhardt, Lily Langtry, Ada Leverson (the Sphinx), James Whistler, and Lord Alfred Douglas (Bosie), went through a court-case, and spent his last days in France. Wilde's character is also factual: his wit, his unique way of dressing, and so forth. Everything Wilde (the character) says in the text, is in character; the real Wilde could have said just this (and probably wishes he had - a remark made by a critic on the back cover of the novel).

Yet we know that Wilde did not write towards the end of his life. His 'last testament' is therefore an invention of Ackroyd's imagination. It could be fact in the form of fiction, or fiction in the form of fact. Although the content and style of the text *could be* true and authentic, we know that they are not, that they are fiction, something made-up. The text basically deals with the difference between historical and fictional truth, a distinction which has become problematic in contemporary times. The traditional view of fiction as containing a general truth and history as containing a specific truth is no longer as simple and straightforward as it used to be. Thus the paradox of fact versus fiction also manifests itself on the level of content. The one inevitably subverts the other.

The relation between fact and fiction, content and form, implies the relation between the past and the present. The real-life Wilde existed in fact, in the past. The character Wilde exists in fiction (a very problematic kind of fiction) in the present. In the process the meaning of the term **history** is modified. One begins to wonder whether *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* is a form of history or historical writing. On the one hand, this would appear to be the case, as the text is of value to someone who wants to know more about the real Oscar Wilde, owing to the large number of historical facts incorporated in the imaginary diary. Because of the historical data, one has to include the word **history** (in at least one of its morphological forms) in any description of the text. On the other hand, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* is primarily a novel, which implies - in the traditional sense of the word - that there is an element of invention and originality (a word which has become problematic in contemporary times). The main concern of the novel is with fiction rather than with fact.

Since the novel-form is combined with history, both terms or concepts are altered. Now one has to ask whether this is an historical fiction or a fictional history. One could raise points in favour of both arguments. The first term, historical fiction, denotes a work of fiction with an historical element. The second suggests a work of history with a fictional element. It is virtually impossible to say which is the better description of *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*.

Since it is published by Abacus - a publishing firm for, amongst other types of writing, works of fiction - the argument seems to be swayed towards the term **historical fiction**. But this attempt at categorising becomes worthless when one considers the fluidity of both the terms 'historical' and 'fiction'. Does the historical information become fictional when printed in a work of fiction? Do the fictional elements become factual because they are entirely in keeping with what Wilde could have said?

If one goes back to 'history' and 'real life' for the epitaph on Wilde's grave, an interesting feature emerges. Although this epitaph does not figure in *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*, it is still of particular relevance to the text. Wilde's epitaph comes from the 29th Chapter of the Book of Job:

Verbis meis addere nihil audebant et super illos stillabat eloquium meum,

in translation:

To my words they durst add nothing and my speech dropped upon them.

(quoted in Jullian, 1969:398)

The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde does exactly what the epitaph forbids: Ackroyd adds a considerable amount to Wilde's words, even though what he adds is strictly in line with Wilde's ideas and style. Since Wilde himself borrowed wi(1)dely from other authors and deliberately did the opposite of what society expected of him, one doubts whether he would have objected strongly to Ackroyd's *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*. One should also remember that Wilde did not choose his own epitaph: some of his intimate friends chose it on their way to Bagneux cemetery for the burial (Jullian, 1969:398). Wilde himself furthermore regarded imitation as the sincerest form of obsequy (Mellors, 1983:27). His ideas now seem to be backfiring on him with Ackroyd's novel.

Neil Philip (1984:518) sees *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* as pastiche and nothing more, and quickly tired of it. In comparison to Ackroyd's other novels this is certainly true: *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* lacks a strong story-line and tends to become monotonous. The diary-form used is normally closely associated with time and chronology. Yet in this novel these concepts receive a slightly more

conventional treatment than in some of the other novels.

Hawksmoor transcends some of the limitations of *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* by means of its strong, 'independent' story-line (in the sense that one can enjoy it without knowing anything about the historical Hawksmoor, whereas some knowledge of Wilde seems to be a prerequisite in *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*).

Already in the title of the novel, *Hawksmoor*, the past and the present and, by implication, fiction and reality, are united and at the same time made indistinguishable. Hawksmoor is the name of Sir Christopher Wren's most distinguished assistant, Nicholas Hawksmoor, the great architect responsible for some of London's finest churches (referred to in *The Great Fire of London*). This information can be found in any encyclopaedia or other 'history of fact'. In the novel these churches are attributed to Nicholas Dyer, while Hawksmoor is a fictional modern Detective Chief Superintendent investigating a series of murders in the East End of London.

The historical Nicholas Hawksmoor was born in approximately 1661, probably at East Drayton, Nottinghamshire, and died either on March the 24th or 25th, 1736, in Westminster, London. His association with Sir Christopher Wren and Sir John Vanbrugh long diverted critical attention from the remarkable originality of his own Baroque designs for churches and other institutional buildings (Anon., 1982b:960). First employed by Wren in about 1679, Hawksmoor owed his professional advancement in part to the political influence of the elder architect. Hawksmoor aided Wren in building St Paul's Cathedral, London (which was completed in 1711). He also aided Vanbrugh in constructing Castle Howard, Yorkshire from 1699 to 1726, and Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire from 1705 to 1716. He held the clerkship of works (a government office) for Kensington Palace from 1691 to 1715, for Greenwich Hospital from 1698 onwards, and for Whitehall, St James's Palace, and Westminster from 1715 to 1718. On the death of Wren in 1723, Hawksmoor became surveyor general or chief architect of Westminster Abbey, the west towers of which were built from 1734 to 1745 to his design. Earlier, that is from 1692, he was responsible for several university buildings at Oxford. In October 1711 Hawksmoor was appointed one of the two

surveyors or architects to the Commission for Fifty New Churches. These churches were to be built in the cities of London and Westminster and their immediate environs. In this capacity he designed seven churches, amongst these the four churches on which his reputation as a Baroque genius mainly rests. These are St Anne, Limehouse (built from 1714 to 1730), St George's-in-the-East (built from 1714 to 1729), Christ Church, Spitalfields (built from 1714 to 1729), and St Mary Woolnoth (built from 1716 to 1724). All but the last of these are in the East End of London (Anon., 1982b:960).

Ackroyd takes these historical facts and breathes imagined life into them (Maddox, 1985:30). In *Hawksmoor*, as a result, the borders between fiction and reality are blurred. *Hawksmoor*, the title of the novel, refers to the fictional Detective Chief Superintendent Hawksmoor who lives in the present and to the real-life architect who built churches in 1711. In the novel the fictional character of Nicholas Dyer is clearly based on the real-life Nicholas Hawksmoor. Yet the style in which Ackroyd writes Dyer's part of the novel is livelier and more literary than the historical Hawksmoor's own, although it does adopt and adapt a number of passages from his letters to his assistants and patrons (Hollinghurst, 1985:1049). Hollinghurst (1985:1049) remarks that Dyer's chance exclamation, 'Curved lines are more beautiful than Straight', is an inversion of a dictum in one of Wren's *Tracts* that 'Strait Lines are more beautiful than curved', and Dyer's insistence that the churches should be 'Sollemn and Awfull' repeats the very words of Vanbrugh's proposal to the Commisioners that 'a Temple ... shou'd ever have the most Solemn and Awfull Appearance ...'.

The lives of Nicholas Dyer and the historical Nicholas Hawksmoor exhibit certain parallels, for example, their occupations and approximate dates of birth and death. Although they have the same first names, their surnames differ. The historical Nicholas Hawksmoor and the detective have exactly the same first and surnames; yet they live in different centuries and have different occupations. The fictional Nicholas Dyer and the fictional Nicholas Hawksmoor have the same first but different last names, despite the parallels in their lives. The similarities between them appear hidden at first, then they

crowd in.⁴ The name Nicholas comes from St Nicholas, the patron saint 'not merely of sailors, pawnbrokers and Aberdeen but also of small boys' (King, 1985:29). The name Nicholas is particularly ironic in Dyer's case, since he kills small boys. In the context of Ackroyd's oeuvre, it could be linked to 'becoming a child', with Dyer as one of those who possesses a secret knowledge about time (see Chapter 8). Nick can also refer to the devil. The name Dyer carries further connotations: in the first place, Dyer was the name of an artist/poet, John Dyer; in the second place, the name Dyer is reminiscent of death in that Dyer is die-er, the one who dies or causes death.

Although Nicholas Dyer is similar to the historical Hawksmoor in so many ways, and although the title, *Hawksmoor*, strengthens this parallel, Ackroyd explicitly states in the Acknowledgement at the beginning of the novel that:

Any relation to real people, either living or dead, is entirely coincidental. I have employed many sources in the preparation of *Hawksmoor*, but this version of history is my own invention.

Ironically, one would usually call this an indemnification. Ackroyd calls it an acknowledgement, which seems to imply that there is indeed a relation between the novel and real, dead people. If one ignores the fact that this is called an acknowledgement, however, even characters like Sir Christopher Wren and Vanbrugh (who are historical figures) are by implication fictionalised. The boundaries between reality and fiction then become vague and ill-defined.

Certain historical details are found in the novel, for example, details concerning the Great Fire of London in 1666 (H:50-51). Yet these historical details are fused with fictional ones. The 'historically real' Nicholas Hawksmoor might have experienced this fire, but in the novel the Nicholas who experiences it is the satanist, Nicholas Dyer, who is not 'historically real', but fictional.

The ultimate irony in this erasure or confusion of the borders between fiction and reality, is found when Hawksmoor goes to the library to do research on Nicholas Dyer. This is what he finds:

⁴ In this regard, see section 8.2.

1654 - c. 1715. English architect; was the most important pupil of Sir Christopher Wren, and a colleague both of Wren and Sir John Vanbrugghe in the Office of Works at Scotland Yard. Dyer was born in London in 1654; although his parentage is obscure, it seems that he was first apprenticed as a mason before becoming Wren's personal clerk; he later held several official posts under Wren including that of surveyor at St Paul's. His most important independent work was completed as a result of his becoming the principal architect to the 1711 Commission for New London Churches; his was the only work to be completed for that Commission, and Dyer was able to realise seven of his own designs: Christ Church Spitalfields, St George's-in-the-East Wapping, St Anne Limehouse, St Alfege's in Greenwich, St Mary Woolnoth in Lombard Street, St George's Bloomsbury and, finest of all, the church of Little St Hugh [which does not exist in reality] beside Moorfields. These edifices show most clearly his ability to handle large abstract shapes and his sensitive (almost romantic) lines of mass and shadow. But he seems to have had no pupils or disciples in his lifetime, and changes in architectural taste meant that his work has had little influence and few admirers. He died in London in the winter of 1715, it is thought of the gout, although the records of his death and burial have been lost.

(H:214)

Although this information is supposed to refer to Nicholas Dyer, it is actually the exact information one would find in a real encyclopaedia under the entry HAWKSMOOR, Nicholas, except for the dates of birth and death; in reality one would not find an entry under DYER, Nicholas.

The novel can be seen as a detective novel, albeit a very unusual and unconventional one, since the murders that Hawksmoor investigates might well have been committed in the eighteenth century, or rather, by an eighteenth-century murderer. Consequently, the novel is filled with mystery and suspense. Unlike orthodox writers of crime and detection, Ackroyd does not provide us with a solution in this open text. According to William Spanos in his essay, 'The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination',

It is, therefore, no accident that the postmodern literary imagination at large insists on the disorienting *mystery*, the ominous and threatening uncanniness of being that resists naming, and that the paradigmatic literary archetype it has discovered is the anti-detective story ... the formal purpose of which is to evoke the impulse to 'detect' or to psychoanalyze - to track down the secret cause - in order to violently frustrate this impulse by refusing to solve the crime

(1987:25, emphasis in the original)

The result is the activation, rather than the purgation, of pity and

terror (Spanos, 1987:26). Yet *Hawksmoor* would not qualify fully as a postmodern detective novel as Bertens and D'haen (1988:88) see it, because it does not undermine *all* clichés of the genre. It merely undermines time and history. Ackroyd takes an older form of fiction and combines it with postmodern ideas about time, history, and the form of a novel. Rupert Christiansen speculates (with regard to *Chatterton*, but this is equally, or even more, valid for *Hawksmoor*) that Ackroyd might be in search of 'a new form of Gothic fiction' (1987:22), one with more than just a postmodern touch. Here *Hawksmoor* seems to qualify as a 'new novel' which has the following features:

Two other features of the 'New Novel' [that is, in addition to the attempt to obliterate temporality] reinforce the sensation of unresolved movement in an abstract present where nothing is certain: the frequent recourse to labyrinthine patterns leading nowhere, and the use of detective-story suspense which remains suspended, or fizzles out in a non-solution.

(anonymous reviewer in *TLS*, quoted in Smith, 1968:240)

As in *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* and *Hawksmoor*, the title of *Chatterton* refers to an actual historical figure, that is, a real person who lived somewhere in the past. Yet the portrayal of Chatterton is far from a conventional fictional reconstruction of an historical figure (Christiansen, 1987:22). The first (and according to history, only) seventeen or eighteen years of his life are portrayed in *Chatterton*, although not in the sense that the novel is a history of his life. Chatterton's life is dealt with only cursorily; yet the biographical details found in this novel (of these seventeen to eighteen years) are historically accurate.

Chatterton was born on 20 November 1752 in Bristol and died on 24 August 1770 in London. His father, a schoolmaster of Redcliffe, died a few months before his birth. Chatterton was a solitary boy who preferred to sit alone in the attic. The past first entranced him when he saw some of his father's old French musical folios with illuminated capitals. He read widely, especially from old material. At the age of ten, he wrote a 'scholarly Miltonic piece', 'On the Last Epiphany' (Anon., 1982a:782). In this poem we can already see that Chatterton was deeply influenced by other writers from the past, in this case, Milton. According to Marion Wynne-Davies (1989:399), Chatterton wrote

precociously in all the genres of the day: mock-heroic couplets, Hudibrastics, political satire imitative of Charles Churchill, African eclogues in the manner of William Collins, and elegiac poetry in the manner of Thomas Gray. It is clear that Chatterton as a poet was primarily an imitator, in this case, of styles of actual poets. His pastoral eclogue, 'Elinoure and Juga', resembled fifteenth-century poetry. Many readers believed it to be so and this signalled the beginnings of Chatterton's career as a literary 'forger'.

He created a past around a fictitious character, the fifteenth-century monk of Bristol, Thomas Rowley. This past has been described as 'an allegory of his present' (Anon., 1982a:782). He even provided fake documents, pedigrees, and deeds (Drabble, 1985:187) to 'authenticate' the fake Rowley-sequence (which was written in an archaic diction and was influenced by the fashionable medievalism of James Macpherson, Thomas Percy, and Horace Walpole). This fictitious monk was apparently a friend of William Canynge, an *historical* Bristol merchant, who also features in Chatterton's work. Chatterton fabricated prose correspondence between the two and other background documents (Drabble, 1985:188). Chatterton's imaginary, fictive Bristol infiltrates the historical past in a totally credible way, since the fictive Rowley refers back to a fictive (but supposedly real) monk, Turgot, of the Norman Epoch, who in turn invokes even older sources (Höfele, 1986:93). A Thomas Rowley must, however, have existed, since Chatterton found the name on a civilian's monument brass at St John's Church, Bristol. Yet Chatterton did not use the real Rowley: he only used the name for his fictitious character. Thus, in the eighteenth century, Chatterton turned history or reality into a story or fiction.

On July 1, 1767 Chatterton was apprenticed to John Lambert, an attorney in Bristol, but did not find this rewarding. Chatterton sent his Rowley manuscripts to various publishers, amongst others, James Dodsley and Horace Walpole, but was ultimately ignored by both when it came to light that the manuscripts were 'modern'. When Chatterton could no longer stand his apprenticeship, he wrote a mock suicide threat, 'The Last Will and Testament of me, Thomas Chatterton of Bristol', and forced Lambert to release him. Chatterton then left for London where he continued writing. At this time Chatterton was virtually starving,

but was still too proud to accept food from friends. On the night of August the 24th, he took arsenic in his Holborn garret and died. There is no certainty about the reason(s) for Chatterton's suicide. In most accounts of his death, one reads that he committed suicide, apparently reduced to despair by poverty (see Drabble, 1985:188).

After his death - probably because he died while still so young - he became famous. Chatterton's death took on an almost mythical quality, making him a symbol to the world of youthful poetic genius neglected by a prosaic world (Wynne-Davies, 1989:399). He influenced various poets and writers, not as far as style is concerned, but in so far as his death made a deep impression on them. Coleridge, for example, wrote a 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton' to him; Wordsworth saw him as 'the marvellous boy' in *Resolution and Independence*; Shelley gave him a stanza in 'Adonais' where he compares him with Keats; Keats dedicated *Endymion: A Poetic Romance* to him; and Crabbe, Byron, Scott, and Rossetti added their praise. In France the Romantics hailed his example, and Alfred de Vigny wrote a play on Chatterton which was later turned into an opera by Luggero Leoncavallo. Biographies, such as E.H.W. Meyerstein's account of the poet and his works, were also written (Anon., 1982a:782).

Although many people doubted the authenticity of Chatterton's Rowley-sequence, it was not until seven years after its publication that these poems were definitively unmasked by the Chaucerian scholar, Thomas Tyrwhitt, according to Marion Wynne-Davies (1989:399). Margaret Drabble (1985:189) presents us with another version. According to her, Thomas Tyrwhitt first published the Rowley poems in 1777 and, a year later, Thomas Warton publicly raised doubts of their authenticity; this controversy raged for decades, and Rowley continued to find champions until Skeat's edition of 1871. It is clear that much concerning Chatterton's life is vague and uncertain.

Marion Wynne-Davies (1989:399) describes the language of his poems as 'an artificial amalgam of medieval, Elizabethan and contemporary elements, typical of the omnivorous eclecticism of the period'. Chatterton drew different times or the styles of different times into one. This is probably the reason Ackroyd was attracted to him as the

subject for a novel, since Ackroyd does the same.

Another aspect of Chatterton's life, even though it is not directly part of it, which should be mentioned, is the famous painting by Henry Wallis: *The Death of Chatterton* (1856), which is currently in the Tate Gallery. This portrait is not based on any authentic portrait or likeness, as none survived (Drabble, 1985:188).⁵

Ackroyd takes the above-mentioned historical information and imaginatively transforms it. The main theme of the novel, forgery, stems from Chatterton as a historical figure, since he is generally seen as the greatest forger of all times.

In summary, one could postulate that Ackroyd was probably drawn to Chatterton as a subject for a novel for the following reasons: Chatterton's early death placed him in the realms of the almost mythical; Chatterton, like Ackroyd, was drawn to the past; he combined the styles of various times in his own style, thus effecting the merging of his own experience and that of a different historical perspective (Höfele, 1986:80) and, by implication, synthesizing the opposing claims of fiction and history (by combining invention with an actual period and its characteristics) (Höfele, 1986:92); and, finally, the many uncertainties surrounding his life and, especially, his death probably appealed to Ackroyd's sense of mystery (these uncertainties can be linked to Chatterton's career as a literary forger, which inevitably results in the questioning of originality). There are furthermore many similarities between Chatterton's and Ackroyd's work. Andreas Höfele describes some of Chatterton's techniques:

*Die Einbeziehung des Irrationalen, des Übernatürlichen und
der Gebrauch einer ungewohnten, archaisierenden Sprache ...*
(1986:83)

The incorporation of the irrational, the supernatural, and
the use of an unusual, archaising language

(own translation)

This could have been said of most of Ackroyd's novels. However, whereas Chatterton's forgeries of the past led to a feeling of

⁵ This does not, of course, mean that none ever existed.

nostalgia for that factual past, Ackroyd's forgeries of the past make one aware of the uncertainty of a factual past. The factual past becomes fiction.

Ackroyd uses both fictive characters and actual persons in *Chatterton*. There are people such as Henry Wallis, George Meredith, and Thomas Chatterton, and characters such as Harriet Scrope (who probably has her origin in Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, another novel about the consequences of forgery, which contains various possible sources for her personality traits (Christiansen, 1987:22)), Charles Wychwood, Andrew Flint, and Philip Slack. Yet the actual historical persons are fictionalised. Although there are historical details (supposedly true), Ackroyd covers them in a fictional varnish. It is impossible for him to tell what these people actually said and did; so he has to (re-)create scenes by making use of his own imagination. This is the first level at which the historical persons are fictionalised. The second, and more explicit, level of fictionalisation is found where Ackroyd 'changes' the past by, for example, speculating that Chatterton might have faked his suicide or might have had another motive for taking arsenic. Yet these changes to the past appear to be 'in character'; they are perfectly plausible and believable so that we are left with the feeling that this might very well be the way things actually happened (as was the case with *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*). Because we know that history is ultimately subjective (despite efforts to the contrary), we can 'willingly suspend our disbelief' and consider the possibility that Ackroyd's version might be just as true/authentic or false/'forged' as the version(s) we find in history.

Ackroyd is by no means the only contemporary author to use historical figures in a work of fiction. In *Four Wise Men* Michel Tournier creatively re-invents the legend of the three Magi by introducing a fourth king, Taor, who came too late for the Nativity. Although parts of the story are based on legends and apocryphal writings, Tournier stresses that he 'felt free to invent the lives and characters of his heroes ...' (1991:249). Similarly, Juan Perucho in *Natural History* and E.L. Doctorow in *Ragtime* combine historical figures and fictional characters with the result that the reader no longer knows which are real and which fictive. Perucho's novel, set in Spain in the 1830s,

contains Chopin and George Sand as well as a vampire, whereas *Ragtime* has Houdini and Stanford White combined with the historically unknown young boy through whose eyes the reader experiences New Rochelle, New York at the beginning of this century.

As was the case with the introduction on Dyer in *Hawksmoor*, Ackroyd starts *Chatterton* with a page-long 'historical' introduction to Thomas Chatterton. At a glance, this seems to be fairly objective and straightforward: it is merely intended to provide the reader with information about the character in the title of the novel. Yet, in this introduction, we are provided with another key. Since the intention is to inform the reader about things necessary to an understanding and interpretation of the novel, we can assume that Ackroyd selects certain bits of information (in a subjective manner) to suit his novel, and the reader's interpretation of the novel. Ackroyd, in selecting this historical information, is - subconsciously - influenced by his intention in writing the novel, and by the manner in which he wants to manipulate the reader. This is what happens in any historical work: the writer has to select, and this selection depends on numerous factors, for example, his/her own background.

First Light differs significantly from Ackroyd's other novels in that it does not take a real-life, historical figure (Oscar Wilde in *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*; the eighteenth-century architect Nicholas Hawksmoor in *Hawksmoor*; Thomas Chatterton in *Chatterton*) or a real-life work of fiction, the existence of which has been historically documented (*Little Dorrit* in *The Great Fire of London*) as its starting point. All the characters are purely fictive. The only 'historical character' in the novel is Aldebaran (this star does indeed, to all appearances, take on the role of an active character). The absence of historical information does not, however, mean that the novel never questions our traditional conception of history (see Chapter 2). A concern with the past is evident throughout the novel.

Although Ackroyd's novels all take something from history, thus transcending the borders of fiction and reality/history, and are all intertextually linked to countless other texts, they are somehow self-contained. Clues to everything one needs to know, in order to

understand the novels, are found within the novels themselves. Paradoxically, the same process of creating self-sufficiency by joining and interweaving fiction and history dissolves the boundaries of the novels as texts, so that they become part of history and the world as text. This interweaving has the effect of fictionalising history and historicising fiction.

CHAPTER 4
ORIGIN AND ORIGINALITY

'The original artist is incapable of copying.
Therefore, in order to be original, he only has to copy.'
(Cocteau quoted by Randall, 1991:525)

'... the originality of a work is directly proportional to
the ignorance of its readers.'
(Hubert Aquin quoted in Randall, 1991:539)

The concept of history or an awareness of the past is essential for an understanding of origin or originality. If, however, history and the past become questionable - as the previous two chapters have indicated - it will be necessary to revise one's views on origin and originality. After briefly tracing the historical development of the concept 'originality', this chapter will focus on originality in *Chatterton* (as the novel in which the concept is explored most extensively) and on the idea that every human being descends from an unknown original.

Originality can be described as the quality of a text which makes it new in respect of form or theme, so that it can be distinguished from other traditional or known texts (Van Gorp et al., 1986:291).

This concept has undergone a considerable change in importance since classical times. Van Gorp et al. (1986:193) describe this change as follows: in classical Greek literature imitation rather than originality was seen as the basis of literary activity. Classical Greek literature subsequently became the model for Latin literature until the time of Augustus. Latin literature would again, in turn, become the object of imitation for later writers. Gradually, imitation began to include the idea of emulation, where the writer would try to equal and even surpass his model. Furthermore, writers would paraphrase texts from other languages. The above-mentioned imitation and emulation of Greek and Latin masterpieces continued throughout the Byzantine period, the Renaissance, and the classical period in West European literature. Yuri Lotman (Van Gorp et al., 1986:130) calls this the aesthetic of identity (literature focusing on a repetition of the same patterns).

The aesthetic of opposition displaced the aesthetic of identity with the advent of romanticism. Imitation was displaced by the demand for originality and unpredictability. As a result, artistic movements began to follow one another rapidly, and different movements began to coexist within one period (Van Gorp et al., 1986:130). This is still the case today as can be seen from concepts such as pluralism.

In the latter half of the twentieth century imitation again came to the fore, albeit in a different form, that is, intertextuality.

Intertextuality is a term which indicates that a literary text is situated amongst other texts and often refers or reverts back to other texts through parody, allusion or quotation. A specific text acquires meaning through its relation with other texts: a later text can be a replica, re-reading, intensification or solution of a previous text. Intertextuality had its origin long before the twentieth century; yet there was a definite shift in focus towards it in the twentieth century with the publication of critical texts such as T.S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' and Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*. With this renewed interest in the relation between one text and another/others, originality has become an object of enquiry. The renewed questioning of originality is furthermore owing to the twentieth-century view of the hegemony of the linguistic consciousness which betrays the subject as being essentially divided against itself. The loss of the subject's authority has produced a crisis in the notions of authorship and originality (Randall, 1991:525).

François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) once said in *Génie du Christianisme*:

*L'écrivain original n'est pas celui qui n'imité personne,
mais celui que personne ne peut imiter*

(The original writer is not he who refrains from imitating others, but he who can be imitated by none).

(quoted in *Dictionary of Quotations*, Anon., 1985:136)

This description does not, however, imply that originality exists. If any writer could be regarded as original, it would probably be Shakespeare. Yet it would be senseless to deny that many later writers were influenced by him and imitated him. Even in quoting Shakespeare, one is imitating him. Most of his plays were furthermore based on already existing stories/histories.

The concepts of originality and origin are central to all of Ackroyd's novels, whether explicitly (in *Chatterton*) or implicitly (for example, in *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* and *The Great Fire of London*). Such concepts are complicated by Ackroyd's use of 'historically true' information as basis or starting-point, and by his use of inter- and intratextuality, which further defer and confuse the idea of origin and originality. Since the 'history' on which Ackroyd bases his novels is subjective and selective (by implication faking the truth), these

apparent origins are also fakes and imitations and not truly original.

Originality, or the theoretical impossibility of ever being original or determining what is original, is one of the main themes in *Chatterton*. In this regard Rupert Christiansen refers to Ackroyd's own insistence that 'there is no real *origin* for anything' (1987:22, emphasis in the 'original'), words which are later echoed by Philip:

... if you trace anything backwards, trying to figure out cause and effect, or motive, or meaning, there is no real *origin* for anything.

(C:232, emphasis in the original)

Philip here appears to be in a deconstructivist frame of mind as a result of his experience in a late twentieth-century world.

The first instance of originality or its lack is found in *Chatterton* - the historical figure and the fictionalised character. *Chatterton* himself created the monk, Thomas Rowley, and his medieval poems:

I invented myself as a monk of the fifteenth century, Thomas Rowley.

(C:87)

To many people of *Chatterton*'s time, this monk appeared to be a real person and his poetry seemed to be original: '... *Chatterton* invented the mediaeval period for the early 19th-century Romantics' (Roberts, 1987:27). If this forgery had not been uncovered, one would today still have believed in its originality. Marilyn Randall (1991:529) remarks that *Chatterton*'s literary crimes constitute the reverse of plagiarism, the whole problem being the absence of the original. *Chatterton* transgressed the rule of authenticity by *denying* authorship of his own works and claiming their originality by presenting them as found documents. His forgeries had political value as a subversive force. The scandal surrounding his poetry hinged on the establishment of the authorial identity necessary to validate the work's claim to original-as-primitive (Randall, 1991:529). What is ironical about *Chatterton*'s poetry, is that he was very successful as Rowley, but mediocre as the eighteenth-century poet, *Chatterton*, who wrote in the idiom of his own time (Höfele, 1986:79). It has also been said of Ackroyd that his pastiche of the speech and writing of periods other than his own is excellent, but that his twentieth-century pieces are weak and unimpressive. Ackroyd is not the only contemporary novelist

to turn to past styles of writing. Large sections of A.S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance*, for example, consist of the invented poems and discovered correspondence between two fictive Victorian poets, Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte.

One could, however, in this time of deconstruction, ask whether the poetry Chatterton wrote could ever be seen as original, even if it was written by a real monk, Thomas Rowley. According to the theory of deconstruction, a writer can never be original, since every time a word is used, it refers to the previous time it was used, which, in turn, refers to the previous instance of usage, *ad infinitum*:

... we can no longer understand the signifier to be preceded by an anterior truth, a meaning, the presence of a signified whose existence ultimately necessitates a transcendental signified ... to which all truths can be referred.

(Belsey, 1980:136-137, emphasis in the original)

As a result, original meaning will always inevitably be deferred. Derrida (1978:314) remarks that everything begins with reproduction or 'always already'. It would then be possible to state that anything aspiring to originality is ultimately a forgery or fake. Even the words used to describe the various forgeries in *Chatterton* are subject to this deferment of original meaning. In a pamphlet on Chatterton, Philip reads the following:

Chatterton knew that original genius consists in forming new and happy combinations, rather than in searching after thoughts and ideas which had never occurred before.

(C:58)

The latter part of the quotation is impossible according to theories of deconstruction. Whether original genius truly consists in forming new and happy combinations, is debatable. Even if it were possible, one would still have to use words, which can never be original. Yet, according to Chatterton, 'without words ... there is nothing. There is no real world' (C:210). Thus words are forgeries of reality (the original). Paradoxically, the original needs the forgeries in order to exist; it can only be expressed in terms of the forgeries.

Leaving deconstruction aside (in so far as it is possible in a novel such as this), there are numerous other instances in *Chatterton* where an original is revealed as a fake or where originality is questioned.

All 'original' works are dependent on already existing models and norms (Höfele, 1986:79). This aspect can be seen when Chatterton is in the process of forging the medieval writers, since he becomes part of them as they become part of his work:

... when I wrote out the words, copying the very spelling of the Originals, it was as if I had become one of those Dead and could speak with them also.

(C:85)

The medieval writers are the originals; yet they were probably influenced by other writers. By becoming one of the dead, Chatterton becomes just as 'original' as they are. This furthermore implies that they are not original, since they can be copied (see 55). He (Chatterton) also fakes *Trew Histories* by combining what is believed to be historical fact and his own speculations. The readers of his 'true histories' will not be able to distinguish between fact and fiction, and because of the title (with its traditional connotations), they will assume that everything is, in fact, fact. When Chatterton calls his work 'authentick evidence, found in an old Parchment Roll and discover'd in the Chests of St Mary Redcliffe' (C:86), the reader knows that it is not true, although it is presented as such. This again suggests that history, which is presented as authentic evidence, might not be true.

It seems as if we can never avoid plagiarism, forgery, influence or intertextuality. As Chatterton says:

Thus do we see in every Line an Echoe, for the truest Plagiarism is the truest Poetry.

(C:87)

The apparent contradiction in terms, especially in 'the truest Plagiarism', further serves to emphasise the impossibility of absolutes: plagiarism implies that something is neither true nor original. Yet in art and literature everything is possible and the truth itself can be interpreted in different ways to suit different objectives. Terms such as 'truest plagiarism' or 'falsest originality' denote nothing in literature.

In a sense all novels are related as 'authentick Histories' (C:89), since novelists invariably want readers to suspend their disbelief (see the preface to *Robinson Crusoe*, one of the first English novels).

Thus, if Thomas Chatterton can be described as a plagiarist and forger, all novelists (and artists in general) must be given the same tag. When Charles's son, Edward, says of the painting of the middle-aged Chatterton that it is a fake (C:14), the question is raised whether all art is not inevitably fake. This term (fake) seems to be superfluous when dealing with art, just as plagiarism will later be shown to be superfluous when dealing with literature.

A further instance of the uncertainty surrounding originality again concerns Chatterton: the painting of 'Chatterton' by Henry Wallis (both the painting as described in the novel and the painting as it exists in the real world, if there is any difference between the two paintings). This painting is original in the sense that Henry Wallis created it in 1856 (as far as we know, that is, in so far as history can be trusted). Yet one doubts whether any painting can ever be original, since it is after all an imitation/a likeness of, in this case, a person. The title of the painting is 'The Death of Chatterton'. According to the title, the person whose likeness/imitation the painting is, is Chatterton, although the model for the painting was not Chatterton, but George Meredith. Therefore, there is a dichotomy between title and likeness. Meredith is, in effect, faking Chatterton's death. When we look at the painting, do we see reality/'the original' (Meredith) or do we see a forgery/a fake (Chatterton), or should the names be the other way around? It does not really seem to matter, because a painting is in any case an imitation. The only certainty associated with this painting is the viewer's resulting confusion. What is clear, however, is that Wallis draws two 'times' together in 'The Death of Chatterton': 1770 and 1856. At the same time, Chatterton and Meredith become synonymous and indistinguishable: one seems to continue where the other left off.

Originality and forgery imply a definite time-sequence: originality can be seen as the past and forgery as the present. As with 'normal', 'ordinary' time, the present can become the past in the future, and a forgery can, in turn, be regarded as the original for another forgery. Having linked originality to the past, and forgery to the present, one can go one step further and link the concepts to fact and fiction, respectively. The terms originality, past, and fact traditionally

imply truth and stability, whereas the terms forgery, present, and fiction imply lies and uncertainty. Now, however, the first three terms become questionable: originality is impossible because of eternal deferment; the past, as we know it, is highly subjective; and the same, of course, applies to 'facts'.

In the historical introduction on Chatterton, Ackroyd informs us that 'Only one contemporary portrait of him is known to exist ...' (C:1). According to other sources, none exists (see Drabble, 1985:188). The reader cannot determine whether Ackroyd here refers to the portrait of Chatterton in middle-age that Charles finds. If this is the case, Ackroyd deliberately misleads the reader by adding a fictional detail to an historical account, and presenting it as the truth. (One can then ask whether this is not in a sense what all historians do.) Ackroyd here deconstructs the historical introduction, and the reader consequently begins to doubt whether everything else in this introduction might not also be a forgery. This second portrait of Chatterton, together with the manuscripts Charles finds, are probably the most important elements in the novel.

Later in the novel it is disclosed/dis-covered that the portrait has been faked by Pat's son and that Chatterton most probably died in 1770. Yet one wonders whether this is the truth and not just another forgery, since Meredith walks into a shop where he sees a painting of a 'middle-aged man, without a wig, sitting beside a candle; his right hand rested lightly upon some books, the titles of which were indistinct' (C:173). He then remarks that the face seems familiar and wonders whether it might be a poet (C:173). Meredith continues to say that he knows the artist well (C:174). This takes place in 1856. It appears impossible for Pat's son to have painted the portrait as 'part of the joke' (C:222). There is more than just a suggestion that Chatterton lived until middle-age, or possibly that Meredith also forged this painting, because Meredith says that he knows the artist very well. The implication would be that Chatterton died at the age of seventeen, since this is 1856 and Wallis could not have painted Chatterton in middle-age. It might, however, not be Wallis, but 'Pinxit George Stead. 1802' (C:22) who painted at a time when Chatterton would have been middle-aged. The manuscripts also date from about 1810 (C:98).

In a sense, the two portraits of Chatterton are both forgeries. Wallis's portrait, with Meredith modelling as Chatterton, has already been discussed. The portrait of a middle-aged Chatterton might be original or forged, depending on which version of the past we choose to accept. Even if one sees it as a forgery (Pat's son's joke), one cannot help but wonder which is closer to reality or the original, that is, Chatterton. Wallis uses a model, Meredith, as Chatterton, whereas the portrait of a middle-aged man can clearly be recognised as an older version of Chatterton. Here one again begins to question how Meredith, Charles, and others can tell that the last portrait is what Chatterton would have looked like in middle-age, since - according to history - no contemporary portrait of Chatterton existed or exists.

Harriet once looks at the painting of a middle-aged Chatterton, closes her eyes, and when she opens them, we read that 'Thomas Chatterton was staring at her' (C:188). He probably stares at her from the painting, but because of some of the strange events in the novel (such as Chatterton's appearing to Charles), we cannot be sure that it might not be the real Chatterton staring at her. One can question the reality of the painting and the real Chatterton's 'ghost', since the real Chatterton can no longer be seen in the flesh, but can be seen in the painting. Yet the painting might be a fake. It becomes impossible to determine which 'version' of Chatterton is the more real. In the same way, Edward believes that Chatterton is dead after Charles's painting has been destroyed (C:230). The forgery paradoxically causes the original, in a sense, and not the other way around as one would normally assume it should be.

Even if objects are fakes, their status as fakes does not preclude their reality, an observation Mr Joynson makes a point of emphasising (C:219). They have reality in that they physically exist and, in this sense, they are just as real as the originals, and can sometimes be even more real than the originals. As Meredith says:

When Molière created Tartuffe, the French nation suddenly found him beside every domestic hearth. When Shakespeare invented Romeo and Juliet, the whole world discovered how to love. Where is the reality there?

(C:133)

People experience reality in terms of forgeries of that reality, which

makes it impossible to determine which experience must be regarded as the original and which as the forgery. Reality imitates its own forgery. The forgeries of reality can, in turn, be used to describe other realities, for example, when Wallis thinks of Mary Ellen Meredith:

No, she is not a Giotto ... but an Otto Runge.
(C:133)

Meredith's words that 'we see nature through the eyes of the painter' (C:134) are therefore true: forgeries help us to interpret the original.

Forgeries often assume greater reality than reality as can be seen when Meredith says of Chatterton:

Our dear dead poet created the monk Rowley out of thin air,
and yet he has more life in him than any medieval priest who
ever existed. The invention is always more real.
(C:157)

If a forgery can be more real than reality, the forgery should perhaps be regarded as the original. Meredith regards this process of forgery as more real than just a recreation or description of the world: it is a process of actual creation (C:157). Yet, paradoxically, in the sense that no work of art can be original, all art is unreal. As Harriet says:

It's not real, you know. It's only a film.
(C:124)

One becomes uncertain about the distinction between art and reality, when one realises that reality can also be unreal (as suggested by the Chatterton-episode).

In *Chatterton* even the houses in Dodd's Gardens are not original, but fake:

... the pilasters copied from the eighteenth century façades
and reproduced in miniature
(C:7)

In the case of these houses one can clearly see that people are influenced by the past and consciously revive it in the present, so that everything within Charles's view from his window appears unreal:

... if it was Victorian it was only as a diorama, a roll of
canvas which unwound and gave the sensation of a moving
world.

(C:17)

This unreality associated with the Victorian houses is probably owing to the impression they create of being the same as they were in the Victorian age. They appear to be anachronisms. Even Harriet Scrope's cat, Mr Gaskell, finds it difficult to distinguish between an original and a fake. When the stuffed bird is knocked off Harriet's hat, he mistakes it for the real thing and instantly tears it apart (C:188). Similarly, Edward believes that Philip Slack's beard is fake (C:17). In a world where nothing can be definite and certain any longer, children learn to doubt everything, including everyday objects. This result can be ascribed to films and television in which 'fake' worlds are created where people are disguised. Edward finds it difficult to distinguish between reality and fiction.

The same uncertainty surrounds the manuscripts which are found and which at first appear real and original (see C:184), until they are revealed as forgeries (C:219). Doubt, however, is cast upon this last version, since about half-way through the novel, Wallis fills a battered wooden chest (probably belonging to Pig) in the attic where Chatterton lived with 'manuscript papers' (C:138). The manuscripts Pat later gives Charles might be these, since Pat lives very close to where Chatterton used to live. Wallis could be the author of these manuscripts: they might be his research or speculation about Chatterton, since he would undoubtedly have done some work as background to his painting of 'Chatterton'.

According to the original, factual account of an event (that is, Chatterton's suicide) in the past, Chatterton committed suicide at the age of seventeen because he could not stand the poverty in which he lived. The portrait and manuscripts, however, suggest that this version we know from history is forged and fictive. In the novel we are, at first, presented with a new version, a version which claims to be factive and original: Chatterton faked his own death in order to continue writing and faking other writers' work. He not only faked fiction; he also faked 'reality' (his own death). He had to do this, because it was discovered that he had faked the Rowley-sequence. He then continued to live and wrote 'newly discovered' poems by Blake and others. The reader even begins to doubt whether Blake's poetry is truly his.

If the possibility is accepted that Chatterton died at the age of seventeen, Ackroyd questions or casts doubt upon whether it was suicide as history purports. By taking the reader back to the eighteenth century and letting Chatterton narrate events himself, the reader is made aware of the possibility that history might be a forgery in the sense that it does not portray what really happened. Chatterton is seen as a victim of circumstances in his suicide; not as history sees it, that is, that poverty and despair caused his *felon de se*, but in the sense that everything worked together against Chatterton to make his death look like suicide, for example, the lines he added to the satire on Alderman Lee and the arsenic. The circumstances forged his 'suicide'. At the end we are left feeling that Ackroyd's interpretation of these circumstances is just as (in)valid as that given by history. There again appears to be no essential difference between history and story.

When studying biographies of Chatterton, Charles comes to the realisation that historical (biographical accounts constitute a sub-division) accounts are always subjective and can present us with different versions of a single moment in the past, all aspiring towards authenticity:

... he noticed that each biography described a quite different poet: even the simplest observation by one was contradicted by another, so that nothing seemed certain. He felt that he knew the biographers well, but that he still understood very little about Chatterton. At first Charles had been annoyed by these discrepancies but then he was exhilarated by them: for it meant that anything became possible. If there were no truths, everything was true.

(C:127)

Towards the end of the novel Vivien realises that history, which has traditionally been seen as an objective description of real events, is in fact nothing but a number of subjective forgeries:

None of it seemed very real, but I suppose that's the trouble with history. It's the one thing we have to make up for ourselves.

(C:226)

In the past history was believed to be the one thing people should not have to make up for themselves. It is this principle which Ackroyd explores in *Chatterton* and the other novels. This realisation lies at the centre of the contemporary predicament, but instead of leading to

joy, it leads to fear and uncertainty.

Almost every character and event in *Chatterton* appears to be there to make the reader aware that nothing is what it appears to be, nothing is original, everything is forged. Harriet Scrope and her novels are an excellent example. At first the novels appear to be 'original', that is, Harriet's own work. Then, however, Philip Slack accidentally reveals that this is not the case: Harriet's novels are forgeries. At least two of the novels have been plagiarised from the nineteenth-century novels by Harrison Bentley (significantly, Harriet seems to be the feminine form of Harrison, so that there is even a close resemblance in their names).

Ackroyd seems to make himself part of the butt of his joke in this episode, when he names Bentley's two novels *The Last Testament* and *Stage Fire*. *The Last Testament* bears too much resemblance to *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* for this resemblance to be ignored. (This is, of course, apart from the resemblance it bears to Chatterton's own 'The Last Will and Testament of me, Thomas Chatterton of Bristol'.) Similarly, *Stage Fire* not only partially resembles *The Great Fire of London* in title, but the title *Stage Fire* is an apt description of what happens in Ackroyd's novel, *The Great Fire of London*. Ackroyd apparently suggests that *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* and *The Great Fire of London* may also have other origins. Here the borders of fictional fiction (or fiction in fiction) and real fiction (or fiction in reality) are dissolved.

The story of Bentley's *The Last Testament* aptly deals with the question of originality:

... the biographer of a certain poet, throughout referred to as K---, discovers that his subject, at the end of his life, had been too ill to compose the verses which had brought him eternal fame; that, in fact, it had been the poet's wife who had written them for him.

(C:69)

One questions whether it really detracts from the poems that they were not written by the poet but by his wife. Because of their inherent nature, the poems are not and can never be original, so that authorship does not really matter (or should not really matter). It is ironic

that Harriet Scrope should choose to plagiarise such a story. The Bentley (and now Scrope) story exhibits certain parallels to Charles's 'discovery' about Chatterton, which suggests that the issue of originality, forgery, and plagiarism is a much older one than is often assumed.

Bentley's *Stage Fire* and Harriet's plagiarised version both deal with artists (an actor and a poet, respectively) who are possessed by the spirits of their predecessors, but who are nevertheless acclaimed as the most original artists of their age (C:69). This implies, first of all, that the predecessor artists were not original: they can be imitated (and combined) by later artists. Secondly, the implication is that the more contemporary actor and poet are not original and can never be. This, in turn, implies that originality is a farce. The poet is the 'most original ... of his age' (C:69), although the reader knows that this is not true, since he imitates others. Yet his critics choose to tag him as original - an impossibility. Originality loses all meaning.

In the course of the novel the question arises whether plagiarism is to be avoided in literature, since intertextuality and literary borrowing are less pejorative words for exactly the same phenomenon (see Harriet's description of her act of plagiarism as borrowing in C:103). Since nothing can, in any case, ever be original, the word plagiarism seems to be unnecessary and superfluous. Plagiarism is no more than playgiarism (a word coined by Raymond Federman, quoted by Hassan, 1987b:21). Marilyn Randall (1991:527) points out that plagiarism depends not on the *textual fact* of repetition, but on the author's presumed intention to conceal the act and thus deceive.

The long discussion about literature in the eighteenth-century part of *Hawksmoor*, written as a small drama or play, is relevant here. The characters discuss the relative value of ancient and contemporary writing (H:117-180), imitation, intertextuality or borrowing from the past which is not plagiarism, but a way of achieving novelty (H:179). This is what happens in *Hawksmoor* where characters and events from the past are borrowed, but used in a new way.

In *Chatterton* Philip believes that Harriet's borrowings do not matter, since there are only a limited number of plots in the world (reality is finite) and it is inevitable that they will be reproduced in a variety of contexts (C:70). This view precludes the possibility of originality. An author can choose only one of a given number of plots, even though this number might appear infinitely great to mere mortals. Philip has come to this conclusion after attempting to write a novel:

... but even the pages he had managed to complete seemed to him to be filled with images and phrases from the work of other writers whom he admired. It had become a patchwork of other voices and other styles

(C:70)

He has experienced the effect of intertextuality. Intertextuality as a phenomenon implies the absence of originality (in the sense of being the first to write something), both in the older writer(s) (whose work can be imitated; see 55) and in the more contemporary writer (who cannot escape the influence of other writers from the past, and who therefore either inevitably imitates them or must refrain from writing altogether). The 'writer thinks less of writing originally, and more of rewriting. The image for writing changes from original *inscription* to parallel script', as Said says of contemporary writing (quoted by Hutcheon, 1983:36, emphasis in the original). Both Harriet and Meredith refer to the writer's predicament:

In any case novelists don't work in a vacuum. We use many stories. But it's not where they come from, it's what we do with them. I've found lots of material elsewhere ...

(C:104)

and:

I never know what is mine any more.

(C:134)

Even William Blake was influenced by Chatterton (this makes the interpretation that Chatterton could have forged some of Blake's poetry plausible). This influence can be seen in Prof Brillo's study *Thou Marvellous Boy: The Influence of Thomas Chatterton on the Writing of William Blake*. In the introduction he states:

This is the one subject which Blake scholars have seemed unwilling to address, for it assumes that Blake was influenced by the work of a forger and a plagiarist. But it would not be going too far to suggest that, without the work

and the influence of Thomas Chatterton, Blake's own poetry would have taken a wholly different form.

(C:72)

It seems strange that Blake scholars should have been unwilling to acknowledge Chatterton's influence on Blake, because Chatterton was a forger and a plagiarist, since Blake himself - in copying or being influenced by Chatterton and by using Chatterton as a figure in his own texts - is therefore also a forger and a plagiarist, even if to a lesser extent. Blake's poetry is not original, since without Chatterton's influence, it 'would have taken on a wholly different form'. This observation seems to imply that Chatterton and his work constitute part of Blake's work. (It is interesting to note that such studies as the fictional Prof Brillo's about Chatterton and Blake actually exist, see Thomas A. Reisner. 1985. 'Blake and Chatterton', *Notes and Queries*, v.32(230)(3):328-329.)

The issues of intertextuality and the impossibility of determining what originality is are further illustrated in *Chatterton*, in that the work and words of many writers often seem completely interchangeable. Andrew Flint says: 'The years are incorrigible, aren't they? They never cease' (C:75) and then is not sure whether it was Tennyson or Horace Walpole who originally made this statement. This uncertainty about the author implies that it does not matter who said this; it could have been the one or the other without making any difference to the words themselves; the words do not necessarily bear the imprint of the writer. For this reason Harriet is afraid that, if she were to die and Charles's poems were to be found on her desk, everyone would think that she had written them (C:185-186). The same happens when Charles quotes Eliot to Harriet, and she mistakes it for Shakespeare (C:100). Although the two writers are divided by centuries, their names become interchangeable. They are all subject to 'the anxiety of influence' (C:100) which, in turn, implies the fear of not being thought original.

The element of the game or playfulness inherent in postmodern intertextuality is recognised by Charles and Philip who used to spend much time 'parodying ... the work of young writers' (C:19), which is nothing but a harmless kind of forgery.

People can furthermore fake the past, either by interpreting it in the wrong way (nobody can say which is the correct way) or by imagining it. Mary, Harriet's assistant, for example, says:

It seems to me that they have seriously misinterpreted Modernism.

(C:26)

Any study, whether of the past or the present, is inevitably subjective. Therefore one can sympathise with Harriet's retorts: 'So you know what is true and what is false, do you?' (C:26) and 'who's to say what is real and unreal?' (C:35). Chatterton already saw that these concepts were relative. In *Sly Dick* he writes of Dick's dream:

It might - perhaps - it might - be true.
(C:189)

This statement implies that it might also be false.

Harriet herself fakes the past in her autobiography. She says that she danced with 'Tom' Eliot in his office at Fabers, while she is not at all sure that he had ever known who she was (C:27). Since he is dead, he will not be able to refute this claim, and this version of history/the past will be seen as the truth (even though Harriet is a fictional character - something which the reader tends to lose sight of). It is clear that one cannot trust or believe in the past, because nothing is certain or definite, as Harriet says:

Everything is made up.
(C:28)

She not only invents certain episodes, but also deliberately conceals others, for example, her plagiarism (C:29). This is true of any history or historical account. She even hires Charles to flesh out or fake her memoirs (Dodsworth, 1987:976).

When Harriet helps the blind man to reach the post office, it serves as another exposition of the nature of history. Harriet tells the blind man that she was also once going blind. The blind man has no way of uncovering the truth and will therefore 'see' Harriet's fake version as the truth. We can only know the past through what others tell us about it. There is no infallible way of knowing whether they are lying or telling the truth (compare the image of the boy leading the blind man discussed later on). The blind man's statement that 'Sometimes ... it's better not to see' (C:30) has implications for history: if we

were able to see the true nature of history, that is, time as a whole, we might discover a few very frightening phenomena (in this respect, one can compare what apparently happens in *Hawksmoor* and the other novels).

Harriet cannot resist changing the past to make it more interesting. She had told the blind man that her husband was a taxidermist; now she tells Sarah Tilt that the blind man was one (C:32) and then accuses him of lying:

I never thought a blind man could *lie*, did you? Except ...
you do get blind poets, don't you?
(C:32, emphasis in the original)

This implies that all poets are forgers; they can never be original.

Even Sarah Tilt's book on death in English painting is subject to forgery, since she studies the portrayal of deaths, but does not really know how the subjects of the paintings died, because they 'were painted from the imagination' (C:34) and 'they used models' (C:34).

A forgery could be described as an invention or imitation purporting to be the real object or the original. Thus, when Sarah says to Charles that he told her that 'reality is the invention of unimaginative people' (C:39), the implication is that everything, including reality, is ultimately a forgery. Nothing remains which can be trusted. History, the past, and reality are all fictions. According to Charles, it is a question of language:

Realism is just as artificial as surrealism, after all ...
The real world [and history] is just a succession of
interpretations. Everything [including history, once again]
which is written down immediately becomes a kind of fiction.

(C:40)

Charles's remark to his son that 'It's rude to imitate people' (C:44) appears incongruous, because he is beginning to realise that art and literature are in essence imitation. Art and literature probably give some distance, and are in any case regarded as fictive and unreal, whereas imitating people 'in reality' is supposed to be true. There is really no difference. Imitation (forgery) remains imitation, regardless of the medium used.

Plagiarism and forgery can, however, be turned into positive

activities, especially if the forger or plagiarist has the ability to imitate the work of more than one person. As Sam Joynson reminds Chatterton:

You prove your Strength by doing their Work better than ever
they could

(C:91)

Since no writer can ever be original, there is no reason why writers should not excel in taking intertextuality as far as possible and in covering as wide a range of other writers as possible, in the process proving their versatility.

Because of people who have the ability to forge or plagiarise in the novel (in essence we all do this), it becomes impossible to say what is true or real in the past, and what is not. The result is that we lose all feelings of certainty and trust in the past. If somebody such as Chatterton cannot only fake poetry, but also his own death (that is, reality), it becomes impossible for us ever to know what we should believe. Ackroyd does not necessarily say that Chatterton committed suicide; he merely makes us aware of this possibility.

At one stage Charles says somewhat obscurely to Philip:

There has to be a copy How could we know it was real
without a copy? Everything is copied.

(C:93)

This remark apparently refers to the Chatterton manuscript. Charles seems to need a copy to determine whether an original exists, since a copy cannot exist without an original.¹ Yet he forgets that copies can be made of copies, so that what he believes to be the original may in fact be nothing but a copy. His reasoning leads nowhere. When Charles then discovers poems by Crabbe, Gray, and Blake, written in what he has come to identify as Chatterton's handwriting, he immediately assumes that Chatterton must be the original writer, and that Blake and the others are the forgers and plagiarists (C:94). He has already forgotten his own words about the existence of a copy for everything. Chatterton (if it is really his handwriting) might merely have been copying or rewriting the 'real' poems by the 'original' writers as

¹ This inversion of original and copy is not so far-fetched. Reality can be seen as a social construct(ion), and a representation of reality in art is also just a copy.

practice to see what makes their poetry work. It is impossible to say whether he forged their work, since he was eager for knowledge about them (C:215), which could either mean that he did not know anything about them or that he was eager to know more about those whose work he had forged.

In literature and in life, everything depends on one's point of view.² Thus Philip and Charles describe Chatterton consecutively as 'the greatest forger in history', 'the greatest plagiarist in history', and 'the greatest poet in history' (C:94). These opinions almost seem like the degrees of comparison of poetry in reverse, with a greater or lesser exclusion of originality in each case.

Grandma Joel, the Art Brut artist, who is mentally unstable (and whom we can assume therefore has a deeper knowledge - see Chapter 8) wants 'to explain the entire material and spiritual world in terms of imitation, and [keeps] on repeating "The blind are fathers of the blind"' (C:109-110). (Chatterton similarly believes that he can explain the entire material and spiritual world in terms of imitation and forgery (C:126).) Grandma Joel's statement can be linked directly to the theme of originality versus (should it rather be, equals?) forgery. Because everything is ultimately imitation, we are like blind people who cannot see the original, just as those whom we might see as the authors of the original are in fact in turn blind, because they have also just imitated what they thought to be the original, *ad infinitum*.

Another of the Art Brut artists, Fritz Dangerfield, has his own alphabet because words make him feel unclean and he wants to start all over again (C:116). His alphabet can be described as a search for the origin and originality. Dangerfield realises that existing words do not refer to concepts, but to the previous time they were used; they carry the traces and connotations of numerous past instances of usage, in the same way Hawksmoor bears traces of Dyer. It is impossible to use words without 'plagiarising'. Wallis also experienced this in the nineteenth century: 'Nothing is pure ... everything is stained'

² This idea will again be taken up in relation to time.

(C:164).

Stewart Merk, the faker of Seymour paintings, is another example of the universal plot against originality. He has faked all of what appeared to be Seymour's last paintings, even while Seymour was still alive. Everything becomes relative when we realise that Sadleir (an expert in the field) believes that some of the fakes (those painted while Seymour was still alive) are real, and some of the fakes are fakes (those painted after Seymour's death). This implies that there is nothing in the fakes to distinguish them from the 'originals', but that one's judgement merely depends on one's background knowledge of the artist's identity. Forgery here subverts the norms of institutional validation. As Merk says:

But who is to say what is fake and what is real? You're sure you know the difference, yes?

(C:113)

Because of the universal cover-up to which all parties involved agree, the world will not be any wiser (C:114). Therefore it is ironic when Sarah Tilt says of Seymour:

He's such a recognisable artist, isn't he? Each work is unmistakably his.

(C:118)

Another cover-up concerns the middle-aged Chatterton portrait: Harriet knows that, if it is a fake, she can blackmail Cumberland and Maitland to authenticate or even alter it (C:187). Thus one forgery inevitably leads to another. Ironically they refer to the act of forgery as 'authentication' (C:201). It is also ironic that Maitland says: 'And paintings never lie, do they?' (C:201), whereas it is clear that they can and do in fact lie; a painting is, by definition, a lie (an imitation). When Stewart Merk tries to authenticate the painting, he discovers that it is a palimpsest and contains 'the residue of several different images, painted at various times' (C:205). It would be impossible to say which of these is the original: is it the first one painted, that is, the one at the back closest to the canvas, or the one at the surface? If one decides on the latter alternative, the implication is that each of the others was also at one time on the surface and therefore the original. Numerous originals that are, at the same time, imitations exist simultaneously. It is ironic that Merk

wants to 'reconstruct the painting until it attained its final, authentic form' (C:227), since this form might be, and probably is, anything but authentic and original.

In many instances in the novel one virtually has a *mise en abyme* of fakes or forgeries. For example, before Wallis paints Meredith, he lies on the bed with one arm trailing down upon the floor (C:136). Here we have Wallis impersonating Meredith impersonating Chatterton (impersonating Death? and also Charles?). The original for the one is the impersonation of another, with the result that the original fades away somewhere in the past. The same happens when the twentieth-century Samuel Joynson suggests that some of Chatterton's poetry might be fake while telling Philip more about the eighteenth-century Samuel Joynson:

He began selling all the old manuscripts he had kept, and I wouldn't be surprised if he *discovered* a few new ones.
(C:220, emphasis in the original)

The forger's work can be forged: 'What better weapon to use against a forger than another forgery?' (C:221) Nothing about the past is certain and, as a result, the novel and the past become a *mise en abyme* of forgery:

The memoirs had been forged by a bookseller who wanted to repay him in kind, to fake the work of a faker and so confuse for ever the memory of Chatterton; he would no longer be the poet who died young and glorious, but a middle-aged hack who continued a sordid trade with his partner. This was the document which Charles Wychwood had carried back with him.

(C:221)

After all the forgeries, it becomes difficult for the reader to believe that this version is the truth. Considering human nature and human spitefulness, it is probable that much of history might have been faked for various external reasons and with various ulterior motives.

Mary Ellen Meredith aspires to an ideal kind of art, which is not subject to the above-mentioned *mise en abyme*:

That medieval style offends me, it is all artifice. What is it that you painters say? *Pasticcio*. It is all *pasticcio*. For me poetry must be direct and it must be inspired. It will be simple and it will be true ... What is the reason for the imitation of an imitation?

(C:160)

All art is artifice and imitation, and can therefore never be direct. Art will always be an imitation of an imitation if it makes use of signs, whether these are words or other signs, since signs always already refer to other signs. Meredith comes to the realisation that 'the greatest realism is also the greatest fakery' (C:139), since all art, whether realistic or abstract, is in essence imitation.

Even the people involved in 'The Death of Chatterton' become confused. Meredith says to his wife who is looking at the painting:

Why not look at the great original rather than the impressions of him?

(C:141)

This comment is ironic, since Meredith is not truly the original. If it had just been the painting, without the title, he might have been the original. Now, however, the painting has a title, and Meredith becomes an impersonation of Chatterton (the original?).

Paradoxically, fakes, forgeries or imitations have the ability to survive for much longer than the so-called originals on which they are based in painting. The picture of Chatterton can survive, whereas Chatterton has perished and Meredith, the model, will also die (C:142). This is indeed what has happened if we view the situation from the present: we still have the painting, but Meredith and Chatterton no longer live (unless it is through the painting or art in general).

When Meredith looks at the painting of the middle-aged Chatterton, he asks:

What do you think, Mrs. Meredith, is he the original or merely a model?

(C:173)

It is clear that Meredith wonders whether the person in the painting is somebody posing in his own identity, or someone else posing as that person. But to the reader, there is no validity in Meredith's question. Whether the person is the original (in the sense in which Meredith uses it) or not, he is still only a model for the painting. The person in the painting can never become more than an imitation; he can never be the original. One now begins to doubt whether the person in the picture is a middle-aged Chatterton, or merely somebody modelling as a middle-aged Chatterton (as was the case with Wallis's

'Death of Chatterton').

Once Wallis has completed the painting of Chatterton with Meredith as the model, he says:

The soul of Chatterton had not yet left it.

(C:175)

Here Meredith and Chatterton again become totally interchangeable in the painting. Meredith is the one portrayed in the painting, although he is modelling as Chatterton; yet it is Chatterton whose soul has not yet left the painting, and not Meredith's.

It is interesting to note that Chatterton believes that one can make two or more apparently directly opposing statements in poetry (it appears that at least one of them must be a forgery), and yet both or all can be true:

When I write in praise of the late lamented Lee ... it is a true relation; and, when I write damning him to the pit of Hell, it is true also.

(C:215)

He believes that the reason for this is that poetry cannot lie. Everything is relative and depends on one's perspective. Poetry enables one to view things from more than one perspective, as one can assume different personalities in different poems. This insight has implications for Mr Joynson's final revelation and Philip's final insight. When Mr Joynson reveals 'The Truth' about Chatterton to Philip, we cannot believe this version unreservedly:

Now, Samuel Joynson did actually print and sell Chatterton's poetry. They worked together. They may even have been friends. ... Chatterton did die. As far as we know, he committed suicide at the age of eighteen.

(C:220, emphasis in the original)

There does, indeed, appear to be reason in not accepting the above as the truth: James Dodley, and not Samuel Joynson, was Chatterton's publisher; Chatterton died at the age of seventeen, and not eighteen. Yet the information as gained from history might very well just be another fallible version of Chatterton's life.

Finally, Philip appears to believe that forgeries are only forgeries if you believe them to be so. Similarly, they are true, real or original if that is the way you choose to see them:

His [Charles's] belief had been the important thing. So the papers were imitations and the painting a forgery - yet the feelings which they evoked in Charles, and now in Vivien, were still more important than any reality. ... 'The important thing is what Charles imagined, and we can keep hold of that. That isn't an illusion. The imagination never dies.'

(C:232)

The novel itself is not original and therefore a forgery in that a fictive world and fictive characters are created and combined with 'real' ones. Yet, whilst reading the novel, we experience the fictional creations as real.

Ackroyd also mentions a different kind of original in many of the novels, an original for every human being. The less than sane Harriet speculates about whether she might not derive from some unknown original of whose periods of activity she might be one manifestation:

Perhaps Mother is another Chatterton! Perhaps I go back thousands of years!

(C:99)

In *Hawksmoor* both Dyer and Hawksmoor refer to the idea of the original, where all people's faces descend from some unknown original (H:208 and 211). This original will later be discussed in terms of a 'presence' in Chapter 8. When Sarah Tilt in *Chatterton* says:

You only live once, don't you?

(C:107)

one begins to question everyday expressions in everyday language. Because of the (re-)appearance of the past in the present, everything becomes relative. In *Dictionary of the Khazars: A Lexicon Novel*, Milorad Pavic explores the same idea of certain people or characters recurring every few centuries, with only slight alterations to the 'original' person or presence.

This idea is also found in *First Light*. Old Barren One's face seems to contain those of all the people Joey knew who are now dead (FL:323). When the archaeologists finally discover the coffin with the words 'Old Barren One' on it, it is apt that Mark should feel that he has found the centre and the origin of the tumulus (FL:289). Old Barren One's name takes on ironic shades: he appears to be the unknown original (referred to in *Hawksmoor*) from which all faces and all people descend;

yet he is called barren. The implication is that there is no such thing as originality. The name, Old Barren One, carries a hint of futility, because of the barrenness. It is furthermore symbolic of postmodern decentring, where the centre is no longer seen as offering a solution.

In Ackroyd's novels, characters have a need to know their origin (the past/their personal history). This is owing to a need for certainty about the past and its continuity with the present. Evangeline Tupper is the first to mention this notion of one's origin. To her, her father represents her origin:

And yet I am so far away ... so far away from him now. So far away from my origin.

(FL:22)

Joey is the most important character in the search for the origin. He continually makes remarks such as 'I have to know the truth. Before I die' (FL:65) and 'I want to find out where I come from' (FL:147). He has to know who his parents were, because he has a need for certainty about the past. He is only aware that he has been 'haunted by the image of some remote and tranquil past; he had known nothing definite about it' (FL:149). This awareness seems to be a longing for security and stability in his sense of origin about which he ironically knows nothing. Damian probably only further confuses him by asking 'Where does anybody come from?' (FL:147), since the past is dark and obscure for all practical purposes. The only thing Joey can recall is an idyllic picture of the valley, associated with a feeling of permanence (FL:149) which the rest of the past cannot give him (FL:154).

When Joey finally discovers his origin and his dead parents, he is exhilarated 'not by their deaths but by his sense of origin; for the first time in his life he could feel that he belonged in the world' (FL:171). His sense of 'not-at-homeness' in the world disappears only when he knows the past, even if it is his personal past:

In fact the experiences of the last few weeks seemed to have rejuvenated him. There had been a time when, without any proper knowledge of the past, he saw ahead of him only the unfathomable and therefore unfair process of ageing; why should he have begun to die when he did not truly know who

he was? But the discovery of his family had allowed him to see his life as part of some larger continuity and, just as he could now look backward with more confidence, so also could he look forward. The world, before, had been merely an index of his own ageing; but now it seemed to him to contain the possibility of change, to be always capable of renewal.

(FL:222-223)

A knowledge of the past gives certainty and direction. He feels unfinished without knowledge about the past and wants facts about the past (something which is impossible) (FL:224). When he finally knows who his parents were, he feels at peace (FL:305).

This search for knowledge about one's origin is finally senseless, even if it does give one a feeling of peace. Just as originality is an impossible ideal which has long since faded into the past in literature and language, the origin of a specific human being is also always inevitably deferred: we can trace our origin back to a specific ancestor who can, in turn, trace his/her origin back to another, earlier ancestor, in an endless web of human beings.

CHAPTER 5
FICTION AND REALITY

'Real, compared to what?'
(McHale, 1987:84)

'Where reality has become unreal, literature qualifies as our guide to reality by de-realizing itself In a paradoxical and fugitive way, mimetic theory remains alive. Literature holds the mirror up to unreality ... its conventions of reflexivity and anti-realism are themselves mimetic of the kind of unreal reality that modern reality has become. But "unreality" in this sense is not fiction but the element in which we live.'

(Gerald Graff quoted by McHale, 1987:220)

It seems that almost all the themes in Ackroyd's novels can - and must - be linked to the relation between the past and the present. Just as the connection between historical information and a specific text, and between the original and the copy implied the connection between past and present, so the same is implied by the relation between reality and fiction. Fiction can often be linked to the present and reality to the past, since - in Ackroyd's oeuvre - the present work of fiction inevitably has its basis in reality: reality exists, then is turned into fiction. The situation can, of course, be turned around, for example, in *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* where Ackroyd has Wilde say that reality imitates fiction. The real Wilde also said:

I treated Art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction

(quoted in Hern, 1985:v)

and:

... Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life.

(quoted in Hern, 1985:zvi)

It is important to look at the relation between fiction and reality as portrayed in Ackroyd's novels, since this relation is, firstly, a central concern in postmodern fiction and, secondly, is linked to time and history, the two focal points of this dissertation.

In *The Great Fire of London* the borders between fiction and reality (and present and past) are gradually and systematically dissolved. The narrator ends 'the story so far' by stating that:

Although it could not be described as a true story, certain events have certain consequences

(GF:3)

This observation implies that the first part of *Little Dorrit* (a fictional account) will inevitably have consequences for what the narrator is about to recount. By drawing on Dickens's novel, Ackroyd emphasises the fictionality of his own fictional world, however realistic it may appear in certain respects: writing follows from other writing rather than from life (Lewis, 1986:8). In the context of the novel and its reading conventions (specifically the 'willing suspension of disbelief'), what follows is seen as reality. Thus fiction has consequences for reality. Within a postmodern context, however, the reader is conscious of the fictionality of the supposedly real. At the end of the novel, the narrator deliberately destroys the

illusion of reality created by the willing suspension of disbelief, when stating:

This is not a true story, but certain things follow from other things.

(GF:169)

By means of this method, the traditional view of a novel as a closed structure with a beginning, a middle, and an end is dissolved. As Andrew says:

... nothing is ever complete in itself, is it?

(GF:47)

One fictional text has consequences for another fictional text. What was written more than a century ago, apparently inevitably leads to another text (within which the older text also puts in an appearance in various ways). Fiction now imitates the causality of reality, and is a mimetic art, but in a manner which is very different from what Aristotle envisioned. Instead of reasserting the foundations of reality and, consequently, the basis of human existence, mimesis has acquired the function of creating flux and instability through the erasure of the parameters of texts; two novels can constitute one novel by means of an intertextual conversation spanning more than a century. Yet this conversation does not imply the total breakdown of order; it is merely another kind of order/pattern/connection.

Little Arthur refers to this aspect of vague borders when he states that 'There's going to be conversations about this' (GF:7). Apparently this statement refers to his 'dismissal' from Fun City. Significantly, 'he hardly knows what he is saying' (GF:7). Later it will be shown that those who have a different (greater) knowledge are often portrayed as 'innocent'; they are either children, animals, or the insane. In a way the novel itself can be seen as one of the forms this conversation takes, since - as far as Little Arthur is concerned - it does indeed tell what happens to him. This dissertation could be seen as another form of conversation. Thus the intertextual conversation not only concerns various literary texts spanning more than a century, but also so-called academic writing or criticism. It soon becomes impossible to decide where one text ends (and whether it ends) and where another begins. Fact and fiction, illusion and reality, merge and become indistinguishable. One is forced to ask whether this

dissertation is any more real and factive as a conversation about the consequences of *Little Dorrit* than Ackroyd's fictional text.

Ultimately the terms **fiction** and **reality** become meaningless. This is also Tim's experience when Little Arthur chases them away from Fun City:

... he did not know if this was real, or something made up, a game. It was something in between, something he did not have words for.

(GF:10)

Tim's words are directly applicable to *The Great Fire of London* and, in a wider context, to the human race's experience of contemporary life and reality. Humanity's doubt about the reality of reality is strengthened and increased by Tim's reaction to Rowan's account of the Little Dorrit-story:

Tim listened intently but saw such things as what they were: stories, fairy tales, not connected with the reality of any place.

(GF:31)

Through the use of dramatic irony, the reader realises that, with this statement, Tim unconsciously implies his own non-existence or fictionality: if characters in *Little Dorrit* are not connected with the reality of any place, then he (as a character in *The Great Fire of London*) is also part of a fairy tale and un-connected with the reality of place. The reader, in viewing him as such, does exactly what Tim did. This has implications for the reader's existence and substantiality, and the result is, once again, a *mise en abyme* situation.

In a similar way, Spenser Spender's aim in making a film version of *Little Dorrit* subverts itself. When he decides to use the abandoned wing of the prison to film the sequences taking place inside the Marshalsea debtor's prison where Little Dorrit was born, one reads that he 'had insisted upon *realism*' (GF:55, emphasis added). This insistence is extremely ironical. Realism (with its root in reality) is totally irrelevant in this film made about a character in a work of fiction who could never actually have visited Marshalsea Prison. Spenser falls prey to a willing suspension of disbelief and ends up believing in the 'reality' of Little Dorrit. Later it is mentioned that the dialogue, real in the sense that it comes from *Little Dorrit*,

sounds artificial and contrived (GF:122). It becomes wholly impossible to decide what is true and false in such a world of vague or absent boundaries.

When Audrey Skelton looks back on the séance, she becomes convinced that 'Little Dorrit was a real person - dead, probably, or she wouldn't have taken her over at the seance. It might be something to do with reincarnation ...' (GF:113). Within the fictive world, Little Dorrit has to be real for reincarnation to take place. Since Audrey is, however, also only a character, this situation becomes much more complex. Little Dorrit is just as real or unreal as Audrey; yet Audrey is supposed to be real and Little Dorrit is supposed to be fictive. Mention is furthermore made of an 'other world' for those who are dead (GF:98). Yet the reader is never informed what kind of world or reality this is.

The borders between fiction and reality are made indistinguishable not only by fiction, *Little Dorrit*, determining reality, *The Great Fire of London* (the past determining the present), but also by reality determining what happens to and in fiction. Certain events have certain consequences (GF:3). The notice attached to one of the walls at the site of the original Marshalsea Prison makes it clear that the prison was destroyed by fire on 14 December 1885 (GF:25). Consequently, it is fitting that the set for *Little Dorrit* should be destroyed by fire (a fire foreshadowed by, or even depicted on, the television set at the beginning, a fire that might be real or on a set (GF:9)). The final paragraph of the novel now acquires added meaning:

This is not a true story, but certain things follow from other things.

(GF:169)

Fiction and reality have become interwoven. In Laetitia's words:

These days, it seemed to her that the people she saw might be creatures from some dream of the past

(GF:134)

From *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* we can see that the relation between reality (history) and fiction, and the relation between past and present (in a certain sense, these two relations are mutually inclusive and parallel, as mentioned earlier) are as central to this

text as they are to Ackroyd's other novels and to postmodern writing in general. One cannot help but agree with Carl Vogel when he says that Ackroyd 'has such expertise in the life and time of England's premier decadent that it takes a period scholar to decide what is historical, what semi-fictional, and what pure fantasy' (1983:1500).

The two above-mentioned relations are both external and internal. They also feature in the novel in Wilde's 'autobiography'. It seems fitting that Wilde should be the subject of such a fake autobiography, since the historical Wilde was much taken with the idea of making nature follow art, and consciously set out creating fictions; his whole life was, in fact, a work of fiction. This aspect of his character comes through clearly in Ackroyd's novel.

In *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* Wilde makes statements such as the following when looking back on his past life:

I tried to turn my life into a work of art,
(LT:3)

I have played so many parts. I have lied to so many people
- but I have committed the unforgivable sin, I have lied to
myself,
(LT:3)

I so fancifully blurred the distinction between what was
true and what was false that my companions were reduced to
silence,
(LT:24)

... I fashioned a world in which such things became
possible. ... I made a definite point of having no
connection with my own century,
(LT:48)

It was of no concern to me if the facts were accurate or
inaccurate: I had discerned a truth which was larger than
that of biography and history Nature always follows
Art,
(LT:121)

I believed that I was a great enough dramatist to turn life
itself into a drama,
(LT:123)

I have lived by legend, and I would die by it,
(LT:141)

and:

... Man is, or should be, what he appears to be.

(LT:170)

The Wilde of this novel interprets everything around him (reality?) through art and literature, as can be seen in the following remarks in the diary (these have been selected at random; there are numerous others):

... I know that it is only in the company of others that one becomes truly oneself, but now I am positively Whitmanesque. I contain multitudes. Although I possess the wonder of Miranda, I have also the faintness of Prospero who foreswears his art as soon as life has quite matched his expectations,

(LT:8)

At most I might play a role in one of Plautus's more horrifying comedies,

(LT:9)

... I worshipped Flaubert with my head, Stendhal with my heart, and Balzac by my manner of dress,

(LT:62)

Sometimes, towards the end, it seemed to me that Constance and I were like characters out of *Modern Love*. I do not suppose that anyone had experienced marital discord until Meredith invented it ...,

(LT:78-79)

and:

I discovered, in my own *tragedy*, that artifice crumbles
(LT:179, emphasis added)

Art and literature seem to lend substantiality, factuality and, ultimately, reality to life. The past gives meaning to the present.

Like almost all of Ackroyd's other characters, Wilde is obsessed with his past, both with its fictions and realities. He wants to return to the past and enter another's heart (LT:181). The same is true of Hawksmoor in *Hawksmoor*. Hawksmoor (the fictional character in the novel) often passes real sights or places; yet these places or sites are real in an unusual sense. Firstly, Hawksmoor travels past the statue of Sir Christopher Wren (H:152). This is not so unusual as such, yet it becomes unusual within the context of the novel, since Wren is also a character in the novel who, according to Ackroyd, bears no relation to any real person.

Just after having travelled past this statue, Hawksmoor comes to St Mary Woolnoth Church and stares up 'towards a stone tablet on which [is] inscribed, "Founded In the Saxon Age and Last Rebuilt by Nicholas Dyer, 1714"' (H:153-154). Hawksmoor sees a similar plaque at St Alfege's:

This church was built on the traditional site of the martyrdom of Alfege. It was last rebuilt by ...

(H:188)

and then a flight of birds distracts his attention. Later Hawksmoor is watching television when he sees another plaque with the inscription 'Christ Church, Spitalfields. Erected by Nicholas Dyer, 1713' on it (H:213). The spelling of Spitalfields on this plaque is the modern spelling (SPITAL) and not the eighteenth-century spelling used by Dyer: SPITTLE. One can assume that the plaque was already put on the church in Dyer's time, since in one of the previous examples, Hawksmoor notices that 'the passage of time had partly erased the letters' (H:154). In all three examples Hawksmoor is looking at real plaques on real (existing in our reality) churches and the inscriptions are also probably real, except for one small detail: Nicholas Dyer is fictive. In reality the plaques probably bear the inscription 'Built by/last rebuilt by Nicholas Hawksmoor'. Thus the borders between reality and fiction, past and present, are further confused.

Since the dissolution of the boundaries between fiction and reality in *Chatterton* has already been implicit in the discussion of the difference between forgery and originality in *Chatterton*, it will not be discussed again in this section.

It should now be clear that Ackroyd erases the boundaries between reality and fiction, history and story, original and copies/forgeries and, by implication, past and present in typically postmodern fashion by using already existing historical and fictional texts, and intertextually combining them with his own fictions. Whereas this section of the dissertation focused on history in its various manifestations in the novels, the next section will focus more on time, a phenomenon already implicit in the concept of history.

SECTION C: TIME

CHAPTER 6
THE CONCEPT OF TIME

'Nothing puzzles me more than time and space; and yet nothing troubles me less, as I never think about them.'
(Charles Lamb in *Dictionary of Quotations*, 1985:307)

'Time goes, you say? Ah no!
Alas, Time stays, we go.'
(Henry Austin Dobson in *Dictionary of Quotations*, 1985:183, emphasis in the original)

6.1 What is Time?

The twentieth century has a 'time-obsession' which is conditioned by the increasing pace of living, by the widespread sense of the transience of all forms of modern life, and by the rapidity of social and economic change (Patrides, 1976:71). In the same way that history has become uncertain, the concept of time, which plays such an important role in contemporary life, has become suspect. People's view of time changes continually as new theories are advanced. In this chapter I shall first look at a few theories on time, focusing specifically on Einstein's theory of relativity. Thereafter Ackroyd's characters' experience of time will be examined to see if and how their experience reflects existing theories on time. An examination of the tenses used in Ackroyd's novels will follow, since the tenses support the thematic structure. This chapter will be concluded with an analysis of the images Ackroyd employs to embody the view(s) of time put forth in the novels.

Various philosophers, authors, and scientists have identified different kinds of time. A few of these will be examined briefly in this subsection.

Hans Meyerhoff (1955:4-5), for example, defines two kinds of time: *le temps humain* as found in literature (the consciousness of time as it is part of the vague background of experience or as it enters into the texture of human lives; so defined, it is personal, private and subjective) and time in physics (defined in terms of the objective structure of the time relation in nature). Dresden, *et al.* (s.a.:93) distinguish four kinds of time: clock time, vital time, mortal time, and human(e) time.

Nietzsche has advanced the cyclical theory of time, that is, the belief that there is nothing new under the sun. This theory is based on the principle of 'the eternal return of the same', a theory particularly relevant to Ackroyd's fiction. It posits the changing cycle of births and deaths as the one unchanging, permanent, and timeless law of history. It provides another way of envisaging a timeless dimension outside and beyond the historical march of time (Meyerhoff, 1955:79).

It may also provide a sense of continuity and unity between past, present and future (both historical and personal), which would otherwise be lost (Meyerhoff, 1955:105). Meyerhoff (1955:80) sees myth as a timeless (since it is ever-present), constant reminder of this eternal return of the same. In Ackroyd's fiction such a myth is created, a myth which is, in a way, a myth of the eternal return of the same or of mobilities of presence. (This myth will be discussed in Chapter 8.)

As was the case with the term *postmodernism*, it is also almost impossible to define *time*. Meyerhoff (1955:14-15), for example, ascribes an element of duration and an element of change to time, rather than giving a definition. Yet we are all aware of time.

Our knowledge of time is circumscribed, because we can never know time fully owing to the relative shortness of our lives. Kermode quotes the physician Alkmeon as saying, with Aristotle's approval, that 'men die because they cannot join the beginning and the end' (1967:4). Although the past leaves traces, the future does not. Therefore we can be certain of nothing connected with time. Strange and terrifying things may happen of which we are not even aware, because of our incomplete knowledge. This aspect of our lives is explored in many of Ackroyd's novels. We cannot really attempt to judge the credibility of these things authoritatively, because of the inherent subjectivity of our experience of time. In Aristotle's words, 'Time cannot exist without a soul (to count it)' (quoted by Kermode, 1967:i), an idea Einstein later included in the special theory of relativity.

We can only speculate whether time is actually the way it is viewed by the Tralfamadorians in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5*. As time is one of the four dimensions, it could imply that all moments exist simultaneously, and not chronologically, as all of space (for example, a mountain range) exists simultaneously. Then the past and the present would both exist at the same time. Our experience of time at present would consequently merely be like letting one's eyes move from one end of a mountain range to the other. In *Gerald's Party*, Robert Coover expresses the same idea by employing a different metaphor:

And if it's a stage ... if it's there in its entirety, the

script all written, so to speak, a kind of cyclorama which seems to move only because we, like those hands here [of a watch], move through it, then it should be possible, if we could just overcome our perceptual limitations, to visit any part of it, including the *no-longer* and the *not-yet!*

(1986:132, emphasis in the original)

It is possible that the traditional view of the four dimensions will have to make way for another/others. Douwe Fokkema (1987:239) quotes Harry Levin as saying that the postmodern conception of past and present as constituting one simultaneous experience may explain its opposition to all preceding currents espousing a linear view of time (such as is found in modernism, for example).

Because of various radical changes in society, science, technology, politics, religion, economy, and art, the concept of time in human experience has changed. There has been an increasing preoccupation with time, caused by the fragmentation of time and the self (Meyerhoff, 1955:89).

Meyerhoff (1955:89-95) identifies three major changes in the concept of time in human experience. First, he distinguishes a sharp decline or virtual collapse of the dimension of 'eternity', which had been an integral part of the ancient and medieval picture of man and the world. Whether eternity was envisaged in terms of a religious, philosophical or social framework, it had to be questioned. Secondly, there was the adoption of the quantitative metric of time in modern science: the familiar units of clocks and chronometers, a kind of 'Newtonian time' as Spanos (1987:241) calls it. One can, however, ask what held the separate units/seconds together. In the third place, with the fading of the belief in an eternal order, time came to be experienced more and more within the context, order, and direction of human history. Spanos (1987:241) calls this a kind of 'spatialized, Kantian time'. Time was no longer the precious medium for the discovery of timeless truths. Yet the reconstruction of time in terms of history was doomed to fail from the start. History itself became 'a patchwork of pieces without a "meaningful," or significant, pattern either in terms of a theoretical model - an intellectual construction joining the fragments of time - or in terms of human values and aspirations' (Meyerhoff,

1955:95). The 'real' time is now the 'radically occasional, the radically temporal, realm of decentered man' (Spanos, 1987:241, emphasis in the original); time is relative and fragmented.

It has ceased to be a friendly medium in which human beings could still feel at home despite the collapse of the dimension of eternity (Meyerhoff, 1955:104). This fragmentation of time is reflected in literature. Italo Calvino says of long novels:

Long novels written today are perhaps a contradiction: the dimension of time has been shattered, we cannot love or think except in fragments of time each of which goes off along its own trajectory and immediately disappears. We can rediscover the continuity of time only in the novels of that period when time no longer seemed stopped and did not yet seem to have exploded, a period that lasted no more than a hundred years.

(1982:13)

Most of the above-mentioned changes in our concept of time are the result of what is probably the single most influential theory this century: Einstein's theory of relativity.

In a pre-Newtonian universe, a universe believed to be stable and unchanging, time and space were generally viewed as absolute. Newton's laws changed this view. If a person is hitting a ping-pong ball on a table on a moving train and the ball were to hit the same spot on the table twice, to a person on the ground it would appear that the ball hits two different spots a certain distance apart, depending on the speed of the train (Hawking, 1988:17-18). The implication is that there is no absolute space. One's perception is now seen to depend upon one's point of view. Thus a point in space can only be described relative to the observer's position in space (and time). Yet Newton still believed in absolute time.

In 1905 Einstein's special theory of relativity showed that the idea of absolute time would have to be abandoned. Einstein postulated that as the speed of an object approaches that of light, its length shrinks, its mass increases, and the passage of time slows down (Korff, 1978:142). The more energy an object has, the more time slows down. Furthermore, Einstein showed that time is not completely separate from

or independent of space, but is combined with it to form an object called space-time (Hawking, 1988:23). Therefore each individual, depending on his/her position in space (which will, in turn, determine his/her energy), has his/her own personal measure of time.

According to the laws of science, time can go forward or backward. This is called imaginary time (Hawking, 1988:143-144). However, there are at least three arrows of time that do distinguish the past from the future: the thermodynamic arrow (the direction of time in which disorder or entropy increases), the psychological arrow (the direction in which we feel time passes or the direction in which we remember the past but not the future), and the cosmological arrow (the direction of time in which the universe is expanding rather than contracting) (Hawking, 1988:145). These arrows point in the same direction, the direction in which disorder increases, and the direction in which we measure the passage of time. Theoretically, this direction can be reversed.

6.2 The Characters' Experience of Time

After having looked at theoretical ideas on time, one can now turn to the fictional characters' experience of time. As literature usually reflects views found in the world from which it emerges, one can expect to find elements of the previously mentioned theories in Ackroyd's fiction.

Once, after waking up, Rowan in *The Great Fire of London* feels as if he had fallen through a hole in time (GF:73). It has been speculated that if one were to survive entering a black hole, it would be possible to come out in another region of the universe or in another universe, in other words, to travel in space and time (Hawking, 1988:89). Rowan's feeling is probably similar to the feeling experienced by characters from *Little Dorrit* when they appear in *The Great Fire of London*. This could mean that, at that moment, Rowan appears in another text, possibly even this text.

Tim in *The Great Fire of London* sees time as a method of imposing

control - a kind of stability. Yet his watch is stolen (GF:98) and he then loses control:

For the first time in years he cried

(GF:98)

His certainty is taken away and all that is left is uncertainty. The narrator remarks that 'any deviation from the set pattern might run the risk of undermining it completely' (GF:125). This is, in a way, what happens to time in this novel (and in the wider context of the contemporary world). When Spenser thinks that he and Laetitia will wipe out the past (GF:141), it seems likely that the result of this will be to increase their feeling of loss and confusion, since wiping out the past is a deviation from the set pattern. The past is, indeed, wiped out in the end: the destruction of the old buildings and the set recreating *Little Dorrit*.

In *Hawksmoor* the borders between the past and the present are vague. This can be seen from the parallels between characters and events in the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. Time dissolves so that *Hawksmoor* is examining crimes of the past (Lewis, 1986:9).

The problematic nature of time in the contemporary world is best expressed in the priest's morning service on television:

So you may say how complicated and perilous modern life is, and how dark the future seems, and how distant our ancestors. But I will tell you this, my good friends, that each age has found itself to be dark and perilous, and each age has feared for its future, and each age has lost its forefathers. And so they have turned to God, thinking to themselves, if there are shadows there must also be light! [If there is light, there must also be shadows, Ackroyd seems to be saying.] And beyond the years, my friends, there is an eternity which we may see with the help of God's grace. And what is so wonderful is that this eternity intersects with time, just as this church -

(H:213)

However, because this solution to the problem of time, that is God, comes at the end of the novel, the solution is also negated and invalidated in that this is a solution to linear time, whereas *Hawksmoor* seems to suggest that time is not linear. One cannot help thinking that Ackroyd must have written this with his tongue very firmly in his cheek. Therefore, the ultimate feeling with which one is left is one of uncertainty and confusion.

The idea that time need not necessarily be linear or chronological¹ is not such a novelty as it may, at a glance, appear to be. In Biblical times, God made the sun reverse its course or stand still. The travelling man whom the twentieth-century Ned encounters at Egham reminds Ned of this possibility when he says:

For your sake He might let the sun turn back in its course,
and let time itself travel backwards. ... If He cared to,
that is.

(H:77)

Yet it appears as though some extra, supernatural power is necessary to enable one to change the linear nature of time. Whereas the travelling man believes that God can do this, a satanist such as Dyer believes that a Darker Force makes this possible.

Although Dyer lives in the eighteenth century, he experiences something of the contemporary crisis as far as time is concerned:

... how do we conclude what Time is our own?,
(H:55)

but, for Dyer, the problem is possibly much more real than for contemporary humanity. He seems to have proof that he exists at/in more than one time; we can only speculate. Again, this does not necessarily mean that we are less confused than Dyer. He, at least, is certain of his uncertainty; we are not even certain of our uncertainty.

Hawksmoor realises that there is some kind of pattern in the murders and those involved in them. It seems to him 'that both murderer and victim were inclined towards their own destruction; it was his job only to hurry the murderer along the course which he had already laid for himself - to become, as it were, his assistant' (H:116). Later he says:

... the dirt needs the cleaner and the cleaner needs the
dirt.

(H:125)

He realises that he may not have to find the murderer; the murderer may find him (H:127). Unlike his assistant, Walter, Hawksmoor knows

¹ Chronological is derived from *chronos*, meaning time. Thus, saying that time need not be chronological seems to be a contradiction in terms.

that because of the relativity of time, he may not be able to find the point where the murders began. Thus he says:

Yes, the beginning is the tricky part. But perhaps there is no beginning, perhaps we can't look that far back,
(H:126)

The pattern ... was growing larger; and, as it expanded, it seemed about to include him and his unsuccessful investigations,
(H:189)

and:

The event of the boy's death was not simple because it was not unique and if he traced it backwards, running the time slowly in the opposite direction (but did it have a direction?), it became no clearer. The chain of causality might extend as far back as the boy's birth, in a particular place and on a particular date, or even further into the darkness beyond that. And what of the murderer, for what sequence of events had drawn him to wander by this old church? All these events were random and yet connected, part of a pattern so large that it remained inexplicable. He might, then, have to invent a past from the evidence available - and, in that case, would not the future also be an invention? It was as if he were staring at one of those puzzle drawings in which foreground and background create entirely different images: you could not look at such things for long.
(H:157)

One must be able to see further in order to understand.

The confusion associated with time can be seen at various stages in the language of the novel. Hawksmoor, for example, says (whilst being surrounded with pages from Dyer's notebook):

At such times the future became so clear that it was as if he were remembering it, remembering it in place of the past which he could no longer describe. But there was in any case no future and no past, only the unspeakable misery of his own self.
(H:199)

Once he has read up on Dyer in the encyclopaedia, he stares at the page 'trying to imagine the past which these words represented, but he saw nothing in front of him except darkness' (H:214, emphasis added). Characters from the eighteenth and twentieth century also say that the murders occurred at different times (H:165 and 172). Time is again shown to be relative.

When Hawksmoor philosophises about the nature of the world, he wonders

what would happen 'If one element was suddenly to vanish, would the others disappear also - imploding upon each other helplessly as if time itself were unravelling amid a confusion of sights, calls, shrieks and phrases of music which grew smaller and smaller?' (H:126) This is exactly what happens when stars collapse to form black holes (Anon., 1978:44), and is a reversal of what happened during the Big Bang. It is possible that this is, in fact, what is depicted in the novel. Time certainly seems to be unravelling. The one element which might have vanished, could be confidence in the traditional view of the world. Because of the lack of certainty, everything unravels and this results in confusion.

In the following chapter Dyer informs Mrs Best that time cannot be restored, 'unless it be in the Imagination' (H:128). This implies that literature (the result of various imaginative activities) can restore time. This restoration of time is possible, since writers can describe the past or an imaginary past in such a way that it can actually appear more real and believable than the actual past.

Dyer's reaction to part of Sir Christopher Wren's discourse to the Greshamite Assembly also has certain implications for time:

... how can you speak of Time past who does not understand the meaning of Time?

(H:141)

When one reads books on the phenomenon of time, it soon becomes clear that nobody really knows what time is and even whether it exists. Those who have attempted to describe time, have distinguished various forms of time, but they have not yet managed to give a simple definition of time. Thus, according to Dyer, none of us has the right to speak of the past, and historians have no right to the claim that they have recorded the past, because they cannot know what time past is, if they do not even know what time is.

Finally, in this open text, one is left with questions rather than with answers: can the past reach out and trap the present? Is there such a thing as 'time' at all? Or merely an eternal dance in which selves appear and reappear in different guises (Maddox, 1985:30)? What is the relation between time and place?

In *Chatterton* the title of Andrew Flint's new novel, *Mean Time* (C:19), carries less conventional connotations. Apart from the normal, ordinary meaning, it carries the suggestion that time is mean, possibly because it is totally incomprehensible. Charles's choice of the story he tells Edward supports the idea that he, like other characters, is obsessed with time, precisely because it is incomprehensible:

In this world children could live for hundreds of years without growing old, as long as they promised to forget the land of their birth.

(C:21)

Charles here apparently has a longing to escape from time, its continuous flow, and its effects on humans. This is another way in which time is mean.

When it first appears as if *Chatterton* is beginning to make his presence felt in Charles's life, something strange happens to the way in which the novel is written. One could almost describe it as 'double-time', because of the repetition of:

When he woke up, on the following morning, he was alone.

(C:45)

It appears as though Charles experiences, or lives in, two periods of time at the same time. This experience overthrows our conventional perception of time. Time is no longer strictly linear and fleeting; it can now be re-called and re-lived.

Time is shown to be largely relative. Words linked to time such as 'modern', for example, are often used in the novel (see C:88). When somebody like *Chatterton* uses such a word, it seems laughable. Something written in the eighteenth century cannot be modern from the point of view of the latter part of the twentieth century.

Harriet's remark that 'everyone needed a story' (C:123) can be linked to time. A story (in narratology) can be described as the logical, *chronological* sequence of events as they can be reconstructed from a narrative text. The term **story** implies a linear time-sequence. One can therefore interpret Harriet's remark as meaning that everyone needs a story for a sense of stability in time. Frank Kermode refers to this aspect of contemporary life:

Men, like poets, rush 'into the midst, *in medias res*, when

they are born', they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span of time they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems.

(1967:7)

One can say that the usual pre-postmodern coherence of plot has as its result 'that narrative time appears as trustworthy. Events, no matter how painful and unintelligible they may be at first, are part of some larger coherence' (Kort, 1985:13). One inevitably approaches Ackroyd's texts with this expectation (even though one knows one should not in postmodern times), an expectation which is then thwarted in typically postmodern fashion.

The resulting absence of a sense of stability is not only confined to the human race's experience of time. Andrew Flint, as a novelist, is acutely aware of this:

Don't you realise ... that nothing survives now? Everything is instantly forgotten. There is no history any more. There is no meaning. There are no standards to encourage permanence - only novelty, and the whole endless cycle of new objects. ... Something has happened during the course of this generation - don't ask me why. But poetry, fiction, the whole lot - none of it really matters any more. ... There is no posterity. At least I can't see it.

(C:150)

Now that the sense of the story of our past (our belief in an absolute, objective history) no longer exists, there is no continuity in time and in events. Nothing is connected any more, and if things are connected (as in this novel), they are connected in such a way as to increase our sense of confusion about the past.

Because of Ackroyd's preoccupation with time, it becomes impossible for the reader to view even ordinary references to time as innocent. What happens to all words according to the deconstructionists (that is, their becoming tinged with previous instances of their being used), here happens to time. Because of the previous connotations given to time, even Chatterton's innocent statement becomes ominous:

It is time. Time to deliver the verses on the late lamented Alderman Lee

(C:202)

The same happens when Harriet says:

So the hand of time should turn the page?

(C:226)

The motto to Part Two of *First Light*, Oscar Wilde's 'Creation began when you were born. It will end on the day you die' (FL:61), focuses on two important aspects: transience and relativity. First of all, one person's life is limited. According to commonly accepted norms, a person is born and dies. Secondly, the relativity of all statements can be seen in the idea that creation begins and ends with birth and death. For the individual this is certainly true. Yet for those who continue to live after a specific individual has died, it is definitely not true: for them creation is still there. It is clear that everything depends on the individual's subjective point of view. The relativity of everything can later again be seen in Joey's remark :

Tragedy in the past, mystery in the future, but comedy in the present.

(FL:174)

One's interpretation of all events rests on the perspective from which one views them, so that the past is just as mysterious as the future.

The third motto in the novel comes from Hardy's *Two in a Tower*:

They more and more felt the contrast between their own tiny magnitudes and those among which they had recklessly plunged, till they were oppressed with the presence of a vastness they could not cope with even as an idea, and which hung about them like a nightmare.

(FL:115)

This quotation could refer to contemporary humanity's experience of time and the void. The 'vastness' can refer to the awareness the human race has of the immensity and incomprehensibility of time and, especially, eternity. We cannot escape its presence; and yet we cannot comprehend it. It is in this ineluctability that the terror lies. The motto to Part Five again comes from Hardy's *Two in a Tower*:

That's partly what I meant by saying that magnitude, which up to a certain point has grandeur, has beyond it ghastliness.

(FL:211)

Time has grandeur, if seen as a limited period only. As a whole, however, it is incomprehensible and holds terror. Without certainty, there is ghastliness.

The relativity of time lends a special feeling of uncertainty to the novel and, consequently, to the reader. This relativity can be seen in the conversation of the two Mints. When Boy Mint remarks that

something took place 'ages and ages back', his father replies: 'Not that far back' (FL:303). Everything depends on the individual's perspective. Because of our limited time on earth, our knowledge is limited, as can be seen in the vision Joey has when Old Barren One comes to an end (or a new beginning):

The smell of those who have just come to us, screaming at the light, and of those about to leave us. This is the sum of our knowledge.

(FL:322-323)

While at the tumulus Evangeline asks Mark what time it is (FL:10). He replies that it is 'thousands of years At least four thousand' (FL:10). This is another indication of the relativity of time. During this conversation, Evangeline glances at her watch and Mark at the tumulus. The implication seems to be that the watch and the tumulus are merely different instruments for the measurement of time. The watch measures short periods of time and the tumulus much longer periods of time. In the sixth motto of *First Light* Old Barren One is linked to magic or what is incomprehensible in the world, since '... all magic is necessarily false and barren ...' (FL:291). Here he seems to be like time itself in his incomprehensibility. Towards the end of *First Light* Martha's remark to Floey when they are at the Hanovers' house to find the coffin is highly ironic:

I do envy people with time on their hands.

(FL:315)

The only thing Joey and Floey have on their hands is Old Barren One, another suggestion that he is in fact time itself.

The tumulus appears to be the past itself. Mark observes this when he describes it as growing 'brighter as he watched it, with all the centuries glowing within it. A place of power' (FL:14). The past is literally contained within the tumulus, as can be seen from Mark's remark that 'when we enter it we will find evidence of a period which has remained undisturbed for almost five thousand years' (FL:38). Time (a period) is present in the tumulus (in a place and not in time). The act of exploring the mound is simultaneously an act of reversing time itself:

... the burial mound would be systematically stripped bare; as they worked downwards the stages of its construction would be reversed until the first secrets of its makers were

finally revealed.

(FL:17)

As there are layers in the tumulus (see FL:39), so there are layers in time. In the other novels the movement was mainly of characters from the past into the present. Here the movement in time is from the present into the past.

As is the case with time, the tumulus and stone circle are apparently international phenomena. When Mark relates his story or vision, which is set in Peru, the stones arranged in a circle with the tumulus at their centre are the most prominent feature (FL:47-48). It is important to note that the tumulus is surrounded by a stone circle, since a circle is an image of time. Mark later says 'The circle is the important thing' (FL:239), which strengthens the idea that the tumulus is time itself. Throughout the novel the tumulus is associated with circularity. These words are, for example, used in connection with the tumulus: 'semi-circular', 'rings and spirals', 'circles', 'half-circle' 'two half-circles' (FL:137), and 'the absolute centre of the stone circle. The dead centre' (FL:250).

The work associated with the tumulus supports this idea of the tumulus being circular as time itself often appears to be. (Circularity implies an absence of boundaries.) When Mark begins work on the tumulus, he observes:

... this was a beginning for him, but an ending for those other workmen who had preceded him thousands of years before.

(FL:52)

There is, firstly, a sense of continuity between the past and the present (which is later expressed in terms of a linear time structure by Mark's thoughts about the builders: 'But had its builders seen so far forward into the prospect of future time?' (FL:193)). Yet there is also, secondly, a certain relativity: the beginning is at the same time an ending, and the ending is simultaneously a beginning. Even after they have been working on the tumulus for months, Mark says:

I think ... that we can begin now.

(FL:192)

Thus time is always relative, depending on one's perspective.²

The passage grave which they believed to be the culmination of their excavations, later turns out to be the beginning, with the hanged man as 'the door-keeper to the world beneath the ground' (FL:245). This grave is another kind of threshold, one to a world of timelessness (it has been proven that time flows slower at the bottom of a building than at the top, an idea discussed further later in this section). Yet later, Mark again says that it is time they begin (see FL:282). One of the travellers who camps close to the tumulus remarks on the relativity of time to Evangeline:

You think you're going forward. But you're not. You're going backward. ... In the beginning there is an end. In the end there is a beginning.

(FL:220)

When the archaeologists finally enter the centre of the stone circle, it is written that they 'peered into the abyss above their heads' (FL:283). Since the tumulus represents time, this almost seems to be the abyss of time. It is therefore fitting that they instinctively form a circle (FL:283), a symbol of time. The words found in both the first and the last chapters about circular motion as the most perfect³, because it has no beginning and no end, are particularly relevant to the novel, which also represents circular motion. The implication is that the novel, like time, has no beginning and no end, and no boundaries, thus making it a truly postmodern text.

When Mark decides to visit the tomb at night (FL:244), he apparently feels that the darkness of night is like the past itself: it might enable him to come closer to the past. Although the tomb is like time, it also excludes time in that it is like a place outside of time. Mark has no sensation of time, and feels as if he is in another dimension while within the tomb (FL:244). Later he has the realisation that it is only in the passageway to the tomb that freedom can be found

² This is, of course, not a new idea. Ackroyd's fiction merely reflects Einstein's special theory of relativity.

³ Aristotle felt, for mystical reasons, that the earth was the centre of the universe, and that circular motion was the most perfect (Hawking, 1988:2).

(FL:258). Freedom here probably refers to freedom from the tyranny of time.

When Damian watches the stars from the observatory, he seems to be in another world or, perhaps, another time. Returning from watching the stars is like 'returning to his own fallen state' (FL:130). Like the tumulus, the observatory is a place of time-travel. It represents a journey into the past, since the light of the stars comes from light-years ago. It is therefore particularly apt that circular structures and figures should abound in the observatory, as they do in the tumulus. We read of the 'dome', 'a circular green metal platform', 'a circular metal stairway', and 'images *spinning* downwards' (FL:131, emphasis added).

Swithin's Column, where Kathleen finally commits suicide, also resembles the tumulus and observatory. It is situated on a circular isolated hill (FL:206), has a flight of stone steps (FL:207), has circular walls (FL:207), and contains a small circular room (FL:207). The important elements for time-travel or communion with the past (see Chapter 8) are present. Kathleen feels as though she has been there before (FL:207). Her feeling of *déjà vu* implies that the present exists simultaneously with another time, possibly with the future, since this is the only other time she is there in the book. T.S. Eliot refers to this phenomenon of simultaneity in *Four Quartets*:

Time past and time future
 What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.
(1966:14)

The tower is like a dwelling place of time itself, since while they (Kathleen and Mark) are there, she feels time encircling them (FL:208 and 209). Her suicide at Swithin's Column proves that time is not only linear. Mark sees the moment of her suicide as follows:

... so it was that the earth shook at the moment of
 Kathleen's death, sending out waves into the past and the
 future.

(FL:254)

Events have repercussions in both the past and the future. All time is influenced by events, since it is like a web where movement in one part is also felt in other parts. According to Einstein's general theory of relativity, 'Space and time are now dynamic quantities: when

a body moves, or a force acts, it affects the curvature of space and time - and in turn the structure of space-time affects the way in which bodies move and forces act. Space and time not only affect but also are affected by everything that happens in the universe' (Hawking, 1988:33). There appears to be a definite pattern in life, even though this pattern may appear chaotic. Kathleen's coffin appears to be put into the ground to restore the balance disrupted by taking Old Barren One's coffin out of the ground. Everything is indeed connected.

Kathleen, in a very depressed mood, remarks on the transience of time and human life in time:

Everything has to end All we're doing is waiting for the end. ... I can look up at the stars But they may be dead too by now. And what's the use of looking so far in any case? Where can I go?

(FL:127)

Transience is a subjective form of time, since only the individual can be transient: the rest of the world continues even after the individual comes to an end. Kathleen here sees time as distance or distance as time in her view of the stars. Mark also has a realisation of human transience after Kathleen's death:

... he realised also that his own life was simply borrowed from time.

(FL:259)

He thinks of her funeral as an abrupt and arbitrary ending rather than as some accommodation with eternity (FL:287). The tumulus, as a timeless space, seems to have a calming effect on him:

Everything had been incomplete, irreconcilable, inconsolable. But now, sitting in the darkness under the earth, this incompleteness, this frailty, was no longer a thing to be feared or even regretted. It was to be accepted, and he no longer felt afraid.

(FL:287)

This is, in part, a solution to the postmodern crisis: acceptance of incompleteness as a new form of order and completeness, not to be compared to previous forms.

In the chapter 'Field Walking', Mark mentions two types of time: hypothetical time and real time (FL:42-43). It almost appears as if hypothetical time refers to the past as observed in and around the tumulus: reconstructed time. Real time, likewise, appears to refer

to the present. In their search for artefacts, everything, including the past and the present, appears to move towards becoming one:

Hypothetical time. Real time. Curving towards each other.
 ... understanding how the dead do surround the living.
 Everything is touching everything else.

(FL:43)

When the past reaches or touches the present, the two times exist simultaneously, by implication. Yet many people in *First Light* still believe time to be linear. Damian Fall is one of these:

You can never go back Signals sent into the past would be killed by their own echoes. You can only do one thing. You can send signals into the future.

(FL:99)

According to Damian, time cannot be reversed on its course.

In spite of this traditional view of time, Damian once says to Mark that time flows faster at the top of a building than it does in the basement (FL:100). This has been shown to be true according to Einstein's theory of relativity (Hawking, 1988:32). The greater an object's velocity, the slower time will appear to flow for that object. Gravity, a form of acceleration involving velocity, could therefore cause time to slow down. The implication is that the lower one goes (even if it means going underground) the slower time flows, because of the stronger pull of gravity. In theory this would mean that one could reach a stage where time will stand still. This knowledge might be the secret the ancient peoples possessed, which made them bury their dead so far underground. By doing this, they might have reached a world of timelessness and, by implication, eternity.

Damian Fall, like other characters in Ackroyd's novels before him, is obsessed with time. When Mark shows him the photographs of the inscriptions preserved in the stones of the tumulus, his first question is 'Do you have a date?' (FL:161). He has a need to place things in time, in order to orientate himself and gain security. His reaction is strongly reminiscent of Hawksmoor's when faced with the murders. The same happens when Sarah in *Chatterton* says to Harriet:

I need more time.

(C:34)

The reader is inevitably made aware of the similarity to Hawksmoor's remarks.

Thus Ackroyd's novels do, indeed, reflect the important changes in our view of time. Whereas some characters still choose to believe in the traditional view of time, others recognise the need to come to terms with relativity and subjectivity, and to accept these as an intrinsic part of the world they live in.

6.3 Inversion (of Time)

Ackroyd often reverses the direction in which time normally 'flows'. This is a device for further relativising time and, in the process, systematically destroying our traditional view of time so that he can replace it with a different perspective on the nature of time.

From one of Spenser's remarks in *The Great Fire of London* about his aim and *modus operandi* in making the film version of *Little Dorrit*, it becomes clear that he is aware of the fact that the present can influence - whether negatively or positively - the past:

All the same ... *Little Dorrit* is a new departure for me.
 I don't want to ruin the book, or anything like that.
 (GF:79, emphasis added)

The conversation between texts is not a one-way relation, taking place chronologically in time. Instead it appears as if the boundaries of time become irrelevant: all that matters are the texts themselves and their relation to one another. This is made explicit in the conversation between Job Penstone and Spenser Spender. They both want to use and interpret *Little Dorrit* as if it were a contemporary text. Spenser says:

But the whole direction of the film, actually, will be to
 make a contemporary point.
 (GF:80)

Later Job remarks that '*Little Dorrit* is a subversive text. It is significantly anti-capitalist, anti-industrial, anti-authoritarian' (GF:80). Here contemporary terminology is used to categorise *Little Dorrit*. Dickens is even described as 'anti-feminist' (GF:83). This passage could almost be described as anachronistic, which can again be linked to the dissolution of chronological time.

Time and causality are sometimes inverted in *The Great Fire of London*.

Thus Spenser says to his wife about Dickens:

... he was here when it all started. He knew what was going to happen.

(GF:16)

Normally one knows what has happened, and not what will happen (see Rowan's vision of the future as trying to read a roadmap at night (GF:125)). Because Spenser is not sure of the present and the past (he should have known what has happened), he now believes that Dickens (who still lived at a time of relative stability when compared to the present) should have been able to tell what was going to happen. For someone like Spenser, life and time are all confusion.

In *Hawksmoor* there are certain disparities in the time-sequence of events that befall the twentieth-century Ned. It is impossible to say whether these are intended or merely slips on the author's part. Thus, for example, Ned looks at a photograph of a child (it might be a photo of Dyer) in front of a stone wall (H:70) and comes to the conclusion that this is a photo of himself as a small boy. Nine pages later - this section comes chronologically and logically after the description on page 70 - Ned finds a book with a waxed, white cover. When he shakes it, a photograph of a child falls to the ground (H:79). He first has the photo, and then finds it. The criteria of chronology and logic become completely irrelevant and meaningless. As far as the latter aspect is concerned, Ackroyd's novel seems to resemble most of Kafka's work. Here there is a difference between Ackroyd's postmodern, 'historical' fiction and historiography. According to Hayden White the coherence criterion in historiography is that of logic, rather than that of poetic or rhetoric:

Individual propositions must be logically consistent with one another and the principles conceived to govern the process of syntagmatic combination must be consistently applied. Thus, for example, although an earlier event can be represented as a cause of a later event, the reverse is not the case. By contrast, however, a later event can serve to illuminate the 'significance' of an earlier event, but not the reverse

(1984:17)

Ackroyd does exactly the opposite.

As Dyer (who lives in the past from Hawksmoor's perspective) approaches his transformation/movement in time, he catches a glimpse of the future

(that is, Hawksmoor's time, which is the present as far as Hawksmoor is concerned):

For I thought I heard a Door closing, and the sound of Steps crossing the Threshold; and there seemed to come the Voice of a Woman calling, Is it you again? Like an echo came the Reply, Is he not yet back? There was then such a Roaring in my Ears that I woke as if from a Trance

(H:131)

This is, of course, what happens in the twentieth century when Walter enquires about Hawksmoor from Mrs West. One should remember that Dyer and Hawksmoor probably occupy the same house, so that there is a definite link (in the form of stone of which the house is built - see Chapter 8 for the significance of stone) between the past and the present. Dyer furthermore remembers the future at this stage, as we normally recall the past. When Sir Christopher shows Dyer the latest invention, the 'Moving Picture', the latter replies:

I have seen this before but I do not know in what Place.

(H:142)

Thus it is clear that time merges (or times merge and exist simultaneously) before a transition from one time to another.

In *First Light* there again appears to be an inversion in the direction of the flow of time. This can already be seen in the examination of the tumulus, which represents a movement back in time in order to uncover the past. The Mints represent such an inversion, the only difference between them being that Boy Mint seems older than Farmer Mint (FL:20). The younger appears to be older, and the older appears to be younger. The incongruity between appearance and reality reflects the inversion of time.

Those who built the tumulus apparently knew and understood more than the present examiners of the tumulus (FL:158). A similar idea is found in John Fowles's *A Maggot* (1986:149-151). The greater knowledge of those from the past when compared to the knowledge of those in the present represents an inversion, since it should be the other way round.

Other inversions concern both time and place. Thus, for example, Floey who is famous for her malapropisms says of Pilgrin Valley:

Very much a case of the time that land forgot.

(FL:72)

Julian Hill's proposed lectures about the 'future of archaeology' also fall into this category (FL:81). The subject of his lectures contains a contradiction in terms: the future of the past. His future archaeology is moreover a dream of an objective recreation of the past in the future:

The stone of these neolithic monuments would seem as real as the stone of the museum in which they had been created ... all the evidence of prehistory resurrected in glowing form.

(FL:81)

Towards the end of the novel time seems to reverse its course for Damian, as the universe ceases to expand, and starts rushing towards him (FL:296). This can be seen as a return to the origin, in that the universe returns to its original state: the Big Bang is followed by the Big Crunch, which means the end of everything:

But why had the ending not yet come? If the universe were contracting, returning to its unimaginable moment of birth, then surely it would have happened instantaneously? Once the pressures of time and space were reversed, and the universe doubled back upon itself, surely this unravelling would occur outside time - would occur, in a sense, after time had ceased to exist? ... Perhaps the collapse of the universe had taken place, had reached past the moment of origin to be transformed into some other shape.

(FL:296)

According to the general theory of relativity, there must have been a state of infinite density in the past, the Big Bang, which would have been an effective beginning of time. From that point onwards, the universe has been expanding. If, however, the attraction of gravity were to become stronger than those forces causing the expansion, the universe would begin to contract, until it recollapsed into another state of infinite density in the future, the Big Crunch, which would be an end of time (Hawking, 1988:173), and which is known as a singularity. This process represents a circular movement: within time there is no escape from time, whether it moves clockwise or anti-clockwise. The only escape from time is to be found outside of time at the point of a singularity where all theory breaks down. Such singularities are found at the moment of the Big Bang and Big Crunch, and once one passes the event horizon of a black hole. Within time, however, there is only relativity.

6.4 Tenses

Ackroyd frequently uses tense - as a linguistic manifestation of time - in association with specific characters or character types, so that the tenses acquire specific thematic functions within his oeuvre.

In *The Great Fire of London*, a structurally self-conscious novel (Strawson, 1982:105), Ackroyd employs three different tenses: the present, the past, and the future. They are used in such a way as to connect certain sections of the novel.

The present tense is used to relate 'the story so far' (GF:3). The use of the present tense in this instance is ironic. 'the story so far' is the story of the first part of Dickens's novel, *Little Dorrit*, written approximately two centuries ago. Dickens is at least one step back in the past as seen from the present of the novel. But the story of *Little Dorrit* as recounted by Dickens is also set thirty years in the past from the point where Dickens was writing. Thus 'the story so far' is twice removed - in the direction of the past - from the present. Yet it is written in the present tense. This seems to imply that the past not only influences the present, but is actually essentially ever-present.

The future tense is used less frequently. In most cases it is used by an almost ironic, tongue-in-cheek, omniscient narrator, for example, in the following instances:

Unlike Audrey, he [Spenser Spender] would not remember his dream

(GF:18)

and:

As he watched Tim walking towards the underground, Rowan was sure that he would never see him again. But in this, as in so many things, he was to prove mistaken.

(GF:133)

These references give one an uncanny feeling. The same feeling is created by the use of the present tense in *Little Arthur's* prophecies. Whenever the future tense is used, it implies that the present will have consequences for the future or will exert an influence on the future. Seen from the point-of-view of the future, the present is a

kind of past which then influences the future (a kind of present). One's view of time depends entirely upon one's perspective which, in turn, depends on one's position in time. T.S. Eliot focuses on this relativity in *Four Quartets*:

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.

(1966:58)

Both the present tense and the future tense imply a different kind of knowledge, something not immediately within reach of the ordinary person. The past tense, on the other hand, is most often used for events belonging to the realm of reality (albeit a fictional reality), although this argument does not hold true for Audrey Skelton.

The tense or tenses in which *Hawksmoor* is written already indicate the relativity and confusion of time found throughout the novel. On the first page of the novel, the basic history of Nicholas Dyer, set in 1711, is recounted by making use of the past tense. The last sentence of this passage is, however, written in the present tense:

This is the vision we still see and yet now, for a moment,
there is only his heavy breathing as he bends over his
papers and the noise of the fire which suddenly flares up
and throws deep shadows across the room.

(H:1)

One can see here that time is relative: the past can live in the present. This change of tense/time serves as an indication that Dyer will exert his presence in the present. The confusion or relativity of time is further indicated by the fact that the part of the novel which is set in the eighteenth century is written primarily in the present tense; and the part which is set in the twentieth century is written in the past tense.

There is a similar change in the tense in which *Chatterton* is written just after Charles has collapsed and is in hospital, either owing to his brain tumour or to more mysterious causes. With the disappearance of the past tense, the continuity of time disappears, and only the present has relevance or meaning:

There is no past and no future, only this moment

(C:166)

This description is of a kind of eternal present. Time now consists of moments in the present, because the present is the only time we can lay any claim to knowing. The inevitable result is an even greater sense of fragmentation. Through a simple change in tense, the past can become the present, as can be seen when Meredith's wife touches Wallis's face across the painting of 'Chatterton' (C:175). Chatterton's conversation with Dan (in the eighteenth century) is also expressed in the present tense which concretely illustrates another form of the existence of the past in the present (tense) (C:214-217). The same again happens at the very end of the novel (C:233-234).

The present tense is thus the tense used when times come together and, in the process, exist simultaneously. The result is the creation of an eternal present.

6.5 Images of Time

Most of the images or metaphors for history and the past in Ackroyd's novels reflect the relativity of time.

The old woman with the two prams in *The Great Fire of London* can be seen as a combination of Mother Earth and Father Time:

She simply added material to her piles, the stuff at the bottom of the prams could not have been seen, or touched, for many years. It represented the remnants of the Chelsea streets, perhaps the only history they had.

(GF:14)

The contents of her two prams are a combination of various periods of time, all existing simultaneously.

While travelling by bus, Rowan Phillips employs the image of a time capsule to describe the various aspects of time. Firstly:

... he was a traveller, omniscient, untouched by what he sees or hears, watching climactic struggles pass by as if they were small boats upon water.

(GF:21)

Here Rowan represents the timeless; he is one outside of time. In the second place, transience:

The people outside this bus were transient things
 (GF:21)

Thirdly, eternity:

Only the buildings seemed solid, lasting.
 (GF:21)

Buildings (as representative of history) can lend stability to transient human lives.

As in *The Great Fire of London*, the images describing time in *Hawksmoor* usually link time to place or to objects. Dyer once describes time as 'a vast Denful of Horrour, round about which a Serpent winds and in the winding bites itself by the Tail. Now, now is the Hour, every Hour, every part of an Hour, every Moment, which in its end does begin again and never ceases to end: a beginning continuing, always ending' (H:62). Time is also described as follows:

A Wheel that turns, a Wheel that turned ever,
 A Wheel that turns, and will leave turning never.
 (H:66)

The twentieth-century beggar Ned says 'It keeps on turning ... It keeps on turning' (H:85) and 'there are wheels ... wheels within wheels' (H:74). From these two images it should be clear that time is relative. Because of the images, indicative of the circular nature of time, time is seen as continuous. Everything forms part of this circle. Spanos (1987:200) sees the circle as the ideal image of Beauty and Perfection, but also feels that it is the rift and not the synthesized circle that is the contemporary reality (1987:275). Ackroyd, however, explores contemporary reality as a circle which is not only perfect, but also relative, because the end of one thing is at the same time the beginning of another, and the beginning of one thing is the end of yet another. Because of this, nothing can ever really be fixed in time, even though it can be part of a pattern. All is relative.

Dyer provides the reader with a picture of time as he sees it:

I am also inclosing Scetches of a very spacious and curious Peece of Painting to be placed at the West End of the Church - being the Figure of Time, with Wings display'd. Under the Feet of Time lyeth the Pourtrait of a Sceleton about 8 Foot in Length, under which is Glory in the form of an Equilateral Triangle within a spacious Circle.

(H:105)

Dyer here combines most of the important motifs in the novel: the churches, time, bodies or corpses (the skeleton), and a circle. Bodies are found at the churches, with which time, symbolised by a circle, is associated. Glory is apparently in contrast to Death (the skeleton). Others die at the churches, so that certain people, such as Dyer, can continue to live.

The image which occurs to Hawksmoor in relation to the pattern connecting the murders has implications for this pattern. The image is one of a train disappearing into the distance, until eventually only the smoke and the smell of its engine remain (*H:126*). The train can be compared to the murders or strangulations that Dyer committed in the past. As the train/the past moves further away, only the smoke and the smell of the engine/the corpses remain. Thus, significantly, there are no imprints or other signs on the necks of the twentieth-century bodies. Like the train, they have vanished with the passage of time.

Various images in *Chatterton* are used to describe various aspects of time and even various kinds of time. Many of these images are fairly conventional. Charles, for example, becomes aware of a movement which cannot be resisted, and sees himself as part of that flow (*C:15*). Here time is somewhat like a river with a linear flow which cannot be halted and cannot change direction (*C:15*). There is nothing extraordinary about this view of time. Flint's remark that the years are incorrigible and never cease (*C:75*) supports this view of time. Our belief in keeping time moving forwards is, however, later questioned in *Chatterton*:

... was it not all just a motiveless revolution of the wheel? We turn the wheel simply in order to turn it, to hear it turning and to break the silence which would otherwise destroy us.

(*C:178*)

The implication of this image of time is that, although it could represent a movement forwards, it is at the same time a turning in circles (from which there can be no escape). Yet one needs to believe in this sense of movement in time to remain sane, even though one is aware of the underlying senselessness of one's actions. The human race has a need to believe in the past, even if it means lying to itself. As Philip realises:

Why should historical research not also remain incomplete,
existing as a possibility and not fading into knowledge?
(C:213)

Everything in contemporary times is inverted.

In hospital, Charles thinks of the poem he has written, 'trying to describe how time is nothing other than the pattern of deaths which succeed one another, forming an outline of light upon a dry, enormous plain' (C:169). A pattern of deaths implies fragmentation. If, however, these deaths are connected (as with Chatterton, Meredith, and Charles), one would expect a lessening of, and in, the confusion resulting from the fragmentation. Paradoxically, the opposite is true. Everything becomes more confusing, bewildering, and scary, which is in keeping with the law of physics that entropy or disorder will always increase.

Time is often compared to a journey, with its implication of transience and continual movement (see C:169, where Charles realises that he merely met Vivien and Edward on a journey somewhere and that he now has to continue alone). The Hanovers' journey to the Mints out of Lyme Regis in *First Light* proceeds along a route described as resembling 'some sacred avenue marked by sacrifices' (FL:163). This is a perfect description of Dyer's journey in *Hawksmoor*.

The palimpsest-like painting of the middle-aged Chatterton can be seen as another image of time:

... the painting contained the residue of several different images, painted at various times

(C:205)

Time has numerous levels of events transposed over/onto one another, especially as time is presented to us in most of Ackroyd's novels. In *Chatterton*, Meredith and Charles constitute a kind of palimpsest, one which can be linked to the image of the blind Prophet led by the boy and the relation between the past and the present (C:87). The blind prophet seems to suggest old age and the boy, youth. The fact that the blind man is a prophet furthermore suggests that he might know more than others not only about the past (because of his age), but that he can also see into the future. Thus somebody from the past is led into the future (the boy is still young and will continue living for some

time to come) by someone who lives in the present. Rowley, Chatterton, Meredith, and Charles can each, in turn, be seen as the boy and the blind prophet: Chatterton is the boy in relation to Rowley; but in relation to Meredith (or Charles), he is the blind prophet, etcetera.⁴

Already in the first paragraph of *First Light* we are introduced to time. The image used here to describe time is that of a clock 'ticking in the pale hands of God' (FL:3). A clock is perhaps the most obvious image of time as we know it. It is humanity's attempt to take possession of time and make it understandable by capturing it in an artificial mechanism; see, for example, the countless antique clocks chiming the hour at the same time in the shop beneath the Clare's flat (FL:35). Yet a clock is not time itself. If one takes into account the nature of time in this and other novels, one would rather expect the clocks to have the form of the melted clocks in the painting by Salvador Dali.

The wheel-image with its implications of circular time from which one cannot escape has already been mentioned in connection with most of the other novels and recurs in *First Light*:

The wheels of the mechanism began to turn.

(FL:3)

At the same time that this image implies some form of stability (a fixed track which time has to follow), it also implies uncertainty (there can be no beginning or end in a circle; everything is always relative); see a remark such as the following:

Why is it ... that we think of a circular motion as the most perfect? Is it because it has no beginning and no end?

(FL:4)

This image is then immediately linked to stone:

Like circles in stone. You know there was an ancient historian who wrote about the stone circles around us here? ... He describes how the god was supposed to return to the island of Britain every nineteen years, the period in which the stars completed their cycle.

(FL:4)

The first part of the quotation appears to suggest that time is found

⁴ Blindness also traditionally suggests insight, as in the Oedipus-myth.

in stone. The second part focuses on the concept of eternal return, a concept found in most of the other novels as well, especially in *Hawksmoor*, and which will be discussed further in Chapter 8. Everything is connected.

A second image used to describe time is that of a river or a stream (FL:75). As in the other novels this suggests a linear time-structure (it could also suggest a linear structure moving in the opposite way, that is, upstream (see FL:322)). Just after this image is mentioned, Joey smells dust all around him (FL:75). Dust (a form of stone) is another way of indicating age or the passage of time.

The motto to Part Four of *First Light* comes from William Blake's 'Europe' and contains yet another image of time:

Then was the serpent temple form'd, image of infinite
Shut up in finite revolutions

(FL:179)

In the light of Ackroyd's oeuvre one can link the serpent to Dyer and his satanism. The 'finite revolutions' suggest circles. The quotation then seems to mean that time (eternity) is enclosed in circles (implying limited movement). One can endlessly/eternally continue moving in a circle without getting anywhere.

Ackroyd thus uses ideas found in contemporary physics and philosophy in his novels in two distinct ways. Firstly, some of the characters discuss their views on time. Secondly, the way in which Ackroyd structures his plots can be seen as a formal embodiment of contemporary theories of time. This second form of exploring time will be examined in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 7

THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

'In space-time everything which for each of us constitutes the past, the present, and the future is given en bloc Each observer, as his time passes, discovers, so to speak, new slices of space-time which appear to him as successive aspects of the material world, though in reality the ensemble of events constituting space-time exist prior to his knowledge of them.'

(Louis De Broglie quoted by Zukav, 1979:238
and Capra, 1975:195)

The relativity of time emerges clearly in Ackroyd's novels through the use of numerous instances where the past is shown to be present in the present. The past, which is supposed to be past, is revealed to be part of our present existence, with the result that two periods of time coexist and the past seems to be present. The two 'times' are also revealed to be reversible.

Nobody can ever truly know the past or, as Charles in *Chatterton* says, own it (C:58). This insubstantiality of the past is the result of our transience: we can only own the moment. Yet people are continually preoccupied with the past, for example, one of Andrew Flint's topics for conversation is 'The Past' (C:73). Like Andrew, we all turn to the past for a basis or foundation. Meyerhoff (1955:113) sees this return to the past as an attempt to recover oneself by discovering a sense of continuity with and belongingness to something that seems lost forever. Writers question past forms, genres, and conventions as well as specific works. This questioning has a dual purpose: it occurs both as a method of finding meaning in that past and as a way of finding new forms of writing fiction by changing and adapting past forms to the needs of contemporary society. This last purpose or function can be linked to the Russian Formalist concept of *ostranenie* or 'making strange', whereby it is always necessary to develop new, unknown techniques to counteract automatisations of perception (Du Plooy, 1986:102).¹

Intertextuality is an example of the influence of the past on the present. Intertextuality, in the broader sense of the word, can turn to history and historical figures as its sources. As is the case with metafiction, the use of the past implies a questioning of the borders of fiction and reality. Thus intertextuality and metafiction are two of the techniques used by writers in the present to comment upon both the past and the present.² The present can also exert an influence

¹ Brecht calls this a *Verfremdungseffekt* (Geiger and Haarmann, 1982:54).

² The concepts of originality and plagiarism, the link between characters from different periods of time, the coming together of various periods of time, and the images associated with time in Ackroyd's fiction all implicitly contain the interplay of past and

over the past. Present conditions and the frame-of-reference of readers/writers will influence their view of the past and the way in which they will see past texts. When present texts are intertextually linked to past texts, the present texts will inevitably influence one's view and re-reading of the older texts. Thus the past can be made equally equivocal and unsteady through the process of questioning. The temporal sequence of past and present becomes reversible, as is evident when Chatterton refers to his own writing, that is, where he forges the Rowley-sequence in *Chatterton*, and remarks that '... it seemed even then that the Dead were speaking to me, face to face; and even when I wrote out their words, copying the very spelling of the Originals, it was as if I had become one of those Dead and could speak with them also' (C:85). In his writing, the past reaches out to the present and the present reaches out to the past, with the result that they exist simultaneously (as is suggested by the word 'also'). Writing links Chatterton and his real and imaginary precursors. Thomas Rowley is part of Chatterton, despite his apparent initial independent existence in the imagination/minds of Chatterton's contemporaries. Chatterton says:

I invented *my self* as a monk of the fifteenth century,
Thomas Rowley

(C:87, emphasis added)

Thomas Rowley and Thomas Chatterton furthermore have the same first name.

In one of Chatterton's poems used as a motto to Part Three, Chatterton seems to predict/prefigure his own and Charles's death (see C:189). In this way the past can influence the future. It might also be that the future influences the past; Chatterton might already have had an inkling of what the future would hold in store. As T.S. Eliot says in 'Burnt Norton':

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.

(1966:13)

The two extracts from Chatterton's poems which act as mottos to Part

present. The 'anxiety of influence' (C:100) Charles in *Chatterton* mentions to Harriet concerning her plagiarism is, in essence, an anxiety about the influence of the past on the present.

One (C:5) express the same possibility. Both these extracts could refer to Chatterton (and later characters) who presumably died in his (their) prime. The future might influence Chatterton's present (the past from our perspective), that is, when he is writing the poems. The poems (written in the past when seen from the moment of his death) could also influence the present (the moment of his suicide). Both possibilities are equally plausible. Harriet, paraphrasing T.S. Eliot, refers to this 'sameness' of time:

Time past is time future, after all
(C:27)

Not only does this imply that all time is one, but - in the light of the rest of the novel and of other novels by Ackroyd - also that Chatterton/Meredith and now Charles will again appear after another hundred years have elapsed. When Wallis's painting of Chatterton comes alive in the twentieth century as Edward observes it and virtually becomes part of the situation, two or more periods of time are, indeed, united (C:229). It is impossible to say whether Edward moves back into the past or whether the past comes to him in the present.

Harriet once says to Vivien about Charles's ill health that 'it could be that all this Chatterton nonsense is affecting his health. He might be obsessed with it' (C:121). This remark implies that Charles is obsessed with the past, which he certainly is. From the novel it moreover appears as though the past (Chatterton) is obsessed with Charles.

Thus the present and the past are indissolubly linked. The present would not have existed if it had not been for the past, since the past leads directly to the present. The present can be seen as a logical development of the past with the passage of time. Similarly, the past would not have existed (for us) if it had not been for the present. Only because of the present, which implies our existence, can we talk of the past.

The so-called 'metaphysics of presence' has dominated Western philosophy to such an extent that we see presence as the ultimate, indecomposable, absolute authority: 'its power of valorization ... structures all our thinking' (Culler, 1986:94). Yet presence or the

present is a product or derivative rather than an autonomous given. Jonathan Culler uses the analogy of an arrow in flight to clarify this idea:

If reality is present at any given instant, the arrow produces a paradox. At any given moment it is in a particular spot and never in motion. We want to insist, quite justifiably, that the arrow *is* in motion at every instant from the beginning to the end of its flight, yet its motion is never present at any moment of presence. The presence of motion is conceivable, it turns out, only insofar as every instant is already marked by traces of the past and future. Motion can be present, that is to say, only if the present instant is not something given but a product of the relations between past and future. Something can be happening at a given instant only if the instant is already divided within itself, inhabited by the nonpresent.

(1986:94, emphasis in the original)

Consequently, presence is already marked by difference, deferral, and derivation (Culler, 1986:95). As a result of this insight, postmodern writers now refuse to distinguish between past and present (Fokkema, 1984:42), because the present always already contains the past (and the future).³

In the course of *Hawksmoor* Dyer once makes the following remark:

We live off the Past: it is in our words and our Syllables. It is reverberant in our Streets and Courts, so that we can scarce walk across the Stones without being reminded of those who walked there before us; the Ages before our own are like an Eclipse which blots out the Clocks and Watches of our present Artificers and, in that Darkness, the Generations jostle one another. It is the dark of Time from which we come and to which we will return.

(H:178)

In the first part of the quotation, Dyer (who lives in the eighteenth century) touches on Culler's deconstruction of presence as mentioned in the previous paragraph. Meaning will always be deferred, because the past is always inevitably present in our words and syllables. So, each time we use a word, it refers to the previous time it was used, that is, in the past. In more than one way, the past creeps up on the

³ However, one should point out that such a view still embraces the traditional linear view of time, although the present is no longer regarded as absolute. In the section on the concept of time, it has been indicated that time is relative: one person's idea of the present can be another person's idea of the past.

present, overshadows it and, in this way, generations meet and come together. In this and other novels Ackroyd seems to be echoing Proust's idea that the past is everything and everywhere (in Dresden, et al., s.a.:23).

As a character Dyer exerts his presence in the present through his architecture. This can be seen at various stages in the novel, for example, when Dyer says '... Architecture aims at Eternity and must contain the Eternal Powers' (H:9), 'My Churches will indure' (H:10), '... this Labyrinth will endure 1000 yeares' (H:24), 'O pigmy Man, how transient compared to stone' (H:51), 'My Churches will live on, darker and more solid than the approaching Night' (H:148), and 'All this shall pass, and all these Things shall fall and crumple into the Dust, but my Churches shall survive' (H:208). The sites where these churches are erected are described as labyrinths 'where the Dead can once more give voice' (H:16). The churches and the stone of which they are made represent a medium for the manifestation of the past in the present. As a result, they defy the passage of time.

Dyer uses memory as another way in which to defy time or travel in time: in remembering the past, one can re-live it. When Dyer becomes lost in memory, it is described in the following way:

And now my Thoughts are all suspended and like a Pilgrim
moving into the Glare of the Sun I am lost in the wastes of
Time.

(H:48)

There is a suggestion that something more than just mental travel is involved, as can be seen in the following:

To explain this Matter, and to wind up Time so that I am
returned to my present State

(H:62)

There appears to be a physical changing of states. Significantly, Dyer does not specify whether he 'remembers' the past or the future. In one of the extracts which forms a motto to Part Two of *Chatterton*, there is a movement similar to Dyer's movement from the present to the past:

Strayt was I carry'd back to Tymes of yore
...
And saw all Actyons whych han been before
And saw the Scroll of Fate unravelled.

(C:79)

It seems that it is only through a movement back in time that one can

truly know the past and the pattern hidden behind events.

A line of continuity from the past to the present exists in the link between certain characters. This continuity is, for example, found in Chatterton's eagerness for knowledge of the poets before him (C:215). Dyer in *Hawksmoor* appears to continue his life or return in the twentieth-century part of the novel, as can be seen in the various references to a man in a dark coat: little Thomas Hill sees a figure in a dark coat looking up at him (H:36) and he later follows and is followed by this figure (H:38-39); the beggar Ned often sees and talks to a figure in a dark coat (H:68); Hawksmoor also sees such a figure, but thinks it is a beggar (H:195 and 162). The possibility exists that this figure need not necessarily be Dyer (though it might be in some or in most instances, for example, in the last one). It might also be Hawksmoor, because when Mrs West looks at him, she sees 'a tall man wearing a dark coat, despite the summer heat' (H:119). Another possibility exists: Hawksmoor and Dyer might, in fact, be the same person. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.

Throughout *Chatterton*, the past is shown to manifest itself in the present in numerous ways: people are continually aware of the sounds of old buildings echoing around them (C:48). Places, such as the spot close to Harriet's home where the gallows once stood (C:28) and graveyards (C:34), are still the same as they were in the past (C:48), although names have changed. The basement, with all the old books, of the library where Philip works can be seen as a repository for the past (C:68). Quotations abound (C:3). Books 'contain' the past with the result that a title such as *The Lost Art of Eighteenth Century Flute-Playing* is ironic; if this art is present in the book, it cannot possibly be lost. Names, such as Sibyl Poetry Leno (C:10) and Homer Brillo (C:72), evoke past characters and writers, and Chatterton's name, Thomas, continues to live in the form of Tom through the idiot boy (C:211). In Chatterton's writing, the past comes to life in the (then) present (the eighteenth century), as Chatterton says:

I will bring the Past to light again.

(C:83)

The past can actually be created in the present, in the process becoming the present (or even the future), as can be seen in

Chatterton's words, strongly reminiscent of those used by Hawksmoor (H:214):

I reproduc'd the Past and filled it with such Details that
it was as if I were observing it *in front of me*

(C:85, emphasis added)

Time is inverted and becomes virtually meaningless when one dabbles with it. In writing about Chatterton, Ackroyd brings the past 'to light'; Harriet has a vision of all her dead friends (C:124). Andrew is writing a biography of George Meredith, implying that Meredith still exerts his influence over the present (C:147); the past thus exists in the present through writing. In this way, Charles also wants to grant Chatterton 'eternal' life (C:148). Andrew and Charles are aware of the way the past exerts its influence on the present through the work of past writers (C:77). When all the characters gather at the crematorium for Charles's funeral, Harriet remarks to Andrew Flint that the gerania should be lovely, since they 'spring from the ashes of the dead' (C:176); the flowers literally have their roots in the past and are fed by it. Michèle Roberts even expresses the view that the past is present in the present in the novel through Ackroyd's depiction of family life:

... Ackroyd, for all his post-modernist sophistication about the diversity of linguistic fancy-dress that history provides as disguise, returns us, eventually, to a sweet and perhaps naive vision of the modern nuclear family, maintaining itself in the face of separation and loss.

(1987:27)

From the first the tumulus in *First Light* is referred to as 'an ancient tumulus' (FL:7), which seems to come from the time of the first light (the distant past), like the stars. Kathleen Clare aptly sees the valley surrounding it as a place for the dead where the living are not wanted (FL:228). Even Harriet's invention of a husband who used to be a taxidermist (C:30) can be linked to the influence of the past on the present, since a taxidermist restores the past so that it can continue to exist in the present.

In Ackroyd's fiction the past as reality recurs in the present as fiction. Just as the Great Fire of 1666 recurs at the end of *The Great Fire of London*, so Dyer (based on the historical Hawksmoor) recurs in Hawksmoor in *Hawksmoor*.

Certain characters and events recur intratextually as well. The Great Fire of London is described in *Hawksmoor* and (implicit) reference is made to it in *The Great Fire of London*. The churches built by the historical Hawksmoor are mentioned in *The Great Fire of London* (GF:16), as are a series of murders in the vicinity of an old pub Rowan enters in *The Great Fire of London* (GF:74). These murders might be those from *Hawksmoor*, a curious 'coincidence', since *The Great Fire of London* was written and published three years before *Hawksmoor*. The past may be influencing the future or the future the past.

The recurrences often involve the actual historical persons on whom Ackroyd based his novels. Wilde, for example, mentions Chatterton's 'so-called forgeries' in his *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* (Höfele, 1986:82). It seems that it is not only Ackroyd who creates fictional parallels between certain characters or persons; in many cases, such parallels already exist in reality.

The past is, furthermore, shown to exist in the present through Ackroyd's use of the present tense to describe past events. The greater part of Chapter Six in *Chatterton* is presented in the present tense, as if it takes place in the present. Yet it is set somewhere between 1752 and 1770. Only at the end of this chapter do we realise that it exists in the twentieth century as a document from the past, being read in the present. Thus the past can be written in the present tense. For a time, however, we believe that we are in the eighteenth century.

After Chatterton has discovered the old papers in the church (that is, after he has discovered the past), he suddenly experiences the kind of moment 'when any Man may see his whole Fate stretching in front of him' (C:84). It appears as if a discovery of the past can unfold a vision of the future. In an instant, the whole of time can be unfurled. Chatterton here seems to be one of those who can hear, as Dyer would say, 'the trew Musick of Time'.

At times the past can be reluctant to exist in the present. An example of this is found where Mr Leno tries unsuccessfully to stuff the canvas of the middle-aged Chatterton (the past) into a plastic carrier-bag

with 'Europe 80' on it (C:12).

Charles's habit of literally eating the past (chewing pages from books, for example) is another way in which the past can influence the present: the past here influences Charles's digestive system; in the process the past literally becomes part of the present (see C:15). Edward's cry of 'Mange tout!' (C:16) when Charles shows Vivien the newly purchased painting with a 'Voilà!', is therefore particularly apt. At the end of the novel it appears as though the present (Charles) has indeed totally consumed the past (Chatterton and Meredith), or vice versa. The sign Mr Leno has put up is relevant to the process of eating the past:

Leno's Antiques. La Crème de la Crème. Come and Taste It.
(C:42)

The fourth refrain in *Chatterton*, 'Craving and devouring; but my Eyes are always upon thee, O lovely Delusion' (C:53, 56, 57, and 60) apparently makes reference to the obsession of the present with the past. The first part seems to refer directly to Charles and his desire always to eat things, such as books, from the past. The second part ('but my Eyes are always upon thee') could refer to Chatterton who keeps watch over Charles. 'Delusion' might suggest that Charles is not what he appears to be. Philip also nearly eats the past (C:69). Other examples of this yearning are found in C:48-49, and 59.

When Mark Clare and Evangeline Tupper in *First Light* visit the tumulus, they must apparently move back into the past. This can be seen in Mark's questions:

Shall we follow our ancestors? Shall we go down? ... To the tomb.

(FL:8)

Immediately after this, Evangeline exhibits the same characteristic or tendency as that which is found in Charles Wychwood in *Chatterton*. She touches the mound and this description follows:

'Something very ancient has entered me,' she said.
'Something old and precious is inside me now.' She was about to lick her finger, but at the last moment she decided not to.

(FL:10)

She literally wants to take in the past. Yet the past is not really

the past if it exists in the present. It is probably merely a case of certain objects, for example, the tumulus, existing in various moments of present.

Mark breathes in 'the dampness of the cold earth and, in his exhilaration, he believed that he was reaching towards unimaginable passages of lost time. He was there. With them' (FL:17). He takes in the past and, in the process, moves back into the past where he becomes part of those who came before him.

Later all the workers at the site take in the past:

A wind had started up in the early afternoon and it had blown particles of dust and chalk into the eyes of the excavators, entering their mouths and streaking their hair.
(FL:83)

This process of the past entering those in the present seems to increase in intensity as they go deeper into the tomb and further into the past:

After all these days of work Mark's hands were cut and swollen, and the atmosphere of the tomb seemed to have entered his body so that he moved and talked more slowly. Now he was changed.

(FL:194)

Even Copernicus licks the dust from his forefinger after having turned an astrolabe in the engraving in Damian's cottage (FL:294).

In *Chatterton* the Art Brut painters are central to the theme of the past and the present. Cumberland says of their work:

Where there is no tradition, art simply becomes primitive.
(C:110)

In the light of this statement, one can describe the present as a 'built-up' past, normally called tradition. Without these various layers of the past, the present becomes like the distant past, that is, it becomes primitive. Again, the present and the past appear to exist simultaneously in that the present becomes the past in the present.

When Charles and Edward visit the Tate Gallery, their movement through the galleries resembles a journey into the past, as can be seen from Charles's remarks:

We have to get through the nineteenth century first
(C:130)

and:

We have to go further back.

(C:131)

Each century is characterised by a specific kind of art, which seemingly reflects the view of time in that century, for example, the modern acquisitions which are 'brooding and unquiet' and the eighteenth-century portraits with 'solid, complete figures' (C:131). In the eighteenth century humanity had certainty; we now no longer have this certainty. Ironically, Edward later leads Charles forward through the centuries, which can be seen as another example of the boy leading the blind prophet.

Throughout *First Light*, in sections of the text dealing with the tumulus, light is associated with the present and darkness with the past. When the excavators are left in the dark after all the torches have been extinguished accidentally, they are completely disoriented (FL:284). It here appears as though light is another dimension. Since light is an image used for the present and darkness for the past, the workers seem to merge totally with the past, thus losing their 'present' identities. The work at the tumulus clearly affects those who work there. They call this effect 'Stone Age gloom' (FL:80). It is as if the people are affected by the weight of the past. Stone Age gloom is accompanied by an ominous sensation of being watched (FL:80), probably by people from the past.

At various stages during the novel when the archaeologists are at work on the tumulus, it is as if the past suddenly invades or comes alive in the present. Another possibility is that the people in the present are for a moment transported back into the past. There is apparently an indication of the time, but this indication subverts itself. We are no wiser about the time after we have been given this indication:

Time. In another time. Either before or after. ... They were the eyes of the dead. And in the darkness they were imprisoned by them.

(FL:119)

This time seems to be a time before time. (Also see FL:138 and 196.)

When the archaeological site is invaded by vandals, it appears as if only those elements and objects belonging to the present are damaged,

whereas those from the past are unharmed (FL:84), which makes it seem possible that the vandals somehow belong to the past (Evangeline says: 'We may have been attacked by something awfully vengeful and ancient. Coming from the abyss of time and so forth' (FL:93)). This idea is strengthened by Julian's theory that 'This invasion corresponded to their own spoliation of the neolithic grave' (FL:85). They damage the past; the past damages them. It might even be that someone from the future damages the present.

As the archaeologists later examine the damaged site, Mark has the following reflection:

Here were the remains of a culture which no one professed to understand, relics of that expanse of time which was a 'period' only in the sense that a story must have a beginning as well as a middle and an end. The disruption of the site confirmed Mark's sense that the secrets of the tumulus would remain secrets, reminders of the larger mystery from which they had so unexpectedly been rescued. They might help to refine the story, but it was a story being told in the dark. The chaos which had descended upon them was a reminder of that darkness.

(FL:93)

The past is again associated with darkness and the present with light. The past is incomprehensible; yet there is a need for form and order. We can only know bits of the past; and even these might be false and invented (see Mark's use of 'story'); this awareness is the crisis of contemporary life. The idea that the past is darkness and the present light is also found in this description:

Mark looked back and glimpsed the dark trail which their footsteps had left but, when he turned again a few moments later, the trail had vanished.

(FL:94)

The past vanishes quickly from our sight and knowledge; the present is the only thing we can claim to know partly.

As is the case with the tumulus, the characters in the observatory link the past to darkness and the present to light. After Damian has observed the stars (the past), he returns to the present and remarks:

Yes. It certainly is preferable to be in the light.

(FL:135)

Human beings feel more comfortable in the present moment, which is partially knowable, than in the past, which is dark with

incomprehensibility.

Towards the end of the novel the Mints describe the tumulus as 'an unlucky spot where the dead could take hold of the living' (FL:304). Such spots also exist in Ackroyd's other novels, for example, in *Hawksmoor* and *Chatterton*.

Thus the past and the present are shown to coexist in the present in various ways. Whereas this chapter deals with the various manifestations in a cursory and general way, the next chapter will focus only on one manifestation of the past in the present, the myth of mobilities of presence.

CHAPTER 8
MOBILITIES OF PRESENCE

'Time is in the Stone, not the Stone in Time.'
(Charles Williams quoted by Patrides, 1976:15)

'Fancy compensates, therefore, for the diminishment of syntax and meaning lost with the height and depth of human temporality, with a new appreciation of the mythical and magical that can be gleaned from a surface unity which is logically indefensible, mimetically perverse, and aesthetically delightful.'

(Tobin, 1978:207)

'The unthought (whatever name we give it) is not lodged in man like a shrivelled-up nature or a stratified history; it is, in relation to man, the Other: the Other that is not only a brother but a twin, not of man, nor in man, but beside him and at the same time, in an identical newness, in an unavoidable duality.'

(Foucault, 1986:326)

'The rules [in quantum mechanics] are that any two states whatever ... can co-exist in any complex linear superposition ... and so "be in two places at once" Why, then, do we not experience macroscopic bodies, say cricket balls, or even people, having two completely different locations at once?'

(Penrose, 1989:256, emphasis in the original)

8.1 Introduction

In his fiction, Ackroyd creates a myth which unifies past and present, and which recurs in every consecutive novel. Kort (1985:65) defines the basis of all myth as 'the overcoming of time as experienced and a going back to the point of beginnings', which is exactly what Ackroyd does. It is commonly accepted that there could be no time before the beginning of the world. Returning to the point of beginnings therefore implies a return to timelessness. Ackroyd leads us to this point by making characters from the past and present meet, in the process completely destroying the way we normally experience time and, at the same time, creating a new experience of time: time as simultaneity or the ever-present. 'Mobilities of presence' seems to be the phrase which best describes this myth. The term 'presence' refers to both the condition of being somewhere and the present. On the one hand, 'mobilities of presence' designates the movement of presence (as found in a specific character) within the four dimensions. On the other hand, it describes Ackroyd's reinvention of time: all time is in fact nothing but various moments of the present. These moments can be moved and are consequently interchangeable. We normally believe that we can move through space in constant time; Ackroyd suggests that we can move in time, with space as the constant.

Ackroyd's myth is usually manifested in a similar form in all of his novels. One character manages to travel in/through time, hibernate, rejuvenate himself or be reborn, by crossing a 'threshold'¹ and taking over or combining or merging with another character similar to himself. Isolation seems to be necessary for this phenomenon. In the process one or both of the characters become like children and die, a reverse

¹ M.M. Bakhtin (1978:520) describes the threshold as a *chronotopos* or time-space which is usually combined with the motif of meeting but can also be linked to crisis and a turning point in life. He adds that in literature the *chronotopos* of the threshold is always metaphorical and symbolic. The threshold is a place where events take place which determine entire human lives, events such as resurrections, rebirths, and revelations (1978:520). In this *chronotopos* and in other related *chronotopoi* (the staircase, lobby, and corridor), 'time is essentially an instant, without duration, as it were, and not part of the normal flow of biographical time' (Bakhtin, 1978:520).

movement towards the point of birth and subsequent non-existence. The process takes place in close association with stone in one form or another.² One or both of the characters involved are regarded by outsiders as insane, probably because they possess some kind of special knowledge. When the two characters merge, two times (the novelistic past and present) come together, by implication, since one of the characters exists at a time prior to the existence of the other.

This basic outline of Ackroyd's myth can be interpreted in numerous ways, as described in the remainder of this sub-section.

In the first place, it is again necessary to turn to physics to explain Ackroyd's fiction, specifically to matter and antimatter. Antimatter is matter in which the electrical charges of the subatomic particles are the opposite of those in matter that makes up the world. According to quantum field theory, '*an anti-particle is a particle moving backwards in time*' (Zukav, 1979:236, emphasis in the original). When matter and antimatter are brought together, they destroy each other's mass or annihilate each other, producing immense energy. Stephen Hawking warns:

There could be whole antiworlds and antipeople made out of antiparticles. However, if you meet your antiself, don't shake hands! You would both vanish in a great flash of light.

(1988:68)

In Ackroyd's fiction, characters from the past and present become like matter and antimatter. When they meet, they die, releasing energy into the atmosphere, energy which can again later be reconstituted as matter.

In the second place, it is possible that when a character sleeps such a character lives in the past or the future. When the night-time character goes to sleep, that character might be living/leading his/her present life.

A third equally applicable philosophical explanation is Benedetto

² Umberto Eco (1989:237) also advances the idea that there are special places in the world. Eco, however, does not relate these to stone.

Croce's. Hayden White (1973:424) describes this explanation as 'the attempted unification of life and death in which individual vitality is merged with universal experience of death as the solution to philosophy's eternal problem.' Many of the possible interpretations imply a return to the idea of rejuvenation or renewal found in comedy.

Helmut Lethen (1986:236) and Hans Bertens (1987:141) quote Ihab Hassan as saying that the postmodernists rediscover Nietzsche's insight that the subject is an empty place where many selves come to mingle and depart. This fourth interpretation seems to be applicable to Ackroyd's fiction. Nietzsche's subject can be equated with the idea of presence, which is somehow timeless and eternal; the selves are the actual manifestations of the presence in specific characters at specific times.

A fifth interpretation is that of eternal return. Mihai Spariosu (1987:73) remarks that 'mutability of the past implies endless Becoming as well as eternal return and joyful forgetfulness.' This eternal return posits a circularity in time-structure, 'as it probably must be in any true gospel on resurrection from death' (Fokkema, 1984:54).

In the sixth place, Bakhtin's 'carnivalization', where the carnival is 'the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal', where human beings discover 'the peculiar logic of the "inside out"' (quoted in Hassan, 1986:507), is particularly relevant here, because Ackroyd does indeed turn time and reality 'inside out'.

Finally, one can look at W.A. Kort's 'rhythmic plot' (one of three kinds of plot, the other two being polyphonic and melodic) (1985:16-17), in which events are related by patterns of repetition. Time is associated with circadian or seasonal cycles in nature, which contain the spiritual alternation of torpor and awakening. Such rhythmic patterns tend to favour the past, and the repetitions of rhythmic time carry the strong suggestion of return:

Time is not extended on a line; nor does it look to completion in the future. Distance from the past increases the need to return to the beginning for renewal, so that the cycle can start again.

(Kort, 1985:17)

This idea could be an explanation for Joey's need to know the 'origin' in *First Light*.

In most instances Ackroyd uses elements from history as the basis for an imaginative transformation of the above-mentioned elements.

The process of rejuvenation has metafictional implications (compare Erik Svarny's description of *Chatterton* as an historical metafiction (1990:1006)). An older text (or the past, in general) takes over the present text or comes to the present (Ackroyd's fiction, and the present in general), and the two texts come together or are combined to form a new text which can continue to exist, until such a time as a new process of merging becomes necessary for the survival and continued existence of literature. Thus this process is one of continual, unstoppable renewal. As W.A. Kort says with reference to Mircea Eliade's ideas:

The entire fabric of the society, along with its particular forms, must return to a time prior to its origin, in order to be re-created and to receive power to continue for another period of time.

(1985:66)

In the course of this chapter, the various mobilities of presence will be explored by first examining the idea of human continuity in terms of the parallels existing between and among individuals at different times. I shall then proceed to look at those characters who are eligible for 'time travel', with specific reference to insanity and special knowledge, two qualities which are apparent requirements for movement in and through time. In the next section the link between these characters and stone will be explored. Finally, I shall pay attention to the actual process of rejuvenation in time.

8.2 Parallels and Human Continuity

Intertextuality or the conversation between texts is made concrete in *The Great Fire of London*. This metafictional technique occurs in the description of the séance that Audrey attends (GF:40). Audrey becomes Little Dorrit and is then engaged in conversation with Miss Norman (a

character in *The Great Fire of London*). Later on, Audrey buys a copy of *Little Dorrit* and reads out 'significant passages' to Tim, taking on various voices, paying special attention to Little Dorrit's part (GF:61). This 'reincarnation' of Little Dorrit in Audrey can almost be described as intertextuality taken too far, so that Little Dorrit and Audrey share a presence across the centuries, a presence or essential character which is then shifted from Little Dorrit to Audrey. This presence can be described as a kind of Platonic reality, which has different manifestations in 'real' characters.

Similarly, there are numerous parallels between the past and the present in *Hawksmoor*. They do not only concern the essential presence as manifested in characters, but can also concern objects. Hawksmoor refers to these parallels when he thinks '... [these things] would never cease to occur and they would always be the same ... familiar and ... renewed' (H:158). Dyer sees them as the dead calling out to the living (H:24). Many of these parallels have something to do with different forms of stone, for example, Stonehenge, the churches, dust, and sand.

The first category of important parallels involves Dyer and Hawksmoor. There are literally hundreds of parallels between Nicholas Dyer and Nicholas Hawksmoor. Nicholas Dyer's place of work as an architect is at Scotland Yard (H:6). Nicholas Hawksmoor's - as a detective - is naturally at New Scotland Yard (H:109). Dyer's place of residence is the two upper stories of a house in Bear Lane of Leicester Fields near the Seven Dials. This house belongs to a tailor's widow, a Mrs Best (H:46), who later finds a man (H:182). Hawksmoor rents a flat in an old house near the Seven Dials crossroads and has a Mrs West as neighbour (H:118-119), who also later finds a man (H:190). Dyer and Hawksmoor might even live in the same house. Both Mrs Best and Mrs West are blowzy, eager matrons. Dyer frequents the Red Gates Ale-House (H:90), whereas the Red Gates Pub is near Hawksmoor's house (H:118). Dyer and Hawksmoor both have a habit of biting the inside of their lips (H:138 and 110). Dyer's assistant is called Walter Pyne (H:1); Hawksmoor's assistant is called Walter Payne (H:110). Dyer has a convex mirror in his bedroom (H:92); so does Hawksmoor (H:119). They are both disgusted by the stench of their fathers' bodies, Dyer when

he visits his dying father (H:14) and Hawksmoor when he visits his old father (H:121). Dyer makes corpses; Hawksmoor discovers them.

At one stage Dyer wants a new team of workmen on his churches (H:91); Hawksmoor later wants new men on the team for the investigation of the murder cases (H:126). When Dyer visits Sir Christopher Wren at Crane Court where the Greshamites hold a meeting, a black cat runs screeching through his legs (H:140); when Hawksmoor visits the Incident Room at Spitalfields, a screeching cat runs out of the room, in the process brushing against Hawksmoor's leg (H:160). When Dyer is flogged across the back by a prostitute (H:151), Hawksmoor dreams that the skin is being stripped from his back (H:152), which supports the idea that Dyer is Hawksmoor's sleeping self, or the other way around. Dyer once dresses up as a beggar (H:181); Hawksmoor also thinks of doing so (H:198). Dyer breaks his glasses by stepping onto them at St Mary Woolnoth (H:137); Hawksmoor breaks his by stepping onto them at Spitalfields (H:196).

Although they were both always loners, Dyer and Hawksmoor become increasingly more isolated (H:87 and 167) and suspect that their fellow-workers are turning and plotting against them (H:204 and 211) towards the end of the two stories. Thus both reach the brink of insanity (Melville, 1985:681 & King, 1985:29), making them fitting candidates for 'time-travel'. Later they become ill and suffer from a fever. On the night prior to their illness, both receive visits from a man in their absence and are told about it by Mrs Best and Mrs West (H:203 and 210).

Just before the end of the novel, Dyer meets his own apparition 'with Habit, Wigg and everything as in a looking-glass'. He then calls out 'Do I know you?' (H:206). Hawksmoor also notices his own reflection in a window. This reflection then turns and walks away, on which Hawksmoor calls out 'Do I know you?' (H:211). After this, both Dyer and Hawksmoor feel as if they have become invisible (H:208 and 215). They later both pass running children in blue jackets and a man in a fur cap (H:208 and 216). When Dyer enters the church of Little St Hugh, he says:

From my first Years Thy Horrors have I endured with a

troubled Mind.

(H:209)

When Hawksmoor enters this church, he reads the following inscription on a stone plaque:

I Have Endured All These Troubles For Thy Sake.
(H:216)

There are other parallels between the past and the present not directly concerning Dyer or Hawksmoor. The most important category of these concerns the churches and the murders committed there, since there are many similarities between the victims in the past and the present, all connected with the churches.

The churches are probably used because they are connected with the historical Hawksmoor and because they are 'repositories of the dark pasts in the modern London of flyovers and computer advertisements' (Maddox, 1985:30). Stone, through which Dyer expresses his faith (Maddox, 1985:30), enables certain people to travel through time, and represents simultaneity; both the past and the present are present in stone. In the labyrinthine tunnels beneath the churches one finds an image of time as Ackroyd probably sees it: time as web or labyrinth, rather than as linear line (see Chapter 10). The churches are 'gothic enclosures', as Brian McHale (1987:81) calls such spaces coming from the realms of the fantastic.

The first church mentioned is Christ Church, Spitalfields. In the past Thomas Hill, the son of a mason, died there when he fell from the tower (H:24). In the present another young Thomas Hill is found dead at this church. At the second church, St Anne's in Limehouse, a beggar called Ned dies in the past (H:66). Another tramp, also by the name of Ned, dies there in the present (H:68). Both the eighteenth- and the twentieth-century Neds were printers in Bristol (H:64 and 71). They are both weary, have sore feet, and wish that the earth might swallow them (H:65 and 77). They also have similar conversations with a man in a coat (H:65, and 78 and 83). In the eighteenth century this man is definitely Dyer. In the twentieth century, the man is again possibly Dyer. At the third church, St George's-in-the-East at Wapping, a Dan is killed in the past (H:92). In the twentieth century

a Dan Dee (dandy?) is killed there (H:111). At the fourth church, St Mary Woolnoth in Lombard Street, Yorick Hayes is killed in the eighteenth century (H:150). In the twentieth century a Matthew Hayes is found murdered there (H:162). The fifth eighteenth-century murdered man is Thomas Robinson, who is murdered at St George's Church at Bloomsbury (H:182). A twentieth-century murdered person is later found there. The sixth murder is committed at St Alfege's Church, Greenwich. A twentieth-century victim is found at this church, although one is not informed of the victim's name. At the seventh church, the Church of Little St Hugh in Black Step Lane (the only church which has no existence in reality (King, 1985:30)), nobody is murdered and no victim is found. Instead, Dyer and Hawksmoor (the latter has by now realised that the churches form a pattern for the murders) both go there, meet, and probably become one person at the end. Therefore there are many similarities between the last pages describing Dyer and Hawksmoor.

There are further categories of parallels between the past and the present, and even between different characters in either the past or the present. As it would be impossible to look at all of these, I have selected only a few.

Some minor characters in the twentieth century have parallels in the eighteenth century. Beggars occur throughout the novel and throughout the centuries. In the eighteenth century Dyer observes some beggars dancing around a fire (H:66). These beggars exhibit much the same characteristics as Dyer, who is a medieval, gothic figure in a landscape of rationalism; they (the beggars) look 'like nothing so much as *Ancient Britons*' (H:66, emphasis added). These eighteenth-century beggars - who, by all appearances, return in the twentieth century - might come from a time long before. Dyer then runs towards them with the cry:

Do you remember me? I will never, never leave thee!,
(H:67)

which suggests that Dyer is eternal and will never leave the equally timeless beggars. In the twentieth century Hawksmoor twice sees some vagrants dancing around a fire (H:68 and 197). Significantly they are unaware of the time and place in which they find themselves, because they are too deeply inebriated (H:68 and 82). They appear to be

eternal, timeless elements, and it is therefore ironic that the police refer to them as 'transients' (H:125). One of the tramps cries out:

Do you remember me?

(H:68)

Here Hawksmoor seems to be an extension of Dyer. The Hawksmoor/Dyer-persona and the beggars appear to be merely old acquaintances meeting one another again after the passage of a certain period of time but, in this case, the period is extensive.

When Dyer and Sir Christopher Wren visit Stonehenge, they leave their two horses at the place provided for tethering them (H:61). When the twentieth-century beggar, Ned, comes to Stonehenge, there are two cars parked nearby (H:76). Stone seems to link the past and the present, and the characters apparently experience similar things because of the presence of stone. On Dyer's and Wren's journey to Stonehenge their carriage overturns and nearly falls off the bridge at Hartley Row (H:59). Sir Christopher then relieves himself. The twentieth-century Ned also nearly falls over the rails of the bridge when a car barely misses him. Afterwards he relieves himself by the roadside (H:76-77). On the same journey Dyer has a slight fever and complains of lice (H:58) at Blackwater. The modern Ned contracts a slight fever and is plagued by lice at Church Oakley near Blackwater (H:77). If one looks at the descriptions of these two journeys, the modern Ned's journey is exactly the reverse of Dyer's and Wren's. Ned goes to London; they depart from London. Both parties go to the Blackwater Inn or Pub (H:58 and 77).

When the modern pathologist nearly scratches his head with his blood-covered hands during an autopsy (H:112), it clearly echoes the time when Sir Christopher Wren is in a similar predicament (H:95). During Dyer's visit to Bedlam and Hawksmoor's visit to his father at the home, both see a woman with her back against the wall, crying 'Come John, Come John, Come John' (H:99 and 120). As both women are standing with their backs against walls, these strange events where time seems to be suspended can again be linked to stone in one of its forms.

There are further parallels between other characters, for example, between the two Walters who are both taken aback by Dyer and Hawksmoor

respectively. Both are worried that they will rise and fall as their masters' reputations change (H:167). Dyer and the twentieth-century Thomas Hill both went to St Catherine's School (H:12 and 29). Various characters pin papers to the walls in their places of residence, for example, Dyer who pins plans for the churches to the walls (H:205), Walter who also pins plans to the walls (H:183), and Hawksmoor who pins pages torn from Dyer's wax-covered notebook to the wall (H:199). They do this so that they will not lose these important papers. The characters seem to feel that the walls lend some kind of ever-lasting stability and security to the papers.

As both Dyer and Hawksmoor finally go to the church of Little St Hugh, one hears the latest tune from a music shop (H:208) and the other hears the latest popular song from a record shop (H:215). Thus certain things recur because of the unchangeability of human nature. The parallels give one a feeling of *déjà vu*.

As has been mentioned earlier in this section, objects can also move across the centuries. When a specific object recurs in different centuries, it could either mean that such an object literally travels through time (the object in the eighteenth century is then exactly the same as that in the twentieth century, just as Dyer could be exactly the same as Hawksmoor) or that objects in different centuries are different manifestations of the specific presence of that object (as Dyer and Hawksmoor share the same presence). Two such sets of objects are letters and the wax-covered notebook.

Letters play a crucial role in the novel. Hawksmoor's father asks him:

'Nick, is there still more to come? What happened to that letter? Did they find you out?' Hawksmoor looked at him astonished. 'What letter, Dad? Is this a letter you wrote?' He had a sudden image of the mail being burnt in the basement of this place. 'No, not me. Walter wrote it. You know the one.'

(H:121)

In the eighteenth century Dyer receives a letter from an unknown person which reads thus:

I have sin yr work in Gods name. I am hear this fortnighet, and you shall hear from me as soon as I com into Whitehill.

I ham with all my art your frind and the best frind in the world if I get my service for all is due and my mouth quiet.
(H:103)

He later receives another anonymous letter, presumably coming from the same source, which reads:

This his to lett you know that you shul be spoken about, so betid you flee the Office by Monda next or you may expect the worse as suer as ever you was born.

(H:131)

Dyer then finds a small piece of paper with the words 'O Misery, Them Shall Dye' (H:171) written on it in Walter's handwriting. This message is an anagram for 'Dyer Has Smote Me Ill' with the initials YH for Yorick Hayes (H:172). When Dyer later visits the ill Walter, the latter says:

You saw the lines I wrote before?
(H:183)

It then becomes clear that the two previous anonymous letters were in fact written by Walter. In the light of this revelation, Hawksmoor's father's questions about a letter written by a Walter take on new significance. In the twentieth century, Hawksmoor's father knows about a letter written by the eighteenth-century Walter about eighteenth-century events. Ironically, Hawksmoor would only assume that it was written by his own assistant, Walter, or that his father is becoming senile. Insanity is again associated with special knowledge.

Hawksmoor receives another letter from the past. Whereas the notes Dyer found (written by Walter) read 'O Misery Them Shall Dye' and 'This his to lett you know that you shul be spoken about', Hawksmoor receives a piece of note-paper with 'This is to let you know that I will be spoken about' an 'O misery, if they will die' (H:166). Walter wrote to Dyer in the past that he would be spoken about. Dyer probably (through some trick of time or perhaps by means of satanism which he practises) then writes to Hawksmoor that he (Dyer) will be spoken about. 'O misery, if they will die' might refer to the eighteenth-century people. It will be a pity if they are to die permanently, in the sense that they are forgotten and no longer remembered. In a typically postmodern way, this process can be taken one step further, thus causing the borders between fiction and reality to collapse even more. Dyer and all the other eighteenth-century characters are indeed spoken about and are not left to die through being forgotten and erased

from human memory. Hawksmoor and the other twentieth-century characters are also spoken about and remembered. Significantly 'Don't Forget' is written at the top of the notepaper ('Do Not Forget' is an injunction to remember past obligations, according to Angus Calder (1985:22) in his introduction to Dickens's *Little Dorrit*). The novel is the means by which they are spoken about and remembered. The reader who reads the novel is thus drawn into this process. In writing this dissertation, the process of speaking about and remembering the characters is furthered even more. What Dyer achieved in reaching Hawksmoor through satanism or time-travel, Ackroyd achieves through the art of writing fiction.

Another important mobile presence is Dyer's notebook. At some stage of his life, Dyer discovers that this book, which is covered with beeswax, has disappeared from the box where he kept it carefully locked up (H:169). In the twentieth century the beggar Ned finds a discarded book with a sticky white cover in a building in the park next to the Wapping church. In it he finds a photo of a child which he keeps (H:79). Hawksmoor later finds a package wrapped in coarse brown paper, containing a small book with a shiny white cover which is slightly sticky as if it has recently been coated in wax or resin (H:191). There are not only certain parallels between the past and the present; it also seems as if certain objects can travel through time, in the process connecting specific people, whose lives already run parallel, and who are themselves possibly mobile presences rather than separate characters.

James Melville (1985:681) sees the parallels in *Hawksmoor* as 'often too pat, as though the author were more concerned with symmetry and ingenuity of form, than with integrity of content'. This is not necessarily the case; the parallels are closely linked to one of the central concepts in the novel, that is, that of time (and also place in so far as it can be linked to time).

As was the case in *Hawksmoor*, characters from the past seem to reappear in the novelistic present in *Chatterton*. There are also striking similarities among certain characters. Whereas these similarities in *Hawksmoor* concerned several 'lines' of characters, for example

Dyer/Hawksmoor and the eighteenth-century Ned/the twentieth-century Ned, they only concern one line of characters in *Chatterton*. This line is, however, much more extensive as far as the number of characters is concerned than any of those in *Hawksmoor*. It is possible to draw a line through from Thomas Rowley, to Chatterton, to Meredith, to Charles, and probably even to Edward.

The first set of similarities involves Chatterton and Charles. The first hint that there are similarities between Chatterton and Charles is given on the first page of the novel where Chatterton murmurs the words that have so powerfully swayed him:

The time of my departure is approaching

...

Tomorrow, perhaps, the wanderer will appear -

His eye will search for me round every spot

(C:2, emphasis added)

Then, when we first meet Charles, Mrs Leno asks him:

Are you of a wandering nature?

(C:9, emphasis added)

It appears as if Charles is the wanderer whose existence and search Chatterton had already predicted in the eighteenth century.

When Chatterton moved to London, he was (according to historical accounts) very poor. This is also true of Charles (C:10). Because of this and numerous other similarities, it is rather ominous when Charles first sees the picture of Chatterton, especially since he does not, at this stage, know that it is Chatterton who is portrayed in the painting:

It was then that he saw the picture. He had the faintest and briefest sensation of being looked at, so he turned his head to one side - and caught the eyes of a middle-aged man who was watching him. For a moment he stood gazing back in astonishment.

(C:11)

It is particularly significant that Charles is not the only one who stares; in his case staring is perfectly natural. What is strange, especially in the light of the events that will take place later in the novel, is that Chatterton also stares at Charles.

In the library where Philip works there is always 'a young man with bright red hair', who just sits and stares at a book without ever

reading it (C:71). Because of the other strange 'reappearances' from the past in the novel, one wonders whether Chatterton might not, in fact, visit the library when he is not visiting Meredith and Charles. Charles would probably recognise him if he were to walk into the library.

At Charles's funeral the priest quotes the lines Wordsworth wrote about Chatterton to describe Charles:

Thou marvellous young man,
With your sleepless soul never perishing in pride.
(C:179)

Apart from strengthening the similarities between Chatterton and Charles, 'sleepless soul' furthermore implies the possibility of the 'time-travel' which apparently takes place.

The second set of similarities concerns Chatterton and Meredith. In the second extract preceding the novel, the link between Chatterton and Meredith is established in the painting by Henry Wallis. The 'original' and the model become indistinguishable and both will be 'immortalised' (C:3), that is, they will live eternally in joined form.

Meredith thus forms part of the chain of characters. Chronologically he is situated almost directly between Chatterton and Charles Wychwood. He once tries to commit suicide while sitting 'in the shadow of Chatterton's Monument' in Bristol Churchyard by planning to take mercury-and-arsenic (C:70). The similarities between this episode and Chatterton's suicide are obvious. The scene is ideally set for an 'appearance' by Chatterton: firstly, there is the Church of St Mary Redcliffe (built of stone); secondly, there is Chatterton's monument (probably a stone structure); finally, this episode takes place in a churchyard, the final resting place of the dead, which makes it the ideal setting for a reappearance of a character from the past. Just before Meredith takes the poison, 'he felt a hand laid upon his wrist; looking up he saw a young man standing over him and forbidding him to drink. When he put down the phial, the young man disappeared. Thus was the young George Meredith saved for literature by the intervention of the ghostly Thomas Chatterton' (C:70-71). Chatterton seems to make a habit of appearing to young artists on the verge of despair.

During Wallis and Meredith's discussion about how people will see Wallis's painting, Wallis remarks that there will come a time when nobody will know the difference between Meredith and Chatterton. This does, indeed, appear to be the case to those who now read the novel. The reader does not know whether Chatterton or Meredith (if they are distinguishable) appears to Charles. They have both apparently 'been swallowed up by time' (C:161).

As both Charles and Meredith resemble Chatterton, it is obvious that they will also resemble each other. The third set of similarities - between Charles Wychwood and Meredith - are brought to the fore by the supposedly more objective observations of other characters. Vivien remarks to Harriet that Charles does not say much, whereas Harriet knows that Charles rarely stops talking when he is with her (C:120). Wallis remarks that Meredith is 'so fluent', yet Meredith's wife says that he 'never speaks of serious things' to her (C:141). One character seems to return once every century. Apart from obvious similarities in appearance, experience, and profession, there are other more oblique ones. Wallis, for example, is destined to go off with Meredith's wife, as is Charles's friend Philip with the widowed Vivien (Dodsworth, 1987:976).

Therefore it is fitting that Charles has an image of 'movement which could not be resisted, and of himself as part of that flow' (C:15), an image of the continuity of people found in Ackroyd's work. Just after this image has occurred to Charles, Vivien remarks that Charles would joke on his deathbed. The deathbed-pose Charles then immediately assumes is that of Meredith's portrayal of Chatterton's deathbed-pose and of Charles's own at the end:

Charles feigned death and fell across the sofa, with one arm trailing upon the carpet.

(C:15)

This pose seems to come to him naturally. There is furthermore a suggestion that Charles is the last link who completes a chain of characters starting - as far as we can tell from the novel - with Thomas Rowley in the scene where Charles cleans the middle-aged Chatterton portrait and feels that it is as if the portrait is only now being completed (C:22).

Up to a point about halfway through the novel, the reader believes that if someone from the past visits Charles it is Chatterton with his red hair. Then we are casually informed that Meredith also has red hair (C:137). We are faced with another possibility: it might be Meredith who visits or 'takes over' Charles. Chatterton, Meredith, and Charles might even be different manifestations of the same personality, character or presence. The time separating them supports this possibility: 1752 - 1770, 1856, and (probably) the latter half of the twentieth century; approximately a hundred years elapse before each of the 'manifestations' appears. In the novel it is made clear that Meredith resembles Chatterton, for example, when Wallis remarks:

No, truly, you do resemble him. Did you know that you both have red hair?

(C:155)

Red hair recurs throughout Ackroyd's novels, especially in connection with time-travel, as is evidenced by Audrey (C:8) and the vagrants (C:161) in *The Great Fire of London*. The above quotation enhances the possibility that Chatterton and Meredith might be two manifestations of the same personality. They are furthermore both artists/poets. We can only speculate about whether Charles resembles them, since he is also an artist/a poet. Like Chatterton's, his eyes are remarkable (C:169).

The similarities among these characters are strengthened when Charles finally regains consciousness, presumably in hospital, and finds that his view is very similar to what both Chatterton and Meredith saw before them (from the attic window):

When he woke up he was sitting beside an open window: he could see the rooftops gleaming after a sudden shower of rain and, curling above them, a large dome which was slowly turning into smoke.

(C:165)

He then notices a young man in front of a white building (with its connotations of stone). As Philip remarks towards the end of the novel:

Life seemed so mysterious to me - everything was connected and yet apart.

(C:232)

Although Chatterton, Meredith, and Charles are, to all appearances, separate human beings, they are connected in such a way as to make one

doubt their separate existences.

On Charles's deathbed, this connection is made particularly clear. The description could just as well be one of Chatterton on his deathbed:

Charles reached down with his right hand and touched the bare wooden floor; he could feel the grain of the wood, and with his fingers he traced the contours of the boards. His knuckles brushed against something ... it was a piece of the rough writing paper he had been using. ... these were the torn fragments of the poem he had been writing [would he be writing a poem in his condition?].

(C:168-169)

Charles feels that he has seen this scene before. As he dies his right arm falls away and trails upon the ground; his head is slumped to the right (C:169). It appears as if history is repeating itself (this time, in fiction). Chatterton really did die in this way; it is historically true. It is also historically true that Meredith imitated him in this; Meredith's death is an imitation of reality which took place in historical reality. Charles's death is a fictive imitation of Chatterton's death; Charles never existed in reality; he is a creation of Ackroyd's imagination. Thus the various deaths can be seen as a continuum of fiction and reality (in so far as these terms can be trusted).

Because of the way events are presented in *Chatterton*, Charles's death seems to coincide with the exact moment Wallis finishes the painting of Meredith imitating Chatterton's death. Even the descriptions are similar:

His [Charles's] body arched in a final spasm, quivered, and then became still

(C:170)

and:

... the painting became very bright in one last effort towards life, and seemed to glow before assuming the solemn quietness of its natural state.

(C:170)

These events imply an erasure of the borders between fiction/art and reality (we have an historical painting, implying an imitation, and a fictive death in real life - within the fictive universe).

Other characters are drawn into this primary maze of similarities. Charles and Philip, for example, see a statue of one Isambard Kingdom

Brunel who 'died young' (C:48). In this respect, he is similar to Chatterton and Charles. Numerous other characters, both real and fictional, might 'reappear' in and at different times.

The name of Joynson appears in both the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet the Joynsons seem to be less like real, individual characters, and more like attributes of Chatterton and Charles respectively. Chatterton is linked to Joynson, the publisher, and Charles to Mr Joynson, the homosexual who possesses a picture and the manuscripts that apparently concern Chatterton in one way or another.

Certain scenes in the twentieth century are a repetition of scenes in the eighteenth century. Thus, for example, the scene in Cumberland's office with Stewart Merk and the Seymour forgeries (C:66) strongly echoes what took place between Joynson and Chatterton (C:90). There are echoes of the past in the words spoken by the forger, Stewart Merk. Merk says at one stage:

They are as genuine as all his other recent paintings.
(C:113)

Chatterton once said:

He is as real as I am.
(C:90)

After Charles's death, he also still continues to live in Edward in a way: Edward imitates Charles's voice perfectly and resembles Charles (C:181).

As in *Hawksmoor*, objects in *Chatterton* can travel through time in order to link certain people. Both Meredith and Charles, for example, encounter the painting of a middle-aged Chatterton (C:173). As was the case with the number of lines of human continuity, the number of such objects in *Chatterton* is smaller than in *Hawksmoor*, but the references to the painting are more numerous.

Characters in one of Ackroyd's novels also resemble those in another novel/other novels. Chatterton appears in *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* where Wilde calls him the great tragedy of the eighteenth century, '... a strange, slight boy so prodigal of his genius that he attached the names of others to it' (LT:67). Thus there are

similarities between Chatterton and Wilde. Rupert Christiansen (1987:22) sees Chatterton as prefigured by 'the isolated and antagonised young apprentice Nick Dyer' in *Hawksmoor*.

When Harriet says:

Perhaps Mother is another Chatterton! Perhaps I go back
thousands of years!

(C:99)

it is impossible not to think of Hawksmoor and Dyer who also apparently go back thousands of years. In the nineteenth century, when Wallis is painting Meredith, thick smoke billows across the window (C:157). The setting is so timeless that one has the impression that this is smoke from another century and another novel blowing past, that is, the smoke from the burning of the set in *The Great Fire of London*.

Towards the end of the novel, Chatterton calls out to the posture master 'You will remember me!' (C:203, emphasis in the original). This bears a strong resemblance to the 'Don't Forget' note-paper in *Hawksmoor* and to the phrases such as Dyer's 'Do you remember me? I will never, never leave thee!' (H:67) and a tramp's 'Do you remember me?' (H:68). Joey in *First Light* in a state of drunkenness also shouts out:

I'm with you! ... I'll never, never leave you!

(FL:279)

Later Chatterton says:

... no one can touch me now,

(C:207)

which is exactly what Dyer says when he is virtually on his way to the future.

Certain sentence structures (and ideas) in *Chatterton* are similar to others in *Hawksmoor*. Harriet asks herself:

Why should she concern herself with the dead when she could
see the living all around her?

(C:208)

This rhetorical question appears to be an inversion of Dyer's 'why do the living still haunt me when I am among the Dead?' (H:89). A character such as Dyer who can travel through time, now appears to be a direct inversion of 'normal' people. When Philip says of Charles:

I think ... that his poetry changed after he found it [the

picture],

(C:212)

Vivien replies:

Perhaps it found him.

(C:212)

These lines of dialogue are similar to those used by Hawksmoor about the murderer: he may not have to find the murderer, the murderer may find him (H:127).

Thus, with the exception of *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* and *First Light*, Ackroyd's novels explore human continuity by means of various manifestations of specific presences.

8.3 Special Knowledge and the Insane

As has been pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, the characters who are about to travel through time or undergo a transformation are often seen by others as insane or out of step with what is generally regarded as normal. These abnormal or insane characters come to resemble children in some way and appear innocent in that they apparently forget the laws governing the adult world. Instead, they possess a different kind of knowledge, a kind which most 'normal' adults have forgotten.³ At the same time, they experience all time as eternal, timeless, and essentially the same.

The present tense is used in chapters one, nine, and twenty-five, and in the last two pages of *The Great Fire of London*. (This tense has already been discussed as the signal of an eternal present.) The one character who figures in all of these chapters is Little Arthur, a man whose name closely links him to the past of *Little Dorrit* (Little echoes *Little Dorrit* and *Little Mother*; Arthur echoes the name of

³ The idea that children may be more in touch with 'truth' or 'reality' is one frequently expressed by physicists. Gary Zukav, for example, frequently refers to 'a childlike ability to see the world as it is, and not as it appears according to what we know about it' (1979:141). Roger Penrose expresses the same view and adds that children pose questions such as 'might we become, or have been, someone else Perhaps my own consciousness might suddenly get exchanged with someone else's' (1989:448).

Arthur Clennam; like Maggie, Little Arthur stopped growing as a child: he stopped growing physically and she stopped growing mentally (GF:43)). Little Arthur is not entirely sane and the governor of the prison says of him:

He should be in a mental hospital.
(GF:55)

His insanity seems to suggest that he is in some way out of step with the times or with time and he is not completely in touch with the present-day 'reality' of the novel, but seems to function according to a different set of rules. Little Arthur almost appears to live in a different dimension. His *Fun City* amusement park can be seen as a 'residual indicator' of carnivalisation (McHale, 1987:174). Little Arthur's difference makes him a fitting candidate to know less about reality, but at the same time to know more about another, less conventional kind of existence. He is the one to warn prophetically:

There's going to be conversations about this There's going to be electricity.

(GF:7)

Significantly, he hardly knows what he is saying, which suggests that he is like an instrument, a vehicle or spokesperson for this less conventional, but in all probability more 'truthful' and important kind of knowledge describing the 'other reality'.

The other (quieter) spokesperson, who experiences things only in terms of the present, is Pally:

My name is Pally ... and where I go I am trouble. I close my eyes and I am *some place else*. ... I ain't daft as he said. I see what I see and I hear what I hear. That one means trouble.

(GF:57, emphasis added)

Pally, another insane character, also knows another reality. Like Little Arthur (interestingly enough, they become friends in prison), he can be linked to the past of *Little Dorrit*. His words are vaguely reminiscent of Mrs Flintwinch's. Fittingly, she is made to believe that she is insane, because of hearing and seeing things that others do not or pretend not to see and hear. In her case these things are actually real. Consequently, there is a possibility that 'the other reality' with which Pally and Little Arthur are in touch is just as real. Little Arthur's frequent references to 'they' and 'them' (GF:42) furthermore echo Mrs Flintwinch's 'them clever ones' (1985b:78) in

Little Dorrit. Later Audrey explicitly refers to 'the clever ones' (GF:113 and 142). These descriptions may refer to those who are already part of the other reality.

Thus there are varieties of insanity or madness in *The Great Fire of London* or, as Neil Philip describes it, 'images of mental imprisonment' (1984:518).

Throughout *Hawksmoor* there are suggestions that Dyer has a superior knowledge of time. He once says:

I cannot change that Thing call'd Time, but I can alter its Posture and, as Boys do turn a looking-glass against the Sunne, so I will dazzle you all.

(H:11)

He apparently acquired this knowledge from *Mirabilis* and his Assembly, and from the other satanists, since he says that they taught him the 'trew Musick of Time which ... can be heard from far off by those whose Ears are prickt' (H:21).

Beggars and the insane are portrayed as eternal, since they are not concerned with time (compare Dyer's words '... the Mad who have no thought of Time as I do' (H:208)) or place. Thus they are found in both the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries (H:63) in *Hawksmoor*.

As was the case in *The Great Fire of London*, the insane have superior knowledge in *Hawksmoor*. When Dyer and Sir Christopher Wren visit Bedlam, a 'Demoniack' calls out to Dyer:

Hark ye, you boy! I'll tell you somewhat, one Hawksmoor will this day terribly shake you!

(H:100)

In a similar way the mentally retarded twentieth-century woman who found the body at St Mary Woolnoth transcends time and replies to Hawksmoor's question about the time when she found the body:

Time? There was no time, not like that.

(H:157)

As was the case in *The Great Fire of London*, Hawksmoor initially does not realise that this woman has a superior knowledge. Because she is retarded, Hawksmoor will merely think that she is out of touch with reality and that he can therefore not expect an intelligent/intelligible answer from her. She is, in fact, correct: the murder

was committed outside time as we see it; it was timeless and eternal at the same time. The same would also have happened in the past: retarded people and the insane would have been ignored and their views would not have been recorded as part of history. Again the subjectivity and, consequently, the relativity of history become clear.

When Chatterton in *Chatterton* meets the hydrocephalic boy, the scene is strongly reminiscent of the one Art Brut painting. This idiot boy is standing in a ruined doorway (which comes from another era because of its age) when Chatterton first sees him (C:209), which suggests that the hydrocephalus is in contact with time and possibly 'time-travel'. The insane in *Chatterton*, as in Ackroyd's other novels, are timeless; compare Chatterton's reflections on the hydrocephalus who cannot speak:

Without words you are in a different time. You exist in
some other place, where you are calm.

(C:210)

The insane have managed to escape the palimpsest of time found in words and are therefore free from the tyranny of time.

Vagrants in *Chatterton* are also eternal and timeless. Thus Harriet, for example, says of a vagrant:

So near and yet so far,
(C:119)

which seems to suggest that the vagrant is neither here nor there, neither now nor then, but on another plane altogether. The vagrants seem to drift through the novelistic world(s) (C:126), as Rowan in *The Great Fire of London* also encounters tramps (see GF:22 and 34), one of whom has carrot-red hair like Chatterton and Meredith.

In *Chatterton*, as in *Hawksmoor*, it appears as if some kind of knowledge is handed over from generation to generation from one privileged person to another. Philip reads the following note written by Chatterton:

... like the blind prophet led by the boy, so was antiquity
given over to my care.

(C:59)

Although this statement, first of all, refers to Chatterton's writing of medieval poetry, there is also a suggestion that it might mean more: it might be a reference to 'special' knowledge.

The first motto of *First Light* - from Kipling's 'The Finest Story in the World' - can be linked to the quotation from *Chatterton* and already contains most of the ideas that are central to Ackroyd's oeuvre:

But if he spoke it would mean that all this world would end now - *instanto* - fall down on your head. These things are not allowed. The door is shut.

(FL:1)

The first idea mentioned is that of some secret kind of knowledge. In the light of Ackroyd's oeuvre, one can speculate that this knowledge probably concerns time and an escape from time. Speaking about this knowledge would mean the end of the world and of time (as we know it), which is indeed what happens in Ackroyd's fiction. The shut door implies the simultaneous presence of a threshold. To most people who do not have this forbidden knowledge, the door is shut; only a select few have access to this other-worldly knowledge: these few are those who have crossed the threshold - people such as Dyer, Hawksmoor, and Chatterton. The others cannot cross the threshold as the door is shut.

As in the other novels, the insane in *First Light* have another, greater knowledge than those who are 'normal'. Boy Mint, who appears to be retarded, is a clear example of this. To most people he appears to be stupid and to say silly things. Yet his father says of him:

He's the one who knows.

(FL:20)

At first one cannot help but wonder whether Ackroyd is here poking fun at the constants in his own work, because, of all the 'insane' characters, Boy Mint appears to be the one who is really merely stupid.

The two Mints do, however, appear to come from the past to all who observe them, so that they are anachronisms in the present:

Father and son stared at her; whenever they had nothing to say, they lapsed into what Evangeline was later to call a 'primeval stillness'.

(FL:57)

Even their house seems to come from the past:

... the house had not changed at all. It might have stood like this for centuries.

(FL:58)

They introduce themselves as 'Mint and Mint. As hard as flint' (FL:164), thus themselves making the connection between them and stone (a way of preserving the past or linking the past and the present), as

will be shown in the next sub-section. When trying to scare the bull out of the drainage ditch, they make sounds 'so unlike their normal voices that they might have been *possessed* - these were the calls which Farmer Mint had learnt from his father, who had in turn received them from his father' (FL:173). The Mints have access to special knowledge which is handed over from one generation to the next. It might be either ironic or apt that Evangeline wants to know the secret of 'eternal youth' from them (FL:271), since they have an appearance of great age. Evangeline is informed by Augustine that 'They're not the Sixties They're the Dark Ages' (FL:273). When Owen sees them, he remarks that 'We are back in the seventeenth century' (FL:319), because of the clothes they wear and the implements they carry - proof that time is not objective and independent, but is found in styles of clothing or appearances. The Mints now represent various ages, as the tumulus does. Farmer Mint's reply is particularly apt:

I don't care what century it is.

(FL:319)

He appears to be timeless because of this carelessness, again resembling the tumulus. The Mints might appear so old because they have lived so long (almost eternally), or because they are ageing rapidly (transience).

Everything or everyone who seems 'stupid', according to our standards, might possess this different kind of knowledge, which could even be superior to ordinary knowledge. It appears as if dogs might have access to greater knowledge, because they have always existed without any apparent change. Jude, the Clares' dog, is an example:

And when he saw Jude asleep on the floor, its paws tucked in and its back slightly arched, it occurred to him that this was the way that dogs had always slept; even at that time when the great stone monuments were being erected.

(FL:28)

(Jude later has 'his own time' (FL:200), an apparently ordinary statement, yet with extraordinary connotations. It is furthermore mentioned that 'animals have no sense of time ...' (FL:203) and are in the 'frame of origin' (FL:254), probably a time before time or a state of timelessness.) The same applies to human beings: only the elect⁴,

⁴ This is a term John Fowles also uses in *The Aristos*; here it refers to vagrants and the insane.

that is, in Ackroyd's fiction, those who resemble others who existed centuries before, can have a greater knowledge. The insane and vagrants are examples of the elect. Vagrants are also found in *First Light* (see *FL*:201 and 254). These vagrants almost seem to move from one novel to the next. A description of what makes the elect the elect could be the following:

... everything had its own form, an inner truth or consistency which was not revealed to those who insisted on some distinction between the real and the unreal.

(*FL*:152)

It is often said of the insane that they cannot distinguish between reality and illusion. Precisely because they do not insist on such a distinction, they can see the inner truth of every object. The best example of the elect in *First Light* is probably the woodlander. He lives among ancient trees (*FL*:203) and is guided 'by his own inner knowledge' (*FL*:203). In the story about his past, it is said that he is left alone in the wood 'as he had been as a child' (*FL*:204) when his friend leaves. He seems to be an excellent candidate for time-travel. As the woods renew themselves each spring (*FL*:205), so the woodlander will also be ever-present:

He knows, too, that someone will come to take his place one day, which is why he always keeps by him his drawings and maps of the great wood - to help this stranger on his way. And so the woodlander lives here still.

(*FL*:205)

His drawings and maps are like superior forms of knowledge which will be passed on to an elect member of his choice.

The idea of the elect is reflected in the article that Kathleen has been reading, which advances a theory that there existed an order of wise men, astronomers or magi in the late neolithic period 'who were able to transmit their knowledge from generation to generation by verse and by ballad' (*FL*:26). This knowledge is not identified or described. What is made clear, however, is that only the 'elect' or magi have access to this knowledge. Mark advances a similar theory when he makes it clear that in archaeology the past speaks to the privileged few who know how to listen:

And yet it will be one [an inquest] in which the dead will speak to us, if we know how to listen.

(*FL*:36)

Kathleen may be a member of the elect. Augustine describes her as a

victim of 'Despair. Melancholy. Madness' (FL:235). Kathleen appears to be like the insane in many ways: she is not normal according to common standards and can consequently renew herself, thus existing eternally in a timeless world:

This was Kathleen as she was, as she would always be
This was the meaning of her time upon the earth.

(FL:30-31)

In the light of Ackroyd's other works of fiction, 'always' sounds ominous and seems to signify more than it ordinarily does. Mark is aware that there is something unusual about Kathleen:

... when he was with Kathleen, he felt isolated, vulnerable, attentive to the darker music of the world.

(FL:33)

The 'darker music' could again refer to the privileged knowledge that Kathleen probably possesses.

The fact that animals and others who fall under the category of the insane (such as the woodlander) have access to greater knowledge is again later proved by Kathleen's death:

And he [Mark] remembered how Jude had not wanted to enter it [Swihin's Column]; it had known, too. And the woodlander had known

(FL:255)

Only Mark did not know (FL:255), which suggests that he is not one of the elect despite his experiences in the tomb and his sickness. The cows the Hanovers encounter on their journey to the Mints also belong to the category of the insane. They are described as having left one world and having entered another (FL:163), and as having 'come from another time' (FL:164). Here time and space are used as synonyms. Others who belong to this category are Corona and her group who are fond of forming circles (FL:215).

Damian Fall belongs to the category of the insane although he appears sane at first. When Evangeline and Mark first meet him, he already looks like death (FL:95). In his letter his insanity becomes more pronounced. Later Evangeline remarks that the astronomer in the observatory went quite mad and kept on talking about Old Barren or Old Ones (FL:307). It is significant that he should talk about the past, and should make the connection between Aldebaran and Old Barren One (it may be that Evangeline merely got the story wrong).

Unlike some of the others, Damian chooses to believe that he is truly insane rather than admit that impossible things are possible. He sees his insanity as 'the re-emergence of primeval images. ... I had become a primitive again. One of my own ancestors. This was madness. And I realised how easy it is to slip into it, how close it always is' (FL:177). The past and the present are very close, and Damian has moved from the present to the past.

8.4 Stone

In Ackroyd's fiction, the past and the story of the past or history are almost always connected with buildings and with stone, since stone can endure a relatively long time. As a result, people can experience the past and history in the present through buildings. The idea of linking stone in one form or another to time is not unique to Ackroyd's fiction. It goes back a long way to the time when the hourglass was first invented. Sand, the substance used in an hourglass, is of course a form of stone. Thus stone or sand is here directly used to measure time or the passage of time.

In *The Great Fire of London* Ackroyd traces 'the map of the Dickensian metropolis under its present form' (Hollinghurst, 1985:1049) by using old buildings in London. This setting could qualify as a 'zone', a term used by Brian McHale (1987:46) where there is, for example, a superimposition of two spaces, creating through their tense and paradoxical coexistence a third space, the zone. Here we have the space of London past and London present, creating a new fictional zone.

The perception of buildings as witnesses of, and to, the past is manifested in various descriptions in *The Great Fire of London*, for example, 'the red brick houses like medieval ovens' (GF:11), 'He would go back to Dickens. He would take a trip across the river, and find the old sites by Southwark' (GF:21), 'There's a lot of history around here' (GF:32), 'The pub he eventually entered was an old one' (GF:73), 'the vague dilapidation of large and perhaps once grand houses' (GF:78), and 'Anyway, I like the idea of using some of the old streets. ... Some of them have changed remarkably little' (GF:87). History and

the past are often equated with buildings and sites. Buildings and sites are not only seen as a link between time past and time present; they also constitute a link between fiction past and fiction present. Bleeding Heart Yard (GF:35), Hampton Court (GF:35), and the Marshalsea Prison are such places. These places are/were real and exist/ed outside of fiction in reality. They are, however, also used in fiction. Dickens used them in *Little Dorrit*; and now Ackroyd (and Spenser Spender) use them in *The Great Fire of London* (and in the film version of *Little Dorrit*). Even intertextuality can be linked to place(s).

Buildings furthermore serve as monuments to the essential sameness of past and present, and - by implication - future in *The Great Fire of London*. Spenser Spender sees prisons as a prime example:

Such places will always exist - once the Marshalsea, now here. Only a small time - an historical moment - separated the two; and they represented the same appalling waste of human life. Nothing had really changed in a society which had such places as its monuments.

(GF:57)

In choosing the contemporary prison in London as the setting for the film, Spenser develops a comparison between the London of Dickens's time and modern-day London (Valenta, 1982:90), thus using buildings to give continuity to life.

Human lives and their histories are linked to certain buildings. Tim feels that 'his life was bounded by the dull red bricks and the tiny gardens' (GF:129) and Spenser views the hospital in the same way:

The whole of his life seemed to merge at this one point, this small area of the world - and was it simply fortuitous that he had also been born here?

(GF:138)

Here Spenser's reflections echo *Little Dorrit's* feelings about the Marshalsea Prison, the only place for her. This intertextual reference gains impetus when one considers the sentence preceding the above-mentioned quotation:

It [the hospital] was next to the prison and had, in his imagination, always been part of it.

(GF:138)

This quotation contains the suggestion that buildings determine destinies.

In the apocalyptic fire at the end of the novel, buildings are destroyed:

Some longed for it to burn everything, but for others a new and disquieting sense of impermanence entered their lives.
(GF:165)

Without the stability of the buildings, transience, impermanence, and flux reign supreme. These characteristics are a reflection of the state of our contemporary, postmodern world.

Stone (as the material used in architecture) is seen as enduring and even eternal. Dyer in *Hawksmoor* experiences the following at Stonehenge:

I was struck by an exstatic Reverie in which all the surface of this Place seemed to me Stone, and the Sky itself Stone, and I became Stone as I joined the Earth which flew on like a Stone through the Firmament.
(H:59)

There are 'marks of Eternity which had been placed there [on the stones]' (H:61), and the phrase 'the Banks where wild Time blows' (H:62) occurs to Dyer while he is there. Stonehenge becomes a symbol of time or time itself, since the twentieth-century Ned sees Stonehenge as a circle (H:76). Circular symbols and images, such as a wheel and a serpent biting itself by the tail, are often used to describe time. It even seems possible to postulate that stone is time or, vice versa, time is stone. Through the medium of stone (and darkness (H:5-6), an image of time and especially of the past), as well as by means of his churches, and through satanism, occultism or black magic, Dyer can 'travel' through time. One can normally travel through three of the four dimensions. Dyer can now move through the fourth dimension, time. Thus he says:

I am in the Pitte, but I have gone so deep that I can see the brightness of the Starres at Noon.
(H:25)

There is also a suggestion that Dyer's churches belong to another time altogether when he says:

... and yet all this while my Thoughts were running on my seven Churches and were thus in quite another Time
(H:6)

The nature of this 'other Time' is not specified. Stone seems to link the past and the future in the present. While sitting by a sun-dial as a child, Dyer experienced the following:

Here I used to sit against a peece of Ancient Stone and set my Mind thinking on past Ages and on Futurity.

(H:13)

Memory is another form of time-travel, a method Dyer employs later in life as well. Thus we read:

And the yeares turn so fast, adds Walter, and now he is vanish'd and I am gone back to the time of the Distemper when I went abroad among so many walking Carcasses sweating Poison.

(H:18)

In the novel stone takes on another form, namely that of dust, since dust is only minute particles of stone or, in other words, stone on which time has taken its effect. Therefore dust plays an important role in *Hawksmoor*. Dyer, for example, says to Walter:

Is Dust immortal then ... so that we may see it blowing through the Centuries?

(H:17)

It is like the sands of time blowing through the (p)ages. Thus characters in both the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries are continually brushing dust from their clothes, for example, the twentieth century tour guide (H:26). Although dust carries a hint of immortality, it can paradoxically also refer to mortality. Both Vanbrugghe (an eighteenth-century character) and *Hawksmoor* say 'From dust to dust' (H:160 and 172). Time is again relative in the concepts of mortality/immortality.

In the historical introduction to Thomas Chatterton in *Chatterton*, we are informed that Chatterton 'had been fascinated by the ancient church of St Mary Redcliffe' (C:1). In the novel itself Chatterton informs us that it fascinated him, because the church had then already existed for 300 years. The church is not only ancient, but also appears to be eternal. It came into existence roundabout 1500, was in existence in 1752 - 1770, in 1856, and in the latter half of the twentieth century. Chatterton's whole life was dominated by this church. He was born close to it (C:49), worshipped there (C:55), and it always loomed over his life until he left for London. As mentioned earlier, Chatterton finds the medieval manuscripts locked up in a room above the north porch (C:83). The 'transformation' of the young boy into an old man (C:54) - to be discussed in greater detail in the next sub-section -

also takes place within this church.

When Charles and Philip visit the church, they visit the only wall left of Chatterton's house; one can assume that stone figures somewhere in this wall. They furthermore find a sundial (probably made of stone and indicating time) there with a verse inscribed around its base:

Has restless Time whose harvest is each hour
 Made but a pause to view this poet's flower,
 In pity he'd have turned his scythe away
 And left it blooming to a future day.

(C:57)

In the novel, time seems to have turned away when faced with Chatterton. Charles is not the only or the first one to visit the house where Chatterton lived, or its remains. This house links Chatterton and Meredith (who goes there for the painting to be made) (C:136).

As a boy, Chatterton used to wander into the fields in the hope of finding 'hidden Tumuli or inscriptions upon Stones' (C:82). These constitute a link with the past, since the tumuli are remains from the past. Ackroyd further explores the idea of the tumulus in *First Light*, just as inscriptions on stones are explored in *Hawksmoor*.

The perception that stone is always associated with age or time in Ackroyd's novels is again found when Charles visits the Leno house in Dodd's Gardens and remarks that the 'entire structure was made of stone, so that it seemed much older than the brick houses beside it' (C:7). It is therefore a fitting place for antiques (another way in which the past can appear and exist in the present) (C:8).

Later, just before Chatterton appears to Charles as he is sitting at the fountain, Charles observes builders at work. He then wonders whether one brick 'had been taken from the rubble of an older building and was now being used again and Charles could see all the houses of the world rising and falling with the pressure of his own breathing' (C:46). This description opens the possibility that certain people (or personalities or presences) might be like stone which can be re-used from time to time in new forms (or manifestations). In one of the Art Brut paintings, the little girl (in another painting the child is a

boy), who is touched on the shoulder by her double as Charles is touched by Chatterton, is sitting on a wall (another manifestation of stone). The significance of this painting will be explained later (see 8.5).

Edward's dream towards the end of *Chatterton* partially resembles *First Light*:

... then he entered a white gallery and made his way through a circle of polished stones which had, at their centre, a cubic pyramid made of shining bronze.

(C:229)

The circle has already been described as a symbol or an image of time, and the stones as a medium for 'time-travel'.

In *First Light*, as in the other novels, the past seems to be linked to a form of stone (this time probably the earth). The tumulus as part of the earth consists mainly of stone (see *FL*:183). The past is ever-present in the ground underneath the archaeologists' feet, since the earth is the same as centuries ago. It is therefore fitting that Mark should recite a poem by Blake at the tumulus in which stone, time, eternity, and timelessness are mentioned:

Rocks piled on rocks reaching the stars,

...

A building of eternal death, whose proportions are eternal
despair.

(*FL*:124)

In *First Light* Damian Fall is affected by his cottage as by all other rooms (rooms are, of course, made of some kind of stone) (*FL*:128). The effect of the cottage is owing to the past lingering in the stone. The idea of the threshold and crossing the threshold (this idea was mentioned in the introduction and will again feature in the last subsection of the chapter), an action which leads to freedom, is mentioned in connection with Damian (*FL*:128), which suggests that Damian might be a 'time-traveller'. The threshold seems to dominate this cottage and those who visit it. They all mention it; see for example Joey (*FL*:146).

Stone in Ackroyd's fiction tends to emit warmth and heat. This is experienced by various characters in *Hawksmoor* and is also the case in

First Light. When Mark visits Lud Mouth the orange stone feels warm to his touch (FL:259). Lud Mouth with all its orange stone resembles the tumulus, observatory, and Swithin's Column; not only because of the presence of stone, but also because it is like a place outside of time. Its peacefulness is described as 'a relic of lost time' (FL:259). There Mark realises that he 'must re-enter the world' (FL:259) after his wife's death so that it is almost as if he is renewed through Kathleen's death.

In Ackroyd's fiction eternity and transience are often contrasted. Farmer Mint, for example, knows that the valley will survive his passing 'just as it had survived the deaths of all those who had come before him' (FL:17). Although humanity is transient, the valley is timeless and eternal; it is the past, in that it comes from the past. In this way it represents a kind of continuity within the process of continual change. Significantly the earth of which it consists is also a form of finely ground stone.

Apart from the tumulus already mentioned, the past is also present in the present in other ways. As in some of the other novels, stone buildings in *First Light* can contain various periods of the past in that they come from the past. They already existed in the past and still exist in the present. Thus, for example, when Evangeline Tupper goes to visit her old father in London, she observes 'A small terrace of mid-nineteenth-century houses ...' (FL:22). Mark Clare's car lights sweep across the eighteenth-century house fronts in Lyme Regis (FL:25) and the cottage in which Damian Fall lives is seventeenth century (FL:96). The connection between the past and the present through stone can be seen in Mark's remarks to the archaeological team about possible finds:

A broken flint or a sliver of stone may be the relic of an activity or even a gesture that will help us to understand this forgotten world.

(FL:36)

Later he wonders whether there had been 'any essential change from the time when the stones were used as arrow heads until this time, now, when the stones are being assembled once again' (FL:41). Stones not only link the past and the present but also indicate the similarities between different periods of time. Life is like a timeless and eternal

dance where nothing really changes; only the dancers 'change and change about' (FL:41).

The story about the flying children which Joey recounts is aptly set in 'the old stone village of St Gabriel' (FL:111). Whenever something out of the ordinary happens, it seems to be linked to stone. The story is furthermore set 'long ago' (FL:111) so that stone is, once more, linked to great age. When the children in the story finally fall back to the earth, they turn into a stone circle consisting of twelve stones (FL:113). Because the story is set so long ago, we cannot say with any certainty whether it is the truth or not. Just because it seems to be out of the ordinary, it does not necessarily mean that it is not true.

The ammonite (another kind of stone), which Joey and Floey find on the beach, leads to an ominous conversation between them. When Joey says that the ammonite is dead and that things that old do not come alive again, Floey replies:

Don't you be so sure.

(FL:64)

Thus the past can live in the present as it indeed does in the ammonite. The mollusc might no longer be alive, but the ammonite as a whole is certainly 'alive' in the present. Ammonites are later described as 'remnants of the delicate creatures which had moved across the surface of this place 140 million years before' (FL:65). The sea-lily that Mark and Kathleen find, can be interpreted in exactly the same way (FL:190). The archaeologists also use traces in the stone or soil to determine the period of time from which the tumulus or the archaeological finds date (see FL:52).

Although stone can take on any of a number of different forms in Ackroyd's novels, its symbolic content is always the same: it represents continuity and therefore makes it easier for human continuity to find expression as an essential presence in various manifestations at various times.

8.5 Rejuvenation

In the course of most of Ackroyd's novels, two similar characters from different periods of time come together and become the same character. This character is probably rejuvenated and will return at some stage in the future.

In *The Great Fire of London* the only instance of counterpointing of the past and present concerns Little Dorrit and Audrey. The counterpointing (a form of intertextuality) is found in the song Audrey sings:

Who bleeds in the yard [Bleeding Heart Yard]?
 Always she [Little Dorrit]!
 Whose life is marred?
 Always me [Audrey]!

(GF:114)

Here Little Dorrit and Audrey are counterpointed; one representing the past and one the present. When Audrey sings, 'her voice becomes surprisingly deep and resonant, as though she had been joined by someone else' (GF:114, emphasis added). Past and present join in Audrey, and as a result of this intertextual play, the quality of the result is improved. Characters in Ackroyd's novels are like Scrooge in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1985a), who is visited by the ghosts of Past, Present, and Yet To Come.

The process of rejuvenation, reincarnation, or whatever one chooses to call it (Dyer in *Hawksmoor* calls it 'my approaching Change' (H:206)), through which characters manage to reappear at various times, is usually associated with becoming a child or being like a child. Significantly this is the case in *Hawksmoor* with the eighteenth-century beggar, Ned, who apparently reappears as the twentieth-century beggar, Ned. The twentieth-century Ned, in turn, smells of 'lost or forgotten things' (H:82). It is a distinct possibility that this Ned has the same ability as Dyer to move in time or exist simultaneously in/at various times. Thus when Dyer remarks that the eighteenth-century Ned is 'very much a child' (H:65), Ned replies:

I have become so. Well, it is too late to be sorry.
 (H:65)

Later a figure (probably Dyer) tells the twentieth-century Ned that he

is at the wrong church:

This is not the place for you. ... There are other churches. This one is not for you. Go towards the river.
(H:78)

It appears that certain characters are predestined to die and to be rejuvenated or reincarnated at specific churches. They must first become as children (that is, move back in time) at specific churches and can then pass on to a new life (all the victims are children or vagrants who have become like children (Hollinghurst, 1985:1049)). In his introduction to Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, Carl Sagan points out the special significance of children:

Except for children (who don't know enough not to ask the important questions), few of us spend much time wondering why nature is the way it is; where the cosmos comes from, or whether it was always here; if time will one day flow backward and effects precede causes
(Hawking, 1988:ix)

In Ned's case, he need not necessarily represent a repetition of the past in the present, in the sense that the eighteenth- and the twentieth-century Neds are separate, but similar characters. The two Neds might, in fact, be one and the same character who moves in and through time.

The twentieth-century beggars usually gather in a house in the vicinity of the Limehouse Church. When we read about their gathering, all the signs are there that they might be transported to another time in the future where they will reappear. Just before they fall asleep, they are described as 'suddenly once more like children' (H:70). They are ready for rejuvenation. This is indeed what appears to happen, although the following might also merely suggest an ordinary drifting off to sleep:

... the four people gathered in this house by the church had passed into a place, one might almost say a time, from which there was no return.

(H:70)

In the light of what happens to characters like Dyer/Hawksmoor at the end of the novel and the similar elements in the descriptions of the events, there is a distinct possibility that this description signals more than just a process of falling asleep. One of the beggars in this house believes he might have prevented a fire in which his wife died (H:71). He took to wandering after this event. It seems possible that

the memory of this event might, in fact, be a memory of the Great Fire of London in 1666. Ned has a similar experience when walking into Severndale Park:

... he felt the breeze bringing back memories of a *much earlier life*

(H:75, emphasis added)

These might be memories of the eighteenth century. The beggars (as 'time-travellers') act as 'the guardian spirits' (H:82) of each of the churches Dyer built. They apparently protect the sites of media for movement in time, or by implication, if one furthers the argument applicable to Stonehenge that time is stone and stone is time to include the churches, they protect time itself.

Before Ned steps over the final threshold and is reincarnated, he enters 'what was known as the "strange time"' (H:84). To Ned, what this strange time is, seems to be common knowledge which - to the reader - it is not. Ned - as a representative of a specific, timeless group, the beggars - has some kind of privileged knowledge. During this period he has a recurring vision in which he sees his own shape watching him from a distance (H:84), which is exactly what happens to Hawksmoor and to Dyer at the end. The other shape might be Ned's new incarnation, which he can already glimpse. It might also be that Ned, at this moment, exists simultaneously in or at two different times. There is furthermore a suggestion that he might even exist at or in three different times, since he sees a cloud cover vanishing from the earth, 'although the pillar of acrid smoke lent the sun a blood-red colour' (H:85). This could be a reference to the Great Fire of London. If this is the case, it implies that the past (the Great Fire), the present (Ned in the twentieth century) and the future (Ned's other shape which is watching him) are all combined in Ned the moment before he 'moves on'. When he then says to Sam, another beggar, 'I don't know how long I'll be here ... I'll go now and then I'll come back' (H:85), it has a distinctly ominous tone.

The most important instance of rejuvenation in *Hawksmoor* concerns Dyer and Hawksmoor. From the novel it is clear that Dyer lived in the eighteenth century. There are also suggestions that he might already have lived during some time prior to the eighteenth century and that

he - already dead - has returned to the eighteenth century. Thus he once thinks 'why do the living still haunt me when I am among the Dead?' (H:89). It sounds ominous when Dyer says: 'But this was in another Time' (H:8), although it apparently only refers to Dyer's youth when he composed verses. It is also significant that Dyer is a gothic, medieval figure in a landscape of rationalism and enlightenment. His churches are built on the ruins of pagan temples, again implying the presence of stone. This makes time-travel a definite possibility. Once Dyer has said that he has run to the end of his time, that is, come to the end of his life in the eighteenth century (H:209), he adds (when some children come running past him):

You will be dead before I return.
(H:208)

Earlier, when Dyer replies to Nat's question about his (Dyer's) whereabouts before Nat's birth, 'I was here and there' (H:47), one cannot help but take this figurative expression literally. Dyer remarks that he has already seen the moving picture when Sir Christopher shows it to him. This must have been in the twentieth century, although he is still in the eighteenth century (H:142). Dyer further says '... my Time will never be out. And it is true yet of Time, tho' in quite another sense' (H:51). He manages this defiance of time through his link with the churches, that is, with place or places. Dyer, the expert on time, says:

What is Time? The Deliverance of Man.
(H:21)

This deliverance could be the deliverance of mankind from mortality.

When Hawksmoor finds Dyer's wax-covered book, he reads certain phrases, one of which is 'The Seven Wounds' (H:191). The number seven is, traditionally, seen as a holy number which represents perfection and completion. In *Hawksmoor* it can be linked to the seven churches and (if Hawksmoor's body is found at the Church of Little St Hugh, as seems possible (see H:70)) the seven bodies. Mortality is like a wound (one of seven) for which death is, paradoxically, the cure - the death of others, that is. If seven people are murdered at seven churches, the result is immortality (at least for a certain period of time - another contradiction in terms) for Dyer. The seven churches form a pattern or 'everlasting Order' (H:186) as Dyer calls it:

... the seven Churches are built in conjunction with the seven Planets in the lower Orbs of Heaven, the seven Circles of the Heavens, the seven Starres in the Pleiades. Little St Hugh was flung in the Pitt with the seven Marks ... which thus exhibit the seven Demons

(H:186)

There is a link between Dyer's time-travel and the stars/planets, which also link *Hawksmoor* to *First Light*.

The last paragraph of *Hawksmoor* seems to suggest that Dyer and Hawksmoor have become one and the same character, although Hawksmoor's voice is possibly used, because this paragraph is written in modern prose. Yet Hawksmoor is identified totally with Dyer, since the speaker looks at himself and again becomes a child begging on the threshold of eternity. Dyer used to be an orphan who had to beg.

Alan Hollinghurst describes this experience or phenomenon in the following way:

What Ackroyd may be saying is that time present and time past are both present in time future, and that the essence of Dyer's possession of Hawksmoor is the simultaneity of experiences centuries apart, to which Dyer's churches are perversely capable of granting access - as all great art may be thought to transcend time.

(1985:1049)

Thus the mystery/detective novel becomes a metaphor for the artistic experience.

Hawksmoor could be Dyer reincarnated or they could be images of each other. The beggar, whom Hawksmoor sees drawing, might be Dyer's ghost. As readers, we do not know what really happens at the end or who the narrator of the final paragraph is. Dyer/Hawksmoor might again appear in future in another guise. There is also a suggestion that Dyer/Hawksmoor might be the devil. Both are called Nicholas and Dyer's mother addresses Dyer as Nick (H:14).

The key to Dyer's secret could lie in the fact that the records of his death and burial have been lost (H:214). Since we (and Hawksmoor) in the twentieth century can only gain knowledge about 'Dyer' from what is written on paper, the disappearance of certain papers might cause history to be re-written. Thus, with the disappearance of the records

of his death and burial, Dyer might continue to live - which he does. Dyer's birth seems to equal his death:

... my first Entrance upon the Stage was attended with all the Symptoms of Death, as if I had been sensible of my future Works.

(H:11)

This might suggest that a previous incarnation of Dyer dies at his (Dyer's) birth and then the Dyer the reader knows, is born.

The same idea is suggested by the end of the novel. At all the churches, except at the Church of Little St Hugh, the bodies of murdered people are found. Hawksmoor might be the body found at this seventh and final church, since he - like some of the other victims before him - meets Dyer. (One cannot help but wonder what happens after the end of the novel: how does this merging appear to the rest of the world? Will the process be repeated in future?). Hawksmoor sees himself as a murdered corpse on a few occasions towards the end of the novel:

... he wondered how he would look to the strangers who encircled his own corpse; and would the breath have left his body like a mist, or like the air evacuated from a paper bag which a child blows up and then explodes?

(H:188)

and:

Time passes, and he looks down at his own hands and wonders if he would recognise them if they lay severed upon a table.

(H:202)

The idea of a simultaneous beginning and ending is also found here at the end of the novel:

... who could say where one had ended and the other had begun?

(H:217)

It appears as though one character is rejuvenated throughout the centuries. Thus the final composite of Dyer and Hawksmoor is 'a child again, begging on the threshold of eternity' (H:217).

Before Dyer undergoes his change, we read that he 'opened the Door and crossed the Threshold' (H:209). He comes to the conclusion that he 'had run to the end of ... [his] Time' (H:209). He then probably moves on from the past to the present. He is therefore not totally at the end of his time, but only at the end of his time in the past. His

shadow stretches over the world (H:209), just as Dyer said that the past is an eclipse which blots out the present (H:178). Dyer's shadow falls across Hawksmoor and they merge. Hawksmoor likewise crosses the threshold before they merge (H:216).

'Crossing the threshold' has another component, namely murder. When discussing the murders with the investigation team, Hawksmoor reflects about the time just before and after a murder is committed:

And at this point Hawksmoor always assisted them, since he liked to be entrusted with the secrets of those who had opened the door and *crossed the threshold*. ... He did not want them to falter in their testimony *but to walk slowly towards him*; then he might embrace them, in the knowledge they both now shared, and in embracing them despatch them to their fate.

(H:159, emphasis added)

This is exactly what happens at the end of the novel. It is impossible to say whether Hawksmoor is, at this stage, fully aware of the implications of what he is thinking. Yet the reader can undoubtedly make the connection, because of the similarity of the words used.

In *Chatterton* the main rejuvenation involves Chatterton, Meredith, and Charles. Some of the numerous similarities between Charles and Chatterton have already been discussed. As was the case in *Hawksmoor*, it seems that, in *Chatterton*, if one does not have evidence of a person's death, one should not automatically assume that the person is dead; the person might still be alive. Charles says of Chatterton:

No He's not dead yet.

(C:132)

Meredith, who pretended to be the dead Chatterton, is closer to death than Chatterton, of whom no picture exists which portrays his death.

Similarly, in an ancient church an old man informs Philip that Chatterton is not buried in the church:

No one knows where he's gone and buried himself. He's a mystery that one is. ... They never found that body. They looked all over, but they never found him.

(C:55, emphasis in the original)

The old man continues to say that 'they'll never find him, they won't. He's long gone' (C:56, emphasis in the original). There seems to be a suggestion that Chatterton is long gone *into the future* or into time.

This idea is supported when Charles reads a quotation ostensibly by Blake, but in Chatterton's handwriting:

Arise now from thy Past, as from the Dust that environs thee. When Los heard this he rose weeping, uttering the original groan as Enitharmon fell towards dark Confusion.

(C:60)

All the elements of 'time-travel' as identified in the introductory section to this chapter can be found here. Reference is made to a kind of rebirth which concerns a movement away from the past into the present; the movement might be carried on into the future. The rebirth is associated with dust, that is, a form of stone. Confusion seems to be the result of this process. Applied to Chatterton, one can infer that Rowley (even though he is fictional) rises from the dust of his medieval past and reappears in Chatterton's eighteenth-century world.

As Chatterton approaches his own death, the words used to describe his feelings are strongly reminiscent of those used in *Hawksmoor* to describe Dyer's and Hawksmoor's feelings:

Everything is coming to a point: it is in front of him and he keeps on walking towards it as he sings.

(C:216)

His hands appear to belong to someone else (see C:224) and may already begin to belong to Meredith or even to Charles.

In the course of the novel Chatterton appears to be making his presence felt in Charles's life. In the 'double-time' description⁵ when Charles wakes up or dreams that he wakes up one morning, something which is stuffed into his mouth chokes his speech:

It was his tongue and it was not his tongue: someone else was forcing it down his throat. ... There was an odd disturbance beneath his scalp as if it, too, were rearing itself upward to speak.

(C:45)

Charles seems to be invaded by Chatterton. After this we are informed that his (Charles's) hair 'was not his hair' (C:46).

So far, Chatterton's presence has not been physical in the sense that he has appeared to Charles 'in the flesh'. However, when Charles wakes

⁵ McHale (1978:101) calls this technique narrative self-erasure.

up after having fallen asleep in the park, a young man with red hair appears to him. When they speak to each other, they seem to be completely indistinguishable; in fact, there seems to be no need to distinguish between them. They are merely referred to as 'One' and 'the other' (C:47). It is significant that these meetings between Charles and Chatterton are associated with sleep, which represents a movement from the world of sleep to the world of wakefulness. The dream-world is a world in which everything is possible. W.A. Kort (1985:69) sees sleep as one of the ways of stepping out of history (opening a novel is another). A person can then sense something of the rhythms that unify and grant meaning to life. Thus sleep is associated with greater knowledge.

The process whereby Chatterton appears to make his presence felt in Charles's life is associated with pain. It is, for example, described as 'a balloon bursting beneath his skull' (C:61). When Edward worries about his father's illness, Charles replies that 'It's the curse of Chatterton' (C:62). One wonders if Charles is really aware of the truth of what he is saying. It is ironic that Vivien says to Philip:

He's not himself.
(C:62)

Chatterton is beginning to take over Charles's life as Dyer did Hawksmoor's. Later Charles says:

I think it's me.
(C:96)

Ordinary references take on a new meaning as a result of the myth of mobilities of presence.

When Charles is walking home one night, he murmurs:

There is a pain ... but it belongs to everyone.
(C:78)

He then becomes aware of someone walking beside him who hears this and nods in agreement. When Charles speaks to this invisible companion, he realises at once 'that these were not his words, but those of someone other' (C:78). Charles seems to be the organ for somebody else's words and ideas. This other person is probably Chatterton, as can be seen from Chatterton's references, for example, when he says:

But such Travelling was not for me: my Voyage was to be of quite another kind

(C:89)

It seems more than possible that this voyage is a journey to the future, a journey to Meredith and to Charles.

In Charles's and Harriet's discussion of Chatterton, strange things happen. When Charles mentions Chatterton, Mr Gaskell, the cat, leaves him with a strange cry. There seems to be something unnatural about Chatterton. After Harriet has been informed that Chatterton did not die, she asks 'What did he do instead? Hibernate?' (C:97). This is quite possibly, according to *Chatterton*, just what he did do. This might be the best description for what the characters in Ackroyd's novels do. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Sykes, 1984: 469) defines **hibernate** as 'spend the winter ... in torpid state; (fig.) remain inactive'. This is what characters in these two novels do; the difference is that their periods of activity recur over centuries rather than annually.

This process of rejuvenation (the same as in *Hawksmoor*), in which Chatterton is involved, is concretely embodied in the church of St Mary Redcliffe where Philip is waiting for Charles. Even though there is no actual transformation, it gives us a clear idea of what appears to happen in most of Ackroyd's novels:

Then he [the small boy] disappeared behind a canopied tomb beside the nave and a few moments later a young man emerged from the other side; it was as if there had been a sudden transformation within this ancient church.

(C:54)

As is the case throughout *Chatterton* and *Hawksmoor*, this transformation takes place within an ancient church.

The continuity of characters in and over time (in both *Chatterton* and *Hawksmoor*) is best illustrated in one of the Art Brut paintings which shows 'several rows of human figures, each one linked to the next so that they resembled lines of hieroglyphic writing' (C:115). The insane, primitive Art Brut artists apparently possess some kind of original knowledge about time and human continuity in and through time. Fritz Dangerfield's (he is another Art Brut artist) composition *The Opium Dream* is relevant to what happens in the novel. It shows 'a girl

sitting upon a wall: behind her, floating in the air, was her double and the second image was gently touching the first image upon the shoulder' (C:116). This painting suggests that certain people have a double (from the past) who can come into touch with them or, possibly, that certain people have their origin in an unknown presence or original who is ever-present, but lingering in the background. This original can reach out and touch the person. Significantly this process is associated with a wall in the painting. Stone has to link the ages and, by implication, the original and its present manifestation. The one Seymour painting of a child standing in front of a ruined building (presumably made of stone) can be seen as a portrayal of time and an eternal return of a personality or presence in time. The child's face is featureless and abstract (and therefore not only impersonal, but also timeless), and everything seems to 'spiral inward towards a vanishing point in the middle of the painting' (C:35). This spiral appears to be the vortex of time into which everything ultimately disappears, as can be seen later:

... the building now seemed to swirl ... to be sucked.
(C:117)

It could equally well be a description of a black hole. When Sarah Tilt later looks at this painting, something seems to be touching the child's shoulder (C:108), something which could be the child's double(s).

The more Charles becomes obsessed with Chatterton, the more frequently strange events, which can be linked to the preceding painting, take place. An example of such an event is found where Charles is reading Meyerstein's *Life of Chatterton* (a fictional character, reading an 'actual', 'real' work):

... there was a patch of darkness on the left hand page, as if someone were standing over him and casting a shadow across the words.

(C:125)

This 'presence' (even if it is also an absence) is never explained. One can therefore only speculate whether this is, indeed, Chatterton looking over Charles's shoulder. A few moments after Charles has perceived this shadow, one reads that 'for a moment he seemed not to know who he was' (C:126). This remark might be a commonplace, virtually insignificant statement, but it is equally possible that

Chatterton might be taking over Charles's life. This postulation is justified by the fact that Charles then starts writing a preface about Chatterton, 'The sad pilgrimage [suggesting a journey] of his life', but afterwards has no idea where the words came from. Then a shadow passes across him and he again starts writing furiously (C:127). Chatterton appears to be writing for Charles, with the result that Charles is unable to rewrite the preface once he realises that his pen has long ago run out of ink.

In the process of being 'taken over' by Chatterton, Charles's speech is impaired; for example, when he wants to say 'finished', it comes out as 'Spinach' (C:128). As the past influences the present, language becomes troublesome. Words no longer have meaning (in that they do not refer to concepts, but to previous instances of use); they are now no more than sounds because of the colouring given them by the past.

During Charles and his friends' dinner in the restaurant, things come to a head. Charles apparently sees someone standing behind Vivien and says 'Yes, of course. I know you very well', before collapsing onto the floor (C:152). This person could be either Chatterton or Meredith. Since we know that Charles has a brain tumour and is very ill, it would be easy to assume that this is merely a form of hallucination. Later, however, we are informed that Harriet looked up for a moment and 'saw the outline of a young man who smiled and bowed towards him [Charles]' (C:166). Unless she is also hallucinating, Chatterton or Meredith must be able to exist in the present. Even the description of the X-ray of Charles's brain tumour serves as proof of this:

She [Vivien] had looked at the bulbous grey shape lodged in his brain, and it seemed to her to have the lineaments of a human face.

(C:179, emphasis added)

Chatterton and/or Meredith apparently grow(s) in Charles's brain like an embryo in a womb.

It has already been pointed out that Charles seems to die at the exact moment that the painting of Meredith as Chatterton is completed. In the same way Chatterton seems to die at the same moment as the painting of the middle-aged Chatterton is destroyed/destroys itself. The painting's death is described as follows:

The face of the sitter dissolved, becoming two faces, one old and one young, as the paint decayed before Merk's eyes, the flakes becoming clots of colour which dropped onto the floor, these two faces recurred in a series of smaller and smaller images until after a few moments they had entirely disappeared. ... it was too hot.

(C:228)

This is how Chatterton experiences dying:

His face is swelling, his eyelids bursting in the heat. ...
oh God save me from melting, melting, melting.

(C:229)

The one death causes the other. (Like Charles, Chatterton experiences something like a blow inside his head and then a rush of light (C:230). This experience seems to link the movement in time.) Thus there are two deaths, associated with the two paintings. The completion of fiction (the Wallis painting) equals the death of fiction (Charles). The death of reality (Chatterton) equals the death of fiction (the middle-aged portrait of Chatterton): this is, if we assume that Chatterton did really die and that the painting is fake. One could also say that the continuation of reality (if Chatterton did not die) equals the death of reality (if the middle-aged portrait is real). Once again, the end-result is confusion as far as the traditional view of fiction and reality is concerned.

Philip's decision towards the end of the novel is to write a story about 'How Chatterton might have lived on' (C:232). His decision is a result of the realisation that things are separate and yet connected. Philip, however, never explains exactly how this process of 'living on' works (not even in the novel which is supposedly the one the reader has just read); we, the readers, can only guess.

Edward, Charles's son, in *Chatterton* also seems to have a link with the past. In his case this link does not really concern another similar character; Edward himself seems to come directly from the past, as can be seen in archaic expressions such as 'You lost yourn' (C:13). Because he is still a child, we can expect that he has some kind of greater knowledge. When Edward later goes to look at the Wallis painting of Chatterton, and the picture comes alive (C:229), it could either be that Edward moves back into the past, or that the past comes into the present. After he has had this strange experience, he

suddenly sees his father lying in the painting (C:229), and then Edward knows that Charles 'would always be here, in the painting. He would never wholly die' (C:230). This has also been said of Chatterton and Meredith in relation to the painting.

Wallis's painting appears to join Chatterton, Meredith, and Charles:

It is still forming, and for centuries he watches himself upon an attic bed, with the casement window half-open behind him, the rose plant lingering on the sill, the smoke rising from the candle, as it will always do. I will not wholly die, then. Two others have joined him - the young man who passes him on the stairs and the young man who sits with bowed head by the fountain - and they stand silently beside him. I will live for ever, he tells them. They link hands, and bow towards the sun.

(C:234)

This episode could be what the one Art Brut painter has painted (see C:115). The above passage closely resembles what happens at the end of *Hawksmoor*. Similar characters or similar manifestations of one personality or presence become one at the end and thus continue to live eternally. Significantly, this last paragraph is written in the present tense, which gives one the impression of an eternal, everlasting present. Martin Dodsworth interprets the paragraph in the following way:

This immortality is the *perpetuum mobile* of meaning that constitutes a literature, and in Chatterton's case it brings him into the company of the artists with whom he will be associated after death: Meredith and Charles Wychwood.

(1987:976)

Literature can lead to the coexistence of those in the present and those in the past.

In the light of some of Ackroyd's other novels, such as *Hawksmoor*, it is distinctly ominous when it is said of Mark Clare in *First Light* that 'there were times when one person seemed to retire as another stepped forward' (FL:8). Like other characters in Ackroyd's fiction, Mark seems to contain different characters within himself. He becomes Nietzsche's subject where many selves come together and depart (see 8.1). The following description from Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* could also be a description of any of the 'elect' in Ackroyd's novels:

There is a chance that I'm not here at all, that all the

parts of me, running along all the choices I did and didn't make, for a moment brush against each other. That I am still an evangelist in the North, as well as the person who ran away. Perhaps for a while these two selves have become confused. I have not gone forward or back in time, but across in time

(1990:164)

Borges explores the idea of 'the other' in many of his fictions and poems (compare 'The Other' and 'The Watcher' in *The Book of Sand*), while Sartre also makes mention of an 'other': 'My original fall is the existence of the Other' (1976:84). Significantly, Damian's surname is Fall.

When walking towards Damian Fall's cottage at the beginning of the novel (Mark does not yet know whose cottage it is), we read that Mark 'was in another time. He was a boy again' (FL:18). This cottage has a stone path leading up to it (FL:94). Later we read that music containing the words 'beginning' and 'silence' (the silence at the beginning of time, or before time?) comes from the cottage (FL:124). Like other characters who want to travel in and through time, Mark becomes like a child, but does not, however, cross the threshold now like many characters in Ackroyd's novels. We are informed that he 'reached a white gate which opened into the garden of the cottage', but that he then 'turned back, and retraced his steps across the valley' (FL:18).

In *First Light* the tumulus is described as a place 'of worship but it was not just the worship of ancestors but, rather, the worship of time itself. The passage of time. And, yes, this was a passage grave' (FL:185). By entering the tumulus, it seems as though one can pass on to another destination and, probably, another time. The tumulus is like an ancient time machine. This idea is supported by Julian Hill's view of the porthole in the tumulus:

... to go through the porthole would have been tantamount to a form of rebirth, thus connecting the burial ritual with an ancillary fertility rite.

(FL:187)

This porthole is another kind of threshold which one can cross to move in and through time.

When the archaeologists finally discover the body in the tomb, Mark

believes that if he had come upon the body on his own, there might have been some communion with the dead. The presence of the living is, however, too strong (FL:195). It appears as if one has to be alone to meet with the past. Hawksmoor and Charles (in *Chatterton*) could do so, because they were alone, whereas Mark cannot.

It later appears as if Mark does meet his double from the past, like Charles and Hawksmoor:

... Mark could only see the silhouette of someone coming towards him. The figure had something tied around his neck - a necklace or a chain with some kind of stone or jewel suspended from it

(FL:197)

Ironically, this figure is only a member of the press. Here Ackroyd seems to be parodying constants in his own work. During Mark's midnight visit to the tumulus, it appears as though the past is repeating itself, when Mark lies down in the position of the body they found earlier. He does this in the hope of 'some alteration in his own being' (FL:244). He has a desire to undergo an invasion of his own being by the past. He then senses the presence of a presence 'continually made and remade, held in place by some inconceivable force' (FL:245). This experience does not culminate in anything concrete; yet there is always the possibility of a change or transformation. Various signs indicate that Mark is continually on the brink of combining with the past so that the past can continue to live in him. After both he and Julian have discovered a passage/passages, Mark has to fight back a rising sickness; he has to try to 'regain his sense of the world' and no longer knows who he is (FL:250). Later he feels himself invaded by some kind of fever or sickness and sweat starts dripping from him (FL:252-253) (as happened to Charles in *Chatterton* before him). Another presence is apparently taking over in him and therefore he feels sick. This sickness is like an acute instance of Stone Age gloom. At a certain stage Mark is left alone in a tunnel, and has an experience similar to that which little Thomas Hill has in *Hawksmoor*:

But then something hit him on the back of his head; he stumbled forward, and he fell.

(FL:285)

Other characters, such as Kathleen and Martha, seem to sense the same

possibility of renewal as Mark does. In the present time Kathleen feels that time is encircling her (FL:30). She feels that her first identity, that of the crippled child, would be her last:

It would always be the one to be renewed, rediscovered.
(FL:30)

Time, and consequently her life, are circular. She starts off as a child, grows up, and again becomes a child who will grow up, only to become a child again. There is no escape from the circular structure of time. Martha also appears to have a double when she is in conversation with Julian:

She looked around, as if she had suddenly become two people and was consulting an image of herself just behind her shoulder.

(FL:240)

Here Martha can almost be seen as a reflection of the Art Brut painting in *Chatterton*.

Even though communion with the past apparently cannot take place in *First Light*, there is still a form of return for the dead man in the tomb, that is, the archaeologists' reconstruction of him (FL:196).

When the 'resurrection men' enter the passageway to the tumulus, time reverses its direction, but is still circular:

... they left the domain of ordinary time, and the echoes of their voices were like the other echoes which they sensed all around them. Time was curving back upon them, encircling them and also protecting them.

(FL:298)

The old one in the wooden casket can apparently be rejuvenated or resurrected, as they say 'We don't want to wake him. Not yet' (FL:300). Later he is carried across the threshold (with its connotations of transformation and time-travel) of Joey's garden shed (FL:302). The room seems to become darker (FL:302), which could be an indication of the presence of the past. Evangeline notices this darkening when she is there to search for the coffin (FL:309). The other characters remark of the old one that it is as if he is in the wrong place, the wrong dimension, the wrong time (FL:300), which is a clear indication that time is merely another dimension and can therefore be journeyed in. Moments before the old one goes up in smoke, Joey says to him:

Your presence is coming to an end.

(FL:320)

This statement could refer to present time. He might again appear in another present time, that is, in the future. The fact that his presence is coming to an end does not necessarily imply that he will be absent.

When he is being burnt, the old one seems to undergo a change similar to the one undergone by characters in Ackroyd's other novels:

Joey stared in surprise at the face and limbs because they were being joined by some other force There were voices. ... it seemed to Joey that these were the original voices - voices which had known speech but not writing. ... And as he gazed at the small figure other sounds began to encircle him or, rather, thoughts raised into sound as a sleeper rises after a dream and talks.

(FL:321)

This experience seems to represent a movement back to the time of origin as well as a transformation:

We are so close to the beginning that we have dreams of origin and of the darkness [the past] from which we come.

(FL:321)

There is another reference to 'Time. Another Time' (FL:321), and when Joey hears this, he turns in circles and time turns about him (FL:321). He seems to be moving back into the past and sharing the vision with Old Barren One. There are fires in the heavens and 'they mark the time of warmth, and to make this time return you must carve them into stone' and 'Build the house of stone within the circle' (FL:322), which is what happens in Ackroyd's novels. Eternal return takes place through stone and circles. Joey here has a vision of human continuity:

He who led us touches hands with the one before him, and touches hands with the one who follows. Like the circling stars and the circling generations of the earth. Locked within the circle.

(FL:322)

The old one is described as the original Mint (FL:302). Thus the Mints, unlike other people, can be secure in the knowledge that they know the original from which they descend. Yet even this knowledge is relative since they do not know the exact year or even century from which he comes (FL:303). Farmer Mint, however, triumphantly adds the remark that they do not even know from which century he comes, 'as if

chaos were part of the pattern' (FL:303). Farmer Mint represents the solution to the crisis in which contemporary mankind finds itself: triumphant acceptance of chaos as part of order. What they can say about the original Mint is that he is as old as the stones, an indication of great age, and this knowledge gives the Mints security (FL:303). They simply cannot put into words what they mean by the beginning. They merely know what they believe, although it cannot be determined (FL:304).

At the end of the novel, the old one's features dissolve and he enters another time (FL:323), thus probably being fully renewed. As the smoke of his being burnt rises into the air, the others at the Hanover house have a vision of those long since dead (FL:325): a lost time is restored to them. There seems to be a kind of union at the end as at the end of *Hawksmoor*:

No one is ever dead, and at this moment of communion a deep sigh arose from the earth and traveled upward to the stars.
(FL:325)

There also appears to be a communion between heaven and earth, two sides of a coin. In what follows, time is indicated as 'Now' (FL:325), a kind of eternal present. Those gathered at the Hanover house are also children (FL:325), which indicates a readiness for transformation and time-travel:

The years brushed past them lightly, like the wings of wings. All this happened in a moment out of time, and out of time it was gone.

(FL:326)

This is a moment of timelessness; they have briefly left the realms of time. When one exists within time, it appears linear; outside of time one can see a different pattern. This is the moment Old Barren One has 'returned to the frame of origin' (FL:326), a frame in which animals also exist (see 8.3). The present joins the beginning, and all times become one.

Damian apparently also undergoes the process of rejuvenation experienced by Old Barren One. Like characters in *Hawksmoor* and *Chatterton*, Damian becomes aware that he is being watched 'by some alien presence' and is filled with nausea (FL:177). He then waits for another sign (compare the motto in *Chatterton*) (FL:177). Like

Chatterton, he becomes aware that 'There was some presence within me, speaking through my own voice. And this was the greatest horror of all: that I was not my own self' (FL:177). Like Charles in *Chatterton*, he feels a 'soft movement' beneath his skull (FL:178). He then says something very strange which makes it possible for one to think that he is in fact Dyer, a character in another novel:

How I knew that I was a murderer. How I believed that I would see my own double walking in the garden. How I knew that I was possessed by the devil.

(FL:178)

Like Dyer and Walter in *Hawksmoor*, Damian in *First Light* believes that Alec is planning to murder him (FL:178). It seems that it is not only *Hawksmoor* who is invaded by Dyer, but also Damian. Boundaries between novels no longer matter.

Later we read that Damian is literally afraid of his own Shadow (FL:294). Because of the capital letter, this shadow seems to be his double and not merely an ordinary shadow. He furthermore amuses himself by wondering how he might seem to anyone 'who was sitting beside him. He turned his head and smiled at his invisible companion ...' (FL:294). These actions seem to be induced by some kind of presence that he senses. Later this presence acquires a name:

... Damian could see the true identity of Aldebaran as it emerged in these lines which were like the spectral handwriting of one long since dead. ... He was haunted by the ghost of Aldebaran. The ghost was in the room with him.

(FL:295)

The past is literally in the present in the form of Aldebaran. When Damian believes that everything has returned to the origin, he feels his stomach melting in the heat (FL:297), another description reminiscent of Chatterton at the moment of death/transformation. However, Damian's transformation is not as positive as Chatterton's:

And he looked into the abysses between them [the stars], the gulfs of darkness which were not of this time, not of this time in which he had his being. ... The universe was a structure established upon Nothing. And as he looked up he was filled with the fear of emptiness, the fear of non-being. And he became nothing.

(FL:297)

His transformation is worthless. It might not even be realised, since he is still caught up in contemporary humanity's crisis. Time gives shape to the universe, so that a loss of belief in time leads to the

destruction of the universe.

At the end Damian seems to be at home with his double, since he now converses freely with it and smiles at it (FL:328), and in the penultimate paragraph of the novel, he can suddenly see the sky clearly (FL:328). This clarity with which he can now observe things might be due to his madness. Like the insane, he can now see things for what they truly are. Then Damian does seem to be transformed in the final paragraph of the novel:

Time. Another time. ... But he can see nothing now. Only the sky filled with light.

(FL:328)

If one keeps the imagery of light and darkness, and its connotations, in mind, Damian now seems to exist in an eternal present. The night-sky no longer represents the past (the stars surrounded by darkness), but the present (light).

If rebirth, rejuvenation, and renewal can take place in nature, for example in spring (FL:315), why not in mankind as well?, Ackroyd seems to be asking. The idea that time does not only follow a linear direction is taken further by the idea of eternal return:

Just because we are trapped in time, we assume that there is only one direction to go. But when we are dead, when we are out of time, everything returns. ... Everything is part of everything else We carry our origin within us, and we can never rest until we have returned

(FL:318)

Thus we are continually renewed as seeds are in nature.

Descriptions of these mobilities of presence in one of Ackroyd's novels often apply to the other novels. The Seymour painting of a child looking out from a ruined building in *Chatterton* (C:35, 36, and 108) is the perfect image for both *Chatterton* and *Hawksmoor*. In both novels we find that certain people become like children and can then travel through time because of their association with stone (in its various forms). They 'begin all over again' (C:36) as Harriet says. The same applies to the Art Brut painting of 'several rows of human figures, each one linked to the next so that they resembled lines of hieroglyphic writing' (C:115). This description is especially true of *Hawksmoor*, but such apt images are not found in *Hawksmoor*. It almost

seems as if Ackroyd is still in the process of completing *Hawksmoor*. Since *Chatterton* was published after *Hawksmoor*, one can now reinterpret *Hawksmoor* from the new (more explicit/clearer) perspective *Chatterton* gives. In the same manner, one's reading of *Hawksmoor* inevitably influences one's interpretation of *Chatterton*.

Many of the intertextual references in *Chatterton* are intratextual references. Mr Joynson's friend, Pat, quotes Mr Joynson quoting Eliot:

Well go on, she says, bury yourself in the garden and don't
bother to come up in the spring

(C:52).

This quote can be seen as another description of what happens to *Chatterton* and Meredith, and also of what happens to Dyer and others in *Hawksmoor*. These characters are like seed (corpses) which must die and be buried before they can be rejuvenated.

When Philip reads to Charles from the pamphlet on *Chatterton* he has found, one of the poets who influenced *Chatterton* that he mentions is Dyer (C:58). One cannot help but wonder whether this name has influenced Ackroyd in his choice of a name for Nicholas Dyer (with its connotations of death and dying) in *Hawksmoor*. The hydrocephalus also says to *Chatterton* 'Dyen? ... Dyen?' (C:210), which could be a reference to Dyer.

Thus a specific presence in Ackroyd's fiction can be manifested simultaneously at various periods of time in various characters. It is equally possible that such a presence can move from one manifestation in one period of time to another manifestation at another time. Yet such a presence need not be bound by the borders of a specific novel: instead, a presence can extend its mobility to include other novels. In this way, all the characters in Ackroyd's novels who are involved in the process of rejuvenation are different manifestations of one presence: renewable being. In the next chapter the kind of time which is necessary for the mobility of presence will be explored.

CHAPTER 9
SPACE/PLACE AND TIME

'Henceforth space alone or time alone is doomed to fade into a mere shadow; only a kind of union of both will preserve their existence.'

(Hermann Minkowski quoted by Patrides, 1976: 89 and Penrose, 1989:193)

In Ackroyd's novels there is a special relation between place or space and time, which makes 'time-travel' possible. In all the novels, especially in *Hawksmoor* and *First Light*, Ackroyd seems to suggest that the relation or connection between place and time is more important than either time or place separately. William Spanos's remark is therefore particularly relevant to Ackroyd's fiction:

... [the] impulses of the contemporary imagination are all oriented beyond history or, rather, they all aspire to the spatialization of time.

(1987:45)

In *Hawksmoor* Ackroyd seems to suggest that the answer to the murders (and to the contemporary crisis) does not lie in time, but in place. Whilst *Hawksmoor* is, at first, obsessed with time, his investigations do not lead him anywhere. His obsession with time can be seen in numerous questions and remarks such as these: 'Time is not on our side' (H:112), 'I need a time' (H:110), 'When did you last see your son? ... can you remember the time?' (H:111), 'I need to know when ... In this case when is more important than how. Do you have a timetable?' (H:113), 'I'm worried about the time. ... the time then, the time of the murder. I have no time' (H:118), 'What time is it now?' (H:127), 'All I need is time' (H:114), 'Eventually I need you to tell me the time' (H:155), and 'What about time?' (H:156). These questions only lead *Hawksmoor* to say:

All we need is a new death, and then we can proceed from the beginning until we reach our end. ... If I knew the end, I could begin.

(H:114)

Nobody can tell *Hawksmoor* when the murders were committed and there are confusing signs on the bodies about the time of the murders (see H:113). Later *Hawksmoor* comes to realise that strangling is not a usual method for committing murder in the twentieth century. It rather belongs to the eighteenth century (H:117). Yet even this realisation brings him nowhere.

Only at the end does *Hawksmoor* begin to see the whole pattern:

He allowed the knowledge of the pattern to enclose him, as the picture on the television screen began to revolve very quickly and then to break up into a number of different images. Where before the churches had been for him a source of anxiety and of rage, now he contemplated each one in turn

with a beneficent wonder as he saw how mightily they had done their work: the great stones of Christ Church, the blackened walls of St Anne's, the twin towers of St George's-in-the-East, the silence of St Mary Woolnoth, the unbroken façade of St Alfege's, the white pillar of St George's Bloomsbury, all now took on a larger life as Hawksmoor contemplated them and the crimes which had been committed in their name. And yet he sensed that the pattern was incomplete, and it was for this that he waited almost joyfully.

(H:214)

Here Hawksmoor connects the murders to place, not time. Only now can he stop worrying about the times of the previous murders or next murder, and begin to concentrate on the next place, that is, the Church of Little St Hugh. When Hawksmoor and Dyer finally meet there, the pattern or circle is complete.

This linking of human continuity to place (specifically the East End of London), in spite of the changes wrought by the passage of time (Lewis, 1986:9), is illustrated by the previously mentioned parallels, and by the episode of the archaeologist who has already reached down to the sixth century but can go down for ever (H:161). Time can be linked to place, and through this can become place, or perhaps place can become time. The past can become, or exist in, the present by linking it to place. The archaeologist says that the skeleton they found, is new, but 'new' here indicates two or three centuries. Time is again shown to be relative and to depend on one's perspective.

Although Dyer has mastered movement in the fourth dimension and can partially control time, he realises that place is more constant than time. Thus he says 'But of this I may speake again in another Place' (H:13) and not 'at another time' as would be more usual.

The modern Ned, in the process of becoming a tramp, begins to confuse time. It is said of him that 'He now sometimes dressed in the middle of the night, and took off his clothes in the late afternoon' (H:74). The following passage is of the utmost importance for the concepts of time and place:

He found a shop several streets away where he bought a small wristwatch, but on his return he became confused and lost his way. He arrived at his own street only by accident and as he entered his room he said out loud, 'Time flies when

you're having fun'. But everything seemed quite different to him now: by approaching his room from another direction, Ned at last realised that it had an independent existence and that it no longer belonged to him. He put the wristwatch carefully on the mantelpiece, and took up the spherical compass. Then he opened the door and stepped over the threshold.

(H:75)

Ned here leaves the watch he had bought (indicative of time) and takes up the compass, indicative of direction or place. Because he has found time confusing, place now becomes more important. This awareness is reflected in his realisation that his room has 'an independent existence'. Ironically the compass probably comes from another time: it might be the one Sir Christopher threw away (H:72). The word 'threshold' in the above quotation can possibly be linked to the final line of the novel. Ned might also be stepping over the threshold to eternity. His link with place is the compass, as Hawksmoor and Dyer's link with it is the churches.

Dyer's conversation with Parson Priddon reflects the importance of place rather than time. Christ was buried for three days and three nights; yet he was buried on Friday night and rose again before day on Sunday (H:135). This discrepancy can only be explained by linking time to place. As the parson says:

... for a Day and two Nights in the Hemisphere of Judaea is in the contrary Hemisphere two Days and a Night: that makes up the Summ employ'd in the Scriptures.

(H:135)

In *First Light* time is described as the shape of the universe itself (FL:295). Therefore Damian Fall feels that time cannot run out, since it cannot run anywhere, a statement which might be seen as a rejection of a linear view of time. Time has to be connected to space and cannot exist separately. Thus a loss of belief in time is, by implication, a loss of belief in everything in the universe.

Although the link between time and space might, at first, appear strange and unusual, it is more common than one might assume. Our way of describing the distance (usually seen as a description of space, a stretch of ground) of stars is essentially a description of time. Damian says 'Naturally none of us believes in a fixed geometry. So by

closer I mean closer in time' (FL:101), which implies that he believes in a fixed time. Alec later says to Mark:

We can see for ever We can detect quasars which are thousands of millions of light years away.

(FL:262)

Time as a means of describing distance is also relative:

They all seem so close to each other, but in reality they are far apart.

(FL:101)

The archaeologists use elements to determine time:

... we measure the level of radioactive carbon to determine age. Great age.

(FL:138)

This is a parallel - if inverted - method of the one used by the astronomers.

The past is present in the present in the stars, thus again linking time and place:

All these coming from the past, ghost images wreathed in mist which confounded Damian.

(FL:4)

When looking at the night sky, we can actually see the past; we are seeing the universe as it was in the past, for the past and the present exist simultaneously. Damian remarks that he can see 'the first human sky' (FL:4), because of this unique 'pastness' of the stars. The title of the novel can be linked to this 'pastness': *First Light* can refer to the first light in the sky and, therefore, to the beginnings of time (if time has a beginning). There is also a suggestion that other elements from the beginning of time could exist simultaneously with elements from the present.

Damian gradually becomes aware that the images of Aldebaran and the other stars as he looks at them might be illusions without reality 'beyond this particular time and place' (FL:134); everything might be a 'vast emptiness' (FL:134). This remark reflects a fear of uncertainty and of the void. Characters experience a need to connect everything to place, because time is so fleeting and impermanent. If one wants to refer to time, one must connect it to place to make it more stable. Damian is constantly aware of this sense of indefinable loss (FL:150). In this respect he is typical of twentieth-century

mankind and its feeling of loss, desolation, and uncertainty.

The linkage of time and space raises the idea that time and place might, essentially, be one and the same. This idea is found in Zen-Buddhism where there is no distinction between time and space (Ferreira, 1990:98). It is believed that time and space were created at the same moment (FL:155), because the one cannot exist without the other:

... space is inconceivable outside of time, and time itself is only an aspect of space. These forces are fractured or incomplete, therefore; only the relation between them is significant, since in that relationship there is some faint echo of the order which existed before the creation of the visible universe.

(FL:155-156)

Here Ackroyd is apparently postulating the theory that neither time nor space is important; the relation between them is what matters. This relation is what Ackroyd explores in his novels, especially in *Hawksmoor*. As this relation contains a faint echo of the initial order in the universe (which is now lost), Ackroyd offers a solution to the postmodern crisis: he tries to regain order by looking at the relation between time and space. Damian's words support this idea of space-time as a means of finding some form of certainty:

At least I know the stars were really there, after all.
Whoever these people were, at least they saw the same light.

(FL:162)

By connecting time (the past) to space (the stars), Damian achieves a form of certainty. Others, such as Evangeline, use the words time and space in conjunction with each other, for example, when she says to the strange groups camping close to the tumulus:

But give us time. Give us space.

(FL:219)

Mark (or Ackroyd?) seems to be advocating a new structure in the universe: that of simultaneity because of the relation between space and time, or because of space-time (FL:156):

The cosmos can no more reverse its fall into the dimensions of space and time than the world can discard the relics of its own development. That is why those buried in the tumulus are as much a part of me as I am of them. Everything is touching everything else, expanding outwards but still mingled together. ... And I, too, am an aspect

of that order, a relic of earliest creation which space and time have now woven together.

(FL:156)

The new ordering structure seems to be more like a web of lines than like a linear line. The idea that everything in the universe is connected has already been formulated in the new physics as Bell's theorem, in response to the phenomenon that if the spin of one particle in quantum physics is changed, the spin of the other in a pair changes immediately. If this theorem is proven true, it will imply that 'what happens here is intimately and immediately connected to what happens elsewhere in the universe, which, in turn, is intimately and immediately connected to what happens elsewhere in the universe, and so on ...' (Zukav, 1979:315). This theorem implies the basic oneness of the universe, which is also the central characteristic of Eastern mysticism (Capra, 1975:134).

When the archaeologists know more about the tumulus, Mark describes it as a labyrinth (FL:267), another web-like formation:

In this place time might not simply go forward, forgetting and forgotten; it might move in other directions also.

(FL:267-268)

If we consider that the tumulus has previously been discussed as time itself, this 'definition' of time seems to be supported by all elements in the novel.

Space-time is further supported by what Farmer Mint says:

Further and further back than that. Deeper and deeper than that.

(FL:301)

'Further' is already an indication of distance usually used to indicate space. 'Deeper' moreover qualifies it as a movement downwards. The words for the indication of time and space are mixed, which implies that time and space must be combined and are probably merely different words for describing the same idea.

Mark and his wife reside in a flat above an antiques shop (antiques being another example of the presence of the past in the present) in a late eighteenth-century building 'which despite renovations had retained its original proportions' (FL:25). Here the past (the original proportions) coexists with the present (the renovations)

through its connection with place. The Clares literally live above time, since the main items in the antiques shop are clocks and various other instruments for the measurement of time (FL:75). (Clocks seem to be ever-present; they are also found in the observatory (FL:130).)

When Mark later observes the antiques in the yard below, they seem to glow in the gathering dusk (FL:28). Previously the tumulus seemed to glow (FL:14). In *Hawksmoor* various stone objects emitted heat, and in *Chatterton* the canvas of the middle-aged Chatterton was too hot to touch. It appears as if the past confirms and emphasises its presence in the present by emitting heat (accompanied by a glow). This phenomenon can be linked to what happens in physics when matter and antimatter come together. Each annihilates the other and energy is released into the atmosphere. It appears as if some periods of time can be called time and others anti-time. When a period of time (for example, the past) and a period of anti-time (for example, the present) come together as in the above examples, energy is released in the form of heat and/or light.

In Dorset Mark experiences a special quality in the landscape:

When he lay upon the grass of Dorset it was as if he were being borne up by the hands of all those who had come before him. They were the ground on which he rested. Yes, this was a haunted place. It contained mysteries.

(FL:33)

Certain places or sites can result in the communion of the living and the dead, the present and the past, that is, of different space-times.

The past and the present can be brought together in other ways. An example would be the magazine Kathleen is reading when Mark returns from Pilgrim Valley. This magazine has the curious title of *New Archaeology* (FL:26). At first this title seems to be paradoxical: archaeology refers to the ancient, new to the present. The past can be new in that it can be recently discovered.

The two scientific activities in the novel, archaeology and astronomy, initially appear to be direct opposites. Archaeology looks downwards and at the past (as Carlos Fuentes says in *Distant Relations*: 'perhaps the work of the archaeologist can be reduced to this: to restore,

however imperfectly, a past' (1984:183)); astronomy looks upwards and to the future (especially in astrology). The two scientific disciplines are, however, on closer examination, almost the same, an idea foreshadowed by Mark's realisation that the stone of which the tumulus consists is 'the debris of dead stars' (FL:266), and by the names 'Aldebaran. Old. Barren' (FL:293). It is obvious that archaeology examines the past and represents a movement back in time. Astronomy also examines the past, if one takes into account that the light of the stars as we see it represents the stars as they were at some period in the past. Thus both disciplines study the past. It is particularly apt that the figure buried in the tumulus is probably an astronomer, one of the 'communal spokesman', 'the interpreters', one of those who know more (FL:44). Both archaeologists and astronomers examine stone or rock in order to understand the past.

In the conversation between Mark and Alec, Alec explains that studying the stars is 'looking back' (FL:262), although they cannot yet look back to the very beginning, because 'To see the beginning is also to see the end' (FL:262). Time is again seen as circular, but with various 'spokes' linking various parts of the circle with others. Everything is related, as Alec says (FL:262).

Ackroyd is not the only contemporary or postmodern writer to link time and place. Jorge Louis Borges does so in *The Book of Sand* (the title of which carries connotations of time within the framework of Ackroyd's oeuvre). Borges (1979:69) describes the journey from one time to another as a journey from one place to another.

In summary, Ackroyd provides contemporary humanity with a solution to its postmodern crisis. The essence of this solution is connection or relation: time and space are connected, and this space-time takes on the form of a web or labyrinth in which past and present are linked and can coexist in simultaneity. All parts of the labyrinthine space-time are in existence at any given moment. Those who are in privileged possession of the necessary knowledge can therefore travel through space and time.

CHAPTER 10
SIMULTANEITY

'Proceeding backward against the stream, one must necessarily come to the point of departure, which, in the last analysis, coincides with the cosmogony, with the first cosmic manifestation. One arrives at the beginning of time and one finds nontime, the eternal present that preceded the temporal experience begun by the first fallen human life. In other words, one "touches" the nonconditioned state that preceded man's fall into time and the wheel of existence.'

(Mircea Eliade quoted by Kort, 1985:65)

Although it might appear improbable and even impossible for different 'times' or periods of time to exist simultaneously at a specific present moment, the idea is not at all far-fetched. Apart from the examples already mentioned, such as simultaneity of time as found in buildings, stone, and the stars, the coexistence of various periods of time can, for example, be seen in our way of measuring time or the hour: if one were to ask somebody in one part of the world the time, that person might say that it is 11h00 in the day, whereas if one were to ask the same question at exactly the same moment to someone in another part of the world, that person might say that it is 23h00 at night. Different 'times' can exist simultaneously in different parts of the world. If this is possible, there is no reason why they cannot exist simultaneously in the same part of the world. It is difficult for us to accept this, only because we have always been conditioned to see time as linear and absolute. Physics has already proved time to be relative; it is only a matter of time before it will revolutionise our view of time as linear, as Ackroyd has done by introducing various examples of simultaneity in his novels. It is interesting to note that Bertens & D'haen (1988:92-93) see simultaneity in time and place/space as a characteristic of modernism, rather than of postmodernism. Yet, while examining simultaneity, Ackroyd also achieves the multiplicity and discontinuity characteristic of postmodern texts.

10.1 Simultaneity: Times Coming Together

Within the framework of the myth of mobilities of presence, there is a movement in Ackroyd's novels from a metafictional simultaneity to a more scientific simultaneity.

The Great Fire of London concerns the simultaneity of past and present fiction, in the process making us question the nature of reality and fiction. The link between *Little Dorrit*, *The Great Fire of London*, and the reader is implied by Spenser Spender's thought:

And yet his life [*The Great Fire of London*] was linked with theirs [other people's lives], and all who had preceded [*Little Dorrit*] or would follow [the reader] them.

(GF:36-37)

Here the continuity of past, present, and future is implicit; yet

apart from continuity, simultaneity also plays a role:

And they, also, became part of him - as though he contained them all within himself at the same time as they directed him forward. The pattern was one, within and without.

(GF:37)

His experience is similar to Audrey's when she is possessed by Little Dorrit. The type of simultaneity found here is much simpler than that found in *Hawksmoor*.

Hawksmoor makes us question the nature of fiction and reality through an examination of simultaneity of history and fiction, history and reality. *Hawksmoor* basically tells two stories in which one would probably not have found anything unusual if they had been kept separate. Precisely because they are interspersed in the novel by placing them in alternating chapters, they become unusual. As Geoff Dyer says, 'omens and allusions from across the centuries weave a web of portents until a mere raising of an arm or a single word in a sentence becomes disturbingly ominous' (1985:34). The idea of the web will be discussed further later on. The six odd-numbered chapters in this book (in which numerology plays an important and significant role) are set in the early eighteenth century and are narrated by Dyer in a contemporary idiom, complete with old spellings and the initial capitalisation of many words, once again illustrating Ackroyd's love of historical pastiche.¹ In this part Dyer is a first-person narrator. The six even-numbered chapters, set about two and a half centuries later, provide a third-person narration of the bizarre and puzzling killings associated with the churches built by Dyer and of *Hawksmoor*'s attempts to track down the culprit.

Despite the time-shift and the almost cinematic movement between the two narratives, they flow smoothly into each other and run strictly

¹ Frederic Jameson sees the mode of postmodern art as pastiche, which he associates with a 'de-centring of discourse, the fragmentation and proliferation of "dialects" and the dissolution or demystification of the "individualist subject" in post-industrial society' (quoted in Bennett, 1988:31). This is a clear example of how Ackroyd manages to combine simultaneity (associated with modernism) and postmodern decentring. Specifically through the use of simultaneity, he demystifies the subject: *Hawksmoor* is not unique; he is shown to be the same as Dyer.

parallel. Two worlds and times overlap (Caless, 1987:7), making this a 'schizoid text' (McHale, 1987:190) with a certain sense of simultaneity (1987:191). The novel is almost symmetrical. The last words of one chapter are the first words of the next chapter. Bertens and D'haen (1988:131-132) see this kind of device as linguistic continuity in a text where chronology, logic, causality, and linear development are no longer valid. Since one chapter is set in the past and the next in the present, and so on, one has the distinct impression that the past is echoed in the present as the present is echoed in the past. This kind of repetition is often the basis for circularity in many postmodern works (Szegegy-Maszák, 1987:47). Circularity, together with an aleatory arrangement and an open ending, can - and does - undermine traditional forms of teleology (Szegegy-Maszák, 1987:46). This undermining is necessary, because *Hawksmoor* does not merely present us theoretically with a new space-time; it makes space-time actual in its formal presentation, thus allowing the reader virtually to 'experience' space-time.

In this way, *Hawksmoor* subverts the usual linear, chronological time structure, that is, the Middle Ages, the eighteenth century, the twentieth century, and the future, in the process showing that time can be simultaneous and, therefore, that people can exist *simultaneously* in the past, present, and future, rather than reappear from time to time. As Dyer says:

... I still hear their Voices in my Head when I walk abroad
in a Croud, and some times I am seiz'd with Trembling to
think *I may be still one of them.*

(H:49, emphasis added)

Hawksmoor has a similar experience:

And for a moment he did not know in what house, or what
place, or what year, he had woken.

(H:152)

There is a possibility that he could be living in the past as Dyer and, at the same time, in the present as Hawksmoor. Thus there is a continuum of times, all existing simultaneously: the past (far from the present), the past (Dyer in the eighteenth century - closer to the present), and the present (Hawksmoor in the twentieth century).

Metafiction is drawn into this interplay between centuries. When Dyer

visits the Greshamites, an old man says:

Nothing is lost when once it is Designed, It is Eternal work
when perfect of its kind.

(H:138)

This statement can refer to both literature and architecture. Literature or words can make things eternal by capturing them, an opinion also expressed by Mrs Best:

O Blessed letters, that combine in one
All ages past; and make one live with all!
Make us confer with those who now are gone,
And the dead living unto counsel call!

(H:46)

Towards the end of the novel Dyer again compares his churches (here Little St Hugh) to a story or narrative, for example, where the detail of the Ground Plot of the church is like the Prologue of a story (H:205). What Dyer and Hawksmoor achieve at the end of the novel, the combination of two ages in one moment, can be achieved through language and literature. Anything is possible in literature. Through the intertextual conversation with older/previous texts, this text can 'confer with those who now are gone' (H:46). The formal structure of *Hawksmoor* metafictionally expresses the simultaneity which constitutes the novel's content.

Chatterton, in a way, combines the concerns of *The Great Fire of London* and *Hawksmoor* in that it examines both history and art/fiction in relation to reality through the simultaneous existence of the past and the present. The merging process between characters in *Chatterton* inevitably implies a merging of periods of time. This is shown at the beginning of the novel in the four extracts with Chatterton as the unifying force, since all the extracts concern Chatterton in one way or another. The first extract can be placed between 1752 and 1770 (C:2); the second one is set in 1856 (C:2-3), whereas the third extract comes from (probably) the latter part of the twentieth century (C:3); the fourth and final extract initially appears to be set in the twentieth century (C:3). Towards the end of the extract, however, one becomes aware that it, in fact, represents the coming together of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, with Chatterton paying a visit to Charles. Because the extracts are set in different centuries, but are placed together, the impression is created that they exist simultaneously. As Charles says: 'There are no rules Everything

is possible' (C:9). As in *Hawksmoor*, Ackroyd uses form to create the effect of simultaneity.

In *Chatterton* Meredith's dream seems to be a vision of two people meeting and passing each other in time:

... I dreamed of Chatterton the other night? I was passing him on some old stairs.

(C:139)

Henry Wallis then explains the dream in the following way:

I believe stairs are an emblem Stairs are an emblem of time.

(C:139)

The past meets up with the present in time so that different periods of time coexist simultaneously. Prior to Chatterton's 'rejuvenation'/passage to eternal life, the future and the past are joined in his head in the present in these words:

Posterity. Antiquity.

(C:217)

They become virtually synonymous and, in the process, meaningless.

At the end of *Chatterton* Rowley is drawn into the chain of simultaneously existing characters by Chatterton:

... when he looks down he sees his own monk, Thomas Rowley ...; they stare at each other *across the vast distance*, and in the *eternity* of that look the light between them burns and decays.

Falling, and Chatterton is walking down a stairway [time] of old stone [as the medium] where he passes a young man [Meredith?] ascending on the other side; and he is always walking, always passing him, and the young man always shows him the puppet which he holds in his left hand. Falling, and Chatterton is standing beside a young man with his head bowed in pain [Charles?]; there is a fountain [of time?] behind them, and the fountain is playing *for ever*. Falling, into the nave of the church [stone] where distant figures are trying to reach him

(C:233, emphasis added)

This experience seems to be either of eternity or a state of timelessness and simultaneity (if there is a difference between eternity and timelessness). Time seems to slow down completely, because matter and antimatter meet. According to Einstein's theory of relativity, time slows down as energy increases. Because matter and antimatter are brought together, immense energy is produced and time

slows down immeasurably. Thus Rowley, Chatterton, Meredith, and Charles (and others) represent a continuity, of which all parts exist at the same time.

When different periods of time come together (for example, in a collection of people as above or in a collection of books from various times as below), the result always seems to be a certain timelessness. Philip experiences this timelessness in the basement of the library where he works:

They [the books] seemed to expand as soon as they reached the shadows, creating some dark world where there was no beginning and no end, no story [which implies a linear time structure], no meaning. And, if you crossed *the threshold* into that world, you would be surrounded by words; you would crush them beneath your feet, you would knock against them with your head and arms, but if you tried to grasp them they would melt away. Philip did not dare turn his back upon these books. Not yet. It was almost, he thought, as if they had been speaking to each other while he slept.

(C:71, emphasis added)

Crossing the threshold implies a movement from one period of time to another. Thus books can represent a movement in time, or enable one to move in time. The implication of the last sentence of the quotation is that specific people from different periods of time are like books which can be in conversation/contact with one another without our being aware of it. Philip's vision of the library is a vision of the Derridean universe (Dodsworth, 1987:976).

Chatterton includes both the union of characters from the past and the present, and a metafictional union of past and present. Writing can unite the past and the present. One can, for example, quote from others and add one's own ideas to theirs, which is what *Chatterton* does (see C:85). Charles is also aware of this, for example, when he remarks that we can join a poet in his childhood, when we read his poetry (C:151).

In *First Light* there is a definite movement away from metafictional concerns. Instead, this novel focuses on archaeology and astronomy in terms of the simultaneity of various periods of space-time. Once the archaeologists have started work on the tumulus, it is as if different times come together:

... there was now some unspoken and unanalysable communion between the living and the dead.

(FL:119)

The past can converse with the present and vice versa. This communion is taken one step further when Owen remarks that if the people connected with the tumulus were to come alive, the only thing they would recognise would be the sky. Mark suddenly becomes very elated and remarks that 'it's all coming together' (FL:124). It is as if Mark feels that the past and the present are coming together as they (representing the present) delve deeper into the tumulus (the past).

The finds discovered on the site of the tumulus further support the idea (mentioned earlier) that the tumulus is time itself:

The precise location of these finds had been noted and, although there were several hundred years' difference in the date of their manufacture, they had in fact been discovered very close to each other. ... In another time. But the dating was again curious; the grooved ware came from a period which suggested that the site was still in use many hundreds of years after its construction

(FL:82)

and:

... it came from so many different periods

(FL:118)

In the underground passage the archaeologists continue to discover objects from different times (see FL:281) - with both great periods of time in between and shorter periods of time in between (the dates indicating the presence of various generations of Mints). Different periods of time exist at the same time in the same place, with the result that 'The centuries were collapsing together' (FL:269), as would happen in the case of a star's collapse to form a black hole. Time literally implodes into simultaneity, which leads to confusion. This implosion is the case with time in the tumulus but the idea can also be applied to time in general. The archaeologists are confused by the tumulus and by time, as can be seen later when other finds continue to follow this pattern:

No one was certain of anything any more

(FL:187)

and:

... everything was in flux.

(FL:187)

This uncertainty is contemporary mankind's experience, and also becomes

the reader's experience while reading the novel, because Ackroyd makes objects and times exist simultaneously.

When the archaeologists are busy examining the tumulus, Mark looks at them and sees 'how the legs and bodies of the archaeologists were now in shadow while their heads and shoulders still caught the slanting light' (FL:104). Part of them is covered in the past, while the rest is still in the present. By examining the past, they manage to live in two periods of time at the same time. The first and last chapters commence with the idea of darkness:

Into the darkness, where nothing can be known.

(FL:327)

The past is incomprehensible. The idea of being in two worlds or two periods of time at the same time is again found in this description:

And so he was straddled between two worlds - the upper half of his body now within the tomb as eagerly he peered forward, the lower half still protruding in the outer world. Part of him had been swallowed up.

(FL:184)

Mark is literally swallowed up by the past as he and others try to swallow the past. Later he describes the entry to the tomb as dark and cold (indicative of the past). At the end of the novel when Joey sees Old Barren One, he has an ultimate vision of the past as darkness:

This is the time of change, the strange time foretold by his death. We stare at the giant mound, at the horror of the stone and the dark world beneath it.

(FL:323)

When Mark has reached the point of origin and the centre at the discovery of Old Barren One, it is a point of timelessness (a synonym for eternity):

... he could see neither backward nor forward. ... He had seen eternity, too, for here there was no beginning and no end.

(FL:289)

This timelessness is a form of simultaneity, since various times come together in Mark's thoughts (see FL:289). Mark then gives the reader a definition of time:

He knew what time was now: it was the word for that which no living thing could understand, because to understand it would be to exist outside it. Only those who had died could comprehend time, for time was God.

(FL:289)

God is a kind of timelessness or eternity, since He is ever-present. Immediately after having formulated this definition, Mark, like Charles in *Chatterton*, feels 'a familiar disquiet, a stirring, beneath his scalp; it was as if something there had swerved and changed direction' (FL:293). Afterwards he turns 'a full circle' (FL:294), a gesture occurring frequently in *First Light*.

From the beginning there is something strange about the relationship between Mark and Kathleen. In the chapter headed 'Earlier Time' (we do not know how much earlier) numerous periods of time are present at virtually the same time in people's memories. Most of the paragraphs begin with an indication of time which confuses rather than orients because of the indefinite nature of the time indication, for example:

Another time. In another time. She is a child, a crippled child.

(FL:29)

The past exists in the present in memory. Kathleen here becomes a child, which has connotations of being ready for time-travel within Ackroyd's oeuvre. The next chapter is 'The Child' (FL:32). The same kind of incident is found where Joey's song reminds the barmaid of 'her earlier life, memories of her childhood. Past time. Another time' (FL:72). She also becomes a child. Whenever Kathleen is mentioned, one can expect the words 'Another time' (see FL:252 and 258).

When Mark and Kathleen are together in yet another time, they meet in front of an old clock, which is probably in a stone tower, and Mark 'becomes a child again with her, a child dreaming of old stones. Old stories' (FL:29). All the elements for time-travel are present. Significantly the part of this chapter dealing with various instances of another time is written in the present tense and yet takes place in the past, whereas the part set in their present time is written in the past tense, so that the past becomes present and the present becomes past. The chapter, 'Field Walking', is also written in the present tense, and yet it describes a search for the past (FL:41). When two (or more) times come together the present tense is used.

When Damian says to Mark that in quantum physics objects simply appear and disappear, and that objects can suddenly emerge in two places at

once (FL:160), it seems to support both the uncertainty principle and the theory of simultaneity. Damian's observation is also an explanation of what happens in *Hawksmoor* and *Chatterton*. Like Ackroyd, Tom Stoppard explores this idea of quantum jumps in *Hapgood* (1988).

In *First Light* everybody is looking for an ordering pattern, since the pattern might give meaning to everything, by providing a key with which to unlock the obscurity of time:

Science is like fiction, you see. We make up stories, we sketch out narratives, we try to find some pattern beneath events. We are interested observers. And we like to go on with the story, we like to advance, we like to make progress. Even though they are stories told in the dark.

(FL:159)

It is therefore not surprising that Mark is elated when he realises that '... everything connects Everything is part of the pattern' (FL:264) at the end of his conversation with Alec. This connection is of course the opposite of postmodernism where it is 'Only disconnect' (Hassan, 1987a:445). Yet Alec has to disillusion Mark:

Yes. If only we knew what it was. ... I suppose that we could only see the pattern if we were outside it. And in that case we would have ceased to exist. So all we can do is make up our stories.

(FL:264)

Certainty is immediately followed by uncertainty, which is, in turn, followed by another attempt at gaining certainty:

But if we are all part of the same pattern ... then nothing is destroyed. Things just change their form, and take up another place in the pattern. No one really dies.

(FL:264).

This view is apparently the solution Ackroyd explores in his novels.

The idea of a connecting pattern reappears during the performance of Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, when the chorus steps forward to explain that 'events which take place in time are never lost but remain, echoing through the past and the future' (FL:152). Events can clearly exist simultaneously at various moments in the past, present, and future. As the audience's thoughts drift during the performance, we have another example of several moments existing simultaneously:

Time. Past time. Future time. Imaginary time. Other times curving around them. Each of them in another time and yet each of them still following the performance on stage, as if somehow the words and gestures in front of them

prompted their own feelings

(FL:153)

They each exist at the present moment and at one other moment in the past, so that numerous past moments exist simultaneously with numerous other past moments in the present. The past moments become moments in the present. It is impossible to represent numerous moments, which exist at exactly the same time in the present, as existing simultaneously in writing them down or recounting them (Ackroyd tries to do this in the first paragraph of FL:155; yet we cannot read about these present moments in any other way than in time). They have to follow on one another, creating the impression of a succession in time, even though a section of writing is supposed to represent a simultaneity, which explains why we are unwilling to believe that the past can exist simultaneously with the present. We have been forced by convention to believe in a linear time-sequence.

In all of Ackroyd's other novels one can only speculate about the vision of time with which he endows his characters. *First Light* might not give us the solution, but it comes very close to giving us a definition of Ackroyd's view of time. Because of its importance for this novel and for Ackroyd's other novels, this paragraph will be quoted in full. This is what Damian Fall observes while watching Aldebaran:

This was its surface as it had been aeons ago and this light, not decayed but rolling onward, was the only sign that the universe had existed before his birth. *Everything on the earth existed with him, shared his time with him in an ever-receding present moment; everything was connected, but this network of invisible relations was a network of simultaneity.* Damian had to assume that there was such a thing as the past but any evidence for it was part of the present, too. All the world had ever known was a succession of present moments. There was - there is - nothing else.

(FL:134, emphasis added)

The first sentence of the quotation is an indication that the past is present in the present because of the speed (or lack of speed) of light. We can only know the past from the present. Therefore the past is, essentially, part of the present. Robert Coover explores this idea of the eternal present in *Gerald's Party*:

... art's great task is to reconcile us to the true human

time of the eternal present, which the child in us knows to be the real one!

(1986:146, emphasis in the original)

Octavio Paz (1985:210) agrees in that he sees 'original time' as the 'eternal present', an idea also found in Buddhism (Capra, 1975:187-188). Because we view everything from the present, everything exists simultaneously. The moment we think of the past from our perspective in the present, the past and the present exist simultaneously. The last line of the quotation from *First Light* seems to suggest that the past tense cannot really exist; and even if it does, it does so from the perspective of the present. The past can only be the past because of our viewing it from the perspective of the present. Ackroyd's definition of time (*italicised*), is thus in essence one of simultaneity. His novels serve to illustrate this simultaneity concretely. Because of the nature of characters such as Hawksmoor and Charles, their links with similar characters in the past (links of simultaneity, according to Ackroyd's definition) can only be brought to the fore by making two times come together and exist simultaneously in the present. Thus, for example, Dyer and Hawksmoor exist simultaneously in present moments: Dyer's present moment has just receded a bit further, which does not mean that it no longer exists. Tobin (1978:211) aptly ascribes this emphasis on the 'fleeting present' to a prevailing ahistorical attitude, which is manifested in antilinearity in narrative.

The first of Ackroyd's novels discussed in this dissertation, *The Great Fire of London*, is closely linked to the last, *First Light*. Whereas *First Light* gives the reader a definition of Ackroyd's view of time, *The Great Fire of London* provides the reader with a solution or 'way out' of the contemporary crisis of uncertainty through the character of Little Arthur.

At the end of *The Great Fire of London*, Spenser Spender who has tried to transform the past (*Little Dorrit*) and situate it in the present, as many people nowadays do, is dead; he does not succeed. Little Arthur, on the other hand, who has lived only in the present, turns out to be the one who survives and sets the prisoners free.

His survival has certain implications for intertextuality and the relation between the past and the present. The outcome of the novel might be an indication that those who dabble with these matters and who think about them too deeply can have no freedom from confusion. Those who only live for the present, and accept things as they are, can survive. Yet even they go through life without understanding the world entirely. Since nobody can do this anyway (nobody can know the entire pattern), one wonders whether all the exertion is worth the effort.

Little Arthur seems to represent the solution to the question of the loss of meaning of time and history. He takes time 'stage by stage, day by day, not wishing to anticipate the next point, and the next. There is virtue in slowness, in inevitability' (GF:145). Little Arthur realises that, by living only in the present, and following the above-mentioned procedure, there can be something controllable, controlled, and stable in life, despite all appearances to the contrary. Therefore he survives and can grant freedom in the end. He is the solution to the contemporary, postmodern predicament, in giving us a suitable 'reply' to contemporary reality. The final fire of the novel, a source of destruction but also of energy like the sun (GF:156), resembles the act of writing, which transforms existing things (for example, the past), which can destroy them, but which can also release energy (hope). Spenser Spender is destroyed in the process, but Little Arthur in a burst of energy releases the prisoners and survives. Audrey and Arthur here have parallel roles: both are 'dark and demented angel[s] of catastrophe' (King, 1982:42) and, simultaneously, of freedom and of release.

10.2 Uncertainty and Confusion

In all of Ackroyd's novels, the characters experience uncertainty and confusion as a result of the radical change in their world-view. There are numerous examples of this awareness.

In postmodern fiction, the borders of fiction and reality become indistinguishable. Audrey in *The Great Fire of London* experiences this vagueness when she visits the site of the old Marshalsea prison which

has already been invaded by the film crew. This site now bears signs and marks of both the past and the present (the chalk used by the film crew). Audrey, however, cannot distinguish the origins of these signs and in the process confuses past and present:

She asked in the local stationers if the Victorians used chalk or not

(GF:97)

Her search for 'clues' or 'some kind of old marks' is ironic on closer examination. She is incapable of realising that there can be no marks, since Little Dorrit was an imaginary creation of Dickens's. 'In reality', Little Dorrit could never have visited the Marshalsea prison. Audrey is subject to a confusion of all definite parameters. A few pages further, Audrey is also incapable of distinguishing between the actress playing Little Dorrit in the film as a person, and as a Little Dorrit-persona (GF:110).

Towards the end of the novel, it appears as if Ackroyd, through one of his characters, is arguing for a new basis to life by moving away from the idea of intertextuality and the dissolution of traditional borders. Rowan says:

I can't really see any proper way of bringing Dickens to life - he is not our contemporary, and it may have been a mistake to make him sound like one. ... Well, it might have been an illusion - an illusion on my part at least. To think that you could just take Dickens and bundle him into the twentieth century.

(GF:158)

Audrey also feels that it is a mockery to have an actress pretend to be Little Dorrit (GF:159). They all have a need to feel that the past is firm, stable, and sacred, something with which one cannot and should not interfere. (Spenser says of the fire that it would mean the end of *Little Dorrit* (GF:163). Thus he believes his own version of the past completely.) Yet, ironically, the novel itself is proof to the contrary: the past invades the present and is itself changed in the process. Unlike Little Arthur, few characters are willing to accept this and come to terms with 'the new reality'. Therefore they can have no certainty.

In *Chatterton* the final refrain, 'the dream unfolds, the sleeper awakes, and still the dream goes on' (C:62, 68, 73, and 78) contains

the implication that there is no real difference between dream and reality. Reality is just another kind of dream from which one cannot awake. If Little Arthur had been a character in *Chatterton*, he would have accepted this unconditionally.

The image of a wheel (in connection with time) has already been mentioned numerous times. Circularity (with its implications of impossible escape and relativity) is reflected in the form of *First Light*: the first and the last chapters are entitled 'The Uncertainty Principle'² and contain much the same descriptions. Brian McHale (1987:109) sees a circular text as one with a non-ending, that is, an ending which seems to be both open and closed. These two chapters and chapter-headings can be seen as keys to the contemporary postmodern crisis. Everything in life is, in essence, uncertain, since mankind has lost faith in traditional views of the world and life in general, and has not yet accepted the world currently being dis-covered by physicists and others. Ackroyd has accepted that world and is exploring the implications scientific discoveries have for our own existence.

Damian Fall is acutely aware of not being able to accept this new world:

But there were always fields, fields of even time beyond the fires. Empty space reaching into the everlasting. At least I thought that as a child. Then there came a tremor of uncertainty. There was no time left. No space to float in.

(FL:3)

Damian's belief as a child, although it implies a certain inexplicability, at least contains some form of security. It does not really matter whether the universe is understandable, as long as one can believe something specific about it without questioning that belief. Once again, this might be the answer to the postmodern crisis: one must simply accept fragmentation and believe in that as people had previously believed in an ordered universe. Fragmentation and

² This is another reference to physics. In 1926 Werner Heisenberg formulated the uncertainty principle, which states that the more accurately you try to measure the position of a particle, the less accurately you can measure its speed, and vice versa (Hawking, 1988:55). This principle led to the development of quantum mechanics.

uncertainty are just another form of order. Damian does not realise this and therefore his change from innocent acceptance to questioning is logically followed by uncertainty. His change is also a reflection of the change of view and perspective in the development of ideas from the Middle Ages to the present. The result of uncertainty is that there is no time left in the traditional sense of the word. Damian here uses time and space as synonyms for describing the same condition.

Even the Clares' act of wanting to adopt a child leads to feelings of uncertainty:

It all begins now. From this time a set of relationships will be established which may endure for ever, passing down echoes of Kathleen and myself from generation to generation; a change in the human pattern and yet why is it so random, so unforeseeable, so permanent? Is everything so tenuous and yet so unassuageable as this one act?

(FL:34)

Nobody can escape uncertainty once they begin to think and question.

There is a clear contrast in Thomas Hardy's and Mark Clare's feelings about the stars, which reflects the change in world view from Hardy's time to ours. Here is Hardy's view:

... the twinkling of all the stars seemed to be but throbs of one body, timed by a common pulse.

(FL:34)

This view is one of unity and order. Mark's view of the expanding universe is much less certain and confident:

They are rushing away from an unknown point of origin, and this planet is rushing away with them, driven on by the force of some event that created time in the same unimaginable moment as it created space.

(FL:34)

This description is also true of people, who continually move away from the point of their origin. When looking at and thinking about the stars, Damian begins to doubt their independent existence:

And if there came a moment when nobody on earth was studying the heavens - no child looking up in wonder at the stars, no radio telescope directed towards the distant galaxies, no astronomer sitting in the observatory - what then? Was it possible that the heaven would then disappear? What if there is a void above us, like the void within me now?

(FL:102)

Everything depends on what the individual believes; this is the new reality we must accept.

Uncertainty is also the result of the excavation of the tumulus:

For, when the theory fell apart, the evidence went with it. All the objects were still there, but as soon as they lost their coherence they lost their identity; they returned at once to that disassembled and dishevelled state in which they had first been found. That new discovery, that suddenly revealed artefact or altered carbon dating, acted as a piece of primal darkness blotting out all light - it was a contagion which sent everything else spinning back into the abyss.

(FL:240)

This observation is equally applicable to time: without linear coherence, time as it used to be has no identity. The contemporary world must first accept the relativity of time; only then will time again have identity.

People need a sense of continuity in time to provide them with certainty, just as a story needs an ending for a sense of certainty (see Mark's words on this subject to Damian (FL:100)). Just as most stories nowadays have open endings - with a resulting uncertainty - time is open in the sense that we cannot really understand or know it. The only time we can lay any claim to understanding is the present as seen from a specific point-of-view. Kathleen expresses this feeling in a conversation with Mark:

Sometimes I think the past is so mysterious that we needn't really worry about the present at all.

(FL:190-191)

When she starts considering suicide, the only thing that can give her a feeling of security is the sound of the clocks ticking in the shop below their flat (FL:242). It is as if the mechanical form of measuring time gives her security in the belief that time can be controlled in this way. Later she thinks:

And what need was there for her own existence in this cave of time, in this place where the movement of the hours was steady, insistent, remorseless? But this was a comfort to her, this sense of continuity, because in the passage of time she could be blotted out, utterly forgotten.

(FL:242)

Everything depends on one's perspective. Therefore everything is relative and nothing is certain. Mark is aware that there are various ways of seeing the past:

It's just ... that we need another way of looking at the site. There are things here we don't even know how to see.

(FL:121)

What one finally sees, depends on the perspective one chooses. Eugenio Donato says of archaeology that it is ultimately 'not an objective science but a fantasy of the perceiving subject' (quoted in Arac, 1987:112).

In Damian Fall's cottage the representation of Kepler bears an inscription which is at the same time a warning to the contemporary world about time and history:

Astronomy has two ends, to save the appearances of the heavens and to contemplate the true form of the edifice of the world.

(FL:97)

We need to either preserve appearances in our questioning of time and history or otherwise accept that the result will be confusion, a confusion we must then accept as a new and different kind of 'order'.

Ackroyd's novels can therefore be seen as 'midfiction', that is, speculations about reality which have a temporary, preliminary, and context-bound character, but which can nevertheless serve as justification (Alan Wilde in Bertens & D'haen, 1988:39).

Characteristic of Ackroyd's oeuvre is what Francis King calls 'the obfuscation from which one struggles to emerge at the end' (1985:30). Others have also referred to this aspect of his novels (see Hollinghurst, 1985:1049 and Kendrick, 1989:23). This obfuscation can probably be explained by the fact that characters and narrators of postmodern novels resist understanding in terms of psychology, or in terms of unity, wholeness or coherence (D'haen, 1987:146), in this way mirroring reality. The temporal content of the novels can also seem obscure, since it likewise resists understanding in terms of traditional views of time.

CONCLUSION

Having looked at postmodernism, the motifs of time and history, other elements belonging to these motifs, and mobilities of presence, one can now attempt to draw certain conclusions.

It has become clear in the course of this study, both of postmodernism and of Ackroyd's novels, that everything in contemporary life is relative, fluid, flexible, fragmented, uncertain, confusing, incomprehensible, and even threatening. These characteristics naturally also apply to our perception of time and history.

Ackroyd is acutely aware of this. When referring to history, his characters are conscious (and make us conscious) that history is subjective and relative, just like fiction. History is no longer absolute fact, but rather a construct. History and story are different names authors have chosen to describe the same phenomenon, their choice depending on what they want their readers to believe about their writing. Thus the content of Ackroyd's novels reflects the contemporary view of history as essentially the same as fiction. Yet, in my view, these reflections (within the novels) on the nature of history are secondary. The primary explorations of history can be found on the formal level of these texts.

In his novels, Ackroyd uses the past as historical background to each of the texts, thereby giving fiction an element of historical authenticity. In the process he makes us conscious of the relativity of the borders of fiction and history, fiction and reality. The introduction of history into fiction has the primary effect of revealing the fundamentally fictional nature of history, with the result that the reader no longer knows what is historical truth and what fictional fantasy. At the same time, Ackroyd makes us aware that the past can be combined with the present to create a newly rejuvenated text, in the process showing that the presence inherent in the past is mobile. In *The Great Fire of London* past fiction existing in history is combined with present fiction. In *Hawksmoor* and *Chatterton* past history is combined with present fiction. In *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* past 'history' (revealed as fiction - in many instances -

in reality) is combined with present fiction (laying claim to being (auto)biography, traditionally seen as historically true). In this respect *First Light* deviates from the pattern with only Aldebaran as historically true. As far as history is concerned, *First Light* therefore seems to represent a shift from a focus on history to a focus on time: history has been 'proven' a forgery and a fake (just as fiction is forged and faked); thus there is a movement towards time, albeit a very different kind of time, as the main creator of history.

The idea that history is a construct is closely linked to that of the (non)existence of originality or the original. All the novels, especially *Chatterton*, reflect the view that it has become impossible to find the original of anything in the contemporary world. Because of the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence with its resulting endless deferral of ultimate meaning, everything always already bears traces of something else, so that everything in the world seems to be connected to everything else. Texts, language, words, and even people 'refer' to other similar creations through Ackroyd's use of intertextuality and the parallels in the lives of certain characters.

In creating a *mise en abyme* of fictions within fictions, some of which pose as realities, Ackroyd dissolves the boundaries traditionally separating fiction and reality. If a world which sees itself as real is shown to be fictional, our 'real' world may be another fiction. Through his writing we are made aware that our conceptions of the world around us are relative.

Thus Ackroyd's fiction reflects Einstein's theory of relativity, which has revolutionised science in that time has been shown to be relative. Some of the characters in the novels still choose to see time as absolute and linear, whereas others have come to accept that it is relative, that the past is present in the present, and that time consists of numerous present moments, all existing simultaneously and all interlinked. This latter view of time is the kind of time ultimately professed in all the novels, and explored and defined in *First Light*, a kind of time which is unconventional and even timeless in relation to 'traditional', 'normal' time, and is a direct consequence of Einstein's theory of relativity. This unconventional,

confusing kind of time is used in the images to describe time (although some of them are conventional, these conventional images merely enlarge the enormity of the unconventional ones), and in inversions in the flow of time. This is also the view of time the reader is finally left with as a result of the structure of the novels. Even the tenses used in the novels support the idea of an eternal present, in that the present tense - the tense used for those who are elect in that they have a greater knowledge - is used to describe the past, in the process making it present. Time is furthermore seen as meaningless unless connected to space in order to constitute a kind of space-time which is ever-present, so that those who possess the necessary knowledge can travel through space-time.

The mobilities of presence constitute part of the confusion, but also part of the solution. By becoming aware that everything is connected through a web of simultaneities, linked intimately to place or space, we may feel confused at first. Yet if we only accept this kind of time and existence, we can find certainty, if that is what we want to find; we can, however, choose to live with uncertainty.

From the preceding study, it has become clear that Ackroyd explores various mobilities of presence in the course of the novels. These concern characters, objects, and texts (both historical and fictional). All the characters seem to have an original who can, however, never be pinpointed because of the endless deferral of meaning. The essence - or presence - of this original then moves along the various links in a web-like chain of characters, manifesting itself in various characters who are similar to other, past characters who constitute part of the same chain. In the same way, objects can appear to travel through time, showing that they are mobile presences. Texts and historical and fictional characters in these texts are a further example of mobile presences, since these prove themselves capable of 'travel' from one text to another, from reality to fiction, from fiction to reality, and from the past to the present.

Finally, Ackroyd's fiction appears to resemble postmodernism which is a mode of the many and not of one. Yet Ackroyd shows that many different, seemingly unrelated parts are in fact connected to form one

pattern and are thus basically one. He therefore either moves beyond postmodern fragmentation, or is still caught up in pre-postmodern centring. As human beings we do not, however, see the complete pattern: to see the entire pattern, one would have to stand outside of it. Time in its entirety can only be seen by those in a state of timelessness or eternity. Those who are in such a state, a state similar to that of the author who stands outside the fictional world of his/her creation, will probably see that time (both past and present) is an eternal, timeless present, with various present moments existing simultaneously, some merely being further away in distance. Time is indeed like a web, with the past as the centre of the web and the present as the outer edges where the always mobile spider is for ever spinning new threads. Just because the central, innermost threads might have been spun 'a long time ago' when seen from the point where the spider is currently spinning, it certainly does not mean that the central parts are no longer in existence, are no longer present. They are still (t)here; they exist simultaneously with the newly created threads; everything connects ... and we are caught in this web of simultaneity from which there is no escape, only acceptance of our condition and, ultimately, possibly the discovery of mobilities of presence.

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