

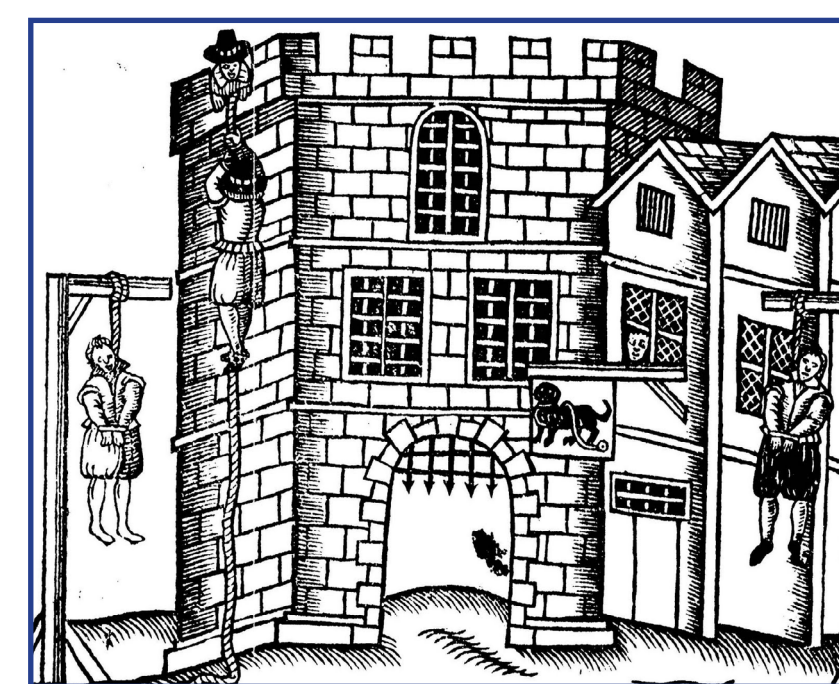
Breaking Down the London Wall

Literary representations of transportation into and out of London's core

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Abstract

Advancements in transportation technology have changed the shape of London and London's city core, but the description of its social geography in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *Sketches by Boz*, and *What We Talk about When We Talk about The Tube* has remained consistent. Transportation into or out of the city is narrated as a journey between two distinct social spaces. First, the city's core is consistently occupied by characters that are defined by their occupations, and in the three texts city-dwellers are profiled as impatient, self-important, or difficult. Secondly, London's outer rim is described as a space for outsiders who reject association with the core's inhabitants or values. The text's authors all have histories that hint at, or admit, an outsider perspective, and the pieces treat movement into or out of the city in similar ways because of this. Through close reading it becomes clear that while London's central core and outer rim have continuously been profiled as two distinct spaces, the residents and occupants of these spaces become increasingly homogeneous as transportation between these two spaces becomes faster and easier.



This reproduction of a 17th-century woodcut depicts Highgate prison. Gates like these protected London from unwanted intruders and prevented any access into or out of the city at night. Characters in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* crossed through Moorgate.

Source: Shakespeare's England



Many Londoners, including Dickens, rode omnibuses like this one into the city everyday. Omnibus drivers were notorious for their outrageous behaviour, which was a regular conversation topic while riding.

Source: London Transport Museum



A 17th-century map of London featuring the Moorfields and the Strand

Source: The British Library

1607

The Knight of the Burning Pestle
Francis Beaumont

Context: A grocer and his wife watch a play and interrupt it so that it can be reworked to their liking. They are mocked for their stupidity. The city is represented by a grocer and the outskirts are represented by the actors.

Spaces in 1607: The Strand was both a commercial and residential space. The Moorfields was a rural space outside the London Wall considered dangerous at night.

Defining the City

The grocer (George) and his wife are represented as difficult and daft. George is unwilling to watch the play prepared for him, and the actors poke fun at George throughout the text without him realizing.

Defining the Outskirts

When one of the actors dies in the Moorfields he warns the others of the dangers outside the city gates. He is shot with an arrow, but it is unclear whether a hunter, vagabond, or creature attacked him. Outside the city wall was a dangerous and unpredictable space for adventurers.



A 19th-century map of London featuring Oxford Street and the Bank

Source: Museum of London

1838

"Omnibuses" from *Sketches by Boz*
Charles Dickens

Context: An omnibus travels from the western part of Oxford Street to the Bank. Commuter culture is introduced. A banker and nameless commuters represent the city. Dickens and a group of young men are the outsiders.

Spaces in 1838: Oxford Street was both a commercial and residential space. The area around the Bank was almost entirely occupational.

Introducing Commuters

An old banker is described as irritable and self-important. Other commuters are described as dull. They dress the same, discuss the same topics everyday, and repeat the same commute everyday.

"We" the Outsiders

Dickens uses "we" to describe the outsiders. "We" is anyone who can find amusement from the old bankers irritability and self importance (such as the young men), but this also includes anyone who boarded the omnibus with Dickens at one of the western-most stops.



A current transport map of London featuring Canary Wharf and Clapham

Source: Transport for London

2013

What We Talk About When We Talk About the Tube
John Lanchester

Context: Lancaster takes a trip on the Tube from his house to Canary Wharf. He discusses the gentrification of his neighbourhood caused by the new Tube line. Bankers represent the city and Lanchester is the outsider.

Spaces in 2013: Clapham is a residential space. Canary Wharf is occupational and commercial.

The City Expands

Lanchester's new neighbours are financial service workers, a group he does not identify with. They work near the "capitalist-triumphalist" (23) Canary Wharf Station, but they do not live near it.

Outsider Status Questioned

London's core is no longer a single physical space, but a group of spaces surrounding Tube stations. Lanchester implies he is an outsider, but his identification is based on his opinion of himself compared to his neighbours, who are realistically more similar to Lanchester than different.