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**CHANGING MODERNITY: RELIGION AND THE
HIGH-RISE AS MARKERS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN
WORKS BY DICKENS AND DOS PASSOS¹**

Keywords: *modernity, modernism, cathedral, church, skyscraper, identification, urban, identity, space, topos*

Abstract: *This paper explores the changing functionality of religious buildings such as the cathedral and the church at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century in works by Dickens and Dos Passos set in London and New York respectively, as well as the rise of the skyscraper in Dos Passos's portrayal of New York. The imposing architecture and intrinsic symbolism of the former allow an exploration of the evolving signification of their represented spaces in the works of the two writers while the ubiquitous presence of the latter in Dos Passos's New York underscores the significance of its absence in Dickens's London. The representations of these architectural landmarks are viewed as instrumental in reconstructing the city inhabitants' identity in the transition from 19th century modernity to 20th century modernism analyzed here by close reading of selected passages against critical works on the city by urbanists such as Mumford and Wright. A modernist view on London's cathedrals is provided by juxtaposing passages from Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway.*

No doubt, symbolic architecture in a city is what imparts not only the outlook of the city, but also forms the urban identity of the city inhabitant. Postcards ensure that the city skyline is there for everyone to see so that the city becomes easily recognizable after just a cursory glance at the monumental buildings. While this ready recognition is guaranteed in photographic evidence, it is literary works set in a city that provide insights of the perceptions of these buildings by both local residents and ambling tourists in a given epoch, thus accentuating the capacity of the city topoi of creating their own often heterotopic² spaces.

A city such as present-day Montreal allows for the seemingly peaceful coexistence of the cathedral and the skyscraper, the latter towering high above the former, typically positioned one behind the other from the perspective of the adjacent street. With the dark cathedral in the front reflected in the shiny electrical surface of the glass and concrete skyscraper in the back, the spatial composition of the symbol

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¹ This analysis is part of this author's published Ph.D. thesis: Boev, Hristo. *Modern(ist) Portrayals of the City in Dickens and Dos Passos: Similarities, Differences, Continuities*. Sofia: Izida, 2013.

² The idea of heterotopias was introduced by Foucault in "Des Espaces Autres" (1967). English title: "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias".

of the highly religious and that of the corporate secular gives precedence of the spiritual at eye level until the passer-by chooses to look upwards. Then it may also dawn on the person looking at the two buildings that although visually glamorous and fascinating, the two edifices suddenly appear to be at odds as the vertical dimension of the skyscraper undermines the initial superiority of the cathedral. A longer contemplation of the composite image of the two buildings will surely account for the realization that impossibly different as the two may seem, they are also strangely compatible not only because of the shared space, but also because the secular has not ousted the religious. Rather, it is the religious in its aspiration for the celestial realms and the sublime that may have been transferred or is being transferred, at the moment of observation, from the cathedral on to the skyscraper. The skyscraper seems to have become or is always in the process of becoming religious in its own right. The relationship between the architectural religious and secular as two cultural antipodes is portrayed as much more dramatic in the works of two writers from earlier epochs – Dickens and Dos Passos, who chose to depict the city (London and New York) as a physical locale.

Dickens's and Dos Passos's representations of the high-rise will be revealed to show the city inhabitants' modes of interaction with this socially constructed space, embodying a sense of transcendence and of being *elsewhere*. Of great significance in this analysis will be what Foucault terms "relations of propinquity" (23) determining the shifting use of a specific site over the years, as well as the changing heterotopia resulting from the acquisition or loss of space of the respective topoi. The term "heterotopia" will be used according to the initial given definition as real sites within a specific culture which are "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 24) and will refer to the examined urban sites in question in their capacity to undergo the changes I have spoken thereof – their transition from their original "sacred" (25) space to another space or other spaces, typically incompatible with the initial one, all of them being contained within the same site, which becomes a marker of a changing sensibility.

In discussing the religious and secular with regards to the high-rise in the two writers' representations of London and New York respectively, I draw on Eric Prieto's ideas related to Geocriticism³ in which he anticipates possible developments of the theory by analyzing not one place, but two based on a commonality of the traits characterizing the two sites:⁴

³ A theory mainly propounded by Westphal Bertrand in his key work so far *La Géocritique, Réel, Fiction, Espace* (2007) and Robert T. Tally Jr. in *Spatiality. The New Critical Idiom* (2013) based on works on spatial theory by earlier critics such as Foucault, Lefebvre, Soja, Bachelard and Sansot. This theory explores the capacity of a place to be expressed by literary and nonliterary means through real and fictional spaces which may be viewed as complementary.

⁴ For the complete list of common features and relations between Dickens's London and Dos Passos's New York justifying a comparative analysis, see the Introductory Chapter of *Modern(ist) Portrayals of the City in Dickens and Dos Passos: Similarities, Differences, Continuities*.

Another way to lend rigor to a study of literary place would be to focus not on singular places but on particular *types* of place. In this case, the texts studies would deal with sites that might be spread around the globe. The unity of such a study would be guaranteed not by the site-specific singularity of a place but by the shared traits that make it possible to conceive the sites as part of the same category. (27)

The cathedral and the church as urban topoi are very important in Dickens's and Dos Passos's represented spaces in establishing points of historical discontinuity. Like the bridge,⁵ they are a key element in identifying the extent to which the two writers abide by the symbolism of this representation of space⁶ in the city or depart from it. This symbolism is seen by Lefebvre as "essentially repressive" (20), the space around it being "colonized" and "oppressed" (20). Unlike the bridge, the cathedral and the church have overtly theological connotations and are designed to create their own sacred (repressive) space within the city.

In rereading Emile Durkheim's classic *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Robert Scott establishes a relationship between the *divine*, the ceremony, and the *rituals* and their representations in the cathedral (149). Thus he speaks of the *sacred force*, which is the ability of the divine to affect the ecclesiastic space within and around the cathedral emanating from its sacred objects. It is considered to possess an irradiating quality producing sacred spaces around it. Its effects are weakened by distance and augmented by proximity respectively, the objects themselves perceived as the necessary containers of this *radioactive* force. Unlike the bridge, which can be placed outside the city, the cathedral in the modern city is an urban element, intrinsically heterotopic in nature, combining sacred and cultural space.

The city dwellers can enter this heterotopic space through the designated entrance and find themselves in different zones of *hallowedness*, the high altar being the one of the greatest intensity of sacredness (159-160). It necessitates the placement of the image of Jesus crucified there. Another very important element of the cathedral is the choir. Scott sees the gothic cathedral as intended to be "a space where people could get a taste of heaven" (121) experienced through the choir, which allows getting a glimpse of heavenly bliss by recreating cosmic harmony within the sacred space of the cathedral. From its conceptual design to its realization as a physical structure, the cathedral represents heaven in the city, and its large space enhances the communal experience of the divine as well as embodies Christian knowledge in its entirety, comprising its moral natural and historical aspects (129).

⁵ Discussed by the writer of this article in "The Modern City Experienced through its Bridges: The Bridge in London and New York in the Works of Dickens and Dos Passos." *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Studies and Environmental Communication* 2 (2012): 21-37. Print.

⁶ Application of the terminology used by Lefebvre (*The Production of Space* 33). In this article and elsewhere in this author's thesis, Lefebvre's triad is contained within the larger term "urban representation" and includes: *spatial practice*, *representation of space* and *representational space*. *Representations of space* refer to city planners' constructions shot through with knowledge and ideology usually referring to buildings while *representational spaces* are experienced or lived situations.

I begin my analysis by examining St. Paul's Cathedral in Dickens's novels, a true point of convergence of past and present in Dickens's times (Miltoun 212), which is positioned at the highest hill in London – Ludgate Hill. It was the tallest building in London between 1710 and 1962, its dome being one of the tallest in the world to the present day. According to Moncrieff, St. Paul's Cathedral in the 20th century acts as a fair presentment of the Anglican Church exhibiting “a duality: at one end solid, spacious, rather cold, decked with hints of the world and the State; at the other toned into harmony with a revival of Catholic forms of worship” (48). It stands as a symbol of national and city identity, being the subject of numerous promotional materials – postcards, souvenirs, etc.

Its function as a promotion of the city as part of an extant Victorian code is expressed in its association with daily chores in the house, evoking images of married bliss in accordance with Biblical postulates. Young David Copperfield thus takes a dose of Victorian morality in the presence of his nurse under the influence of the image of the cathedral: “her [Peggotty's] work-box with a sliding lid, with a view of St. Paul's Cathedral (*DC* 30); “always with her ... a work-box with a picture of St. Paul's upon the lid” (*DC* 1193).

The irradiating influence, I have spoken of, in my discussion of the significance of the cathedral, dominates David Copperfield's childhood memories, as also exemplified in a preceding scene where his mother reads him about the resurrection of Lazarus and then he is shown the churchyard in reassurance that the dead are in their places (*DC* 28). The church is shown to be performing its function of a representation of religious space in establishing the boundary between the living and the dead as well as establishing the connection between the living and heaven. The song of the clergyman is representative of the cosmic harmony imposed by the choir in the church, the hypnotic tones of which merge the distinction between the dead and the living. In doing so, the song establishes a sense of resignation and acceptance manifested in the mesmerized David Copperfield, who falls off the seat on the pew “more dead than alive” (*DC* 29).

The shapes and sounds of St. Paul's cathedral keep turning up for the city dweller, becoming his timekeeper and signature seal of the known. Its shapes contain the space of the coffee house positioned within the archway of the churchyard (*DC* 747). The cathedral appears even in the main protagonist's dreams with its bell tolling, marking the time ticking away from his marrying Dora, a recurrent dream invariably accompanied by counterarguments of poverty (*DC* 689). The striking bell seems to announce the beginning of an incident (*DC* 937) or the countdown to a forthcoming one as in the portrayal of the last night of an inmate in the death row at Newgate (*SB* 215). Midnight seems to be the preferred dramatic hour of turbulent events tolled significantly by St. Paul's bell (*DS* 788). The tolling of the bell also serves as an announcer of a recent or an imminent death (Nancy's). It is complicit to the accumulated grim effects of the heavy symbolism of London Bridge, the menacing contours of the tower of St. Saviour's Church and the spire of St. Magnus (*OT* 427).

In Dickens, the combination of urban and theological symbolism also plays the role of a strong city identifier along the city dweller's path towards brutal death, crossing the line of the space of the living and that of the dead. St. Paul's cathedral, thus, is a very strong factor in the lives of Dickens's Londoners always associated

with certain incidents they go through, but also a symbol of intransience and timelessness (*DC* 1119). St. Paul's Cathedral becomes a place of identification with and belonging to London through the prism of eternity strengthened by the ubiquitous image of the cathedral recurring in multiple references to Peggotty's workbox, as unchanging and enduring as the very building itself.

Just like the bridge, the cathedral in Dickens is a place of a particular force capable of producing events, which are anticipated by the city inhabitants. Occasionally, it also suggests their meaningful absence resulting from a city resident's pre-modernist sensibility – Mr Micawber taking David Copperfield to the Medway conurbation along the Medway River. They are visiting a cathedral town out of tourist cultural curiosity, where surprisingly nothing turns up (*DC* 361) in accordance with Lefebvre's discussion of the "reversal of heterotopy" (11), which here signals a discontinuity announcing the advent of the new epoch, triggered by a change in the spatial functionality of the cathedral. The cathedral is then a place of city identity and belonging, a symbol of intransience, a closed world excluding the world without, and a place of rejuvenating reminiscence of days gone by in a "half-sleeping and half-waking dream" with the "world being shut out" (*DC* 366). The treatment of the cathedral so far reveals it as a largely positive urban topos entirely in accordance with its medieval symbolism dating back to the times most cathedrals were built, manifesting occasional points of discontinuity. The cathedral bell is typically *congenial* (*DC* 389) bringing back memories of boyhood, its towers – invariably *venerable* (*DC* 770) although the cathedral itself is frequently described as being *gray*.

Alternatively, an earlier work such as *Sketches by Boz* and a later one – *Our Mutual Friend* make a modernist loop in doing away with St Paul's Cathedral's irradiating influence over the city inhabitants. This influence is occasionally suppressed by the nonchalant representation of "Doctors' Commons" situated near the Cathedral as a counteraction of the secular towards the religious: the court where what is done by the church – a marriage, can be undone by the state (*SB* 88). The name is corrupted by the uneducated parvenu – Boffin to "Doctor Scomons" (*OMF* 97). He is ignorant enough to show equal irreverence to either, and is representative of the modern man with a new sensibility for whom the profane ousts the sacred.

A special attention should be paid to Dickens's treatment of the cathedral in the opening scene of his last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* where its representational contradictions resulting from traditional Victorian perceptions of veneration of the cathedral and modernist disregard for its symbolic significance crystalize in the consciousness of Edwin's uncle, Jasper and set the frame of the entire novel:

AN ANCIENT ENGLISH CATHEDRAL TOWER? How can the ancient English Cathedral tower be here! The well-known massive gray square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here! There is no spike of rusty iron in the air, between the eye and it, from any point of the real prospect. What is the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? Maybe it is set up by the Sultan's orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers, one by one. . . . Ten thousand scimitars flash in the sunlight, and thrice ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers. . . . Still the Cathedral Tower rises in the background, where it cannot be, and still no writhing figure is on the grim

spike. Stay! Is the spike so low a thing as the rusty spike on the top of a post of an old bedstead that has tumbled all awry? (*MED* 3)

Jasper's modernist duality of a choirmaster at the Cathedral in the dystopian Cloisterham and an opium den frequenter in London is realized in his opium-induced dream in which dream and reality are blurred, merging into one another. The spike of the cathedral representing a real image of his place of work is transformed from a scimitar, under the influence of the oriental flavor of his opium-infused dream, to the more realistic rusty spike of the cheap bedstead twisted awry. The transition from dreaming to reality is subtle enough for Jasper to see the spike of the Cathedral as a manifestation of guilt (Newcomb 63). Jasper's consciousness becomes the junction where East and West meet and where the projection of his body as a representation of Western Christianity is impaled *writhing* on the spike of the Cathedral for his infidelity to the West in the committed sacrilege, having consumed opium as an Eastern temptation for the Western man. The presence of the Cathedral in his Eastern dream is triggered by his awakening to the reality of the rusty spike of the bed in London's opium den and the persisting urge for him to return to the Cathedral in Cloisterham where he should belong.

As Newcomb points out, the cathedral in Jasper's case does not lead to his salvation according to the canon, but only to the graveyard (63), resulting from his relationship to the Cathedral, which is "hypocritical and guilty" (63). This relationship suggests his renouncement of the Cathedral and its traditional symbolism as a representation of religious space. As a result, it assumes or resumes (reversal of heterotopia) its formal functions connected to his providing a living for himself. The tension between the secular and the holy in the Cathedral becomes intolerable for Jasper, and so he further desecrates it by supposedly committing the crime of murdering his nephew, Edwin Drood, thus becoming a tragic figure whose eroding religiosity and increasing lust after secular pleasures enter into a violent clash similar to that of Ambrosio, a character from Matthew Lewis's gothic masterpiece *The Monk*, whose devoutness becomes his nemesis. Jasper's treatment of the Cathedral, where he formally performs his duties as a choirmaster, is exemplified in the following passage showing him returning from the opium den and viewing the Cathedral as a place of boring work routine completely stripped of religious connotations, hence of holiness:

That same afternoon, the massive grey square tower of an old Cathedral rises before the sight of a jaded traveller. The bells are going for daily vesper service, and he must needs attend it, one would say, from his haste to reach the open Cathedral door. The choir are getting on their sullied white robes, in a hurry, when he arrives among them, gets on his own robe, and falls into the procession filing in to service. Then, the Sacristan locks the iron-barred gates that divide the sanctuary from the chancel, and all of the procession having scuttled into their places, hide their faces; and then the intoned words, "When the wicked man – rise among groins of arches and beams of roof, awakening muttered thunder". (*MED* 6)

As with other depictions of city life from his later works, Dickens does not fail to register the sensibility of the city dwellers entering the modernist times, here also enhanced by the opposition of realities – the opium den located in London and

the dystopian location of the Cathedral. The reflection of this period of transition, however, does not go without the writer's superimposition of a moral code governing the city inhabitants' actions, manifested in their going through regular pangs of remorse. In the passage above, these Victorian remnants are realized in the continuous experience of guilt in the reception awaiting Jasper at the Cathedral where the rest of the choir intones his accusation of being a *wicked man*. His wickedness is locked in his inhabiting a sacred space and is voiced by the Cathedral itself in its reaction to his deeds. Jasper's portrayal as a city inhabitant with an early modernist sensibility realized in his secular Eastern practices is thus made all the more prominent by the Victorianism exuded by the Cathedral, existing in the exteriorized reality of Jasper's nightmarish dreams containing Victorian relics. Consequently, he is *jaded* by his traveling to the cathedral and its dome is not *venerable* as in *David Copperfield*, but is *massive* and *gray* as is the tower.

The modernist loss of overt religious piety in the city dweller, when near a Cathedral in general and St. Paul's Cathedral in particular, can be observed to the same effect in Virginia Woolf's portrayal of Londoners in *Mrs Dalloway*. In this representation of London, the churches are first introduced from the perspective of an airplane as an insignificant gray island (20) where only St Paul's Cathedral has preserved its role of an urban topos creating a sense of belonging to and identification with the city, similar to the perception a city dweller nowadays may have. The traditional heavy symbolism of the cathedral has turned into a disembodied spirit (20-1) no longer associated with the irradiating objects in the cathedral space discussed by Scott. Furthermore, St. Paul's cathedral takes its reserved place in post-Victorian times as a prominent landmark which is there to direct city residents to other destinations as in Mrs Dalloway's moving towards a place of great "uproar" and "geniality" (65). The only force remaining in the cathedral is then of memory and imagination as the city dweller's imagination supplies what is lacking in memory. As such, the Cathedral may occasionally become an object of curiosity, of desire for identification with a city topos imbued with supposed and attributed deeper meanings which are contrasted with the apparent lack of such profundities in the modernist city. The latter is manifested in Mrs Dalloway's approaching the tower of Westminster Cathedral where "the habitation of God" (83) floats amidst a thick traffic of disinterested city residents.

Just like bridges, homotopic spaces with modernists like Dos Passos, if we exclude some history-laden bridges such as Brooklyn Bridge, may become heterotopic producing a space of their own. By contrast, Victorian heterotopic spaces such as churches, with him tend to lose their heterogeneous qualities and fail to produce their own sacred space. It is a fact that can be observed to be in the making or *unmaking*, for that matter with reference to literary London, in the relationship between the Cathedral and Jasper as well as in the hesitant city dweller who wonders if he should enter St. Paul's Cathedral or not in *Mrs Dalloway*. Such topoi, however, may acquire another space, thus restoring their heterotopia in being associated with yet another modern function in Dos Passos's New York – that of a place of repose and of consuming a snack in the city inhabitant's lunch break.

In order to examine the American counterpart to Dickens's representations of the cathedral, I propose to analyze the representations of the church in New York,

notably Trinity Church, located at the intersection of Wall Street and Broadway. At its completion, its 86m-spire and cross was the highest point in New York until it was surpassed by The World Building (Pulitzer Building) in 1890, thus marking the advent of business as the new religion.⁷ For Manhattan residents, the cemetery next to the church is nothing but a green oasis where they can consume their sandwiches among the tombs in their lunch breaks, the commercial spirit of Broadway and Wall Street effectively dispelling the aura of the sacred space of the church in an equally strong counter-radiating influence of the secular and profane.

A scene with Church space from *Manhattan Transfer* reveals Jimmy Herf's interactions with the adjacent spaces of the secular and the sacred. Determined to decline his uncle's business proposition, Jimmy automatically heads for Battery Park where he hopes to be relieved from the stress of the urban jungle of the glass-and-concrete metropolis. On his way, he enters the amplified active consumerist space of Broadway and Wall Street, which annihilates both spaces contained in the churchyard and the cemetery as places producing heterotopic spaces (the sacred and cultural). This adjacent spatiality results in the production of a compensatory *third space* – a functional byproduct of the consumerist spaces radiating from the surrounding places of consumption. Thus, the lunch break oasis is an institutionalized extreme profanation of religious space – lunch being consumed by people-machines – the *officeboys* rendered in one notion word. They have their lunches among the tombs of a plethora of distinguished American cultural icons buried there. The scene is then changed completely by a swarm of immigrants from all over the world, crowding outside the steamships at the harbor as a place of potential concentration of job opportunities. The merging of the two scenes of New-Yorkers – the ones desecrating the tombs by eating among them outside the workplace, and the ones who are not eating – the immigrants without jobs, who hope to join the first group, is too much for Jimmy to bear. He turns around and faces the gritty wind, which physically emphasizes and impersonates the urban jungle of the metropolis to see the *gash* of Broadway in a suppressed cry for a respite from so much concrete and consumption (*MT* 101).

Similarly, churches are also reduced to timekeepers, but unlike Dickens's routine representation, they are typically discordant with the city dweller's state of mind as in the passage with Fainy looking for a job in Chicago with the morning full of "churchbells jangling in his ears" (*The 42nd Parallel* 22). The churches, just like the other representations of places in the metropolis, are permanently set at variance with the city inhabitants' moods, complicit to the ever-blue metropolitan skies, exuding indifference. The residual sacred space in them is so insubstantial that they become an enigma for the American metropolitan dweller with their disapproving "stern faces" (*The 42nd Parallel* 12). By contrast, Dickens's predominantly reverential treatment of the church and cathedral space renders Jasper constantly gnawed by remorse for being a modern man and a clergyman at the same time. Like Jasper, Dos

⁷ With reference to Dos Passos's New York, discussed by the author of this article in "Pecuniary Culture and Consuming the Jazz Age in the Big City: the Case of *Manhattan Transfer*." *Space and the City in American Culture*, *RJAS* 1(2014): 11-21. Print.

Passos's metropolitan inhabitants consider it to be work like any other (*The 42nd Parallel* 285) commensurate with doing social services without experiencing Jasper's inner struggle.

Naturally, this changed modernist perception of the cathedral and the church is related to the fact that the modern city dweller of the twentieth century tends to view it rather as a tourist attraction or as a work of art, which results in the fact that cultural tourists "may greatly outnumber religious worshippers" (Shackley 346). Furthermore, this gradual loss of religious piety in the modernist city is connected to the loss of what Eliade terms "*non-homogénéité de l'espace*" [spatial non-homogeneity] (25). This immanent heterogeneity is invariably associated with the collective conception of the religious and nonreligious persons and refers to the fact that the sacred space imparted to the cathedral by a religious person is the only one that *really* exists for that person. It is opposed to the formless *other* surrounding the sacred space, which exists in reality for everyone else. The general loss of the sacred space for the inhabitant of the modernist city, whether in Woolf or in Dos Passos, therefore, could be viewed as a transition from a heterotopic to a homotopic space in the loss of the primary space in a religious building, with possible regained heterotopia in yet another modern utilization of that space occasioned by convenience.

Unlike cathedrals, skyscrapers were mainly built for business purposes. Confined on all sides, Manhattan could not spread out and had only one direction – the movement upwards, which resulted in the fast construction of over 550 buildings over 10 stories high in lower Manhattan by 1910. The incredible amassment of people from all over the world on the island brought about the first tangible dimensions of mass consumption, which in turn resulted in the birth of corporations that coveted the air as their logos topping the skyscrapers emanated dominance and prosperity commanding vertically the urban space. It is not surprising that with advancing in the metropolis, having become the dominant urban culture based on business, the skyscrapers in New York were seen as powerful works of art always being before the eyes of the city inhabitants unlike works of modern art (R. Hughes 419). The American metropolis itself was becoming *unreal* in a much more alien sense than the portrayal that T. S. Eliot was able to devise in depicting London of the 1920s in *The Waste Land*, which drew its inspiration from Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*.

While these perspectives of perceived distortion of urban space have found their modernist expression in *Manhattan Transfer* and *USA*, it should be said that they were specific of the American metropolis of the 1920s and were not to make their presence in London until 40 years later following the rebuilding of the city after the Second World War. In order to establish the significance of the presence of the skyscraper in Dos Passos's New York and its absence in Dickens's London, I shall dwell on some of the ideas of the organic city propounded by Frank Wright and Lewis Mumford, who did not share the wonderment at New York's high-rise skyline unlike other architects or newcomers to the metropolis.

In *The Highway and the City* Lewis Mumford laments the spoiling effect of the skyscraper in London stating that it has the devastating effect of a *bomb* in historical areas that "both recall the past and grace the present" (110). In his and Frank Wright's arguments for decentralization of the city, Mumford sees London as excelling in this aspect and as the city of this size "the most capable of maintaining

the human scale” (111). He discusses one skyscraper in particular – the newly built Millbank Tower aka Vickers Tower (1963), which according to him, *violates* the historical space around Westminster Abbey. As both he and Wright look beyond the imposing grandeur of the skyscraper, they condemn it as “capital gains over public needs” (Mumford 113) and more precisely as “congestion promoter” and “dead wall of obstruction” (Wright 85), both campaigning for organic, humane architecture as the initial *sacred* urban space modeled after practical residential needs. Mumford even goes so far as to state that London looked more beautiful “battered by the bombs” (114) while Wright remarks that “skyscraper by skyscraper is the gravestone of capitalistic centralization” (85). It was in his collection of essays on New York, originally published in installments under the title *The Sky Line* (1931-1940), some of which appeared in *The New Yorker* (1932-7) that Mumford was to make his most poignant comments on the sense of urban *irreality* imparted by the skyscraper in Manhattan. One of them is strikingly consonant with the manner in which it was perceived by many – as a ship:

...and the tall building, called the skyscraper after the topmost sail of its old clipper ships, a little later; and it used these new utilities as a means of defrauding its people of space and light and sun, turning the streets into deep chasms, and obliterating the back yards and gardens that had preserved a humaner environment. (*Mumford on Modern Art* 45)

Another one resonates with Dos Passos’s vision of it, revealing a connection to Dickens’s propensity for the fog and soot enshrouding monumental buildings in London:

In other words, the tall skyscraper is the businessman’s toy, his plaything, his gewgaw; in an expansive mood, he calls it alternatively a temple or a cathedral, and he looks upon the romantic altitudinous disorder of a modern city with the same blissful feeling that the Victorian industrialist had for his factory chimneys, belching forth soot and foul gases. The skyscraper makes him feel prosperous even when he is losing money on it. (*Sidewalk Critic* 58)

In compliance with the modernist cubic perception of space, palpable in the American metropolis, Mumford likens Manhattan, seen from a distance, to “a shimmering silvery-blue mass, mountainous and buoyant, like a bundle of Zeppelins set on end” (*Sidewalk Critic* 85).

As the subsequent analysis will show, Dos Passos shares many of Mumford’s visualizations of the skyscraper and both Mumford’s and Wright’s moralistic condemnation of it. In doing so, he revels in depicting this most elevated urban space in its interactions with the city dweller as a place of desire and identification, giving a full play of his ultramodernist techniques of portraying the modern cityscape. In *Manhattan Transfer*, the skyscraper operates as externalized representational space for two city inhabitants – Phil Sandbourne and Jimmy Herf. Jimmy is haunted by the recurrent image of the skyscraper. He even has a nightmare in which he makes repeated futile attempts to enter the building, incessantly walking “around blocks and blocks looking for the door of the humming, tinselwindowed skyscraper” (365), but

this urban space is denied him as social practice for the privileged. The *inaccessible skyscraper* becomes the epitome of the perfection and self-containment of the modernist metropolis, the presence of his estranged wife (Ellen), with whom he is still in love, “beckoning from every window” (365) is an acute expression of his longing for a reunion with her in a supposedly better world. The idea, crystallized in most immigrants’ belief that the skyscraper itself might become the urban space where human condition will receive a more humane habitation, is expressed in Phil Sandbourne’s attempts to persuade the wealthy lawyer, George Baldwin, to finance an idea for a new kind of building material. He fantasizes an idyllic representation of urban space, the self-containment of the skyscraper miraculously resolving urban tensions of social life – reducing divorce rates, infusing this novel urban space with the consummation of love (*MT* 218). In imagining the skyscraper, Herf and Sandbourne also articulate the two extremes in the argument over how urban life and urban design are related: the recognition of the inhumanity of the monumental skyscraper in its inaccessibility to Herf and the simplistic environmental determinism of Sandbourne’s assumption that visually attractive buildings will compensate for all the inherent deficiencies and vices society holds for its members.

A scene illustrating the statements above features two of the most famous skyscrapers of the epoch with Jimmy Herf standing jobless in front of them. The passage is indicative of the distortion of urban space caused by the skyscraper where the city inhabitant is dwarfed by its colossal construction. Jimmy leaves the Pulitzer Building also called the World Building (1890) and walks away into a futuristic mystic city where urban spaces seem to have changed or to be changing their spatial code at will, thus causing nothing but frustration. As he walks away, the Woolworth Building (1913) – one of the tallest skyscrapers in New York to present day, seems to mock at his inability to find a job and, consequently, to identify with it. It is transformed into a telescope that extends like a tentacle chasing him on the street, the telescopic shape of the building itself appearing to bend over and move sideways like other objects in *Manhattan Transfer* which are prone to acquiring motor functions as if mocking at the city inhabitants’ efforts to control them. As is the case with other depictions of urban space in Dos Passos, the metropolis exudes indifference featuring the bluest of skies, a modernist metropolis of glass and neon lights, of thousands of signs and a total loss of human meaning, in spite of the omnipotent presence of *signifier* and *signified*:

Jobless, Jimmy Herf came out of the Pulitzer Building. He stood beside a pile of pink newspapers on the curb, taking deep breaths, looking up the glistening shaft of the Woolworth. It was a sunny day, the sky was a robin’s egg blue. He turned north and began to walk uptown. As he got away from it the Wool-worth pulled out like a telescope. He walked through the city of shiny windows, through the city of scrambled alphabets, through the city of gilt letter signs. (*MT* 298)

Unlike majestic cathedrals or bridges in Dickens, which provide ambivalent representational spaces for the inhabitants of the metropolis, and whose symbolic function is perceived to be closer to the Christian ecclesiastical understanding, the skyscraper in Dos Passos is not overtly theological unless perceived to be a *mammonic*

place of idolatry. In this function, it establishes a vertical spatial division between the rich and the poor (*Mumford on Modern Art* 55). In fact, the skyscraper literally and figuratively dominates and disposes of all city inhabitants connected to consuming its urban space. The *slanting* of the street and release of the pent-up desire for growth upwards is seen by Dos Passos as a realization of the ultimate dreams of civilization, but also as a powerful deterrent to meaningful social practice on part of the ordinary city residents.

The very skyscraper in Dos Passos becomes a tangible expression of success or excess as also defined by Mumford (*The Highway and the City* 114) in Manhattan. This fact is corroborated by Eleanor's taking a cab to the Flatiron Building (1903) just to be close to it and experience a sensation of identity with the spirit of the money-bent metropolis. The sky over the metropolis, otherwise consistently portrayed as serene, this time reflects the predominantly gray color of the skyscrapers below it, a bleak reminder of the pecuniary and spiritual deficiencies of the metropolitan inhabitants. The mimetic nature of the skyscrapers, similar to anthill turrets, the streets between them – stony gorges, spawn images of artificial flowers in her mind in an inversed evocation of Dickens's exploitation of city-laden rain in the countryside (*DC* 1075), which conjures up a haunting urban mirage:

In the afternoon she'd ride downtown in a taxi and look up at the Metropolitan Life tower and the Flatiron Building and the lights against the steely Manhattan sky and think of crystals and artificial flowers and gilt patterns on indigo and claret-colored brocade. (*The 42nd Parallel* 352)

It is the Flatiron that welcomes Jimmy Herf on his entering New York as a child (*MT* 64), while the Pulitzer and Woolworth see him off as an adult, evoking a New York based poem – “Montage of a Dream Deferred” (L. Hughes 268). “What happens to a dream deferred?” is the recurrent question asked by the poet. The answers that the poet gives can be applied to almost all inhabitants of *Manhattan Transfer*. With Ellen (one of the two developed characters, the other one being Jimmy), it “crusts and sugars over” when she accepts its glamor. For the successful immigrants, it “festers like a sore” as they submit to its dominance over them while with Jimmy Herf, it “sags like a heavy load” when he admits defeat. It is with Stan Emery, an architect that it finally “explodes” in his setting fire to himself, having realized his impossible identification with the skyscraper.

Amy Koritz's comments on Dos Passos's portrayal of the metropolis as a representation of space, producing spaces of desolation, synthesize the incapacity of the city inhabitant of controlling and mastering urban space – it is manifested in inhabiting rented apartments in tenement buildings, pubs, parks, *not* skyscrapers. This critic also establishes the self-containment of the skyscrapers whose financial power is so great that they dispose of and dispense with all of their *contained* the way they see fit. As a result, they are portrayed by Dos Passos as “celebrities, objects of desire and aspiration – the Flatiron, Woolworth, and Pulitzer” (112).

Mumford's lament for the unrealized potential of the skyscraper, which might be, but is not used to “accentuate the clean and lonely qualities of a place”, is used instead to “foster and reap a financial harvest from congestion” (*Sidewalk Critic* 84) and forfeits its potential for shaping the city as “an organ of love” (*The City in History* 575). Mumford's view thus affirms the representation of the skyscraper in Dos Passos

as a *dream deferred*. It promises much more than it can deliver, being a monstrous symbolic representation of space, by adding a new *unnatural* dimension to it. The effect is that it creates desires of identification with it on part of the characters populating Dos Passos's seminal works, *Manhattan Transfer* and *USA* as an imagined salvation from social chaos.

In my discussion of the reaching out for the sublime by the city inhabitants and their reverence for and attempted identification with cathedrals, churches and skyscrapers from two adjacent epochs, both Dickens and Dos Passos's urban depictions are moralistically colored but for different reasons. In Dickens's representations of London I have shown the complexity of the attempts as well as a gradual early modernist decay of the *sacred* at the expense of the *profane*, a certain balance between the two being established in a middle novel such as *David Copperfield*. With the advent of Modernism and its advance into the 20th century, both London and New York experienced the introduction of the skyscraper to the cityscape, with the skyscraper immediately gaining the upper hand in height over the cathedral and the church. Dos Passos's and Mumford's renditions of it, in fiction and nonfiction respectively, reveal both a fascination with and an abhorrence of it, underscoring its religious relation to the cathedral, exhibiting the same characteristics of the rituals – the city residents' pilgrimages to the skyscraper, attempting to identify with it. Likewise, the sacred force is represented in the irradiating influence of the skyscraper. The divine in the established correlation is the same intangible force that may be made palpable in the wondrous new construction materials. The modern-day striking but typical spatial coexistence of the two in Montreal where the skyscraper calmly mirrors and visually contains the cathedral marks a profound modern perception of the two buildings being rendered ambivalent over the last 100 years – having lost, regained or acquired religiosity.

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