NATURE IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLES DICKENS

by

ALMA KADRAGIC

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Date

Coleman O. Parsons
Chairman of Examining Committee

Nov. 20, 1973
Date

Allen Mandelbaum
Executive Officer

Morton N. Cohen

Supervisory Committee

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INTRODUCTION

That there has been no substantial study of nature in Charles Dickens' novels is surprising. Granted the new and important role of the city in nineteenth-century European novels and Dickens' own contributions to its mythology; granted too the Victorians' growing skepticism about nature's ministry, especially as a result of the city's awesome power; and granted too the long-lived modern attitude that all is dark in Dickens' later novels. Still it seems to me that to apprehend the importance of nature in Tennyson's poetry or Arnold's, and in George Eliot's Mill on the Floss or anything of Hardy's, for example, while overlooking it in Dickens' works is to once again commit the cardinal error of Dickens critics, the Lilliputian fallacy or the reduction of the Inimitable.[1]

Because Dickens is among the greatest novelists of the city, any attention he pays to nature must perforce be perfunctory and unimportant.[2] This kind of thinking is seen in the familiar critical oppositions, Dickens as the two Scrooges vs. Dickens as Pickwick; Dickens the moralist vs. Dickens the entertainer: each term of every dichotomy cancels the other. Although one may speak of Dickens' being more entertainer than

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[1]One prominent exception is J. Hillis Miller in Charles Dickens. The World of His Novels (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959) who establishes in the Preface that the "most striking characteristic of [Dickens'] novels is their multitudinousness" (p. xv).

[2]Many critics, however, have alluded to or discussed the role of nature in specific novels, as I shall indicate below. The minority who have recognized the perennial importance of nature in Dickens' novels take their cue from John Forster who assures us of his friend's genuine love of nature (The Life of Charles Dickens [London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1927], I, 417 and passim. It was Forster too who first noticed

moralist in a particular section of a novel, the novel itself invariably combines comic and didactic effects. The critic will be hard put--though he shall have to try--to decide which predominate. Like the best circus, or department store, or, indeed, university, the Dickens novel contains many different elements, impinging on each other and separate, melting together and individual, at once compound and colloid. To look at nature in the novels of Dickens is to isolate one of these elements, a characteristic and crucial one, I believe, not to obliterate the others but to illuminate the whole. A great work of art continually defeats the critic in just this way. Analysis cannot permanently break down the artistic synthesis. Dickens critics particularly, it seems to me, have not realized this often enough.

Biographers have shown that Charles Dickens lived a good part of the time in the country. The all-important early years were spent in the vicinity of Rochester where he learned to love the Kentish countryside that figures in most of his novels. Everyone knows about the

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that Dickens' last words--in the unfinished Mystery of Edwin Drood--describe the beauty of Rochester and its environs, a harmonious and transcendent scene of man and nature (II, 415). Among major critics George Gissing in Charles Dickens. A Critical Study (London: Blackie & Son, Ltd., 1926) states that Dickens "had a true love of the country," and "some of the sweetest, freshest pages" in his novels describe Kentish scenery (pp. 13-14); Angus Wilson in The World of Charles Dickens (New York: The Viking Press, 1970) points out that after 1858 the country was the center of Dickens' existence; John Lucas in The Melancholy Man (London: Methuen & Co., 1970) detects a "developing use of pastoralism" in Dickens' novels (p. xi). In his brief article "The Idyllic in Dickens" (Dickensian, LII [1956], 59-64), Frank A. Gibson observes that "Dickens, to whom crowds and cities were at times imperative, returned ever and again to the country" (p. 64). In "The Complexity of Dickens" (Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater [London: Chapman & Hall, 1970]) Barbara Hardy mentions the "pastoral reinforcement of character" from Pickwick Papers on but questions its aesthetic value (p. 53).

Marshalsea and Warren's Blacking. Less emphasis is placed on Dickens' young manhood outside London, the constant trips by coach and horse as a reporter and then the inevitable vacations. Hardly a summer passed that Dickens and his family did not rent a country or beach house. The American trip of 1842 inaugurated the major travels. In the United States Dickens spent at least half of his six months outside of cities. Much of American Notes is devoted to descriptions, mostly unfavorable, of the American countryside. During a year's stay near Genoa Dickens wrote the letters collected as Pictures from Italy in which many natural scenes are described, most of them in glowing terms. An additional year abroad in an especially bucolic setting near Lausanne was still another highlight of the 1840's.

In the 1850's Dickens and his family continued the extended vacations outside London. During all these years there were walking tours with friends and country house visits, some connected with the many dramatic performances Dickens organized. The readings from his works which he began in the late 1850's also took him away from London on journeys throughout the country. Finally, with the purchase of the Gad's Hill property in 1856 Dickens became a landowner in his beloved Kent, near Rochester, where he lived most of the time until his death in 1870. The point is that a substantive case may be made for Dickens' being a lover of the country who sought to escape the city all his life. My intention here is not to urge this extreme view but simply to underline that Dickens' preferences were not as obvious as some have implied and that his biography suggests a more than theoretical love of

nature.[3]

Nature is an enveloping term for those aspects of the environment not made by man. It functions as a continual reminder to man that there are other forces, other concerns than the overburdening cares of the present day. Recognition of these other forces may be a path to transcendence of the daily cares, the glorious end of nature's ministry, as Wordsworth assured the Victorians. Recognition of nature, however, can mean something as simple as one's enjoyment of his garden after a hard day's work or the rejuvenation one feels after a week in the country. Less comfortingly, nature may take the form of imitations of the chaotic beginnings of creation and suggest that creation slumps toward an inevitable entropy. In Dickens' novels nature is all of these though only the later novels, from David Copperfield on, demonstrate the full range of nature's potential in its relationship to man.

For the urban western societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the city, crowded, dirty, crime-ridden, evil, is the immediate reality. Its depiction by writers like Balzac and Dickens among others

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[3]More evidence of Dickens' love of nature can be found in his non-fictional writings. Dickens' long letter to Forster in early July, 1841 from Scotland is full of the beauty and awesomeness of Glencoe Pass and the Scottish mountains; a month later in the same year Dickens writes extensively to Forster from Broadstairs, his favorite beach resort, about the sea's incredible brilliance. See The Letters of Charles Dickens II, ed. Madeline House and Graham Storey (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 322-327, 359. With Wilkie Collins Dickens wrote "The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices," after a trek through the Lake Country in September, 1857. In All the Year Round Dickens launched the papers later collected as The Uncommercial Traveller: "Tramps" and "Shy Neighborhoods" are about his walks from Gad's Hill. We can match Dickens' enthusiastic account of Niagara Falls in American Notes (1842) with his ecstatic comments to Forster in 1868 (see Forster, II, 347). Interestingly, Forster also tells us that at Gad's Hill on the walls of the little chalet which he used as a studio after 1865, Dickens hung five mirrors to reflect nature as he wrote (pp. 211-212).

becomes so compelling that the city emerges as the symbol and the reality of modern life. At the same time, for Dickens at least, it is not the sole or sufficient reality and thus not the only symbol. Philosophically nature represents an answer and an alternative; aesthetically it provides many novelists a dramatic contrast to the city. The Lilliputian fallacy reaches beyond Dickens, though because of his qualities its distortions are greatest in his case. Romantic realism has been defined as employing the theme of the "great modern city . . . signaling the end of 'nature' and the 'natural life,' and the beginning of 'modernity.'"[4] The implication is that novelists like Balzac, Dickens, and Dostoevesky who are admittedly romantic realists do not deal with nature. Actually, Dickens, for one, juxtaposes urban and rural elements. Among the English novelists the same is particularly true of Meredith, Hardy, and Lawrence. In the poetry of Wordsworth critics have seen nature as a symbol of transcendence of modern life. I believe that nature is a counter-symbol to the city in many Victorian novels also and especially in the novels of Charles Dickens.

Like the city, nature begins as setting and ends as much more. To place a character in a remote, unpopulated, or wild terrain--as every adventure novelist knows--is to give him freedom from society's restrictions. He then substitutes the narrow social morality for another less confining, even a transcendent one. Such an increase in freedom leads inevitably, in the novels which fully exploit the setting, to self-revelation. Buried lives are unearthed in nature. But in many

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[4]Donald Fanger, Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. viii.

serious novels nature may not act so unrestrictedly upon characters. Often one finds only pathetic reminders of nature punctuating urban life, the huge tree outside the Manette home in A Tale of Two Cities, for example. Characters are distinguished then according to the keenness of their spiritual perceptions, their ability to catch the scent of flowers in December even if they have never set foot in a garden.

The role of nature in the novels of Charles Dickens suggests an answer to the problem of his attitude toward society. Dickens is not primarily concerned with arguing for this or that reform though undoubtedly he attacks the new Poor Law or the lack of sanitation procedures in London in his novels. Rather he tries to bring the urban symbol and the nature symbol into harmony: the analogue is of course Wordsworth's "Lines Composed on Westminster Bridge" where for a moment the city lies entwined with sky and river--a modern trinity--and time is suspended. Admittedly this synthesizing tendency develops in Dickens though I find it implicit from the beginning.

Dickens' works separate easily into three creative periods: Pickwick Papers to The Old Curiosity Shop (1837-41), Barnaby Rudge to Dombey and Son (1841-48), and David Copperfield to the last complete novel Our Mutual Friend (1848-65). This division diverges from the usual one in two respects. Barnaby Rudge which because of its date is usually grouped with the early novels is decidedly a novel of transition, more properly related to Martin Chuzzlewit than to The Old Curiosity Shop despite the fact that Dickens' voyage to America came between. David Copperfield is properly a late novel because in it Dickens for the first time depicts nature in all three of its aspects. In the late--not

from my point of view "dark"--novels, Dickens achieves full mastery in the treatment of nature.

PART I -- CULTIVATED NATURE

Introductory

Dickens' early novels are comic and sentimental extravaganzas depicting a circus of exciting character acts against a simple and stereotyped background. From Pickwick Papers to The Old Curiosity Shop the world seems to offer only two alternatives: the dark, vicious city or the light, friendly country. The degree of emphasis each setting or way of life receives determines whether the novel's dominant tone will be comic or pathetic. The city is the haunt of crooked lawyers and provides the Fleet prison for their victims in Pickwick Papers. It is Fagin's territory in Oliver Twist, a thieves' and murderers' warren. In Nicholas Nickleby the miserly plots of Ralph Nickleby and Gride emanate with the noxious odors from the city's center. And in The Old Curiosity Shop Quilp, the demon of the city, is Nell's bane while the corrupting forces he partly embodies bring destruction to the male Trents and almost succeed in bringing down the comic hero, Dick Swiveller. At the same time in each novel threatened characters escape the city for the country's beauty and balm. For Pickwick, Oliver, Nicholas, and Nell, just to mention the central figures, the country represents freedom and happiness and sometimes life defeating death.

Neither city nor country in the early novels is particularly memorable. We recall the tone of life at Dingley Dell, not particulars of the natural environment; the same is true even of Fagin's London where darkness is all and the effect of the vivid criminal characters

provides interest and impact, so that we tend to attribute to Dickens a descriptive skill he has not really yet mastered in the early novels. But the country is very important too as a source of values and as a dramatic contrast.

Dickens' earliest depictions of the country rely heavily on literary and general conventions about nature. Nature is good and helpful to man. One should try to live outside cities to be closer to nature. If one cannot manage permanent rural living, one can try for the occasional vacation. If all else fails, one can demonstrate proper instincts by requesting to be buried far from the city's smoke in a country churchyard. That all this is vague need not in itself detract from its emotional force in the novels because Dickens' narrative requires an antidote to the horrors of city life. The country is always there, beyond, for seekers to find.

So, in the early novels, nature is the English countryside, cultivated and fresh, full of generalized standard properties like birds, trees, flowers, and happy farmers.[1] Because Dickens' model for the English countryside is Kent, the garden country, it is easy for him to compress country into garden. The flourishing cared-for garden is an important image in the first novels as the essential representation of nature friendly to man, cultivated by his loving hands and yielding sustenance and spiritual comfort in return. It continues to play a symbolic role in almost every Dickens novel, but it tends to become a

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[1]However, Judith Fairbank Slater in "The Development of Impressionistic Techniques in the Novels of Dickens" (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1970) praises the "simple, brilliant images" of nature in the early novels (p. 22).

dream garden of the past or future, not a realistic direct contrast to the travails of city life. Another type of garden in the early novels is the gently fertile churchyard shaded by trees and tended by either a child or an aged person or, even better, both. Dickens invests much emotional capital in the garden grave and offers it as a genuine and sufficient religious consolation; this too changes later.

Chapter 1 -- The Happy Garden: Pickwick Papers

Typically Dickensian as Pickwick Papers is, it is nevertheless unlike any of the other novels in its illusion of freedom. Chesterton has said it best: "no novel with a plot and a proper termination could emit that sense of everlasting youth--a sense as of the gods gone wandering in England."[1] Though one can argue about the degree of plotlessness, it still seems clear that Pickwick and his friends are not characters in the way that Oliver Twist and his friends are. The Fagin circle and the Brownlow-Maylie circle consist of socially defined figures while the Pickwick circle, including Sam and Jingle, does not. Moreover, Pickwick may well be threatened with an unjust lawsuit and may even serve time in the Fleet despite his innocence, but escape is ever in his power. In fact Dickens minimizes the few situations that might challenge Pickwick's power.

In the poignant scene in Chapter 47 when Pickwick takes leave of his fellow prisoners, he is "far more sad and melancholy, for the moment, than when he had first entered it. Alas! how many sad and unhappy beings had he left behind!" (My italics) But neither he nor the reader remembers them longer than "a moment," for in the very next sentence Pickwick and Sam are celebrating their freedom in the usual way at the George and Vulture Inn. Four sentences later it is morning, they are on the road, and Sam observes,

> "I wish them horses had been three months and better in the Fleet, sir."

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[1] Charles Dickens, A Critical Study (New York: Dodd Mead & Company, 1951), p. 79.

> "Why, Sam?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.
> "Wy, sir," exclaimed Mr. Weller, rubbing his hands, how they would go if they had been!"[2]

Invariably in Pickwick Papers the right joke banishes the gloom. Even the grim interpolated tales generally end with Pickwick's having fallen asleep, so that the reader's anxiety or pity dissipates in enjoyment of Pickwick's wholesomeness.

Humor and physical escape work together to free the Pickwickians. The primary idea is travelling about for its own sake, the novel having been conceived as the comic adventures of a picaresque coterie. But Dickens could not resist, from the outset, pairing city and country as moral opposites. Pickwick and his friends go to London to fulfill obligations, but they fly to the country first to avoid and then transcend them. The characters from the country are less dangerous than the city slickers: compare Nupkins' brand of justice and Dodson and Fogg's. Pickwick can come to terms, after a comic misunderstanding, with the former while he is reduced to shouting impotent threats at the latter. We see Pickwick at his glorious best at Christmas in Dingley Dell, accepted by the entire company as an angel in tights and gaiters. We see Pickwick in the depths at his London trial publicly named a monster preying on innocent women. At the end of the novel, when age and family circumstances require compromise, we find Pickwick establishing what is in effect Dingley Dell East, a suburban country house; once having tasted freedom, he can never return to lodgings in the city.

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[2] Pickwick Papers (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 667. All future references are to this edition.

The sense of country in this novel is so distinct that it is amazing to find how little description Dickens actually gives us. If one recalls any of those key scenes in a novel of Hardy's where a character observes himself in relation to an enormous and carefully visualized landscape, one realizes how different Dickens' method is. First of all, he does not, in any early novel, show nature humbling man. More importantly, nature is seen implicitly in its effect on the characters. It is not remote. Repeatedly, Dickens will open a chapter with a description of the day; then someone will explain how he feels, another will retort, and we are launched once again on the round of companionship which we have thus been made to associate with nature.

In Chapter 11 Pickwick, Snodgrass, and Winkle walk to Cobham from Rochester in pursuit of the jilted Tupman.

> A delightful walk it was: for it was a pleasant afternoon in June, and their way lay through a deep and shady wood, cooled by the light wind which gently rustled the thick foliage, and enlivened by the songs of the birds that perched upon the boughs. The ivy and the moss crept in thick clusters over the old trees, and the soft green turf overspread the ground like a silken mat.
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> "And really," added Mr. Pickwick, after half an hour's walking had brought them to the village, "really, for a misanthrope's choice, this is one of the prettiest and most desirable places of residence I ever met with." (p. 135)

They next see Tupman eating in the approved Pickwickian way and enter into discourse with him. The same effect appears again in Chapter 19 and, with a winter setting, in Chapter 28, Christmas at Dingley Dell.

A description of the country as seen from a stagecoach opens Chapter 16: Pickwick and Sam, following the impostor Jingle to Bury St. Edmunds, observe the prospect. There are "clear skies, green

fields, and sweet-smelling flowers" and a "mellow softness" over everything. "The influence of a scene like this, was not lost upon the well-regulated mind of Mr. Pickwick." Thinking about Jingle at first, "by degrees his attention grew more and more attracted by the objects around him; and at last he derived as much enjoyment from the ride, as if it had been undertaken for the pleasantest reason in the world (pp. 208-209)."

Now follows one of the famous colloquies between Sam and his master whose humor remains linked therefore to the country. If the relationship of Pickwick and Sam is the central theme "to which the underlying theme of country (holiday happiness) and London (the horror or reality) is subordinated," then the two men and themes are joined at this point. Sam in his unique way talks about his childhood, a comic but horrifying contrast to what the country represents. Through bringing him to the country, Pickwick becomes Sam's savior.[3] Yet of course, Sam does a good deal of saving in return. As throughout Pickwick Papers and all the novels, the juxtaposition of city and country yields imaginative dividends.

Dickens' landscape description in the early novels has been called "banal,"[4] or, worse, ignored. This is, I think, because it is different from his description of urban scenes: it does not embody the frenzied

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[3]Wilson, p. 120.

[4]Barbara Hardy is one of the sternest critics of Dickens' rural scenes. In The Moral Art of Dickens (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) she writes, Dickens is at "his least gripping in the passages of description in Pickwick Papers, and there are many rural scenes . . . which show nothing of his ability to animate a scene by keeping his eye on the nature of objects or by a grotesque metaphorical projection (p. 84)."

and ultimately diseased vitality that epitomizes the city for Dickens. Since he cannot give benevolent nature demonic life, and yet he needs benevolent nature as a counter to the rapacious city, he emphasizes, at best, the feel of nature. Dickens "never elaborates--perhaps never even sketches--a landscape; yet we see and feel the open-air surroundings. The secret is his own delight in the road and meadow, and his infinite power of suggestion in seemingly unconsidered words."[5] Pickwick Papers, I believe, is one of those rare works whose words become something infinitely grander in the mind; the beauty and freedom of nature, the love between Pickwick and Sam, the transfiguration of normal life at the end of the novel are all ideals which finally overwhelm the reader--although the critic can never sufficiently establish them by quotation. The novel's perennial popularity is an important proof.

In Pickwick Papers and the other novels up to The Old Curiosity Shop, Dickens is struggling with two different concepts of nature. The first, as we have seen, has to do with the general freedom the countryside offers. The second, with which the novel concludes, is the more restricted setting and greater potential ambiguity of the garden. In this novel of Dickens' apprenticeship, the garden idea of nature cannot help but represent a reduction of freedom and possibility. Part of this is dictated solely by common sense. Pickwick cannot indeed wander forever upon the roads of England, except in our imaginations. He must settle down, and the garden seems like the best solution. The issue is confused, however; we have already passed gardens in the novel, from the rustic lawns of Mrs. Leo Hunter to the enclosure where Arabella

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[5]Gissing, p. 180.

Allen is confined by her brother. Moreover, the garden as satiric background and the garden as Eden are curiously combined at Wardle's home at Dingley Dell.

On a delicious morning Pickwick awakes to "the hundred perfumes of the little flower-garden beneath [which] scented the air around." The dominant tone is satiric. Pickwick hears a voice calling, looks up, looks left, looks right, "and then he did what a common mind would have done at once--looked into the garden, and there saw Mr. Wardle." Earlier in the same sequence Pickwick meditates on the beauties of nature: nature is beautiful, it is right to think so, but this is only Chapter 7 and Dickens' attitude towards his central character is still unresolved. So Pickwick can say the right things and still be a butt, "having cross-examined solitude after the most approved precedents, at considerably length (p. 82)." Dickens is struggling with this problem from the novel's first page where a "ray of light" illuminates the career of Pickwick who himself "burst[s] like another sun from his slumbers" in Chapter 2 (pp. 1, 6).[6] Using light imagery for mock heroic effects simply was not congenial to Dickens' sensibility. He never did it again in a novel.

As if the garden at Dingley Dell were not already enough confused, it is also the setting for the amours of Tupman and Miss Wardle. Into their bower of bliss comes the snake Jingle in a green coat. Initially the garden is a comic Eden where the two mature lovers can avoid

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[6]Compare Harvey Peter Sucksmith's analysis in The Narrative Art of Charles Dickens (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1970) of "the complex effect," that is, we see Pickwick "both sympathetically and critically." We also "feel and sympathize with the vitality of the comic hero (pp. 50-51)."

society's laughter and lose the years in the sunset's glow. With the entrance of Jingle comedy becomes burlesque. Miss Wardle turns out too absurd to remain in the novel, and she is banished to the home of a relative who does not know Pickwick. Tupman, on the other hand, is rescued for friendship and thus can yearn for the ladies to the end. The garden is forgotten as the Pickwickians' next visit is at Christmas when there are frost and mistletoe and a wedding, young lovers joined, not old ones sundered. By this time Pickwick's character and role have been established, and there is no more satire with him as target. On the contrary, he is identified with natural behavior.[7]

The final garden is announced by the mellowed Pickwick in the novel's last chapter. He has bought a house and garden at Dulwich and proposes to "consecrate this little retreat" by another wedding, that of Emily Wardle and Snodgrass (p. 796). Two years later is another consecration when Sam and Mary are wed. Their fruitful union populates the garden with children. All of his friends at hand and himself still in good health, Pickwick has succeeded in forming one of those perfect little societies that stand for the earthly paradise in Dickens' early novels. Because we have seen enough of Pickwick's power, the strength of laughter and the kindliness of nature, there is no reason in Pickwick Papers to doubt that all will indeed be perfectly happy.

The happy flourishing garden lingers with the reader of Pickwick Papers. There is, however, another kind of garden suggested in the

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[7]Barbara Hardy notes in "The Complexity of Dickens" that from the beginning of the novel, "Dickens seems to be presenting caricature in terms of a social distortion of 'natural values' (p. 38)."

interpolated tales. The trouble with the tales as a whole is that they have nothing to do with the character of the storytellers, they have no influence on the listeners, and they are only distantly if at all connected to the central interest: one has only to remember how carefully Dickens uses the interpolated narrative of Miss Wade in Little Dorrit to realize his failure here. But the tales do reveal many of Dickens' concerns and uncertainties.

"The Convict's Return," "The Old Man's Tale about the Queer Client," and "The Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton" have in common scenes of country happiness opposed to the direst misery, and in the second of these tales that theme is worked out in terms of country vs. city. A man who watched his wife and child die when a word from her father could have saved them has his terrible revenge on the old man. Then all he can do for his wife is to fulfill her last request. So the tale ends with the picture of "one of the most peaceful and secluded churchyards in Kent, where wild flowers mingle with the grass, and the soft landscape around forms the fairest spot in the garden of England (pp. 295-296)." Dickens presents the tranquil churchyard, itself a garden in its vernal beauty, as sufficient to allay grief over a wasted life.

Both "The Convict's Return" and "The Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton" show a misanthropic main character shocked out of his pessimism by the brief glimpse of a Wordsworthian integration of nature and man. In each case the churchyard association is stronger than the feeling of vigorous life. The returned convict works for the clergyman-narrator until his death; we may safely assume that his duties were

related to the churchyard and the service of the dead. Gabriel Grubb, the sexton of the title in the other tale, is bearded by goblins as he digs graves. This proto-Scrooge is converted by being shown, alternately, scenes of misery and happiness. The rather clumsy interpolated tales have little intrinsic merit, but they are foreshadowings of future techniques in Dickens' writings as much as leftovers from Sketches by Boz. Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, and The Old Curiosity Shop all imply, at least in part, that the sole attainable happy garden is the grave.

Chapter 2 -- The Garden Grave: Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop

In Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop it has become almost as difficult to find freedom in the country as in the city. Oliver, born and raised in the country workhouse, initially reverses the Pickwick pattern by escaping to the city--and total bondage. Not until his final return to the country with the Maylies is he free. We might note too the obvious limitations of Oliver's position as a poor and illegitimate child dependent on adults. This is particularly the dilemma of Nell. Nell's position is worse than Oliver's for her problem is her beloved grandfather. No escape can save Nell for he is always with her, a cheerfully accepted albatross. Only his dawning consciousness of her approaching death restores him to a measure of responsibility. Were it not for Nell's death sentence, so visible that strangers apprehend it, he would once again find the occasion to betray her trust and break her heart.

Dickens' turning to the child as a central figure in his second and fourth novels is in itself a clue to his train of thought in general and with respect to nature. Clearly, the child cannot derive the same comfort from nature as the adult. He is only at the first stage of the process Wordsworth defined. The child gambols in the fields and races the wind. Intermittently he may receive a glimmer of an intimation of immortality, but the philosophic mind is years beyond him. What can one poor child do, hard-pressed, but seek tranquillity and finally death? For Nell high hopes of paradisical country living lead to the peaceful grave. Oliver, of course, does not die in the novel, but death is

constantly in his path while Nell's journey from the beginning with its references to Pilgrim's Progress can have only one destination.

Oliver's life until he encounters Mr. Brownlow is a grim one. From Mrs. Mann to Bumble and Sowerberry and lastly Fagin is a dreadful progress. Oliver sinks from poverty to degradation to crime. There is relief for the reader, of course, in the humor and irony: Oliver's staying alive at birth only because no tender relatives assisted; his asking for more at the workhouse; his devouring the undertaker's dog's scraps; and in the parallel comedies of the Gentlemen of the Board and Fagin's household. But it is evident that by the time Oliver is arrested for robbery, he has plunged as deeply into the darkness of life as he can afford if he is to remain innocent. He has been locked up in lightless places--the workhouse, Sowerberry's coal scuttle, and Fagin's back room. He has been cheated originally of his birthright and then almost of his very life. Fagin indeed wants to rob him of his soul. At this point, when Oliver seems to have touched bottom, he is removed or rather translated to another world.

At Mr. Brownlow's house at Pentonville, a London suburb, Oliver is cared for; everything is "quiet, and neat, and orderly"; his first acquaintance with the middle station of life "seemed like Heaven itself."[1] The contrast with his previous way of living is extreme. However, the tone of the household is somnolent. The inmates are elderly; Oliver spends most of his time in bed convalescing. This may not be death but it is a very quiescent sort of life. Dickens does not insist at this

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[1] Oliver Twist, ed. Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 84. All future references are to this edition.

point on nature associations, but Oliver's first interview with Mr. Brownlow takes place "in a little back room, quite full of books, with a window, looking into some pleasant little gardens (p. 84)." The boy never plays in these gardens, for he is back with Fagin almost as soon as he has recovered from his illness, back in the dark, crowded, and animated city streets where his companions, except for Fagin himself, are young, however old in crime.

During Oliver's second stay with Fagin Dickens intensifies the horrors of the thieves' lives. The apparent security of their first dwelling is shattered. They are shown to exist on the razor's edge of self-betrayal. Nancy's role is all-important in establishing the insecurity and in setting Oliver apart from it. By the time Oliver participates in the robbery with Bill Sikes, he is very much separate from Fagin's gang, having lost all of his initial sympathy as Fagin's benevolent old gentleman pose wears ever thinner. Dickens too, I think, believes it is time to choose sides, for he has come dangerously close--as Thackeray, for one, thought--to depicting the thieves as revolutionaries or even heroes. So Sikes' brutality, Fagin's treachery, and Nancy's nascent rebelliousness are played up in Chapters 15 to 28. The workhouse is many chapters distant. Oliver and the reader see only the awfulness of the city. In Chapter 29 Oliver's being about to become a thief is once again the means for his social ascension. And he is never more in danger of losing moral status though the novel is but half finished.

Unlike Mr. Brownlow the Maylies live in the country, and if this were not definite enough, they repair to spring and summer quarters even more remote and bucolic. The only other significant difference between

the Brownlow and Maylie households is the presence of Rose. Otherwise, the Maylies--despite the name--and their retainers seem old. Rose, as her name says, comes laden with significance, some of which goes beyond the novel since she is a portrait of Mary Hogarth. Oliver has not yet seen her when her tears falling on his sleeping face suggest "some pleasant dream of love and affection he had never known." The narrator relates this dream to intimations of immorality, "some brief memory of a happier existence, long gone by." The problem is that Dickens wants immortality to imply transcendent happiness but, especially in the context of children, it can just as well signify a morbid interest in death. Again the example of Wordsworth is instructive. His child in the Ode is not conscious of his own immortality. It is the adult philosophic mind that discovers the consciousness and its beauty and sorrow. Dickens transfers his own adult perceptions to the child Oliver in the implications of a smile.

The full paragraph from which I have taken excerpts reads:

> The boy stirred, and smiled in his sleep, as though these marks of pity and compassion had awakened some pleasant dream of a love and affection he had never known. Thus a strain of gentle music, or the rippling of water in a silent place, or the odour of a flower, or even the mention of a familiar word, will sometimes call up sudden dim remembrances of scenes that never were, in this life; which vanish like a breath; and which some brief memory of a happier existence, long gone by, would seem to have awakened for no voluntary exertion of the mind can ever recall them. (p. 191)

In its vagueness and yet importance in the novel, this paragraph exemplifies what is wrong with those parts of the second half of the novel that deal with Oliver. Dickens is not content to let Oliver be a robust child rollicking in the country. He must also be spiritual although he has done nothing thus far which would give the reader cause

to suspect him of having particularly fine sensibilities. His healthy sense of self-preservation now dissipates in a series of impossibly precious actions. In other words, he never digs for fishing worms or plays soldiers. Like a middle-aged aesthete Oliver gathers flowers and tends caged birds and seems always on the verge of breaking into poetry. At the very least, Dickens is giving us an adult's version of a child's occupation.[2] Before the Maylies take him to the country, the preternaturally sensitive Oliver in an ecstasy of joy offers to serve Rose by "working" for her: "if I could only give you pleasure by watering your flowers, or watching your birds, or running up and down the whole day long, to make you happy; what would I give to do it! (p. 205)"

Life in the country is described primarily in the last three pages of Chapter 32 where Dickens reverts to the summary or essay form of the lesser Sketches by Boz and utilizes all the "clichés of pastoral convention."[3] Here description does not precede dramatization as in the best sketches. Three months are subsumed in the description. An opening paragraph--beginning with the rhetorical "Who can describe the pleasure and delight, the peace of mind and soft tranquillity, the sickly boy felt in the balmy air, and among the green hills and rich woods, of an inland village!"--is followed by an account of Oliver's days, interrupted by such guiding comments as "It was a happy time (pp. 210, 211)." Simplicity does not work here. The self-indulgence glares out in such a bit of untruth as "the sickly boy." Actually Oliver is quite a healthy

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[2]Sucksmith, p. 281.

[3]Sucksmith, p. 279.

child who has collapsed under intolerable stress including a bullet wound. After the three months with the Maylies, Oliver is "completely domesticated", more lap dog than boy (p. 212).

The deeper implications of Oliver's uncommon spirituality are shown in his attraction to the churchyard. He likes to sit there thinking of his mother's humble grave. The reader might accept this in Oliver were it not merely a preliminary to the crisis of Rose. This character who suffers from Dickens' failure to actualize her angelic qualities becomes ill unto death for no other reason than the refracted guilt of being the sister of an unwed mother. Another essay summary, a two or three page sequence at the end of Chapter 33, juxtaposes Rose's illness and the bloom of nature. Oliver sits in the churchyard and contemplates the "peace and beauty," "brightness and mirth," "life and joyousness" in the landscape and the birds. Somehow, "the thought instinctively occurred to him that this was not a time for death (p. 219)." This proves, however, to be the wrong consolation. True, Rose does not die, but there is a surrogate corpse, a nameless young woman who dies for Rose just as Dick later dies for Oliver.

Instead of death an uneventful life as the wife of a clergyman in a small village awaits Rose with Oliver and Mr. Brownlow and all the rest of their circle nearby. The future according to the narrator is an infinite vista of good works and piety. Rose and Oliver are visualized "passing whole hours together in picturing the friends whom they had so sadly lost (p. 367)." The morbid nostalgia of Rose and Oliver is applauded by Dickens who ends the novel by invoking the memory of Oliver's mother, a ghost whom he imagines now to be at rest. What Dickens intends

to be the model of a virtuous life in harmony with nature looks uncomfortably like death.

The second half of Oliver Twist has long been a critical problem. The usual solution is to ignore or dismiss it. The excellent 1950 David Lean film of the novel in which Mr. Brownlow is made the boy's grandfather, and the whole Maylie plot is eliminated notoriously illustrates this approach. There are no country scenes whatsoever so that the viewer remembers only the cavernous streets and catwalk bridges of Fagin's London. But this is not Dickens' Oliver Twist any more than Dr. Leavis' proposed Gwendolen Harleth is George Eliot's Daniel Deronda. Dickens is a novelist who always succeeds with contrasts and suffers from an overly concentrated plot line. The relative failure of Hard Times is due to his not sufficiently depicting the life of the heart that Sissy Jupes epitomizes while its opposite, the Gradgrind-Bounderby fallacy, is thoroughly realized. In Oliver Twist Dickens tried to repeat the city vs. country pattern of Pickwick Papers.[4] For various reasons, however, including the child hero's qualities, the novel works only in the London sections. Nature is without vitality despite the singing birds because Dickens seems unable to dramatize its impact on the characters.[5] As a result the spiritual depths which one can fathom under nature's tutelage turn out to be puddles, and all dissolves in that surface moisture, tears.

Dickens has told us in the Preface to the Cheap Edition of 1848

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[4]Fanger contrasts the "indifference" of London and the "unspoiled country" (p. 80).

[5]Sucksmith speaks of Dickens' "failure to find an objective correlative for the emotion he wishes to convey" with the Maylies in the country (p. 278).

that he intended with Oliver to demonstrate the persistence of goodness despite the assaults of evil. This is helpful with respect to Oliver's role in the first half of the novel, and it begins to explain why the Maylie sections of the second half are so unsuccessful. Goodness in the presence of goodness can merely glow: the narrative must either provide a fallible narrator-character, a Dante for Beatrice, or paradoxically present new and unexpected difficulties for goodness to overcome. We know that in Oliver Twist Dickens did not attempt the first. He did try to introduce problems for Oliver in the peaceful countryside, the impending death of Rose and the incursion of Monks and Fagin--which terrify Oliver but have no narrative consequences. The novel is oddly inconsistent in this respect because one would imagine that the thieves would not give up Oliver so easily. Dickens, however, does not want the thieves in the country, for he is trying to do something else.

Earlier, in Chapter 30, Dr. Losberne who is treating the wounded Oliver replies to Rose's comment that the young and innocent-looking Oliver cannot be a criminal: "crime, like death, is not confined to the old and withered alone. The youngest and fairest are too often its chosen victims (p. 191)." The theme of the persistence of goodness acquires all the more importance in a world where the youngest and fairest may be doubly assaulted by crime and death. So Fagin and Monks' plots can be equated with Rose's illness in their effect on Oliver and one substituted for the other. Though the story is by no means fully coherent, Dickens tries to make the city the environment of crime and the country the environment of death. In the end, however, despite an aborted attempt to bring crime to the country, crime and death are in

the city while in the country there seems to be only that ever-present morbid consciousness of death which Dickens--out of his own grief for Mary Hogarth--chooses to call happiness. The city is forgotten as if it had ceased to exist.

But the city remains, and in The Old Curiosity Shop it is once more city and country, crime and death, in their impact on the young and fair. Nell and her grandfather Trent are harried in the city; so they escape to wander in the country. Yet it is clear from the beginning that it is what they are, not where they live that makes the problem. In Nell Dickens has created the convincingly sensitive child Oliver was not. In old Trent he has given her the motivation and the necessity to be wise beyond her years. From the forcibly maintained conjunction of these two characters, the obsessed old man and the faithful child, what can result but death? Thus the wandering into the country amounts to choosing where they prefer to die, always a valuable choice in Dickens' novels and sometimes the only expression of personal freedom. We are far removed from the jolly travelling of the Pickwickians.

As someone once remarked, Nell seems to stop in every rural churchyard in England. There is a good deal of foreshadowing in this repeated association of the apparently blooming child, thriving nature, and the grave. It is present even earlier in the old curiosity shop itself where Nell waits for her grandfather amid the objects of another day with only a cheery bird for company. One of two things can happen to the captive princess. She is either rescued by a prince or she dies of a broken heart. Some authors prefer the second alternative, for example, Hawthorne in Rappaccini's Daughter. From the way Nell is kept

apart from Kit or Dick Swiveller, either or whom might be cast as prince, we see quite soon that she is not to be a happy princess. Thus the end in the Gothic dwelling finds Nell in the same kind of setting, full of relics of what life used to be like, as the old curiosity shop.

In some ways Dickens' commitment is contradictory. He must show Nell's death, and yet he believes in what the country can do for the troubled spirit. He must extoll the peace and tranquility Nell and old Trent find in the rural setting, and still admit always that it is not enough to relieve either of them. The failure, in this respect, is worse than in Oliver Twist, for there is less external evil threatening them. Vivid as Quilp undeniably is, he does not have clearcut designs on Nell the way that Fagin has on Oliver. So it is not evident why they have to keep running from Quilp when he materializes only once outside London and old Trent does not even see him. There is ample justification for seeing in the novel a "diseased, unconvinced and unconvincing pastoral."[6] Nell needs a burrow to shelter in--gone is even the artificial vitality of Oliver's wish to feed birds and pick flowers. Dickens gives us no idea of what humble people really do in the country. The only occupation is the sexton's. Nor does Nature help Nell to achieve self-understanding. In her perfection, she can hardly improve very much by introspection.

When Nell and old Trent set out from London in Chapter 15, they step through the fields they have known before, enjoy the sun and space, and eat picnic meals. Later, once the initial exhilaration has subsided, the grandfather becomes frightened, and Nell must cajole him to follow

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[6]A. O. J. Cockshut, The Imagination of Charles Dickens (New York: New York University Press, 1962), pp. 88-89.

her through a wood with only a bird for a guide. This is after they have run away from the fair and the overzealous attentions of Codlin and Short. In Chapter 42 the dire threat of old Trent's robbing their benefactor Mrs. Jarley impels Nell to save her grandfather: no picnics, no bird guide now; "as if she had been an angel messenger," Nell carries such authority that her grandfather cannot resist her.[7] Once more they leave all behind and throw themselves on God's mercy, plunging into nature.

This is the prelude to hard times. The pair journey through an industrial region, cold, wet, and hungry. At the point of collapse, they are rescued by the schoolmaster who takes them to their final resting place. The wanderers' path thus far has led them through alternate scenes of natural isolation and society. In each case the return to nature is more difficult and more significant, for they have just saved themselves from a greater peril than the previous one. In each case, Nell has adjusted to social life while old Trent has not. He is the force driving her to destruction, but her acceptance of him as a burden divides the responsibility and makes her death almost tragic.

The unnamed village is remote and unknown. Nell has been in the country for months but never country like this. Although the village has homesteads and children, its actual boundaries are the perimeters of the church property, the church itself, the graveyard, and the two ancient dwellings. Unlike Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey whose ruins aid the poet in musings on time in his own life, these ruins capture the child and remove her from the present. The Gothic foliage carved in stone has

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[7] The Old Curiosity Shop (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 318. All future references are to this edition.

outlived many springs. Weathered and broken, it seems itself a part of the nature it sought to imitate. The ancient crypts, the bottomless well, the countless legends associated with the ruined church, the aged sexton who talks about his youth as if it were someone else's, and the other people who have lost track of human time all help send Nell out of this world. Her search for peace takes her not into vital nature but into the prehistoric.[8] In suggesting that nature can be superseded by a principle of disintegration, non-organic nature or, ultimately, chaos, Dickens is working toward another view of nature that will prove more dynamic in his novels than cultivated nature. But this sense of chaos is still latent in The Old Curiosity Shop.

At the end of the novel Dickens makes his first serious attempt--since the wholly different Pickwick Papers--to show a character achieving transcendence through nature. He has all but eliminated Nell from life by the requirements of her devotion to her grandfather. In the prehistoric village she has become a curiosity herself, a child marked for death. But first she is granted one last vision that annihilates time and space. After sitting among the tombs reading the Bible, Nell climbs up the tower to see the expanse of country below her.

> Oh! the glory of the sudden burst of light; the freshness of the fields and woods, stretching away on every side, and meeting the bright blue sky; the cattle grazing in the pasturage; the smoke, that, coming from among the trees, seemed to rise upward from the green earth; the children yet at their gambols down below--all, everything, so beautiful and happy! It was like passing from death to life; it was drawing nearer Heaven. (p. 398)

This reads like a summary of the opening of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," even to the smoke that seems a part of nature. But the passage

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[8]Steven Marcus, Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1965), p. 141.

lacks the poem's strength, the sense of a mind revealing itself. The idealized child Nell has not progressed in spirit from the let-us-be-beggars-in-the-country mood of Chapter 12. Obviously Dickens cannot entrust the final vision to Nell; it is the narrator's transferred by implication to the child. The novel is successful in many respects, and the motif of child and old man linked to death is a moving and powerful one. It is a picaresque motif, one which requires a series of incidents and not development of character. Thus it limits what the novelist can achieve with nature. Broad effects are possible, for instance, the contrast of peaceful country and hurried city. To go beyond, to reveal God through nature, is not finally possible for Dickens, given characters and plot, so that the novel depends mainly on the threatened child situation. In Chapter 53 the death of a child is marked by his brother who tends his grave. When Nell speaks to him, "[the grave] was greener, he said, than all other gardens, and the birds loved it better because he had been used to feed them (p. 394)." All that Dickens can do with Nell is lead her for the last time to a garden grave.

To focus entirely on Nell, however, is to do an injustice to Dickens' almost infinite variety. If in her story he reverts to the garden grave of Oliver Twist, in the stories of Kit and Quilp, Dickens maps other territory. Kit is a successful character because he is kept on the same level throughout, the loyal young workingman who considers Astley's and oysters among the great pleasures of life. For this figure transcendence is in domestic comforts, and he finds a kind of nature he can live with. The Garlands' country cottage--their name recalls the Maylies'--with little stable and birds in cages, plants around the path,

and garden "bright with flowers in full bloom," is Kit's paradise and, best of all, one he may hope to attain soon on earth (p. 168). There is something excessively tiny about the Garlands and their home, and yet they live comfortably and prove themselves benevolent people. In later novels Dickens rings many changes on this basic natural domesticity theme, which remains a significant one for him to the end.

With Quilp the breakdown of cultivated nature comes into the open. Quilp is intended to be anti-natural in everything from his eating habits to his treatment of his wife. In his stature and physiognomy, he is a parody of nature. At the same time, he is close to being an elemental force, and thus allied to a chaotic type of nature Dickens has not previously portrayed. Quilp's feeling for parody, which comes from his rage at the trick nature has played on him, is exercised in his false pastoralism.[9] As Nell seeks the cooling breezes of the country, Quilp lounges in the noisome, damp "summer-house" "on a piece of waste ground, blighted with the unwholesome smoke of factory chimneys, and echoing the clank of iron wheels and rush of troubled water." Quilp leads a guest to "this inviting spot, entreating him to observe its beauties, as they passed along (p. 162)." Named the Wilderness, the summer-house is an appropriate setting for Quilp's tormenting of assorted victims. In various Sketches by Boz Dickens ridiculed foolish characters who set up as admirers of nature. That simple comedy, however, is only a distant relative of Quilp's case, for through nature parody he expresses his character and reveals the spinelessness of those who allow

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[9]Lucas, p. 86.

him to call the Wilderness a summer-house.

Quilp is a new type of character for Dickens in his experimentation with the narrative uses of nature. Quilp's portrait is complete in the dramatic setting of his death, the dark river whose beauties he had ironically praised toying with his body, dragging and tossing it "until, tired of the ugly plaything, it flung it on a swamp . . . and left it there to bleach." Our last view of Quilp is as a monstrous parody of life, his corpse extended, clothes and hair ruffling in the breeze, "such a mockery as the dead man himself would have delighted in when alive (p. 510)." The river here does not perform the comforting functions of kindly nature; it does not purify the body,[10] for example, or render it beautiful in death. Rather the elements sport with Quilp until he returns to them.

The garden grave idea of nature predominates in The Old Curiosity Shop but there are indications of another kind of nature too. In this respect Quilp and Kit, not Nell, have the last word. Even in Oliver Twist the pastoral repose of the village setting is challenged by the elemental nature background of some London scenes. There is not much subtlety or notable writing in this. Fagin's errands around the city are accompanied by chill, dampness, wind, mud, and fog. Casually Dickens once uses the antedeluvian monster image later developed in Bleak House: "the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved (p. 121)." Much happens by the river; Sikes journeys with Oliver to the robbery; the Bumbles meet

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[10]Lucas, p. 89.

with Monks; Nancy speaks with Mr. Brownlow and Rose; and Sikes shouts defiance at the crowd in the last moments of his life. Already we see the river that will play a major role in the later novels though not yet realized so distinctively.

> A mist hung over the river, deepening the red glare of the fires that burnt upon the small craft moored off the different wharfs, and rendering darker and more indistinct the murky buildings on the banks. The old smoke-stained storehouses on either side, rose heavy and dull from the dense mass of roofs and gables, and frowned sternly upon water too black to reflect even their lumbering shapes. (p. 291)

Implicitly the river is something apart from man that cannot be controlled by him. The novels of Dickens' second creative period show cultivated nature and the garden grave receding in importance while primal nature, untouched and untouchable by man, comes to dominate.

PART II -- PRIMAL NATURE

Introductory

The three novels of Dickens' middle period explore disintegration. In each, surface order succumbs to inner rending forces and chaos. In Barnaby Rudge long-suppressed injustices erupt into civil war; in Martin Chuzzlewit destructive selfishness is the principle of life on two continents; in Dombey and Son, a Midas fable, one man's pride annihilates everything he touches. The end of each novel reestablishes order, albeit often somewhat mechanically. Nature in these novels is no longer epitomized by either type of garden although the garden image retains some importance. It becomes an abstraction, the second term in an analogy, no longer the actual garden with flowers of Pickwick or the Garlands. Rather nature is mighty, untamed, and almost formless. Most typically the force of nature is embodied by the sea, raging or calm, always remote and mysterious. In Martin Chuzzlewit the sea's violence gives way to the flat hopelessness of the swamp, Eden after the Flood, nature as it was in the beginning and will be at the end of time.

Nature also introduces an alternative to clock time, but whereas in the early novels, Oliver Twist for example, the alternative is easeful, in these novels nature generally provides no relief. Thus Dickens lets nature indicate moral choices to the characters without sheltering them from their consequences. Or, to put it otherwise, in the middle novels we see Dickens becoming much more toughminded: he pushes major characters to extremes of experience and shows them strengthened and marked by

suffering rather than etherealized like the child heroes Oliver and Nell. The role of nature both creates the need for such characters and makes them possible.

In charting a transition from cultivated to primal nature, it is important to repeat that the secret of Dickens' method during his career is accumulation. Almost all his middle novels make use of techniques, motifs, and themes from previous novels. He very seldom abandoned anything which he had once used. He preferred to reshape it. One need only glance at Our Mutual Friend, the last complete novel, which re-uses, among others, the workhouse theme from Oliver Twist, the murder and the murderer's disguise from Martin Chuzzlewit, the society dinners from Little Dorrit, and recurrent characters such as the dissolute gentleman, the coquettish girl, and the saintly woman as parts of a complex work unlike any other.

The novels of the second period do not abandon the images and descriptions of cultivated nature; they are subordinated while others come into the forefront. Sometimes cultivated nature becomes the target of parody, as we have seen with Quilp. Or cultivated nature is shown as an ideal for only one or two selected characters. Finally, images of cultivated nature are attached to figures who have no direct knowledge of it: other characters continually associate Florence Dombey with gardens. In parody Pecksniff's breast is a moral garden to him.

Chapter 1 -- The Swamp: Martin Chuzzlewit

For all its variety and even incoherence of plot Martin Chuzzlewit is unified by organic images. One might say that the novel is loosely organized around the possible answers to the question, What is natural? In the exposition of likely answers Dickens covers everything from the natural selfishness of the Chuzzlewits--all the way back to Adam whose last name, had he had one, would have been Chuzzlewit--to the natural humility of Tom Pinch. Nature, which is the natural outside of man, encompasses the rural beauties of Wiltshire, the swirling Atlantic's waves, and the Mississippi morass called Eden. The basic elements are the land and the water, garden or swamp, stream or sea. Just as Dickens habitually connects man to his artificial environment--the face in the doorknocker syndrome--so in this novel, he ties him to nature. It is the first Dickens novel in which there is a consistent thematic use of imagery.[1]

This gives the novelist freedom within an organizing framework. He may express a character's harmony with nature or the opposite; he can suggest a character's moral quality by the implications of the image; he can allow himself a flight of fantasy by means of an extravagant image; he can satirize a character's outlook on life by hinting at his attitude to nature, and so on. Moreover in Martin Chuzzlewit almost all the imagery is comic in effect, contributing to the special quality of the novel in which everything but murder is transmuted into laughter.

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[1] In Barnaby Rudge the major crowd scenes are depicted in terms of the surging, roiling sea (the image Dickens repeats in A Tale of Two Cities), but sea imagery is obviously absent from the Maypole sections.

The undertaker Mould, a minor character who has an important part in the organic cycle, is a philosopher of nature. He has an Idea of a garden to which he keeps referring. Out of the window of his house in the City next to a churchyard, he gazes with delight on the graves; "his moist glance wandered like a sunbeam through a rural screen of scarlet runners, trained on strings before the window."[2] Not bothered by flies, Mould hears in the hammering of coffins "quite the buzz of insects . . . . It puts one in mind of the sound of animated nature in the agricultural districts. It's exactly like the woodpecker tapping (p. 402)." Flourishing nature and disintegration are all one to Mould, steps in the same process. If we accuse him of insensitivity, he is still in some fundamental way right about nature. He has found happiness by denying the grisliness of what he sees daily and transforming it into beauty. The humor is that this practical man does not care about flowers growing atop future graves. He sees the flowers right now. Dickens' fascination with undertakers and his ambiguity about their professional callousness reappears and is resolved in David Copperfield where the wise figure of Omer redeems for David the error of the young Minnie and Joram, who courted on the way to his mother's funeral.

Many images link scoundrels and ruined flowers, weeds, or other leftovers from the ruined garden. The garden itself has faded into time but the waste recalls its glory. Major Pawkins, the American, is a stale weed, "such as might be hoed out of the public garden, with great advantage to the decent growth of that preserve, and tossed on some

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[2]Martin Chuzzlewit (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 401. All future references are to this edition.

congenial dung-hill (p. 269)." Tacker, Mould's assistant, "had been a tender plant once upon a time, but from constant blowing in the fat atmosphere of funerals, had run to seed (p. 322)." Montague Tigg, before his translation into Tigg Montague denies his former leader Chevy Slyme. "'I am, sir,' said Mr. Tigg, striking himself upon the breast, 'a prominent tulip, of very different growth and cultivation from the cabbage Slyme, sir. (p. 221)'" In reality both men are growths of a particularly malignant kind which no healthy garden could produce.

The hypocrite Pecksniff is surrounded by organic images that expose him. Sea and garden are the basis respectively of two elaborate images early in the novel that acquaint us with this character.

> Time and tide will wait for no man, saith the adage. But all men have to wait for time and tide. That tide which, taken at the flood, would lead Seth Pecksniff on to fortune, was marked down in the table, and about to flow. No idle Pecksniff lingered far inland, unmindful of the changes of the stream; but there, upon the water's edge, over his shoes already, stood that worthy creature, prepared to wallow in the very mud, so that it slid towards the quarter of his hope. (p. 154)

Seizing a pretext to dismiss Martin from his house, Pecksniff grandly postures. "'I mourn over your corruption, I pity your voluntary withdrawal of yourself from the flowery paths of purity and peace'; here he struck himself upon his breast or moral garden; 'but I cannot have a leper and a serpent for an inmate (p. 210).'" One of Pecksniff's tricks is to use the clichés of general morality as if he had coined them for the occasion. Dickens' technique is to undercut the character's words by a narrative direction which unveils their falseness. If Pecksniff's orotundity were not enough to condemn him, the moral garden would be.

Pastoral parody is involved in the portrait of Pecksniff but it is

different from that in The Old Curiosity Shop. In many ways a more realistic figure, Pecksniff is a much less outlandish characterization than Quilp. He eats no shrimp with heads on and hardboiled eggs in shells, nor is he an obvious sport of nature. Where Quilp delights in exposing the hypocrisy of others by acting outrageously, Pecksniff sets up as a country gentleman. When his falsehood is greatest, he reaches back for the bucolic illusion. To impress old Martin Chuzzlewit who has come calling, Pecksniff seemingly needs but a garden hat and a spade. "'You find me in my garden-dress. You will excuse it, I know. It is an ancient pursuit, gardening. Primitive, my dear sir; for, if I am not mistaken, Adam was the first of our calling (p. 384).'"

The important scene when Pecksniff loses face in wooing Mary Graham continues the parody. Mock heroic language and overturning surface assumptions about nature contribute to the passage's comedy; the conventional references are effective because they are part of Pecksniff's pretension. The stately rhythm helps to ridicule the villain.

> The summer weather in his bosom was reflected in the breast of Nature. Through deep green vistas where the boughs arched over-head, and showed the sunlight flashing in the beautiful perspective; through dewy fern from which the startled hares leaped up, and fled at his approach; by mantled pools, and fallen trees, and down in hollow places, rustling among last year's leaves whose scent woke memory of the past; the placid Pecksniff strolled. By meadow gates and hedges fragrant with wild roses; and by thatched-roof cottages whose inmates humbly bowed before him as a man both good and wise; the worthy Pecksniff walked in tranquil meditation. (pp. 479-480)

Before Mary rejects him--as Tom Pinch will later--nature does. At the end of the passage whose opening I have quoted, Pecksniff trips over a tree root and is brought down to earth, hard. The same thing keeps happening to him in the novel until the final exposure finishes him for

good.

Pecksniff is a supremely comic character because the reader is at all times confident that he will not succeed. Dickens achieves his triumph by opposing him to nature. As nature continually defeats the hypocrite, so will he be defeated by those who represent justice. Chapter 2 which introduces Pecksniff begins with an extended description of the Wiltshire scene on a late autumn afternoon. The whole section is powerful, suggesting nature's grandeur and at the same time its playful vitality. In this moment of the year when death seems to be coming to nature, a last flash of sun "shed a glory upon the scene."

> The wet grass sparkled in the light; the scanty patches of verdure in the hedges--where a few green twigs yet stood together bravely, resisting to the last the tyranny of nipping winds and early frosts--took heart and brightened up; the stream which had been dull and sullen all day long, broke out into a cheerful smile; the birds began to chirp and twitter on the naked boughs, as though the hopeful creatures half believed that winter had gone by, and spring had come already.
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>
> On the motionless branches of some trees, autumn berries hung like clusters of coral beads, as in those fabled orchards where the fruits were jewels; others, stripped of all their garniture, stood, each the centre of its little heap of bright red leaves, watching their slow decay; others again, still wearing theirs, had them all crunched and crackled up, as though they had been burnt; about the stems of some were piled in ruddy mounds, the apples they had borne that year; while others (hardy evergreens this class) showed somewhat stern and gloomy in their vigour, as charged by nature with the admonition that it is not to her more sensitive and joyous favorites she grants the longest term of life. (pp. 7-8)

Night falls, the wind gathers, and the leaves which seemed the only dead elements of the scene are driven helter skelter into life by its heedless force. The tone of the description is playful, the narrator

enjoying the wind's power, especially its last act which punishes Pecksniff, before the reader knows how richly he deserves it.

> The scared leaves only flew the faster for all this, and a giddy chase it was: for they got into unfrequented places, where there was no outlet, and where their pursuer kept them eddying round and round at his pleasure; and they crept under the eaves of houses, and clung tightly to the sides of hayricks, like bats; and tore in at open chamber windows, and cowered close to hedges; and in short went anywhere for safety. (p. 9)

The unsuspecting Pecksniff opening his door is knocked flat by the wind's suddenly slamming the door against him. "Being by this time weary of such trifling performances, the boisterous rover hurried away rejoicing, roaring over moor and meadow, hill and flat, until it got out to sea, where it met with other winds similarly disposed, and made a night of it (p. 10)."

The opening of Chapter 2 represents a significant narrative progress for Dickens. Recalling earlier nature settings in Pickwick Papers and Oliver Twist, we must notice the greater pointedness of the above passages. Not content with painting a beautiful scene and then moralizing in essay form, the novelist has created a scene that initiates character and thematic development. The playful impetuosity of the wind reappears exacerbated in the wild tempest of the Atlantic which mercilessly buffets the hapless Martin Chuzzlewit and Mark Tapley steaming to America in Chapter 15. The winds are scornful of man and his dreams. They join to vent their power for no better reason than their power to do it.

> On, on, on, over the countless miles of angry space roll the long heaving billows. Mountains and caves are here, and yet are not; for what is now the one, is now the other; then all is but a boiling heap of rushing water. Pursuit, and flight,

> and mad return of wave upon wave, and savage struggle, ending in a spouting-up of foam that whitens the black night; incessant change of place, and form, and hue; constancy in nothing, but eternal strife; on, on, on, they roll, and darker grows the night, and louder howls the wind, and more clamorous and fierce become the million voices in the sea . . . . (p. 245)

Clearly not benevolent nature, this is a destructive force that tends to chaos. Man must recognize that this too is nature. If he is to endure--and Martin and Mark survive the ocean crossing and the disastrous frontier settlement--then it must be through his own strength and fortitude. Nature need not extend the helping hand, either here or in Eden.

From the turbulence of the wind-ravaged ocean to Eden is a mythological journey: the Flood receding leaves the swamp, fertile only in fevers and flies. Much more definitively than Nell, Martin has gone backwards in time to enter a past too grim to contemplate, let alone bear.[3] As Pecksniff at the outset receives a tap from uncaring nature, so Martin in his monstrous delusion of selfishness is struck down by incomprehensible nature. The description of Eden is masterly in that the characters' perception is included in it. Both feel they are in the territory of Giant Despair.

> A flat morass, bestrewn with fallen timber; a marsh on which the good growth of the earth seemed to have been wrecked and cast away, that from its decomposing ashes vile and ugly things might rise; where the very trees took the aspect of huge weeds, begotten of the slime from which they sprung, by the hot sun that burnt them up; whose fatal maladies, seeking whom they might infect, came forth at night in misty shapes, and creeping out upon the water, hunted them like spectres until day; where even the blessed sun, shining down on festering elements of corruption and disease, became a horror; this was the realm of Hope through which they moved. (p. 377)

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[3]Bert G. Hornback, "Noah's Arkitecture." A Study of Dickens' Mythology (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1972), p. 44.

In Eden Martin sees himself for the first time. By recognizing in the dreadfulness of the land an illustration of his own moral state, Martin prepares himself for appreciating the scenes of his former life when he returns, humbled, to them. Whereas Martin had walked insensitively among the beauties of Wiltshire, now they are Eden to him. Thus in Martin Chuzzlewit Dickens expands a view of nature already found in Pickwick Papers, that is, the ideal landscape is the familiar one blessed by human community. Tom Pinch is important in this connection; always he appreciates the surroundings above all.

Tom's three journeys are examples. In each case no matter what his mood, Tom is supremely conscious of the freedom of the road and the beauty around him. Tom Pinch is the only character in whom the Pickwickian joy in stagecoaches and country walks is reincarnated, but he is not the novel's central figure. His defining simplicity sets him apart, a balding innocent-child character. To describe his journeys Dickens employs a different narrative tone than for any other character, writing with a gusto and appreciation that at once reveal Tom's enthusiasm and the novelist's special approval of him.[4]

> See the bright moon! High up before we know it: making the earth reflect the objects on its breast like water. Hedges, trees, low cottages, church steeples, blighted stumps and flourishing slips, have all grown vain upon the sudden, and mean to contemplate their own fair images till morning. The poplars yonder rustle that their quivering leaves may see themselves upon the ground. Not so the oak; trembling does not become him; and he watches himself in his stout old burly steadfastness, without the motion of a twig. The moss-grown gate, ill-poised upon its creaking hinges, crippled and decayed, swings to and fro before its glass, like some

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[4]Judith F. Slater finds the passage to be in the "coaching prose" tradition though Dickens' rhythm is his own (p. 27, note 3).

> fantastic dowager; while our own ghostly likeness travels on, Yoho! Yoho! through ditch and brake, upon the ploughed land and the smooth, along the steep hill-side and steeper wall, as if it were a phantom-Hunter. (p. 562)

What Dickens is reaching for with Tom Pinch is the Miltonic implication of Eden's being wherever the heart is. Though Tom is excessively humble and the sort of person Dickens probably scorned in life, yet in Martin Chuzzlewit he embodies the best kind of natural instincts. After showing Tom's influence on all in the most advantageous natural setting, Dickens removes him to London. There Tom emerges as a hero, creating a home and rescuing his sister Ruth from servitude and others from Pecksniff's influence. From the unhelpful terrain of the Temple, Tom and Ruth create a veritable garden. Unlike Mould's illusion of "rural districts" which is his comic idiosyncracy, the Temple courtyard is transformed for others through the Pinches' magic. The "smoky shrubs," the old fountain, the law-bred sparrows, the "puny" boughs of "dingy" trees become a locale for happiness, for John Westlock as well as Ruth and Tom. In David Copperfield, Bleak House, and Little Dorrit the transforming power is given to the main female character who is exalted especially for this ability to create Eden out of unpromising materials, to bring order out of chaos.

If creation means transformation of unpromising elements into an ideal, then Pecksniff is not creative when he pretends to be a rustic gardener; instead of creating, he is merely falling back upon obsolete conventions. But there are those whose consummate moral blindness prevents them from even pretending to be other than they are. Jonas Chuzzlewit is the fundamentally uncreative man, alienated from nature as he is from all good natural feeling, filial and communal. He first

separates himself from the Chuzzlewit background after his father's death which he has so long awaited. Even before his marriage to Mercy Pecksniff which will reveal his brutality, Dickens--almost gratuitously as it seems then--depicts Jonas' reaction to the Wiltshire countryside.

It is a lovely setting, a spring evening at twilight; the warm sun has yielded to a cooling wind; "a thousand pleasant scents" diffuse from the leaves and buds; smoke rises from chimneys; newly turned earth shows the laborer's work.

> It was a time when most men cherish good resolves, and sorrow for the wasted past; when most men, looking on the shadows as they gather, think of that evening which must close on all, and that to-morrow which has none beyond.
>
> 'Precious dull,' said Mr. Jonas, looking about. 'It's enough to make a man go melancholy mad.' (pp. 330-331)

But this is not a random incident. It foreshadows the murder scene in which Jonas' insensitivity--he is unaware of any need to pretend to be a nature lover--increases a thousandfold. Where Dickens devotes one paragraph to describing the environment Jonas finds dull, he prepares for the murder in Chapter 47 with several passages of description in which the related ideas of natural beauty and quietly productive human life are reiterated. As he was blind and deaf before, so Jonas is now enclosed in the prison of his delusion. He sees and hears only the dreams that foreshadow his act and its consequences, but he lacks the imagination--again--to understand them. Dickens has the birds and the fishes, the trees and the stars, every blade of grass or stalk of corn, watching Jonas in his unawareness. They also watch the victim, Tigg, fitting companion for Jonas in never having felt nature's sweetness, never having given a thought to what it represented.

The murder takes place in a wood which is like a cathedral.

> Vistas of silence opened everywhere, into the heart and innermost recesses of the wood; beginning with the likeness of an aisle, a cloister, or a ruin open to the sky; then tangling off into a deep green rustling mystery, through which gnarled trunks, and twisted boughs, and ivy-covered stems, and trembling leaves, and bark-stripped bodies of old trees stretched out at length, were faintly seen in beautiful confusion. (p. 724)

This recalls the holy wood where Nell and her grandfather found peace. But in The Old Curiosity Shop moral ugliness has appropriate settings. Quilp's body falls into the polluted river while Nell dies in the ideal village and is laid to rest in a garden grave. In Martin Chuzzlewit the chaos underlying order is everywhere evident. If nature is remote from man on the ocean and in Eden, so is man removed from nature. Murder occurs in a natural cathedral, and neither murderer nor victim realizes where he is. The hollow in the wood stained with blood recalls the hollow in Tennyson's Maud,[5] nature polluted with "a dark, dark stain that dyed the whole summer night from earth to heaven (p.725)." The bloody hollow is like Eden, the boggy ground, moss, fallen trees, all suggesting their relationship.[6] After the murder, the cathedral becomes figuratively, the swamp of despair. It is a timeless story. The Chuzzlewit line goes back to Cain. Jonas' murder of Tigg repeats the first murder, a senseless killing in the midst of nature by a self-enclosed man, a willful destruction of order.

At the end of the novel, as befits a comedy, order is recreated.

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[5]Geoffrey Russell, "Introduction" to Martin Chuzzlewit, p. xi.

[6]John Holloway, "Dickens and the Symbol" in Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater (London: Chapman & Hall, 1970), p. 70.

Old Martin apportions rewards and punishments, and the evil are left out. But American Eden remains the heart of darkness and even Wiltshire has been touched. In Barnaby Rudge after the mob has surged through the Maypole village, and justice is done and everything restored, still the security of the social organization, even the security of the family, has been shattered and is forever precarious. The idiot Barnaby lives a permanent reminder of the sins of the past. So too in Martin Chuzzlewit although Jonas is dead and Martin is safely established with his grandfather and Mary, the memory of Eden and the bloody hollow lingers in the mind of the reader.

Dickens never changed his basic pattern of subjecting characters to great tests while giving them the strength to win through to happiness. As he grew older and his novelistic talents developed, however, the problems facing the characters become more and more crucial and overwhelming so that despite the characters' ultimate success, their plight during the greater part of the novel engages such attention that it almost begins to seem as if they have been defeated after all. This is much more true of Dombey and Son than of Martin Chuzzlewit where Eden and the murder are mitigated by the irresistible humor of Mrs. Gamp, the funerary group, and Todgers', and it becomes especially important in the novels of Dickens' last period. Nature is not always as significant in a Dickens novel as it is in Martin Chuzzlewit, but it does play a major role in each one.

Probably there is more nature description in this novel than in any other by Dickens.[7] Much of the Wiltshire scenery may be abstract

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[7]Lucas, p. 126.

rather than realistic because no account is taken of rural poverty,[8] but we can see that the novelist balances primal Eden and the English countryside at its best. If the novel has the most nature description, so too it has the least about London. Despite the excellent writing in the chapters on Todgers and the Anglo-Bengalee boondoggle, we get little distinct sense of the city. All the earlier novels are stronger in depicting the city's personality. In this novel the city is curiously undefined, neither frightening nor exciting.

One reason, I think, may be that Dickens expended so much on Eden that he could not then revert to the city as fully as he needed to give it an identity. Another is that the strength of the urban characters--the splendid comic figures of Mrs. Gamp, Bailey, and Moddle--is their independence from setting. They are too unruly for a dominant background. Thus the contrast is between Eden and Wiltshire, primal and cultivated nature, not between city and country. In Dombey and Son, generally a tidier novel, nature is concentrated into one dominant image, and London is the City of Dombey's business and the dark streets that ensnare the child Florence.

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[8]Lucas, p. 129.

Chapter 2 -- The Sea: Dombey and Son

The sea in Dombey and Son stands for everything that Dombey and Son trample under. It is life, nature, self-forgetfulness, happiness, and death. It is an abstraction that is never experienced by the characters but always invoked by the author. No one actually goes for a swim; immersion is figurative. No one tastes the salt of the water or is tossed by the sea. The voyage and shipwreck of Walter Gay are reduced to a few lines of exposition when he returns; the wedding voyage to China of Walter and Florence is on a sea of glass; we have no indication of the actual sea's life or fury as we do in Martin Chuzzlewit or David Copperfield. Characters are related to the sea in arbitrary ways for undramatic reasons. Because Dickens has decided that the sea will function as a counterweight to the theme of commercial hardness, he uses the evocative sea image as a test of moral values. Those who respond to the sea are among the blessed, the others are dying in blindness. The child Paul intuitively responds to the sea; the blighted Carker, Mrs. Skewton, and Dombey do not.

In the opening chapter the fine characterization of Dombey in terms of his attitude to nature reflects his state of mind extravagantly but accurately.

> The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre.[1]

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[1] Dombey and Son (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 2. All future references are to this edition.

But the sea image is often gratuitous. The chapter concludes with the death of Mrs. Dombey in the arms of Florence. Accompanied by a vague sea image that reflects no character's thinking but only Dickens' insistence on a symmetrical pattern, "clinging fast to that slight spar [Florence] within her arms, the mother drifted out upon the dark and unknown sea that rolls around the world (p. 10)." This is more sentimental than the garden grave version of death. Mrs. Dombey is assimilated into words, not nature.

The deaths of Paul and Mrs. Skewton are contrasted by the image of the sea. In tracing the steady decline of Paul's strength, Dickens emphasizes Paul's attraction to the sea. He is not interested in marine facts or the names of countries bordering the sea. He wants to know what the voices in the waves are saying. The character Paul is a fascinating one in some ways. Dickens is successful in depicting the child's latent cunning which responds so quickly to his father's teaching about the power of money. On the other hand, Dickens wants to show that Paul cannot be totally corrupted and has spiritual qualities expressed in his love for Florence. So Paul is queer and old-fashioned and visionary. Some of this is acceptable yet the extreme manifestations of his desire to know what the waves are saying are not. In those passages sentiment overcomes meaning.

Though Paul's death takes place in London, his last thoughts are suffused with water. The child thinks not merely of the sea but of the river flowing to it. He sees the sun's rays on the wall as golden water. He sees in his mind the dark river of night and the sunny river of day whose flow he tries in nightmares to stem. "How fast the river runs,

between its green banks and the rushes, Floy! But it's very near the sea. I hear the waves! They always said so! (p. 225)" With his last breath Paul speaks of his mother waiting for him on the shore. The "dark unknown sea" of Chapter 1 is now fathomed and clear as the dying child has a vision of the afterlife which he reports to those at his bedside. Because most of the novel is severe or sardonic, the emotional sections seem especially indulgent. In its context Paul's death is more sentimental than Nell's (as Florence herself is a more sentimental conception than Nell), for her spirituality has been present from the outset.

Mrs. Skewton dies at Brighton in sight of the waves which she does not comprehend. Her chair is vainly wheeled to the water's edge: "Its speech is dark and gloomy to her, and a dread is on her face, and when her eyes wander over the expanse, they see but a broad stretch of desolation between earth and heaven (p. 584)." Her moral deafness extends to her friends in the funeral party who do not hear "the waves that are hoarse with repetition of their mystery, and blind to the dust that is piled upon the shore, and to the white arms that are beckoning, in the moonlight, to the invisible country far away (p. 587)." The victim is the same woman who once spoke to these friends of her love of nature. "'I assure you, Mr. Dombey, Nature intended me for an Arcadian. I am thrown away in society'" and "'I want Nature everywhere. It would be so extremely charming (p. 289).'" Mrs. Skewton is another of Dickens' characters who parody nature in their viciousness. Her death in ignorance of nature's message is grimly ironic.

Dickens' attitude toward the sea in Dombey and Son is inconsistent

and unresolved. Sometimes the sea is the elemental reality, primal nature, which Dombey in his arrogance identifies as a roadway for his company's ships. Mostly it seems intended to suggest the afterlife, not a reabsorption into formless eternity as imagined by Shelley in "Adonais" but a material existence, complete with boats met on shores. Signs of God in nature which are read in the peaceful wood where Tigg is murdered are clumsily visualized in Dombey and Son. Waves with arms and voices, boats and masts, sea shells and sand are inadequate for the magnitude of the concepts, hopes, and emotions they embody. Moreover, they are vaguely depicted, and seem to have no sensuous reality.

For example, when Florence is sailing to China, she thinks one night of Paul. The association of ideas is understandable. The narrator, however, enhances this reminder of mortality in the midst of happiness by calling upon the familiar and meaningless abstractions. "And the voices in the waves are always whispering to Florence, in their ceaseless nurmuring, of love--of love, eternal and illimitable, not bounded by the confines of this world, or by the end of time, but ranging still, beyond the sea, beyond the sky, to the invisible country far away! (p. 811)" The novel's original ending, cut by Dickens in proof, made even more of the waves.[2]

With the sea in Dombey and Son Dickens tries to make primal nature into transcendant nature, to show nature first as elemental and then as religious.[3] This is the goal he reaches in the great novels of

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[2]John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work (Fairlawn, New Jersey: Essential Books, Inc., 1958), pp. 112-113.

[3]Hornback criticizes the use of the sea as a "euphemism" for death (p. 56).

his third period and one he had already approached in painting the Edenic joy of Pickwick's garden, Oliver's bliss in the fields, Nell's vision of tranquil harmony from the church tower, and Tom's joyous drives through the country. In this novel, however, perhaps because Dickens has essayed more, he has achieved less.[4] On the whole he does better with Eden and the hollow of Martin Chuzzlewit where he makes primal and cultivated nature the settings for original sin and redemption.

Although the preternatural sensitivity of Florence and Paul is suggested mainly by their hearing voices in the waves, they are also associated with the cultivated garden. However, their gardens are imaginary. These children do not have the opportunity to walk among the flowers and birds. They grow up in a grimly luxurious house--the first of many such in Dickens' works--with "a gravelled yard, where two gaunt trees, with blackened trunks and branches, rattled rather than rustled, their leaves were so smoke-dried (p. 21)." The sun appears only briefly as if against its volition. Faced with this reality Paul dreams of going into the country with his sister and living in "a beautiful garden, fields, and woods" for the rest of their lives (p. 190).

Years later after Paul's death, the house is allowed to deteriorate into a "wilderness," a reassertion of primal nature. Grass grows on the roof, "a scaly crumbling vegetation sprouted round the window-sills," "the two trees with smoky trunks were blighted high up, and the withered branches domineered above the leaves (p. 320)." Nevertheless Florence blooms in this ruined garden. The one time she walks in a real garden,

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[4]Wilson calls the sea imagery "too wide and vague" while Philip Collins in Dickens and Education (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1964) finds it "obvious" (p. 202). But see Cockshut, who likes the sea symbol (p. 113).

she overhears a conversation about Dombey's cruelty to her. That convinces Florence she must return to the grim house--to protect her father's good name. Even her wedding is in an ancient church--not a primeval one like Nell's but sufficiently dusty--through whose windows no light comes, nature represented by a "meagre tree" outside and one whistling blackbird in an adjacent building (p. 807).

Florence continues the character type of Tom and Ruth Pinch. They share essential goodness and act as touchstones for other characters. Martin is selfish when he disparages Tom, unselfish when he values him. More important, their creativity lets them reconstruct nature from its vestiges. So the Pinches make a romance of the Temple fountain and Florence leaves nosegays of flowers for her father in the dark Dombey mansion. But Florence is also the least effective of the long line of characters from the Pinches to Lizzie Hexam because she does not actually do anything. In most of Dickens' novels the main characters suffer from material and emotional deprivation. This means that their search for love will be grounded by the equally strong need for food and shelter. These characters are forced to act, to travel, to be independent.

But Florence has no such pressing need because she always has a place to go. When Dombey fails her, Captain Cuttle is ready to embrace her into his household. Wherever she is, she has servants and followers. Her role is to be coddled and appreciated. Florence's passivity is akin to the sea's which may call to people but cannot guarantee that they will hear. In making Florence part of Paul's garden dream, the novelist uses the familiar cultivated nature image effectively to evoke the child's ineffable longings in his own words. But Florence herself has no words

and almost no actions. By making her passive like the sea, Dickens pairs a static character with a static image, neither one an adequate objective correlative for the other. Thus Florence has a negative effect on all the novel's characters.

Dombey is incomprehensible in the scenes with his daughter--too sadistically cruel for us to accept his final rehabilitation--whereas with Paul, Edith, or Carker we understand the contradictory sides of his character. Only the comic characters such as Toots and Diogenes the dog come off well in terms of Florence. She reduces everyone to repetitive protestations of undying affection acceptable only from the mindless. The importance of Florence and the sea image makes Dombey and Son Dickens' least satisfying novel, if we omit the uncharacteristically thesis-ridden Hard Times and A Tale of Two Cities. But we must not overlook that the novel demonstrates some other developments in Dickens' narrative use of nature.

The modernity of the commercial world represented by Dombey and Son is convincing mostly because of its association with the railroad. Dickens identifies the railroad as the symbol of change. Broadly it is opposed to the unchanging sea. Actually, the sea has no relation to the railroad, which is shown in terms of its effect on the landscape and on the human mind. Stagg's Gardens in Camden Town is an ambiguous piece of ground upon which families have lived for generations in the belief that it is as bucolic as its name. "Frowzy fields, and cowhouses, and dung-hills, and dustheaps, and ditches, and gardens, and summer-houses, and carpet-beating grounds" all await the railroad (p. 63). This is not domesticated nature as we have seen it in Dickens thus far. But he

recognizes the inhabitants' belief in their home and their distrust of changes.

The railroad comes like a cataclysm. It appears that nature itself is disrupting Stagg's Gardens. The excavations seem as if an "earthquake" had occurred; an "unnatural hill" is thrown up; "something . . . had accidentally become a pond"; "hot springs and fiery eruptions" underline the confusion (pp. 62-63). Out of this unnatural acceleration of nature comes a modern neighborhood, wealthy and busy. "Villas, gardens, churches, healthy public walks" have replaced the chaos. Economic conditions have improved for everyone. And yet, says Dickens, "Oh woe the day when 'not a rood of English ground'--laid out in Stagg's Gardens--is secure!" At most he accepts this kind of progress regretfully.[5] If the new neighborhood is more sanitary, the old was a true community of the working poor such as Cook's Court in Bleak House and Bleeding Heart Yard in Little Dorrit. In Dombey and Son Dickens is far from praising nature unreservedly as in The Old Curiosity Shop. But his essential orientation has not changed. Even attenuated nature is preferable to new gardens since it represents communal identity.

Progress has another kind of effect on traditional life. Nell and old Trent pass through a series of neighborhoods on their way out of London from commercial to industrial to rich residential to humble, and so on. City modulates into country by perceptible stages. Harriet and John Carker live in an area which is almost a no man's land between city and

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[5]Lucas finds ambiguity in Dickens' attitude toward the new Stagg's Gardens. But Marcus believes that in this novel Dickens had no sympathy with the past, except in terms of Florence (pp. 148-149 and pp. 300, 356, respectively).

country, a recurring setting in most of the later novels. It is "blighted country, and not town"; there are "tall chimneys belching smoke all day and all night" and also fields where "turf is cut" and "dusty nettles grow"; "a scrap or two of hedge may yet be seen" and even a few birds for the birdcatcher (p. 472). This is neither cultivated nor primal nature precisely. It may be considered fruitful land returning to chaos,[6] or it may hint at the death of nature. For the repentent Carkers, living humbly to expiate John's crime as a youth, the setting is appropriately purgatory. However, the added implication, substantiated by the original Stagg's Gardens, is that the value of nature depends to some extent on the beholder.

Captain Cuttle's dwelling is in a different kind of no man's land where the boundary between earth and water is blurred. First one sees flagpoles before the taverns; then marine clothing shops; forges where anchor and chain cables are hammered out; rows of houses with weather-vane masts; ditches, willows; oar-making and boat building establishments; marshy ground; next Captain Cuttle's house by a canal; and finally the water itself. The Captain's closeness to the sea and therefore goodness is self-evident, but Dickens intends, I believe, no moral point in this setting. It is quaint, of course, like everything about Captain Cuttle but it is also an indication of how pervasive Dickens' feeling about the breakdown of form into chaos was at this time.

Carker the manager and chief villain lives in the traditional suburban setting at Norwood. Everything inside and out is perfectly arranged. "The lawn, the soft, smooth slope, the flower-garden, the

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[6]Hornback, p. 60.

clumps of trees where graceful forms of ash and willow are not wanting . . . bespeak an amount of elegant comfort within, that might serve for a palace (p. 471)." Beautiful as it is, something is wrong, something excessively soft and diseased. The parrot in a gilded cage spends most of its time walking upside down, screeching--the voice of nature protesting, a herald of Mrs. Merdle's vociferous bird in Little Dorrit. Dickens by no means rejects the value of a country setting; he repeats the Norwood location for the idyllic Spenlow home in David Copperfield. Because of its intrinsic value nature can be used to express nuances that echo characteristics in the figures associated with it. Is the trouble with Carker's home and grounds his own feline being from which "there issues forth some subtle portion of himself, which gives a vague expression of himself to everything about him? (p. 472)" Who can doubt the answer? Even here amid the perfect order and beauty there is a troubling suggestion of lurking chaos.

The stagecoach journeys of the previous novels are railway trips in Dombey and Son. The stagecoach ride almost always announces a happy escape and is marked by the traveller's appreciation of natural scenes. The one previous exception is the nightmare journey to Wiltshire in Martin Chuzzlewit during which Jonas rehearses the murder to the accompaniment of lightning and wind. That Gothic scene despite its effectiveness has its novelistic and theatrical antecedents. The railroad trips of Dombey and Carker are unprecedented explorations of psychology through reaction to landscape.[7]

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[7]Sylvère Monod, Dickens the Novelist (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 245, and also Barbara Hardy, "Dickens and the

Dombey flees to Leamington Spa after Paul's death "carr[ying] monotony with him." Oblivious to "a rich and varied country," he sees "a wilderness of blighted plans and gnawing jealousies (p. 280)." The railroad is an instrument of death, a monster of chaos. As it rushes through towns and fields and woods, it seems to explode them with its speed, destroying as it passes. Exposed to the tracks are slums of wretchedness and smoke, fever and poverty.

> As Mr. Dombey looks out of his carriage window, it is never in his thoughts that the monster who has brought him there has let the light of day in on these things; not made or caused them . . . . All things looked black, and cold, and deadly upon him, and he on them. He found a likeness to his misfortune everywhere. (p. 282)

Like Dombey Carker suffers from Tigg's obliviousness to nature. Tormented by fear of his pursuer, broken in pride, and desperate, Carker flees to England from France after all his schemes are exposed. He too feels the presence of death, but he is not mourning a lost child, so that death seems to be upon him. In France he travels by carriage, in England by rail. It is all the same, however, no jollity, no champing horses, nothing except fear and confusion. "The clatter and commotion echoed to the hurry and discordance of the fugitive's ideas. Nothing clear without, and nothing clear within (p. 769)."

Figures and scenes of the past are jumbled with the landscape dissolving before his eyes. He can see truly only the road behind him which he anxiously scans for sight of pursuers. And there is the sameness of change for the man whose life is now "a fevered vision of things past and present all confounded together; of his life and journey blended into

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Passions," in Dickens Centennial Essays ed. Ada Nisbet and Blake Nevius (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 76-77.

one (p. 773)." Jonas Chuzzlewit after the murder is a driven man also, but he has committed a tangible crime for which he knows he will be punished. Carker's sense of being driven is the result of the collapse of his powerful will. Only the insubstantial wing of death touches him now.

In England he takes the train to a remote bucolic spot "on the borders of a little wood (p. 775)." One house alone interrupts nature. Even here, however, he cannot find rest. Still he hears pursuing footsteps, sees avenging visions. Only the mysterious demon railroad can fix his mind. He yearns for destruction and revels in the sensation of being shaken almost to disintegration by the railroad's violent force. Carker walks by the tracks to feel "a trembling of the ground, and quick vibration in his ears; a distant shriek; a dull light . . . an irresistible bearing down of a great roaring and dilating mass; a high wind, and a rattle . . . . (p. 776)" Over and over he subjects himself to this almost-death. Finally he is killed by the fascinating monster. In the last moment we see fear on Dombey's face when he realizes what is about to happen but Carker is not afraid. Dispassionately as if he were already dead, he watches the monster's rush and accepts the dispersion of his elements.

With both Dombey and Carker, Dickens extends his techniques of portraiture. The conventional identification of good man and nature, bad man and blindness to nature, receives verbal enhancement. Just as Dickens' facility in expanding a figure of speech into an elaborate rhetorical pattern is marked in Martin Chuzzlewit, so here the usual attitudes about nature are revitalized by extravagance of presentation.

The following passage which develops an approach briefly tested with Pecksniff must be quoted in full.

> Mr. Carker the Manager rose with the lark, and went out, walking in the summer day. His meditations--and he meditated with contracted brows as he strolled along--hardly seemed to soar as high as the lark, or to mount in that direction; rather they kept close to their nest upon the earth, and looked about, among the dust and worms. But there was not a bird in the air, singing unseen, farther beyond the reach of human eye than Mr. Carker's thoughts. He had his face so perfectly under control, that few could say more, in distinct terms, of its expression, than that it smiled or that it pondered. It pondered now, intently. As the lark poured out her melody clearer and stronger, he fell into a graver and profounder silence. At length when the lark came headlong down, with an accumulating stream of song, and dropped among the green wheat near him, rippling in the breath of the morning like a river, he sprang up from his reverie, and looked round with a sudden smile, as courteous and as soft as if he had numerous observers to propitiate; nor did he relapse, after being thus awakened; but clearing his face, like one who bethought himself that it might otherwise wrinkle and tell tales, went smiling on, as if for practice. (p. 379)

The absolute moral deafness of Carker could not be better expressed than in the realistic conceit--if I may use the term--of the lark's rise and fall. The same point about his self-enclosedness appears in the next scene when Edith and Dombey are riding through the fields. With basilisk eyes (and teeth!) Carker fixes his chief and has not one thought, not even the pretense of one, for the summer landscape. All one can say for Carker is that he does not pretend to be a nature lover, but that is only because he cannot recognize <u>any</u> lack in himself.

The character of Dombey emerges distinctly early in the novel at Paul's christening. Dickens so intermingles the images of cold and wind in the scene that they become more than examples of the pathetic fallacy.[8]

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[8]Michael Goldberg, <u>Carlyle and Dickens</u> (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 53.

"Mr. Dombey represented in himself the wind, the shade, and the autumn of the christening." When he looks out at the puny trees in the gravelled garden, the leaves fall "as if he blighted them (p. 52)." But the coldness is not only within Dombey. It spreads outward to freeze all the participants in an accumulation of misery. Everyone shivers and the baby cries. Dombey here is not merely a frozen gentleman but an anti-natural destructive force--ironically, in his desire to impose form upon life.

Chapter 47, in which Edith Dombey leaves her husband, opens with the narrator's well-known discussion of nature. He cries "for a good spirit who would take the house-tops off . . . to show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes, to swell the retinue of the Destroying Angel as he moves forth among them! (p. 648)" The thrust of the passage is a call for a social and moral cleansing, the two, as ever, bracketed by Dickens. The relation of the generalization to Dombey is clear in the sequel.

> Not the less bright and blest would that day be for rousing some who never have looked out upon the world of human life around them, to a knowledge of their own relation to it, and for making them acquainted with a perversion of nature in their own contracted sympathies and estimates . . . . (p. 648. My italics)

Dombey and Son fails in important ways while it succeeds in others. The images of cultivated nature advance the novel. The equation of children and plants in Dr. Blimber's school--thus forced tender young plants for bleary-eyed stupefied students--is comically effective. The railroad versus nature sections are dramatically realized as are the characterizations of Dombey and Carker. There is even an atypical Hardyism: Edith and her mother encounter Good Mrs. Brown and Alice on the Downs "with nothing but a bare sweep of land between them and the

sky (p. 574)." The emptiness of the setting and the remoteness of the sky aptly portray the moral loneliness of the two young women after their yielding to social, that is, maternal, pressures.

Our final version in the novel is of a more benevolent landscape, sea, sky and sand intermingling in the sun's light while a sadder and wiser old gentleman plays with his grandchildren and an old dog he once ignored. Broadly speaking, though his later novels exhibit changes in narrative approaches including first-person story-telling, Dombey and Son ends Dickens' drastic experimentation with the novel. In terms of nature it ends the primary emphasis on images of destruction and chaos. These are assimilated into the later novels which deal with nature in all its phases, primal, cultivated, and transcendent.

PART III -- TRANSCENDENT NATURE

Introductory

Among the novels of Dickens' last and longest period are his masterpieces, David Copperfield, Bleak House, Little Dorrit, Great Expectations, and Our Mutual Friend. Three of them begin with a family whose existence testifies to a social and moral problem that radiates seemingly into every level of society: Bleak House, home of the Jarndyces,; Little Dorrit, daughter of William Dorrit, Father of the Marshalsea; John Harmon, our mutual friend, possessor of the Harmon dust mounds fortune. The other two novels detail, in the first person, a young man's growth from foolish innocence to maturity; each life is complicated by the legacy of the past, a dual heritage of soft emotionality for David and an early introduction to the most banally vicious clichés of upward mobility for Pip. In all the novels the struggle for psychological, moral, and financial independence devolves upon one or two characters.

These figures plunge into experiences that further individual growth. For all the emphasis in many of the novels on giant institutions like Chancery or the Circumlocution Office, the only movement or change is in the individuals. The courts remain and so do the prisons. Dickens' verbal vitality makes them live for the reader, but they are dead by definition, in their inability to adjust to circumstances. Characters who receive no help from social institutions or society in general need ever so much more strength from within. For example, all the elegant

dinners, from the one which David attends at the Waterbrooks' to the Merdles' and the Veneerings' feasts, are travesties of the communal meals enjoyed by Pickwick. Bringing out one's inner strength, calling upon hidden resources of will, is a constant theme of the third period. It depends essentially upon two interrelated ideas: first, going over memories of the past in their joy and pain so that one's feelings are ever renewed. Part of this--and this is the essence of Dickens' attitude to the past--is recognizing what was once joy or pain as sublime humor. The second involves nature: taking advantage of what nature has offered and continues to offer for development of the philosophic mind and tranquillity.

The great novels of the third period are Dickens' most complex. Each gives the reader an overwhelming sense of tragic life as well as the characteristic resolution, falsely termed a happy ending. The mood of tragedy is created by opposing characters to primal nature. The resolution comes after the calming of the destructive waves and finds the sun illuminating a scene of spiritual peace. Transcendent nature is recognized by the observer, if he has taken the spiritual journey to understanding. Characters like Mrs. Skewton are forever inured to it. Cultivated nature, the garden of Dickens' first novels, appears primarily in memory, Eden forever lost. Cultivated nature in the present is generally involved in parody. It is seldom proferred as an entirely positive value. The Meagles in Little Dorrit live amid a garden paradise in the country. Beautiful as it is, it also reflects their self-indulgence which destroys their daughter's happiness. We see too in these novels many gardens of the imagination brought forth into reality, most notably

the roof garden of Jenny Wren and Lizzie in Our Mutual Friend overlooked by chimneys and London smoke. Nature then is an imaginative creation that refers to an essential reality dimly apprehensible. Idealism in terms of nature is a concomitant of the general idealism which proposes the life of the moral imagination as the highest good, beyond any merely social achievement.

Chapter 1 -- David Copperfield

The development of David Copperfield from childhood to maturity unfolds in settings that exemplify the progress from cultivated to primal to transcendent nature in Dickens' works. As the first novel of Dickens' maturity David Copperfield demonstrates how the novelist has come to associate cultivated nature with childhood, primal nature with the crises that transform adolescence into adulthood, and transcendent nature with accomplished maturity. The calm gardens of the first novel and the mysterious seas of the middle novels are put into a continuum culminating in David's vision of universal harmony in the Alps.

Gardens appear throughout the novel as types or reminders of the original garden that David knows. The garden is part of the unreality of Blunderstone Rookery, a house named for birds that no longer live in the abandoned elms. The garden is "a very preserve of butterflies . . . where the fruit clusters on the trees, riper and richer than fruit has ever been since, in any other garden, and where my mother gathers some in a basket, while I stand by, bolting furtive gooseberries, and trying to look unmoved."[1] But despite its gate and padlock the garden too soon is invaded by an outsider, and the empty dog-kennel gains an inhabitant, the dog ferocious like his master Murdstone. Even before this early point in David's story, the other kind of archetypal garden, the grave, has been introduced. David's father is buried in the old churchyard, visible to David from the house, with its very green grass, shady trees,

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[1] David Copperfield (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 15-16. All future references are to this edition.

and quiet tombstones. The enchantment of David's life with his mother and Pegotty turns death itself into peaceful beauty. It seems to David (and to the reader) as if on almost the next day his mother is also laid there to rest. And the original garden is pushed further back into the past.

Not for a long time does David find another happy garden. He endures humiliation and pain in the "gravelled yard" of Salem House school "which was such a desert in miniature, that . . . no one but a camel, or a dromedary, could have felt at home in it (pp. 78, 81)." At the same time David dreams of a happy garden, a way of expressing his loneliness for his home. The child's need for consolation, natural and human, is such that he mistakes his desires for actuality. Tramping on the Dover road David passes hop-grounds and orchards which he finds reassuring in their harvest splendor. But on that same road he meets the vicious tinker who robs him and other frightening figures so that David is not allowed to make any facile connection between nature and ease of life.

Before David begins a new life with his sober-minded Aunt Betsey, he has been exposed to another illusion, the idyllic world of Mr. Pegotty and little Em'ly at Yarmouth. For the child the Yarmouth scene has the same qualities as the original garden: natural beauty, closed boundaries, people who love and serve him, an aura of timelessness. This is not the adult David's Yarmouth, only the child's illusion remembered in the adolescent's delusion. David feels he has "never seen such sunlight . . . never beheld such sky, such water, such glorified ships sailing away into golden air (p. 144)." The implication is that of the Intimations Ode,

children sporting on the shore, the prison shades soon to close.[2] He dreams of marrying little Em'ly and "going away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields, never growing older, never growing wiser, children ever, rambling hand in hand through sunshine and among flowery meadows, laying down our heads on moss at night, in a sweet sleep of purity and peace, and buried by the birds when we were dead! (p. 147)"

Interestingly, what Dickens offers here as the child's dream is almost identical in language and tone to the actual life of Oliver in the country with the Maylies. But David's language is a child's dream of the future, not a true reflection of how he spends his time with little Em'ly. The novelist uses vague descriptions to suggest the child's mind. Moreover, the Yarmouth idyll is not a set piece but an introduction of the sea theme which is so important in the novel: David's growth from boy dreaming by the silken water to adult witnessing the sea's furious power.

The next idyll is David's adolescent fascination with Dora. First, however, he has been taken in by Aunt Betsey, given the new name of Trotwood, and introduced into another garden. Aunt Betsey's is a disciplined garden with "carefully tended" flowers, as she herself possesses a disciplined heart and personality (p. 190). A vestige of the youthful foolishness that led her to marry an unworthy man lingers in her vendetta with the donkeys, but for David she is a bracing influence as is Dr. Strong, another character much given to his garden, either at his school in Canterbury or at his cottage outside London. These gardens are important places for David where he accumulates experiences although they

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[2]Lucas, p. 174.

do not catch his imagination. They are not illusions; they need to be watered and watched. Even the lunatic Mr. Dick understands that and helps Annie Strong with her gardening.

Dora is David's last illusion. She too is associated with a dream garden, which is magical only so long as the young people's love seems suspended in an eternity of unchanging bliss. The garden that David and Dora have in front of their own cottage is just a garden. The Spenlow hedges hide an enchanted princess, truly a garden of dreams. Specifically we learn that it is "lovely" with a "charming lawn," "clusters of trees" and trellisses on which flowers and shrubs grow (p. 389). As at Yarmouth it is not the place itself but the glow given to the place by people and circumstances that ensnares David. The dream is incarnate for him in the conjunction of "a straw hat and blue ribbons, and a quantity of curls, and a little black dog being held up, in two slender arms, against a bank of [geranium] blossoms and bright leaves (p. 396)."

After marriage banishes the enchantment and Dora's death consigns it to memory, David is free of dream gardens. Though Agnes has tended her own garden throughout the novel, as child and adult, she has not been surrounded by fantasy. Like Aunt Betsey and Annie Strong, she pulls out stubborn weeds and props up drooping plants. In his mind and perhaps in his books the mature David treasures his rich memories of Eden; in his life he walks and works in earthly gardens.

The original garden is a prelude to years of misconception culminating in the unfortunate marriage to Dora. So too the Yarmouth idyll is a prelude to the tragedy of Steerforth which grants to David an understanding of primal nature. The first time the child David enters

Mr. Pegotty's boat-house, the wind sighs and moans. When the adolescent David and Steerforth come, the wind laments "even more mournfully (p. 311)." The use of the pathetic fallacy is almost classical, presaging some terrible catastrophe.[3] The entire Steerforth-Pegotty story is accompanied by sparse and powerful atmospheric underlining. Mr. Pegotty and Ham are sailors born, one with the sea in all its moods. "They were both as grave and steady as the sea itself; then lying beneath a dark sky, waveless--yet with a heavy roll upon it, as if it breathed in its rest--and touched, on the horizon, with a strip of silvery light from the unseen sun (p. 456)." Steerforth is the outsider, coming to conquer, ultimately defeated in the height of his defiance.

His defeat is hinted many times. His mother and Rose Dartle whose lives are focussed on Steerforth's spend the evenings in their house at Highgate looking at London in the distance on "sombre evenings" with a "lurid light in the sky (p. 666)." After Steerforth has run away with Emily, they see on one such evening that "a mist was rising like a sea, which, mingling with the darkness, made it seem as if the gathering waters would encompass them (p. 673)." The threatening sea is the advancing shadow of the waves that will engulf Steerforth and drown them in futile, unrelievable grief.

In David Copperfield the drowning theme that receives its finest exposition in Our Mutual Friend is first elaborated. From the deaths at sea of Emily's parents to the drownings of Ham and Steerforth, the attempted suicide of Martha Endell, and Barkis' going out with the

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[3]Sucksmith, p. 202.

tide,[4] drowning is a harsh but appropriate fate for the characters who are either associated with the sea by origin or livelihood or committed to it by choice. But David himself, despite the caul which is forgotten after Chapter 1, is only a visitor to the sea. His dream picture of Yarmouth has nothing to do with the real sea. While Steerforth sails in his new boat, David revisits Blunderstone Rookery and the cemetery. His elements will be the air of the high Alps and the rocks on which they repose. Agnes the model woman character is similarly untouched by the sea and implicitly related to air (she points ever upward) and rock (in her steadfast loyalty). One of the many differences between Dickens' two first-person narratives is that David is spared many ordeals while Pip in Great Expectations is not. Pip feels, not only witnesses, the terror of the marshes as Orlick's prisoner. David records his participation in other people's torment and makes that a part of his emotional history.

The story of Martha illustrates the dark end awaiting Emily after Steerforth leaves her, and Dickens' belief in the rehabilitation of prostitutes. The plot is carefully arranged to motivate Martha to go to London where she will be on hand to assist Mr. Pegotty in his nocturnal searches and to save Emily when the time comes. The moral obloquy surrounding Martha which would fall on Emily too except for her uncle's solicitude is suggested then not by the clean pure sea of Yarmouth but by the polluted sewer of London, the Thames. This is once again the river by which Nancy waited in Oliver Twist and the site both of Quilp's

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[4]Joseph Gold, Charles Dickens. Radical Moralist (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), pp. 177-178.

summer-house and of his drowning. The river in this novel begins to be a significant presence, more than just a convenient background.

The river has an aura which almost speaks to the sensitive observer. David and Mr. Pegotty follow Martha, thinking that she will lead them, unwittingly, to a house where Emily is. "But that one dark glimpse of the river, through the gateway, had instinctively prepared me for her going no farther (p. 679)." What they see all about them is the refuse of civilization, manmade structures becoming part of the slime and returning to their elements, to their formless primal condition.

> Coarse grass and rank weeds straggled over all the marshy land in the vicinity. In one part, carcases of houses, inauspiciously begun and never finished, rotted away. In another the ground was cumbered with rusty iron monsters of steam-boilers, wheels, cranks, pipes, furnaces, paddles, anchors, diving-bells, windmill-sails, and I know not what strange objects, accumulated by some speculator, and grovelling in the dust, underneath which--having sunk into the soil of their own weight in wet weather--they had the appearance of vainly trying to hide themselves . . . . Slimy gaps and causeways, winding among old wooden piles, with a sickly substance clinging to the latter, like green hair, and the rags of last year's handbills offering rewards for drowned men fluttering above high-water mark, led down through the ooze and slush to the ebb-tide . . . . It looked as if it had gradually decomposed into that nightmare condition, out of the overflowings of the polluted stream. (pp. 679-680)

Rather too explicitly, Martha connects the river and the Yarmouth sea by whose shores she was born with her own fate. "It comes from country places, where there was once no harm in it--and it creeps through the dismal streets, defiled and miserable--and it goes away, like my life, to a great sea that is always troubled--and I feel that I must go with it (p. 681)." As the river is cleansed in approaching the sea, so Martha too will be a new woman after finding Emily and joining the Pegottys

in the ocean voyage to Australia. But beyond that, Dickens does not resolve the problem of the river in this novel; that task remains for him in the last two complete novels. Instead he returns to the sea for one final catastrophe.

"Tempest," Chapter 55 of David Copperfield, is a self-contained drama with exposition, climax, and resolution unique in Dickens' novels. It is an acting out of nature's retribution on Steerforth, the snake who subverted the Yarmouth Eden. As ever, nature's hand is mighty, and it strikes others besides the perpetrator. After the tempest subsides, all is calm while many are left to grieve over their losses. The beginning is Steerforth's betrayal. The chapter opens in medias res with David's trip to Yarmouth to bring Ham one last message from Emily and his uncle.

The night before the final act is ample warning of what is impending. David finds the sky "very remarkable," and the coachman comments prophetically, "'There'll be mischief done at sea, I expect, before long!'" The sky is thrown into "murky confusion" by the wind, clouds tossed into heaps like mountains while the "wild moon" seems "to plunge headlong, as if, in a dread disturbance of the laws of nature, she had lost her way and were frightened (p. 786)." Struggling to reach Yarmouth, they are blown and battered by the wind's fury. David hears stories in every village about the storm's prodigious feats of destruction. When Dickens has enhanced the wind's fury to the utmost, the prelude is over. David has reached Yarmouth, and the wind's effect on the sea becomes the primary focus. The following passage shows that Dickens depicts the waves' assault on the shore as a cataclysm destroying order and breaking up everything into its components. The wind and sea

demonstrate the triumph of primal nature which includes shattering the civilized man's confidence in his rationality.

> The tremendous sea itself, when I could find sufficient pause to look at it, in the agitation of the blinding wind, the flying stones and sand, and the awful noise, confounded me. As the high watery walls came rolling in, and, at their highest, tumbled into surf, they looked as if the least would engulf the town. As the receding wave swept back with a hoarse roar, it seemed to scoop out deep caves in the beach, as if its purpose were to undermine the earth. When some white-headed billows thundered on, and dashed themselves to pieces before they reached the land, every fragment of the late whole seemed possessed by the full might of its wrath, rushing to be gathered to the composition of another monster. Undulating hills were changed to valleys, undulating valleys (with a solitary storm bird sometimes skimming through them) were lifted up to hills; masses of water shivered and shook the beach with a booming sound; every shape tumultuously rolled on, as soon as made, to change its shape and place, and beat another shape and place away; the ideal shore on the horizon, with its towers and buildings, rose and fell; the clouds fell fast and thick; I seemed to see a rending of all nature. (p. 788)

If in one sense David is, as I have suggested, but a spectator of the tragedy, yet he is more involved than that. His careless pride originally introduced Steerforth into the Pegotty household, and he has been a part of every incident leading up to and after Emily's elopement. Although not distinctly guilty of anything, David bears the guilt of excessive innocence. Thus the storm which kills Steerforth and Ham exercises David's moral imagination. He is tormented by Ham's absence on an errand and searches for him through the thick of the storm. But mostly the upheaval of primal nature upsets David's equilibrium. The certainties of his life with Aunt Betsey and after, complicated only by problems that he could overcome, have been upended. We must remember that Dora's death came immediately before the storm, and thus David's secure, if incomplete, life is no more. Added to this then, the storm

has tremendous impact. "Something within me, faintly answering to the storm without, tossed up the depths of my memory and made a tumult in them (p. 789. My italics)." That "faintly" marks David's distance from both Pip who is nearly murdered and Eugene Wrayburn in Our Mutual Friend who is mortally wounded in expiation of his guilt.

The other human victims of the tempest are introduced in the second half of the chapter. The atmosphere of doom has prepared us for what must happen to them. On one side we see the spectators, David among them, frantic to help the survivors of the shipwreck, especially the "active figure with the curling hair," Steerforth (p. 792). One man braves the sea to attempt a rescue of that "active figure," the last survivor. David tries to prevent Ham's going, remembering now an earlier premonition, certain that Ham cannot live in that sea. Finally, the sea washes up on the shore, separately, the bodies of two dead men, shattered in the storm like the old boat-house. The tragedy is complete, the sense of waste overwhelming,[5] and David is left alone to reintegrate his life.

By comparing the role of the sea in Dombey and Son and David Copperfield, we realize that Dickens attempted less and achieved more in the later work. Because the sea in Dombey and Son is at once given great meaning and denied dramatic importance, it remains a setting about which the narrator rhapsodizes. In David Copperfield the sea idyll is part of David's childhood and a rich memory in his adult life, but Dickens lets neither David nor the reader remain with that impression alone. The sea

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[5]Sucksmith, p. 311.

is comprehended in the other side of its reality, just as every experience that David undergoes must be understood by him and by us as multi-faceted. The sea is not single-valued as in Dombey and Son. Dickens has taken another step away from the simplistic equation of nature and religion although he by no means denies the potential moral and spiritual value of nature.

Moral nature heightened to encompass the vision of a harmonious universe becomes what I have termed transcendent nature. In David Copperfield Dickens hints at nature's being the greatest consolation until the hints culminate in David's conversion in the Alps. David revisits the old town of Canterbury where he went to school for the first time after the shocks of Aunt Betsey's loss of fortune and the death of Dora's father. He is at a point in his life when idyllic fantasies are passing either into dreams or the light of common day. It is a time to act and a time for discipline, and also a time for reevaluating the past to understand what its seminal moments have been. David finds Canterbury unchanged, as he himself--to his surprise--is unchanged. Looking at the cathedral towers, the rooks, the ivy, the old houses, "the pastoral landscape of field, orchard, and garden; everywhere--on everything--I felt the same serener air, the same calm, thoughtful, softening spirit (p. 564)." Moreover--and this is typical of Dickens whenever he depicts transcendent nature--David associates the serene air with Agnes, as he realizes he has always done in the past.

When David returns to Canterbury on the eve of Micawber's exposure of Uriah Heep, he is struck all over again with the changelessness of the landscape. "The rooks were sailing about the cathedral towers; and the

towers themselves, overlooking many a long unaltered mile of the rich country and its pleasant streams, were cutting the bright morning air, as if there were no such thing as change on earth (p. 742)." By now David has reason to worry about human change, having lately witnessed Dora's decline and the disruption of the Pegotty household. But whatever happens to David and those around him, the changeless scene reminds him that there is a principle of consistency in the universe; in personal relations Agnes is its illustration.

Although David knows all this, the shocks he endures from the deaths of Dora, Ham, and Steerforth drive him to despair. Following the Romantic pattern of Childe Harold and Diogenes Teufelsdroeck, the gloomy, self-indulgent Victorian hero journeys to the continent to commune with himself and nature. In traditional conversion imagery David expresses his condition as night and "this everdarkening cloud upon my mind." He has wandered through many cities and then in the mountains. The "awful solitudes" have impressed but not touched him, not melted the frozen springs of joy in his heart. "I had found sublimity and wonder in the dread heights and precipices, in the roaring torrents, and the wastes of ice and snow but as yet, they had taught me nothing else." Dickens repeats the frozen gentleman image of Dombey and Son, here, and also suggests that the awesome mountains reminded David too much of the violent sea, cresting and subsiding. He has had enough of primal nature; he needs a different kind of experience. Finally, the long-awaited moment comes. David is descending into a peaceful valley when he feels "some long-unwonted sense of beauty and tranquillity" awakening (p. 814).

> I came into the valley, as the evening sun was shining on the remote heights of snow, that closed it in like eternal clouds. The bases of the mountains forming the gorge in which the little village lay, were richly green; and high above this gentler vegetation, grew forests of dark fir, cleaving the wintry snow-drift, wedge-like, and stemming the avalanche. Above these, were range upon range of craggy steeps, grey rock, bright ice, and smooth verdure-specks of pasture, all gradually blending with the crowning snow. Dotted here and there on the mountain's side, each tiny dot a home, were lonely wooden cottages, so dwarfed by the towering heights that they appeared too small for toys. So did even the clustered village in the valley, with its wooden bridge across the stream, where the stream tumbled over broken rocks, and roared away among the trees. In the quiet air, there was a sound of distant singing--shepherd voices; but, as one bright evening cloud floated midway along the mountain's side, I could almost have believed it came from there, and was not earthly music. All at once, in this serenity, great Nature spoke to me; and soothed me to lay down my weary head upon the grass, and weep as I had not wept yet, since Dora died! (pp. 814-815)

This is all quite Wordsworthian. The Prelude had been published in July, 1850, and in August Dickens began the serial number dealing with Dora's death.[6] The Swiss setting of poem and novel is an obvious connection. We know that Dickens read some of the Poet Laureate's work, but there is no proof of his reading The Prelude. Nevertheless, we can see a number of similarities between this crucial episode of David's regeneration and Wordsworth's poetic philosophy. Moral appreciation follows aesthetic response: David's sense of beauty was dulled by grief (and the terrors of primal nature); so transcendent nature could not speak to him. All of nature's scenes have their value in contributing to an individual's moral development, but the tranquil ones are ultimately the most meaningful, those that bring the participant closest to God. As in Wordsworth's poems, there are no supernatural voices, no fantastic occurrences; the participant reacts to the apotheosis of the commonplace.

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[6]Lucas, p. 169.

Most important, natural settings acquire added meaning through the people they become associated with. David's melting is given a foundation by the letter from Agnes that awaits him. Her simple words of truth, speaking of duty and purpose, love and discipline, confirm David in his new peace and resolution. As night comes, he notes that the darkness is passing from his mind, that he is no slave of the pathetic fallacy, and that Agnes will be dearer to him than ever before because of her role in his conversion.

In the following novels Dickens arranges his characters' moments of transcendent feeling more subtly. Only in David Copperfield does he allow himself the luxury of creating a new landscape for the main character's conversion. The entire European epsiode has been called a "prolongued cliché."[7] But one need not be quite so severe. Generally Dickens is most successful when he can show a familiar landscape transformed by a character's ability to perceive what is there. In this novel, however, David's growth has been in terms of various backgrounds populated by different sets of characters. David has shuttled between Dover, Canterbury, Yarmouth, and London and the people associated with each.

When he travels to the continent, David goes for the first time where no one waits to receive him. He is totally on his own, with only his memories and nature to help him. His regeneration requires that he recognize what nature offers and that he distinguish which elements of the past are forever lost except as memories and which represent vital

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[7]F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, Dickens the Novelist (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 99.

forces in his life. Thus David must be independent of all previous settings and influences so that he can decide what truly matters.

It has been pointed out too that the Alpine setting provides an appropriate symbol in Wordsworthian and biblical terms by enabling David to find "the rock on which his love is founded."[8] And if Dickens achieves nothing original in depicting the mountain valley, yet his description is more than adequate in suggesting the scene's harmony. Beyond that Dickens does not go in this novel. After the moment when David leaves the Centre of Indifference, he becomes a member of the village community and works hard on his own novels. Of his further epiphanies, David only says, "I sought out Nature, never sought in vain (p. 816)." His main emotional occupation is determining that he loves Agnes. The discovery seals his conversion and sends him back to England.

The Swiss episode is set in proper perspective if we consider what happens when David returns. He still labors under delusions about Agnes. Aunt Betsey who tries to hint about Agnes' feelings is frustrated by David's misunderstanding. Dickens works hard to show that David's experience does not represent a final point of achieved wisdom but a turning point in his development. David reveals his inner state when he speculates about the cold wind-swept sea and the frozen ranges of the Alps, wondering which is lonelier. The frozen images of Switzerland are repeated as David rides from Dover to Canterbury to visit Agnes. In his uncertainty, David sees only "frozen particles of ice," "stiff-tilled soil," "snowdrifts in the chalk-pits," and the "whitened slopes and sweeps of Down-land lying against the dark sky, as if they were drawn on a huge

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[8]Barbara Hardy, The Moral Art of Dickens, p. 133.

slate (p. 859)." Once again there is darkness in David's heart and the whiteness of ice and snow is like the cloud which overlay his soul.

What happened to David in alien Switzerland must be repeated on familiar ground. Even better, now the living Agnes is beside him. As the lovers are finally united and all misunderstandings are explained away, Dickens underlines the rightness of their relationship with a suggestion of transcendent nature serenely present and apparent to them. When they walk together in the frosty fields, "the blessed calm within us seemed to be partaken by the frosty air. The early stars began to shine while we were lingering on, and looking up to them, we thanked our God for having guided us to this tranquillity." And so the warmth of their hearts dispels the cold. Dickens uses the stars many times in the late novels to suggest either that they are very remote from human concerns or that the distance can be traversed by love. In other words, the stars do not change, only the attitude of the beholders.

For David in this novel of memory to find himself with Agnes, their true relationship declared, is to be at peace with nature and with his past. The end of the passage about the stars from which I have been quoting reconciles past and present. "Long miles of road then opened out before my mind; and, toiling on, I saw a ragged way-worn boy forsaken and neglected, who should come to call even the heart now beating against mine, his own (p. 863)." In each of the major novels of the third period only characters who are emotionally prepared recognize transcendent nature. The recognition is always related to a reinterpretation of past events. Transcendent nature makes it possible then for the novelist to depict a character's rounded consciousness of all the influences that

have molded him as at once aspects of time and timeless. Dickens' use of it is an event in the history of the novel not sufficiently appreciated.

Chapter 2 -- Bleak House

The dark aspects of the city are enhanced in Bleak House by being associated with primal nature. We have already seen that the polluted Thames epitomizes the fallen woman's misery in David Copperfield, and that the surrounding landscape contains the debris of civilization. The structure of the novel is such, however, that the London scenes are not central to David's story. The plot does not contrast David in the country and David in the city but rather David at six, at twelve, at twenty, and so on.

This is curious considering the opportunities Dickens ignored. The child David's existence in London could have been another version of Oliver among the thieves, and then the adult's return to the awful city would have been fraught with significance. But this is not the direction that Dickens took; the Murdstone and Grinby period is a difficult one for David yet there are the Micawbers and, most of all, David's own resourcefulness founded in his sense of what he has been and is which preserves him from the hopeless dependency of Oliver. When the adult David comes to London to live and work, his problems are due to his innocence. London, except for the Martha Endell episode, is no more than the city to which the bildungsroman hero must come to complete his education. Thus in David Copperfield Dickens does not consistently relate the city to primal nature because the main character's development requires that he remain independent of any one setting.

In earlier novels from Oliver Twist to Dombey and Son Dickens depicts the city as the dark, gloomy scene of corruption and crime.

Already the images that coalesce in Bleak House are suggested, haphazardly, for local effect. For example, Fagin is identified with an antedeluvian monster. But the novelist does not let the suggestion lead to another and another until a pattern is discovered. There are fog and rain and mud in the London scenes of Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop, but there is no attempt to show that these elements are more than incidental aspects of the city's unpleasantness. Similarly, the London of Dombey and Son is dismal. It is not, however, absolutely so in the way of Bleak House London. From Bleak House to Our Mutual Friend Dickens makes the city the Centre of Indifference upon which virtually no light shines. Reversing Wordsworth's vision in "Composed upon Westminster Bridge," Dickens sees in London a stagnation so deadly that nature revolts and returns to the chaotic phase.

The novel's famous opening presents the defeat of the city by nature,[1] but it is a pyrrhic victory indeed. Everything has been reduced to mud and fog by the "newly retired" waters, all dissimilarities obliterated, men, dogs, horses, almost indistinguishable in their common mud and misery. Out of the misery no unity of spirit emerges: all suffer from a "general infection of ill-temper." In the ensuing chaos imitations of nature predominate. Smoke lowers from the chimneys "making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun." Instead of the sun gas lamps loom through the fog, "much as the sun may, from the spongy fields, be seen to loom by husbandman and

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[1]Fanger, p. 83.

ploughboy."[2] There is something grimly humorous about this awkward impersonation of nature,[3] the same humor attending Jarndyce and Jarndyce in Chancery, that unsuccessful impersonation of justice. One might well say that this is the reversal of evolution, man's development out of the original slime come to these feeble imitations of nature, once more in a setting of universal slime.[4]

In Chapter 2 the same note is struck in a different place. Chesney Wold, ancestral residence of the Dedlock family, represents another dead end. Centuries of landscaping and gardening have not been able to preserve the beautiful estate from the floods. The waters destroy a bridge and overflow the lower grounds. Trees, animals, the very air, all are soaked. Neither the church nor the Dedlock mansion can resist the annihilating dampness. Seemingly representing an ideal way of life, Chesney Wold is actually vulnerable in the same way that London is. In both settings the revenge of nature creates a primal morass from the pride of modern civilization.

That pride, in another sense, is the reason for the revenge. The do-nothingness of the legal system, the smugness of the ruling class, the general feeling of all being right in the world have called forth retribution. At the same time the mud-laden streets and the water-logged countryside are external equivalents of mental states. We know that

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[2]Bleak House (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 1. All future references are to this edition.

[3]Barbara Hardy, "The Complexity of Dickens," p. 36.

[4]Lucas, p. 226; Miller, pp. 160, 195.

Lady Dedlock suffers from the absence of the child and the husband she might have had. We know too that in Chancery's web hang suspended myriad creatures like Miss Flite and the Man from Shropshire who have been destroyed by injustice. And we may make our assumptions about the feelings of the nameless others, the pedestrians jostling each other in "a general infection of ill-temper." Thus Dickens is using the pathetic fallacy[5] and also making the setting represent his own moral criticism of society's condition. In previous novels we have seen Dickens using each technique separately. In Bleak House for the first time he combines them.

On the broadest scale Dickens invokes primal nature in his description of the horrible Tom-all-Alone's. If every part of the city is subject to fog and mud, its most dismal slum always epitomizes the worst of all. Complete darkness has fallen, a darkness resisted at first only by some "dungeon lights burning, as the lamp of Life burns in Tom-all-Alone's, heavily, heavily, in the nauseous air, and winking--as that lamp, too, winks in Tom-all-Alone's--at many horrible things." Then there are no more lights, even the moon having broken her "dull cold stare" and passed away from this "desert region (p. 627)."

Chief representative of Tom-all-Alone's is Jo, the crossing sweeper, barely human in his mental confusion and dressed in shreds "in colour and in substance, like a bundle of rank leaves of swampy growth, that rotted long ago (p. 630)." Not only is Jo the relict of the foul union between city and nature, but he is also the guide to the center of horror, the

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[5]C. B. Cox in "A Dickens Landscape" (Dickens. Bleak House. A Casebook, ed. A. E. Dyson [London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1969], pp. 200-203) makes the definitive case for Dickens' use of landscape to reveal character, with reference to Chapter 2 of Bleak House.

cemetery at the heart of the city. Here corpses are "sown in corruption, to be raised in corruption." When we remember the consoling garden graves of the earlier novels, we understand the judgment Dickens is making of a society that buries its dead in such a "beastly scrap of ground (p. 151)." To this cemetery at last will come Lady Dedlock, her pride extinguished, to die at its gate, a sign that the immaculate classes are not separate from the slime outside.

On the individual level the story of Lady Dedlock culminates in her escape from the Dedlock mansion in London. In her two days of wandering she plummets from social heights to the bottom and reverts to the moment when she was mother of a new-born baby. The frozen pride that let her preserve her social position melts, and a torrent of emotion is released. Its external equivalent is the opening of the floodgates when the spring thaw comes. The entire sequence is narrated by Esther Summerson, Lady Dedlock's long-lost daughter, whose own emotions parallel her mother's as she follows her trail with the detective Bucket. While Lady Dedlock is in a state of emotional freedom that cancels out the imperatives of her former life, Esther the well-regulated housekeeper is in a dreamlike confusion. Confronted with primal nature, Esther's creative powers, in evidence during most of the novel, are over-taxed and she approaches mental and physical collapse.

Bucket leads Esther to the river first, the setting of Martha Endell's suicide attempt emotionally intensified. They stop at "a little slimy turning" by the river where Bucket looks at a corpse that has washed ashore. For Esther, suffering as she fears the corpse will be identified, the situation has "the horror of a dream." A man "dark and

muddy" who speaks to the detective is the personification of her horror and a link to the river in his "long swollen sodden boots and a hat like them (p. 770)." For hours they cross and recross the river, stopping again and again, passing only anonymous Marthas. Meanwhile, the river flows on, a constant terror and reminder.

> The river had a fearful look, so overcast and secret, creeping so fast between the low flat lines of shore: so heavy with indistinct and awful shapes, both of substance and shadow: so deathlike and mysterious. I have seen it many times since then, by sunlight and by moonlight, but never free from the impressions of that journey. (p. 771)

The mystery of the river yields to the ubiquity of the snow falling on their faces as they travel inland on their quest. The snow too is semi-liquid, "but partially frozen, and it churned--with a sound as if it were a beach of small shells--under the hoofs of the horses, into mire and water (p. 780)." The horses seem to be swimming while Esther fears they have missed the road and "got into ploughed grounds, or the marshes." The thick mist makes it impossible to distinguish elements of the landscape and, even worse, blurs Esther's sense of time. "If I ever thought of the time I had been out, it presented itself as an indefinite period of great duration; and I seemed, in a strange way, never to have been free from the anxiety under which I then laboured (p. 781)." Confusion of time accompanies confusion of direction. Bucket and Esther go as far as they can from London until the detective's stunning realization of the truth about Lady Dedlock's destination sends them back to London the way they have come through the "miry sleet and thawing snow (p. 785)."

The universal wetness, mist, and confusion--the elements of the

novel's opening--are present once again at the climax of Lady Dedlock's journey and Esther's search. But now, of course we hear no impersonal narrator using the eternal present tense to give his impression of London's condition; it is the individual figure of Esther seeking to save her mother and thereby herself who is observer and subject. Esther becomes like her mother in walking, having left the safety and distance afforded by the coach. Within Esther's mind, the loosening of repression repeats her mother's experience in the same image of water pouring forth. As before Dickens uses setting to reinforce the character's experience and to make his moral statement.

> I have the most confused impressions of that walk. I recollect that it was neither night nor day: that morning was dawning, but the street-lamps were not yet put out; that the sleet was still falling, and that all the ways were deep with it. I recollect a few chilled people passing in the streets. I recollect the wet house-tops, the clogged and bursting gutters and water-spouts, the mounds of blackened ice and snow over which we passed, the narrowness of the courts by which we went. At the same time I remember . . . that the stained house fronts put on human shapes and looked at me; that great water-gates seemed to be opening and closing in my head, or in the air; and that the unreal things were more substantial than the real. (pp. 810-811)

Before the novel's end Esther has succeeded in reintegrating her world, aided by the love of others and her own solid good sense. Still Dickens has shown that even this most balanced of characters comes close to being overcome by the mental and physical forces of darkness and chaos, exemplified so dramatically by primal nature. In this sense the novel may be regarded as an "anatomy of destructiveness followed by a small scale model of construction."[6]

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[6]Barbara Hardy, The Moral Art of Dickens, p. 14.

The "model of construction" is related to the activities of Esther and a handful of other positive characters like Jarndyce, Boythorn, Caddy Jellyby, and Woodcourt. It involves the ideal of cultivated nature flourishing amid the wastes of modern life. Since the affirmations of Martin Chuzzlewit, however, we have seen that Dickens plays down the benefits of cultivated nature in Dombey and Son and David Copperfield. Not that Dickens ever ceased to believe in them, but he becomes increasingly wary of the simple affirmations he offered in the early novels. So in Dombey and Son the direct value of nature is parodied by Mrs. Skewton while in David Copperfield cultivated nature is mostly in the realm of memory. In Bleak House Dickens returns to nature parody. The only memory garden is the one Esther remembers from her childhood with Miss Barbary, which has no happy images. Rather it commemorates the first deaths: the unlamented passing of Miss Barbary and Esther's burial of her doll in the garden.

An elaborate parody of the pastoral ideal is sustained in terms of two vicious figures, the lawyer Tulkinghorn and the dilettante Skimpole.[7] Parody of Tulkinghorn begins with his address, Lincoln's Inn Fields, which gives the novelist leeway to spin an elaborate conceit of the lawyer as shepherd without a staff (only one clerk). Or in another image the lawyer in his rusty black garment is a rook, "like a dingy London bird among the birds at roost in these pleasant fields, where the sheep are all made into parchment, the goats into wigs, and the pastures into chaff (p. 583)." Tulkinghorn who never thinks of real fields

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[7]Lucas mentions the "dead pastoral" motif surrounding Tulkinghorn (p. 231).

contrasts unfavorably with the ineffectual Snagsby who loves to talk of the brook that used to run down Holborn and is so pleased with this "flavor of the country" that he never feels the need to go there (p. 130).

Skimpole is more Pecksniffian than Tulkinghorn, setting up as an unaffected lover of nature and thereby staking his claim to charity. This character who is finally exposed even to the trusting Jarndyce as a vicious hypocrite likes to contemplate life "strewn with roses . . . bowers, where there was no spring, autumn, nor winter, but perpetual summer (p. 72). Doing no work himself, he is a follower of the Drone philosophy, ignoring the example of the busy bee. The demands of a creditor Skimpole answers by apostrophizing our "one great mother, Nature" and his contemplation of the "blooming summer morning," "the cloudless sky," "the air full of fragrance (p. 599)." All this takes precedence over the just demands of the man he has cheated. When Esther and the Jarndyce heirs go to the country in Chapter 6, they find the nature lover already there, a veritable serpent in paradise.[8]

Pastoral parody also touches such characters as the Smallweeds and Vholes, a figure of death, who nonetheless keeps daughters in the country and an aged parent in the Vale of Taunton. The Smallweeds grow in Mt. Pleasant, an "ill-favored and ill-savoured neighborhood," narrow and shut up with only "the stump of an old forest tree" to recall vanished nature (p. 287). But Dickens' parody is wide-ranging, modulating from the simple joke of the inappropriate name Mt. Pleasant to the contrast between the legendary and the actual Lincoln's Inn Fields. Finally it ceases to be

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[8]F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, p. 148.

parody altogether. In any of his novels when murder is about to happen, the novelist heightens the moral value of the atmosphere; just before the murder in Martin Chuzzlewit, Tigg traverses the wood oblivious to the voice of nature, deaf to the birds and the trees, a lost soul for whom death will not be peace. Similarly Tulkinghorn, spinning his plots, walks home to his death, looking up "casually" at the moon and remarking, without a speck of genuine understanding, what a fine night it is.

It is still on the high roads and the hills; it is still on the river in the country. Even the city river winding through scenes of horror down to the sea is still. But more,

> even on this stranger's wilderness of London there is some rest. Its steeples and towers, and its one great dome, grow more ethereal; its smoky house-tops lose their grossness, in the pale effulgence; the noises that arise from the streets are fewer and are softened and the footsteps on the pavements pass more tranquilly away. In these fields of Mr. Tulkinghorn's inhabiting, where the shepherds play on Chancery pipes that have no stop, and keep their sheep in the fold by hook or by crook until they have shorn them exceeding close, every noise is merged, this moonlight night, into a distant ringing hum, as if the city were a vast glass, vibrating. (p. 663)

Tulkinghorn has no insight into nature; he cannot apprehend the panorama of London to which the narrator responds. The enveloping quiet, unifying city and landscape, is beyond him: so too the feeling of even transcendent wholeness signified by the "distant ringing hum."

To comprehend Tulkinghorn's mind, the narrator reverts for a moment to the parody image of lawyers as shepherds, but before the sentence is over, parody is dismissed and all the elements of the city, shepherds and sheep, are transmuted in the transcendent moment. This is an important example of Dickens' mature narrative technique. Without employing an inconvenient and vague symbol like the sea of Dombey and Son,

Dickens suggests transcendence by heightening the ordinary. He is able to do this despite the presence of a limited character like Tulkinghorn. By unfolding a vision that includes and surpasses Tulkinghorn, the narrator incorporates the gamut of possible responses from the simple and restricted banality of "What a fine night" to the almost religious perception of "a vast glass, vibrating."[9]

Bleak House also contains Dickens' best descriptions of cultivated nature.[10] Invariably, however, the qualities of cultivated nature are related to certain characters[11] and to the observer Esther.[12] As soon as Esther, Ada, and Richard leave London in Chapter 6 the day begins to brighten, and Esther finds "the green landscape" of the country "delightful" (p. 60). It is dark by the time the trio reach Bleak House, but they see its bright light long before they arrive. "A gush of light" greets them from the open door (p. 62).

In the morning Esther discovers the flower garden, kitchen garden, rose trellises, and so on. Quite clearly, the atmosphere of light and flowers represents Jarndyce. Of course, it rains sometimes, but the dominant impression is sunny just as at Boythorn's house, which situated

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[9]The above passage, incidentally, with its conjunction of dome and glass suggests to me that Shelley's "Adonais" had some time made an impression on Dickens.

[10]Cockshut, pp. 61-62.

[11]Sylvia Manning in Dickens as Satirist (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) makes this point with respect to Boythorn (p. 128).

[12]F. R. and Q. D. Leavis justly praise Esther's "quiet personal descriptions of natural scenery (p. 156)."

next to Chesney Wold must share its floods. Yet in Chapter 2 when Chesney Wold seems submerged in water, no mention is made of the other house. Interestingly, the setting of the first Bleak House is not described in much more detail than that quoted here; instead Dickens lets us see the behavior of its inhabitants, particularly Esther's. Then, at the end, when the new Bleak House is established, a miniature replica of the original, we are told more of its setting, information which can then be applied, in part and in retrospect, to the first house. The point is always that landscape in Dickens' later novels tends to have no predetermined meaning. It fluctuates as characters do.

Bleak House, as the very name reveals, is a perennial reminder of the destruction brought by Chancery upon the Jarndyce family. It is a cheerful place because of its present owner, but it includes a Growlery where even a John Jarndyce needs to repair periodically when the wind is too long in the east. Not so the former parsonage where Boythorn lives. Boythorn's life has been limited by his fiancé's abandonment. But this is a personal, not a familial and (symbolically) a national, disappointment. Thus Boythorn is able to express his thwarted love in a garden so fruitful that it seems the model of fertility. Again the approach to his house is through the sun, in summer this time. "The green corn waved so beautifully, the larks sang so joyfully, the hedges were so full of wild flowers, the trees were so thickly out in leaf, the bean-fields, with a light wind blowing over them, filled the air with such a delicious fragrance! (p. 244)" The house and garden wear "an aspect of maturity and abundance (p. 247)."

> The old lime-tree walk was like green cloisters, the very shadows of the cherry-trees and apple-trees were heavy with

> fruit, the gooseberry-bushes were so laden that their branches arched and rested on the earth, the strawberries and raspberries grew in like profusion, and the peaches basked by the hundred on the wall. Tumbled about among the spread nets and the glass frames sparkling and winking in the sun, there were such heaps of drooping pods, and marrows, and cucumbers, that every foot of ground appeared a vegetable treasury, while the smell of sweet herbs and all kinds of wholesome growth . . . made the whole air a great nosegay. Such stillness and composure reigned within the orderly precincts of the old red wall . . . (pp. 247-248).

Just before Esther observes Boythorn's house, she catches a glimpse of Chesney Wold, a description in which the note of stillness is sounded again. Over the house and the little church, "garden, terrace, green slopes, water, old oaks, fern, moss, woods again, and far away across the openings in the prospect, to the distance lying wide before us with a purple bloom upon it, there seemed to be such undisturbed repose." The houses then are alike in stillness, but there is a world of difference between the "maturity and abundance" and "undisturbed repose." At Chesney Wold everything seems to have grown and ripened long ago; the house and gardens "seemed scarcely real in [their] light solidity (p. 246)."

The note of unreality is repeated many times in terms of Chesney Wold. Dedlocks live there and Dedlocks have always lived there. It seems more real in the past than in the present. The motif of the Ghost's Walk is part of the past's legacy; the position of everyone at Chesney Wold seems fixed by inexorable laws that have nothing to do with their actual existence. The meeting of Esther and Lady Dedlock share in the general unreality; there is greater emotion on both sides than the situation seems to warrant in each meeting before they know their relationship.

The setting of one meeting underlines the potential drama. Esther and Ada are accustomed to sit in a sheltered nook on the property where they view a bright prospect from the shade and thus seem to get "a glimpse of the better land (p. 253)." This daydreaming yields to the reality of a storm; they seek shelter; and Esther is confronted with Lady Dedlock, a meeting fraught with emotional significance amid the banalities of courteous chatter. The episode ends with a vista of Chesney Wold sparkling in the light rain, and a touch of unreality, "the little carriage shining at the doorway like a fairy carriage made of silver (p. 257)." But that fairy carriage has played its role in hastening the doom of Lady Dedlock, as the absurd, unreal, and truly frightening figure of the maid Hortense walking shoeless in the wet grass could testify.

Ultimately the unreality of Chesney Wold is twofold: its existence depends on the continued dominance of a superannuated social class and its present mistress is living a lie. At the end after Lady Dedlock's death resolves the tremendous contradictions of her life and Sir Leicester's decline makes of Chesney Wold a kind of sleeping castle, the unreality is lifted like a veil and Chesney Wold remains a beautiful relict. Meanwhile Boythorn's garden continues to multiply.

We have already seen in one instance how Dickens hints at transcendent nature by heightening the everyday. In the crises of Esther's story this is particularly evident. On the day of the storm at Chesney Wold Esther notices that "the rain came plunging through the leaves as if every drop were a great leaden bead (p. 253)." Later during her illness with smallpox which she has caught from Jo, Esther has nightmares in which she sees "strung together somewhere in great black space . . . a

flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which I was one of the beads! (p. 489)" A bead from a flaming necklace in the heavens could well fall to earth, rain-cooled, a great leaden bead. Together with this must be set Esther's impression of distant London seen from Bleak House on the night she goes to succor Jo and catches his infection. Only a few stars shine in the aftermath of rain, rain being pretty well ubiquitous in this novel.

> In the north and north-west, where the sun had set three hours before, there was a pale dead light both beautiful and awful; and into it long sullen lines of cloud waved up, like a sea stricken immovable as it was heaving. Towards London, a lurid glare overhung the whole dark waste; and the contrast between these two lights, and the fancy which the red light engendered of an unearthly fire, gleaming on all the unseen buildings of the city, and on all the faces of its many thousands of wondering inhabitants, was solemn as might be. (p. 429)

In her dreams and in her observations Esther sees flaming lights and fires, an expression of her inner torment, particularly her self-doubt, engendered by Miss Barbary's accusation years ago, "'You are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born, like them, in common sinfulness and wrath (p. 18).'"

When she has recovered from smallpox, Esther returns to Boythorn's house and thus to Chesney Wold. Already her perceptions are renewed and expanded: "I found every breath of air, and every scent, and every flower and leaf and blade of grass, and every passing cloud, and everything in nature, more beautiful and wonderful to me than I had ever found it yet (p. 503)." But into her new world Esther must absorb Lady Dedlock's confession. And this is Esther's greatest trial, for despite her new-found happiness she is beset by fears that she had better not been born, that her footsteps, resound on the Ghost's Walk bringing disgrace to her mother and the Dedlock name.

In this frame of mind, Esther can derive no sufficient tranquillity from contemplating nature. Boythorn's garden cannot help her, nor does Dickens send her off to the Alps. In her own room Esther realizes "how wrong and thankless this state was (p. 515)." She reads letters--like David Copperfield--from Jarndyce and Ada, expressing their love and is aided by these tangible proofs. Thinking of her life, Esther decides that she could not have been meant to die, for then she would not have lived, nor "have been reserved for such a happy life (p. 516)."

Out of her inner strength and a timely reminder of how needed she is, Esther reconstructs her faith and continues to do what she has throughout the novel. When at the end she moves to marriage with Woodcourt and the second Bleak House, Esther is not just being rewarded by the author in a happy ending. Everything at the new house is as she has organized it in the original. So the new Bleak House is her own creation, a triumph of common sense and goodness in a lovely country setting. This is not now the idyllic pastoralism of earlier novels;[13] this is a real house with real garden where a hard-working not too well-paid doctor will live with his wife and children. If it is in "a lovely place, so tranquil and so beautiful, with such a rich and smiling country spread around it," it is after all in Yorkshire, not so very far from Rouncewell's iron works and the "heavy never-lightening cloud of smoke" that dominates it (pp. 856, 845)." Near Bleak House itself is a humming mill and, apparently, many possibilities for industrial development. In other words, the Woodcourts live in the world, made happy by their sustaining goodness

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[13]But compare Lucas who considers the second Bleak House to be situated in a dream landscape (p. 241).

and serious labor.

This is as close to permanent transcendence as one can come in Dickens' later novels. At one extreme we have the definitive alienation of Jo, munching his crust at sunset, "looking up at the great Cross on the summit of St. Paul's Cathedral, glittering above a red and violet-tinted cloud of smoke. From the boy's face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the great, confused city; so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach (p. 271)." The sun is understood by us in that red and violet tint. But for Jo, he is alone in a manmade, incomprehensible world. At the other extreme, we have seen Tulkinghorn's distance, on the night of his death, from the narrator's consciousness of London as a vast glass vibrating.

The way of Esther demonstrates the novel's ideal of transcendence: the good person as an agent of nature. As she literally represents the effects of the summer sun, so she sees in Jarndyce, when he tells her she will marry Woodcourt, an extension of nature. "Soothingly, like the gentle rustling of the leaves; and genially, like the ripening wheat; and radiantly, and beneficently, like the sunshine; he went on" with his words of love and care (p. 857). Implicit in Bleak House and the other novels of the last period is "a sense of universal Divine order."[14] It is misleading to suggest that Dickens shows little faith in nature or human nature in Bleak House.[15] The divine order is blurred, by fog for example, in much of the novel, but a pattern emerges in the end, reinforced by

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[14]Gold, p. 186.

[15]F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, p. 130.

Esther and Jarndyce. Nature and human goodness simultaneously comprise the pattern and ensure its continuation.

Chapter 3 -- Little Dorrit

Critics generally agree that Little Dorrit, not Bleak House, is Dickens' bleak novel. One reason is that nature exists as something infinitely remote from man in most of the novel. Another is that human goodness, epitomized by Jarndyce and Esther in Bleak House, both strong and decisive figures, is limited to the child-woman Amy or Little Dorrit whose goodness remains always a function of her weakness. Appreciated fully by very few characters and mostly overlooked by the family she sacrifices herself for, Little Dorrit is a convincing but not a reassuring figure of human triumph over adversity. Nonetheless, ultimately, in a narrowly defined context, nature returns to man who has prepared himself morally and spiritually.

In the opening chapters of Books I and II Dickens creates a panoramic scene in which the freedom of the setting contrasts dramatically with the restricted condition of the characters. Superficially, these two framing chapters contrast. One is about Marseilles on a bright and blazing hot summer day; it focusses on two imprisoned men cut off from the light. The second depicts the high Swiss Alps in the vicinity of the Great Saint Bernard monastery; it focusses on a group of travellers relaxing by the fire at the monastery after a day of awesome sights. Hot, cold; day, night; prisoners, travellers; sea level, mountain heights; poverty, riches: these are only some of the contrasts developed in the chapters. But what is more important is that in each chapter the characters have no emotional relation to the setting, demonstrating a

pervasive human alienation from nature.[1]

The novel opens with a view of Marseilles under a broiling sun. Not the kindly source of healing, its rays parch and wither everything they reach.[2] One can only hope to escape them. To come out into the sun is "to plunge into a fiery river, and swim for life to the nearest strip of shade." The image of a fiery river, associated with hell, is an unusual one for Dickens. It provides a clue as to how we are to regard the first setting.

> The universal stare made the eyes ache . . . . Far away the staring roads, deep in dust, stared from the hill-side, stared from the hollow, stared from the interminable plain. Far away the dusty vines overhanging wayside cottages, and the monotonous wayside avenues of parched trees without shade, drooped beneath the stare of earth and sky. So did the horses with drowsy bells, in long files of carts, creeping slowly towards the interior; so did their recumbent drivers when they were awakened, which rarely happened; so did the exhausted labourers in the fields. Everything that lived or grew, was oppressed by the glare . . . .[3]

Instead of a vital, life-giving sun, this sun halts life, stultifies it into somnolence and eventually--so the implication goes--death. We are told that the lizard and the cicala alone are unexhausted by the heat. We are back to primal nature, then, with the same uncaring sun that shone over the swamps before animal life rose out of them. In previous novels we have seen primal nature suggested by rain and mud, never--except briefly at Eden in Martin Chuzzlewit--by the ferocious sun. Here primal nature

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[1]Gold, p. 213.

[2]Lucas finds the chapter describes "a terrible elemental world, too awful almost for human beings to bear (p. 248)."

[3]Little Dorrit (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 2. All future references are to this edition.

reminds us more of the desert than the swamp. The reason is that Dickens creates people whose hearts are deserts and uses the landscape as an objective correlative more precisely than ever before. As in Bleak House nature takes the inevitable form to express its judgment on man.

Reclaiming the deserts demands water or tears. But strangely Marseilles, the great seaport, is cut off from the water. The harbor is an "abominable pool," the "beautiful sea" is beyond, and the two do not mix (p. 1). On the land there is no water except for the metaphorical "fiery river." So the opening of Little Dorrit presents a scene of unbearable heat and light, nature unwilling to observe man's present needs in answer to his past sins. Before Chapter 1 has ended, moreover, the irony is complete. For the escape from the sun that all seek is to be found in prison where it is cool and the sun never enters. And in prison all that the inmates desire is to get out and back to nature.[4]

In David Copperfield when David travels in the Alps, he makes it clear that the dramatic mountain passes and glaciers have not affected him. It is the sight of the valley with little houses dotting the slopes that stirs his emotions. David's movement from overwhelming nature to a more comfortable and benevolent nature is reversed in Chapter 1, Book II of Little Dorrit. The travellers have watched scenes of harvest, country work in beautiful settings. They have seen mountains in the distance, and they are among them as night falls.

> As the heat of the glowing day, when they had stopped to drink at the streams of melted ice and snow, was changed to the searching cold of the frosty rarefied night air at a great height, so the fresh beauty of the lower journey had yielded to barrenness and desolation. A craggy track, up which the

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[4]Lucas, p. 246.

> mules in single file, scrambled and turned from block to block, as though they were ascending the broken staircase of a gigantic ruin, was their way now. No trees were to be seen, nor any vegetable growth, save a poor brown scrubby moss, freezing in the chinks of rock. Blackened skeleton arms of wood by the wayside pointed upward to the convent, as if the ghosts of former travellers overwhelmed by the snows haunted the scene of their distress. Icicle-hung caves and cellars built for refuges from sudden storms, were like so many whispers of the perils of the place; never-resting wreaths and mazes of mist wandered about, hunted by a moaning wind; and snow, the besetting danger of the mountain, against which all its defences were taken, drifted sharply down. (p. 432)

Moreover, while in the earlier novel the reader is conscious of David's presence at all times, in Little Dorrit Dickens reverts at the opening of Book II to the method of Book I's opening, using an abstract narration not initially focussed on specific characters. This is all the more striking because the end of Book I shows the Dorrit family leaving the Marshalsea prison, very much in control of the scene and demonstrating their weaknesses of character. Not until the end of the next chapter are the names of the Alpine travellers revealed; the Dorrits who have been so much in the forefront are effectively reduced by setting and narration and seem of no more importance than the unknown figures in Marseilles sweltering in the sun.

The Dorrits are in the midst of primal nature, another desert though a frozen one. Once again nature's condition expresses and punishes man's.[5] For all the thematic similarities between the Marseilles and Alpine settings, there is at least one profound difference. The mountains are seen as dreamlike and unreal, an attitude which is repeated

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[5]F. R. and Q. D. Leavis call the Alps non-Wordsworthian, which is true in a general sense but misleading in that the poet of The Prelude passes through Alpine deserts that confuse or frighten him (p. 275).

periodically in Book II and obviously related to the ephemeral quality of wealth. The riders see everything through clouds and "dissolving into cloud (p. 433)." As the travellers enter the Saint Bernard monastery, the narrator mentions a grated house, several yards away, in which the frozen bodies found in the snow are preserved in the same positions as when they were found. These grotesque iced figures will outlive the travellers warming themselves by the fire.

Even by day in Chapter 3 with the sun shining, the aura of unreality persists. The travellers seem to float above the earth, cut off from their roots as the Dorrits are cut off from the Marshalsea. "To help the delusion [of having entered a new existence], the solid ground itself seemed gone, and the mountain, a shining waste of immense white heaps and masses, to be a region of cloud floating between the blue sky above and the earth far below (p. 452)." But when they come down from the mountains, everything seems real once again. The streams run, and the sun shines warmly when Little Dorrit looks at her father believing that there is no longer a screen between him and nature, between him and reality. And that is the greatest unreality of all, for the prison shades have long ago closed around William Dorrit never to lift while he lives.

In the chapters I have been discussing, primal nature drives man to seek shelter in the shade in Marseilles and in the Alpine monastery. But the best place to hide from the sun is in a prison like the one in Marseilles and the best place to find warmth in the Alps is in another prison, the Saint Bernard monastery which Dorrit finds overly confining. Yet the prison also provides the antithesis to the freedom of nature. Dickens presents a world in which those who are in prison want to get out

and those who are not devise their own prison. The confusion about freedom extends to nature; people think that nature will provide freedom, but it brings only illusion to those whose minds and souls are not free.

The case of Arthur Clennam is helpful in this connection. Fettered by memories of a difficult childhood and the presence of a harsh and unloving mother, Clennam is timid about making any claims to personal happiness. A chance seems to present itself when he meets the Meagles family and their beautiful daughter Pet. Behind Clennam's pretense of being "nobody" and too old for love, it is clear that he senses an opportunity for all he has never had. The bucolic setting of the Meagles' house where the drama is played out contributes to Clennam's reluctant hope. But cultivated nature, the "handsome trees and spreading evergreens," the garden around the house, and even the clean, peaceful river flowing by cannot help Clennam (p. 191). The fact is that Pet is already committed to the poseur Henry Gowan, but that is not the only reason. Clennam cannot find freedom through the country, lovely as it may be, because he is not himself free. Passive and restricted, Clennam looks to the river outside the Meagles' window and thinks for a moment "that it might be better to flow away monotonously, like the river, and to compound for its insensibility to happiness with its insensibility to pain (p. 200)."

Clennam's greatest test in terms of Pet comes after cultivated nature lulls him into a false sense of security, that is, passivity. The following passage is one that might appear in any of the middle or late novels, but its relation to what follows is unique to this novel.

> A tranquil summer sunset shone upon him as he approached the end of his walk, and passed through the meadows by the river side. He had that sense of peace, and of being lightened of

> a weight of care, which country quiet awakens in the breasts of dwellers in towns. Everything within his view was lovely and placid. The rich foliage of the trees, the luxuriant grass diversified with wild flowers, the little green islands in the river, the beds of rushes, the water-lilies floating on the surface of the stream, the distant voices in boats borne musically towards him on the ripple of the water and the evening air, were all expressive of rest. In the occasional leap of a fish, or dip of an oar, or twittering of a bird not yet at roost, or distant barking of a dog, or lowing of a cow--in all such sounds, there was the prevailing breath of rest, which seemed to encompass him in every scent that sweetened the fragrant air. The long lines of red and gold in the sky, and the glorious track of the descending sun, were all divinely clear. Upon the purple tree-tops far away, and on the green height near at hand up which the shades were slowly creeping, there was an equal hush. Between the real landscape and its shadow in the water, there was no division; both were so untroubled and clear, and, while so fraught with solemn mystery of life and death, so hopefully reassuring to the gazer's soothed heart, because so tenderly and mercifully beautiful. (pp. 332-333)

Nothing implicit here is explicitly denied by what follows. However, the serenity of the landscape cannot ease Clennam's troubled spirit when Pet tells him in confidence that she will marry Gowan. Her words banish the "dying hope that had flickered in nobody's heart so much to its pain and trouble; and from that time he became in his own eyes, as to any similar hope or prospect, a very much older man who had done with that part of life (p. 334)." Clennam's problem is that until he stirs himself and sets about creating what he needs, he will not find it.

Creativity associated with nature is the power of Little Dorrit. Before we come to her, however, we may glance at the support this idea receives from Dickens' use of comic pastoral motifs.[6] The young turnkey John Chivery, Mrs. Plornish, and--in a different way--Flora Finching are all characterized by their yearning for nature and their ability to

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[6]Lucas says that the comic pastoralism is part of the "affirmative possibilities" of the ending (p. 286).

create it out of rather indifferent materials. John dreams of marrying Little Dorrit and spending their days in the Marshalsea room so high that, standing on tiptoe, one can almost see over the wall; "with a trellis-work of scarlet beans and a canary or so, [it] would become a very Arbour." The infatuated lover does not even mind the prison. "With the world shut out . . . with its troubles and disturbances only known to them by hearsay . . . with the Arbour above, and the Lodge below; they would glide down the stream of time, in pastoral domestic happiness (p. 212)." When Little Dorrit gently refuses this improbable lover, he is to be found in his mother's "very little dull back-yard," sitting among the drying sheets. "'Says he feels as if it was groves!'" explains the sympathetic mother to a visitor (pp. 256, 257). The comedy is in John's social, mental, and physical incongruity as a husband for Amy. But the young man's essence is glimpsed in his foolish daydreams. They suggest the moral delicacy that will allow John to help Clennam, his rival, when he in turn finds himself in the Marshalsea.

Mrs. Plornish delights in the wall of her tiny London shop that has been painted to represent a thatched cottage complete with hollyhocks and sunflowers at the door and smoke curling from the chimneys. The sign reads "Happy Cottage" and no oddity of size or function will disabuse the good woman of her pastoral triumph, "the Golden Age revived (p. 574)." Like John the Plornish family are in the comic relief department; but again like the former no absurdity can obliterate their goodheartedness, a rare quality in the world of Little Dorrit.

Also remote from living nature is Flora Finching. Her name suggests what she used to be like, light and charming. For her, nature, that is,

love, is tied up in a vision of romantic nonsense twenty years earlier. The middle-aged woman she has become is ridiculous when she prattles of hearts and flowers. She is completely credible when she forgets to rhapsodize and lets her basic good instincts guide her. Like John, Flora demonstrates her saving graces by helping her successor in love. All of Flora's embarrassing nonsense is forgiven when we remember her devotion to Little Dorrit and--even before that--to Mr. F's Aunt.

Counterpointing these figures is the aptly-named Mrs. Merdle who employs pastoral language to justify her socially vicious actions. Like Pecksniff, Mrs. Skewton, and Skimpole before her, she prates of nature when it suits her. Unlike them, however, she makes of nature a kind of Mrs. Harris to be dragged into a conversation as necessary. In her interview with Fanny Dorrit in Book I, Mrs. Merdle justifies her buying off Fanny to save her son from an unmercenary marriage by contrasting nature and society. Society is "'hollow and conventional and worldly and very shocking, but unless we are Savages in the Tropical seas (I should have been charmed to be one myself--most delightful life and perfect climate I am told) we must consult it (p. 239).'" In another day Mrs. Merdle "might have the pleasure of knowing a number of charming and talented persons" who are presently taboo to her. "A more primitive state of society would be delicious." She would willingly be an Indian if "a few thousand persons moving in Society, could only go and be Indians . . . (p. 242)." With Mrs. Merdle the pastoral comedy turns to bitter satire, reinforced by the parrot in the golden cage who accompanies all her statements with a shriek--repressed nature having belated say. Mrs. Merdle whose only god is society and who lacks any independent power

could not be further removed from the moral ideal of the novel.

To understand fully what Little Dorrit has achieved, it is necessary only to consider Arthur Clennam's situation. After twenty years in China, Clennam returns to London on a Sunday evening, burdened by the self-engendered gloom that the clamoring bells, sooty streets, and noxious atmosphere do nothing to lighten. What should be fresh living water is a "deadly sewer [that] ebbed and flowed (p. 28)." The rain that in the country would bring clean air and new growth "developed only foul stale smells, and was a sickly, lukewarm, dirt-stained, wretched addition to the gutters (p. 31)." Clennam's visit to his mother's house recalls the emotional poverty of his past and confirms his feeling that all is hopeless. We can grasp the reasons for Clennam's despair, and we can sympathize with him. Yet his sorrows--after all he has been substantially free for twenty years and supplied with money--are trivial compared to Little Dorrit's. Born in prison with only the worst possible examples around her, she has formed her life, and her family's, to an amazing extent.

From her childhood Little Dorrit is separate from the other prison children who play games as if they were in their own yards. She sits looking up at the sky through the barred windows. And she takes to the idea of fields and flowers before she sees them for herself with her friend Bob the turnkey. Care for her father is her first concern, long before she is old enough to work for his comforts. When Clennam meets Little Dorrit, therefore, she has long guided her father, Fanny, and Tip while receiving nothing herself, content with her own sense of what must be done.

No weather or muddy streets can deter her.

> The wind blew roughly, the wet squalls came rattling past them, skimming the pools on the road and pavement, and raining them down into the river. The clouds raced on furiously in the lead-coloured sky, the smoke and mist raced after them, the dark tide ran fierce and strong in the same direction. Little Dorrit seemed the least, the quietest, and the weakest of Heaven's creatures. (p. 96)

Weak and little, she needs no coach to go back to the Marshalsea; she catches no cold from the rain. Nor does she spend a moment matching her mood to the weather. Always her father comes first, and she is glad of Clennam's friendship on his behalf.

Perhaps the most poignant and expressive incident is Little Dorrit's being locked out of the prison overnight with her "child" Maggy. Cold, tired, and wet the pair wander, shying from people, spending time until the morning when the Marshalsea doors open. Little Dorrit never despairs, though Maggy grows querulous, but imagines instead a party that she might be attending at her own house with Clennam there too as a guest. Lost in this "vista of wonder," she looks up at the stars until Maggy calls her. She incorporates the stars, nature, into her dream because the river is misted with vapor; the stars are so far away; nature by itself offers her nothing. It is Little Dorrit who creates with nature and out of nature: so much so that she does not realize how much her freedom is due to her own actions. As she gazes at her imprisoned father, it seems to her that she has never truly known him because he cannot see "the sunrise on rolling rivers . . . on wide seas . . . on rich landscapes . . . on great forests where the birds were waking and the trees were rustling (p. 231)." But she can. That is the point. She sees them in her mind, and so could her father, were it possible for him. Chapter 1, Book II, as we have seen, demonstrates that Dorrit's inability to be free

is his spiritual condition.

The vision of Little Dorrit does not make her infallible, but it does make her reactions valid, whatever they might be. When she fails to transform the environment, it is because her inner state is confused. The Dorrit family's journey, in luxury, through the Alps into Italy, is a dream for Little Dorrit. Unable to understand her new position as least-needed member of the family, she sees everything as unreal: "the more surprising the scenes, the more they resembled the unreality of her own inner life as she went through its vacant places all day long (p. 463)." Travelling through the bright Italian countryside, with its vistas ever-changing and groups of people, Little Dorrit, most practical of women, remains in a dream. Throughout the continental sojourn she is quiet but unhappy, thinking always of England and Clennam. During most of Book II Little Dorrit is quiescent. Only when inevitable adversity overtakes the Dorrits, does she return to reality. Not her own needs but other people's bring her back to life.

Little Dorrit is not a Romantic child of nature,[7] but she is in harmony with nature, and she shares something of its essential power, explicitly contrasted to the images of dryness and iciness. Her love for her father is a "fountain . . . that never ran dry or waned, through all his years of famine (p. 229)." Less blatantly than Esther Summerson, Little Dorrit is often seen in sunlight, though admittedly the sunlight is sometimes patterned by the prison's black bars. In fact the general cover design for the monthly parts depicts Little Dorrit at the center,

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[7]Lucas, p. 284.

transfixed by shafts of sunlight.[8]

Water and sunlight, needed for growth, give way to the blooms themselves. In his hour of need a broken Clennam, imprisoned for debt, longs for freedom. Watching the rain fall in the heat of the prison, he thinks of "its softer fall upon the country earth." Much later, in his troubled sleep Clennam receives "some abiding impression of a garden . . . a garden of flowers, with a damp warm wind gently stirring their scents (p. 755)." He wakes to see a bouquet of lovely flowers and, later still, realizes that Little Dorrit is in the room, nursing him as she had nursed her father for so long.

Until the very end of the novel Little Dorrit's own self is obscured by the figures of those she sacrifices herself for. But with her father dead, Fanny married, and Tip out of the way, she can stand in the sun and show herself fully to Clennam, the person who has been most responsive to her from the beginning. But even Clennam's response was inadequate in one respect, his inability to see her as a woman and to fathom her secret of love for him. Once Clennam realizes his error, he sees Little Dorrit clearly. In this he is being most true to himself, for almost at the outset the narrator has told us that despite Clennam's being brought up "in coldness and severity," his spirit retains hope for others if not himself. "Leaving himself in the dark, [his mind] could rise into the light, seeing it shine on others and hailing it (p. 165)."

Dickens' attitude to nature and freedom becomes clear in the novel's last chapter. Little Dorrit and Clennam in perfect understanding, it

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[8]Butt and Tillotson, p. 225.

hardly matters that he is still in prison and that she must leave him locked up there every night. The chapter begins with another panorama though more generalized than the two previous ones. It is peaceful England now, and man is in harmony with nature. The season is golden autumn; the fields have been reaped and plowed; the apples are ready; and some of the trees are already showing winter bareness. The reanimated ocean has awakened from its hot summer doze.

As in the previous panorama chapters, a view of nature is followed by a prison scene. But this one has a very different implication. Although inside the Marshalsea the "bricks and bars bore uniformly the same dead crop," to Clennam it is as if he were roaming in the fields. Listening to Little Dorrit's voice reading, he hears in it,

> all that great Nature was doing, heard in it all the soothing songs she sings to man. At no Mother's knee but hers, had he ever dwelt in his youth on hopeful promises, on playful fancies, on the harvests of tenderness and humility that lie hidden in the early-fostered seeds of the imagination; on the oaks of retreat from blighting winds, that have the germs of their strong roots in nursery acorns. But, in the tones of the voice that read to him, there were memories of an old feeling of such things, and echoes of every merciful and loving whisper that had ever stolen to him in his life. (p. 815)

Transcendent nature in Little Dorrit then is nature perceived in its absence through the medium of the main character. Or, if nature is not totally absent, it is at best an addition to, not a condition of, the setting. After their wedding Little Dorrit and Clennam walk through the streets "inseparable and blessed," in the "autumn morning sun's bright rays (p. 826)." Were there no sun at all, it would make no difference to them nor would "great Nature" be any less present.

In the entire novel we are granted only one momentary vision of

transcendent nature enveloping the whole city. Appropriately it happens when the novel's emblem of unnatural rigidity, Mrs. Clennam, has softened in her implacable hatred of the Dorrit family and--as part of her change--is no longer paralyzed. It is an amazingly light summer evening.

> As [Little Dorrit and Mrs. Clennam] crossed the bridge, the clear steeples of the many churches looked as if they had advanced out of the murk that usually enshrouded them and come much nearer. The smoke that rose into the sky had lost its dingy hue and taken a brightness upon it. The beauties of the sunset had not faded from the long light films of cloud that lay at peace in the horizon. From a radiant centre over the whole length and breadth of the tranquil firmament, great shoots of light streamed among the early stars, like signs of the blessed later covenant of peace and hope that changed the crown of thorns into a glory. (p. 793)

This is a moment of universal hope in which nature seems to be reapproaching man. In keeping with the novel's bleakness, however, no character is made to notice the unusual sky or to demonstrate any awareness of it. With great restraint Dickens simply presents the overarching vision of radiance. But it is not a manifestation irrelevant to the plot. Right after it, the two women in Clennam's life witness the disintegration of the grim family house. Blinded by the dust that the destruction produces, they see for a second the dust clouds part and the stars shining through. It is judgment day in small; Rigaud is crushed in the debris, the Clennam wrongs against the Dorrits are finally redressed, and Mrs. Clennam pays for the blight she has caused by becoming deaf and paralyzed indeed.

Even in the bleakest novel Dickens remains hopeful about man's chances of blessedness,[9] of responding to the voice of nature. The

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[9]Dyson, p. 211.

conditions of civil life--expressed through the Marshalsea, the Circumlocution Office, and the Merdles' Society--make such optimism an act of great imaginative and religious faith. Morover, in Little Dorrit although it is certainly true in general that the city is cut off from the divine and the country is close to heaven,[10] as we have seen the country cannot always settle a troubled mind nor is the city invariably a hellish place. In demonstrating an extended conception of freedom through his characters, Dickens goes beyond his usual contrasts of country and city. The mind and spirit can recreate the world if they will and make a heaven of hell or catch the scent of flowers in the foul city air.

Another way of discussing the novel's major concern is to consider the creative characters as opposed to the uncreative or fixed characters.[11] Besides Little Dorrit, Clennam, Doyce, and, in a more limited sense, the Meagles are creative. Mrs. Clennam, the other Dorrits, Rigaud, and Gowan emphatically are not, though the last two have some hypocritical pretensions in that direction. The comic pastoral figures John Chivery, Mrs. Plornish, and Flora Finching are humorous versions of individual creativity. In Dickens' last two novels the value of creative power is somewhat dissipated. No single character represents it. Because Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend are novels of character discovery which involves the protagonists in self-examination--more like David Copperfield or part of

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[10]Miller, p. 237. Taylor Stoehr in Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965) also emphasizes the contrast between prisonlike city and open countryside (p. 191).

[11]One might designate them round or flat, though that is not quite what E. M. Forster meant by those confusing terms.

Bleak House in this sense than Little Dorrit--the characters have less opportunity to transform the lives of others, the test of creativity. As a result nature appears more directly in those novels than in Little Dorrit as the chief transforming force in the major characters' lives.

Chapter 4 -- Great Expectations

The complexity of Dickens' later novels is related, as I have argued, to the presence of nature in all three of its manifestations, primal, cultivated, and transcendent. In the novels discussed so far, it has been possible to separate, for example, primal and cultivated nature or primal and transcendent nature, and to show at what point characters are confronted with each type.

The ideal novel for equating a certain kind of nature and a time of the main character's life is, of course, David Copperfield where it is possible to trace David's growth by his progression from environments of cultivated nature to primal nature and finally to transcendent nature. Though David revisits some places from the past as he grows older, mostly he moves on to new settings; the crucial regenerating experience takes place in an entirely alien surrounding which Dickens invents for that purpose and to which David never returns. The old places continue to live only in David's mind.

What happens in Great Expectations, however, is that the three types of nature are brought closer together, and it becomes much more difficult to speak of them separately. Even more, each natural setting is shown ultimately to be transcendent, but Pip the narrator-protagonist cannot apprehend this until he has matured sufficiently. Growth for Pip is not just a matter of learning to smile at the miseries of the past though inevitably the adult will gaze half-tenderly, half-scornfully at himself as a child and youth. Growth means learning to see into the heart of the familiar things one has always known. It means seeing

reality instead of a reflection of oneself in the environment.

Thus Dickens uses the pathetic fallacy as Browning does in "Porphyria's Lover," to portray the narrator's solipsism, though obviously Pip is never insane like Browning's lover. Growth means seeing transcendence in nature through the confusion, or to borrow Pip's favorite image to sight the stars through the mist. Since faults lie within the individual rather than in society, there is no need for escape or pastoral retreat.[1] But unlike in Little Dorrit, actual nature is present at the turning points of the main character's life.

In Little Dorrit creativity is the way to happiness in any situation. The culmination of Pip's progress yields a similar lesson although its application is different. Clennam finds in Little Dorrit a guarantee of temporal and eternal joy, justly appreciating her power of transforming sorrow and hardship into purpose and quiet contentment. Pip has no Little Dorrit--he rejects Biddy who is a somewhat similar type--so he must discover for himself, painfully, some of her intrinsic wisdom. Because she almost intuitively loved the birds and the fields, Little Dorrit does not really need the presence of nature.

But Pip is a frightened, lonely little boy when we first meet him, alienated from his physical and social environment, not at all a Wordsworthian[2] or even an early Dickensian child delighting in rural freedom. It is his luck--part of the divine goodness in which Dickens believes--that nature's presence is felt in all the episodes of his life.

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[1]Manning, p. 197.

[2]Miller, p. 251.

After many years, he responds to it and embraces the opportunities nature offers to man, symbolized in the western tradition by Adam and Eve leaving the Garden of Eden. Dickens ends Great Expectations with a scene recreating that archetypal moment of man in full consciousness of his situation at the threshold of life.

Pip's home is a village in Kent by the marshes, a half day's walk from London. For the first time Dickens depicts a village entirely without idyllic attributes. Even in Bleak House the village by Chesney Wold seems overly stocked with simple rural goodness. Good people may live in Pip's village--Joe and Biddy, for example--but good people like Matthew Pocket are also to be found in London. Orlick is part of the village as Compeyson is London's product. Village lives revolve around work, tavern, hearth, the occasional holiday. The same is true of city lives. Pride, envy, even violence are known in the village. The daily coach may bring convicts or detectives; soldiers ride through and bring their horses to the blacksmith. If the village is Pip's rightful place, it is only because it has been his family's home for generations, and he feels most comfortable there.

Remembering Dickens' usual depiction of villages, we are startled to notice the lack of description of natural beauty around this village. We are given no scenes paralleling those in Bleak House that laud the picturesque fertility of Boythorn's garden or the second Bleak House and its environs. The sole exception is almost at the end of the novel when Pip returns to the village, now a haven for him, and finds it looking fertile and beautiful. Of course, this is just before he learns of Joe's marriage to Biddy which terminates his dream of returning to the past.

Usually, however, Dickens suggests the well-known differences between city and country life. Pip's introduction to his London lodgings at Barnard's Inn is disappointing; he finds everything dingy, decaying, and noxious. The house stands on a square "like a flat burying ground" with "the most dismal trees" and "the most dismal sparrows."[3] He reacts the same way to Miss Havisham's house at Rochester. But infected with his dreams, Pip insists on detecting glamour and wealth in both. Till the end great expectations cancel common sense. The creative ability that Pip needs to develop in himself is not a fantasizing talent. He has that already, and it leads him to mistake Miss Havisham's motivation, and Estella's. What he lacks is an inspired kind of common sense that penetrates through illusion to reality.

Pip's attitude to the marshes all through Great Expectations reveals his mental and moral state.[4] We encounter Pip amid primal nature when he emerges from the ooze, at the moment not of birth but of consciousness. Alone in the graveyard, wondering about the dead, the child realizes he is afraid, not of anything specific but of his condition--one small dot in an indifferent flat landscape of marshes, river, and sea. The child

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[3] Great Expectations (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 162. All future references are to this edition.

[4] It is surely wrong to suggest as Goldberg does (p. 210) that the "nightmarish" view Pip sees when he is held upside down by Magwitch shows that Dickens has retreated from belief in an Arcadian rural innocence. As early as Barnaby Rudge Dickens showed blood on the countryside. What Pip sees is what his mind allows him to see. Similarly the marshes are hardly Pip's Eden as Monroe Engel believes in The Maturity of Dickens (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 158. Unlike David Copperfield the child Pip is never portrayed as wholly innocent.

is afraid to be alive even before the convict appears, and neither the marshes nor the churchyard (so comforting to Oliver, Nell, and David) helps.

Dickens combines primal and cultivated nature in the description of the marshes: the graveyard, sign of human impingement upon nature, lies among the grasses and mists. The child is equally remote from both types of nature. His fear puts him beyond insight and thus morality. Pip's innate insecurity, understandable in an orphan constantly reminded of having been brought up by hand, determines his reaction. On the other side, the convict Magwitch wants food and a file; the marshes impress him only as uncomfortable for sleeping out. He is a far from unimaginative man; so his matter-of-factness here highlights Pip's dramatizing. But Magwitch too does not respond fully to nature at this point, a comment on his moral condition as well as his desperation. An interesting sidelight on Dickens' attitude to both Pip and Magwitch at the outset is that he often took friends from Gad's Hill to the cemetery in the marshes at Cooling where they picnicked among the tombstones and saw the lozenge-shaped tablets that Pip puzzled over.[5]

The second meeting of convict and boy continues the contrast. Running to find Magwitch with the stolen food and file, Pip translates nature into evidence of his own guilt. His rimy window looks "as if some goblin had been crying there all night, and using the window for a pocket-handkerchief." Whitened hedges seem to be covered with "a coarser sort of spiders' webs (p. 14)." The gates, dykes, banks, and cattle on the

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[5]Arthur A. Adrian, Georgina Hogarth and the Dickens Circle (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 126.

marshes seem to Pip to be accusing him, crying Stop Thief. Pip feels guilty, so goblins are ready to take him, traps or webs are set, nature and man combining to arrest him. This is more fantasy. So long as Pip reacts in this way to circumstances and thus to nature, he is not able to see what really exists.

Magwitch's purposefulness shows up Pip's weakness. The starving chilled convict devours the vittles, files his iron, pursues Compeyson. The discrepancy in reactions--everyone a secret to his brothers--despite a human sympathy linking Pip and Magwitch, foreshadows the gulf between them over the great expectations and Pip's inability to understand the convict. The last time the child Pip sees Magwitch is from the safety of Joe's back and in the company of soldiers. Now Pip describes several hours of chase without referring to fear or guilt. He has no more fantasies about nature. The landscape has been neutralized by a feeling of community arising from the need to hunt people, an irony compounded by its being Christmas Day.

A year later on the fateful day that Pip hears that Miss Havisham wants a boy to play at Satis House, he demonstrates his moral distance from transcendent nature. Still thinking of the convict on this cold and frozen night, Pip imagines that a man sleeping on the marshes would die of exposure. "And then I looked at the stars, and considered how awful it would be for a man to turn his face up to them as he froze to death, and see no help or pity in all the glittering multitude (p. 46)." The point is, however, that the dying man would find "help or pity" were he willing to receive nature's ministry. Stephen Blackpool, who dies comforted by a single star in Hard Times, testifies to Dickens' belief

that even the humblest individual in the least propitious circumstances may derive comfort from transcendent nature. Pip prefers that transcendence, like great expectations, be handed to him on a platter.

Childhood impressions of marshes and village give way to adolescent turmoils triggered by the seductions of Miss Havisham's power and Estella's scorn. In his selfishness Pip makes facile comparisons between himself and nature which show how little he knows either. The apprentice Pip relates his "own perspective with the windy marsh view, and [makes] out some likeness between them by thinking how flat and low both were, and how on both there came an unknown way and a dark mist and then the sea (p. 100)." The marshes still mean primal nature to Pip which he equates with misery and social inferiority. With such delusions Pip cannot enjoy himself or forget his dreams of Estella long enough to respond easily to what life offers. The Sundays with Joe at the old Battery are "pleasant and quiet," but Pip longs for a world beyond what he can grasp. "Miss Havisham and Estella and the strange house and the strange life appeared to have something to do with everything that was picturesque (pp. 102-103)."

With Biddy Pip's dissatisfaction and insensitivity are cruel, for she loves him and makes him happy to the extent he allows. On a lovely summer day, as they sit by the river, Pip talks about his discontent, but he wonders for a moment whether he is "not more naturally and wholesomely situated, after all, in these circumstances, than playing beggar my neighbor by candlelight in the room with the stopped clocks, and being despised by Estella (p. 123)." Unfortunately, Pip's delusion is strong; he eagerly leaves the natural life once Jaggers makes known his fortune. On his

last pre-London walk through the marshes, prideful Pip finds that the once-accusing dykes, banks, and cattle "wear a more respectful air now and . . . face round, in order that they might stare as long as possible at the possessor of such great expectations (p. 139)." Along with Dickens' irony we recognize that Pip has not progressed emotionally beyond the belief that nature invariably echoes his tune, that is, beyond the pathetic fallacy.

For the rest of Pip's journey to wisdom, he reverts constantly to the marshes in thought and deed. Herbert's sensibly asking whether Pip might not forget Estella summons in Pip "with a rush and a sweep, like the old marsh winds coming up from the sea" longing, sorrow, and tenderness for the past when he "had been so innocent and little (pp. 236, 151)." At this point nature is related to time: Pip's recollection of a place evokes his psychological condition there. But, and this is the measure of Pip's progress, he now realizes what connections his mind is making.

Similarly, the burial of Pip's sister in the churchyard where conscious Pip was born recalls that distant time. The past, however, is remote as Pip sees an entirely different mood in the setting. The marshes and the cemetery now suggest eternal calm, a pastoral setting with transcendent overtones. "And there, my sister was laid quietly in the earth while the larks sang high above it, and the light wind strewed it with beautiful shadows of clouds and trees (p. 267)." The sister whose heavy hand Ticklered the child into obedience becomes part of the marshes. His mature forgiveness links past and present, recalls childish guilt and dislike while overcoming them.

But before Pip is finished with the marshes, he must endure two experiences that repeat and ultimately explain the past. The first is Magwitch's coming to Pip in London; the second is Orlick's attack on Pip in the marshes. The setting of the first experience recalls the Yarmouth storm in David Copperfield and the opening of Bleak House. The weather is stormy, the streets are full of mud. Ferocious winds tear off roofs and root up trees and "gloomy accounts had come in from the coast of shipwreck and death." This is all related to the general turmoil against which Pip's troubled spirit can mount no defense. There are no stars, only darkness, and the wind blasts through Pip's house like "discharges of cannon," recalling the cannon rounds fired from the prison ship when convicts escaped (p. 298). Even the church bells sound distorted, "curiously flawed by the wind (p. 299)."

Nature, however, is not the main agent of Pip's ordeal as it is for David Copperfield. No one drowns here; only the background suggestion of primal nature's force parallels Pip's original meeting with Magwitch. The original contrasts are strengthened. Although Pip is now a well-to-do adult ensconced in his chambers and his social status receiving as a visitor Magwitch the prosperous colonial farmer, Pip is equally a man who lacks crucial knowledge, and Magwitch, of course, walks always in the shadow of the gibbet. Once again Pip makes the misleading connection between primal nature and misfortune. The seas rising on the coast when Magwitch comes seem to Pip to have been swelling for weeks preparing the tidal wave of the convict's arrival by carrying him to England.

The old fear of the marshes, of consciousness, and of evil men like convicts, is finally exorcised by the adult Pip's confrontation with

murderous Orlick.[6] The incident duplicates in many respects the initial experience on the marshes. The convict's leg-iron and Pip's limited vision are common elements. The child stumbled into danger; the adult is lured by a plot. The child thought only of himself; Pip's coming to the marshes is out of fear for Magwitch's safety. He passes again dykes, gates, cattle but notes only that he "seemed to have the whole flats to [himself] (p. 400)." To the adult the urgency of the errand is all; he has ceased to fantasize and he thinks less of his own importance.

Child and convict met in the churchyard where the man frightened the child, then let him go, and, as time showed, dealt honorably by him. Orlick tricks Pip into coming to the marshes, traps him in the sluice-keeper's house, and tries to kill him. Both incidents are long-ranging, reverberating into the future and echoing the past, respectively. The same kind of character, superficially, attacks Pip both times, but by the second incident Pip can distinguish between interior and exterior roughness. The sunset mist of Pip's childhood is the night blackness the adult Pip faces. A pretended threat by a desperate man becomes attempted murder. Once Pip was let go by the convict; now Pip is rescued by Herbert from Orlick's clutches.

Then the convict's visit was the prelude to long years of delusion. At last Pip emerges a better man from the nightmare of waiting to be murdered. The marshes are changed for him because he has no more need to invent. The following day Pip observes the sunrise in London, but the

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[6] F. R. and Q. D. Leavis point out that Pip's going to Orlick is Christian braving the Valley of the Shadow of Death to encounter Apollyon (p. 320).

vision that he experiences applies to the marshes as well. "A veil seemed to be drawn from the river, and millions of sparkles burst out upon its waters. From me, too a veil seemed to be drawn, and I felt strong and well (p. 411)."

Maturity means clear-eyed acceptance of what is and cannot be changed. The mature Pip sees nature less critically and more realistically. Mill Pond Bank, Chink's Basin is an unexpected dwelling place by the Thames amidst the oozy debris that Dickens always describes as belonging to the riverside. Yet it is not grim and desperate. Although almost overwhelmed by primal nature, Mill Pond Bank is still "a fresh kind of place, all circumstances considered, where the wind from the river had room to turn itself around; and there were two or three trees in it . . . (p. 354)." Associated with Herbert's charming fiancé Clara and then with Magwitch, Mill Pond Bank defies easy characterization, like the weather--summer in the sun, winter in the shade--on the March day that Pip and Magwitch try to escape down the river.

Pip's attitude during the journey is philosophical. He notes that the air is crisp, the sun bright, and the river uncrowded. He describes the floating traffic from the broken chains and odd buoys of the port to the "clearer river" downstream (p. 414)."[7] The river brings them to flat country like Pip's home marshes, "monotonous, and with a dim horizon. As night falls the vista is extended but unchanged. "There was the red sun, on the low level of the shore, in a purple haze, fast deepening into

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[7]Forster tells us that Dickens hired a steamer for a day to cruise from Blackwall to Southend in order to be able to describe Pip's journey down the Thames (II, 287).

black; and there was the solitary flat marsh; and far away there the rising grounds, between which and us there seemed to be no life, save here and there in the foreground a melancholy gull (p. 416)."

Except for the fear, understandable in the circumstances, that pursuers lurk in the shadows, Pip does not add to what is actually present. He separates himself and Magwitch from the scene and never loses his hope and equanimity. Knowing where the right lies, Pip reacts directly to events, unencumbered by false assumptions. When Magwitch is before the bar receiving his death sentence, Pip can distinguish society's sentence from God's.

> The sun was striking in at the great windows of the court, through the glittering drops of rain upon the glass, and it made a broad shaft of light between the two-and-thirty [sentenced to die] and the Judge, linking both together, and perhaps reminding some among the audience, how both were passing on, with absolute equality, to the greater Judgment that knoweth all things and cannot err. (p. 434)

After Magwitch's death Pip's serious illness seals his moral rebirth and brings Joe to him. On a beautiful Sunday they go into the country and talk as they used to on the marshes by the old Battery, but Pip's appreciation of Joe's goodness and nature's beauty separates the present from the past.

The same attitude on Pip's part figures, implicitly, in one more scene, almost the last in the novel. Poor, disillusioned, bereaved, Pip has a remaining faint hope of marrying Biddy, returning to the marshes he now associates with the happier past. "The June weather was delicious. The sky was blue, the larks were soaring high over the green corn, I thought that country-side more beautiful and peaceful by far than I have ever known it to be yet." Under its influence Pip hopes to find "a

guiding spirit at [his] side (p. 452)." However, this is not David Copperfield or Little Dorrit. Biddy is not for Pip, and on that glorious June day he finds her married to Joe. The cycle is complete. The adult Pip is finally shocked into accepting the irrevocability of the past. It is a sobering realization which frees him from sentimental excesses.

Pip's life has followed the Thames. From the novel's first page when the child becomes aware of its low, leaden line to his young manhood in London when he rows on its waters, the river's track marks the way. Like the marshes which he never actually leaves behind, the river is omnipresent. Going from the home village to London means being farther from the sea but still on the same main road. Magwitch's escape attempt is along this road as is Pip's emigration when he becomes a clerk for Clarriker and Company. Like the marshes the river represents the influence of nature in Pip's life, and his changing recognition of it marks the changes he undergoes.

During Pip's life in the village the river signifies change and adventure. In London he appropriates the river as a source of entertainment, supporting gentlemanly boating on Sundays. Finally Pip learns from a Magwitch very different from the gruff convict, oblivious to nature, he once met that the river's flow is both soothing and unpredictable. "'We can no more see to the bottom of the next few hours, than we can see to the bottom of this river what I catches hold of (p. 415).'" Dickens' view of life itself is that it is changing, fluid, yet following out an inexorable, unfathomable design.

All unhappiness comes from fruitless opposition to natural principles in this most Tolstoyan--except in length--of Dickens' novels.

Miss Havisham's revenge on mankind which takes the form of laying waste her heart and her garden is an example as is Pip's grasping after great expectations. Pip's initial insecurity and insensitivity can be gauged by his preferring a "rank garden" to the marshes and Miss Havisham's frigid house to Joe's forge. From the first, the garden is "overgrown with tangled weeds (p. 58)." Another time Pip observes "a rank ruin of cabbage-stalks, and one box-tree that had been clipped round long ago, like a pudding, and had a new growth at the top of it, out of shape and of a different colour, as if that part of the pudding had stuck to the saucepan and got burnt (p. 74)." The garden has a fatal tendency to produce inorganic-looking matter: "there were old melon-frames and cucumber frames in it, which seemed in their decline to have produced a spontaneous growth of weak attempts at pieces of old hats and boots, with now and then a weedy offshoot into the likeness of a battered saucepan (p. 83)." Primal nature has taken over the once-cultivated garden in a peculiar form, reproducing the shapes of civilization's leftovers. The unnatural growths in the garden are nature's answer to the diseased condition of the Satis House occupants. Pip's recognizing the verdant puddings and saucepans gives us hope that his sense of reality will one day save him.

But Pip's delusion is such that a walk with Estella round the ruined garden makes it "all in bloom" for him (p. 225). Perversions of cultivated nature must be dealt with harshly as always in Dickens' novels. Pip suffers the shattering of all his dreams, especially the loss of Estella through her pointless marriage to the brutal Bentley Drummle. Miss Havisham dies penitent, and Estella too undergoes a softening process because of her husband's viciousness. The old house and brewery are

razed; only the garden wall remains. A mature Pip back from abroad notes "that some of the old ivy had struck root anew, and was growing green on low quiet mounds of ruin (p. 458)." Clearly there is hope if nature can invigorate this wasteland. Fittingly on discovering this, Pip sees stars and Estella herself, and "in all the broad expanse of tranquil light . . . no shadow of another parting from her (p. 460)." The diseased garden has given way to fresh growth. The mists of great expectations have cleared, and Pip is free to see the stars, those evidences of transcendent nature ever-present if one will only look up.

The Maylie-Garland-Boythorn-Meagles eccentric lover of domesticated nature reappears in the contradictory Wemmick. Not the possessor of a decidely beautiful country home, Wemmick has only the tiny and peculiar Castle. Yet his desire to have a bit of garden, a pig, and a drawbridge is admirable. He is literally a different man in Walworth than in Little Britain. The Castle does not affect his work; if it did, he would lose his job and thereby the Castle as well. But Pip recognizes, as does the reader, that the difference between Jaggers and Wemmick, the unapproachability of the one and the humanity of the other, is that one feels no need for a Castle.

Pip's long-lasting education process leaves him independent of illusions, free to understand himself. In his moment of fullest recognition, the final meeting with Estella in the reclaimed wasteland, he sees the brilliance of the stars. Like every other major Dickens character, he is not free of nature, only of shackles falsely forged by himself in its name.

Great Expectations is Dickens' most profound novel about the

relationship between man and nature. The second ending is absolutely essential, I believe, for it completes the theme of man's relationship to nature which Dickens elaborates in the novel. The first ending in its nihilism[8] blocks the positive movement toward maturity in Pip's life. Whatever one may think of Dickens' previous last minute plot changes, in this case Bulwer-Lytton's advice was sound as Dickens was quick to realize. The brevity and choppiness of the first ending are due no doubt to the novelist's tiredness. After a breather, Dickens gave himself the time to do final justice to his second greatest novel.[9]

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[8] F. R. and Q. D. Leavis call the first ending "nihilistic" (p. 289).

[9] A minority of critics prefers the second ending. See for example, F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, p. 289; Dyson, p. 247; Miller, p. 278; Slater, p. 159.

Chapter 5 -- Our Mutual Friend

In Dickens' last and greatest novel, primal, cultivated, and transcendent nature are represented by the Thames River. Like the marshes in Great Expectations, the river has an objective identity at any time, clear to the unbiassed observer, and a subjective implication, vivid to the engaged beholder. The novel's main characters, with the exception of Bella Wilfer, are immersed in the river, literally or figuratively, from the outset, and their development is expressed in terms of their changing reactions to it.[1]

What the characters find, sooner or later, is not so much the possibilities of creativity--as in Little Dorrit--as the necessity of cheerful acceptance of river and life. Such an attitude heralds the beginning of faith. In the novels and even the magazine writings after 1856 Dickens is less concerned with politics and current events and more with personal salvation and the future life.[2] We have seen already that Little Dorrit and Great Expectations depend heavily on a final vision of individual salvation, an escape into faith, not the country. In Our Mutual Friend Dickens comes closest since Pickwick Papers to depicting an

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[1]Annabel M. Patterson in "Our Mutual Friend: Dickens as the Compleat Angler" (Dickens Studies Annual I, ed. Robert B. Partlow, Jr. [Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970]) notes that characters are differentiated according to how they see the river in relation to themselves (p. 253).

[2]Philip Collins in "A Tale of Two Novels. A Tale of Two Cities and Great Expectations in Dickens' Career" (Dickens Studies Annual II, ed. Robert B. Partlow, Jr. [Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972]) does not believe that this constitutes a positive development in the novels (p. 346).

overwhelming all-encompassing benevolence.[3] We are shown a "vision of a spiritual universe pervading the material world."[4] Nature helps characters at crucial points to overcome their own defects and to ignore banal social morality.[5] In the end the worthy achieve transcendence through the power of their spirit and the aid of nature.

The novel's memorable opening once again introduces the river as primal nature.[6] On an autumn day at sunset two nondescript human figures, one of them "half savage" in appearance, float down the river enclosed in an elemental world bounded by stone (London Bridge) and iron (Southwark Bridge). "Allied to the bottom of the river rather than the surface, by reason of the slime and ooze with which it was covered, and its sodden state," the boat carries the fishers for corpses in the river.[7] We learn

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[3]Dyson finds that Our Mutual Friend unites the complexity of the late novels and the "sunlit quality" of the early novels (p. 250). James R. Kincaid in Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1971) says that the novel is closest to Pickwick Papers in "stark optimism" (p. 224).

[4]Sucksmith, p. 345. H. M. Daleski in Dickens and the Art of Analogy (New York: Schocken Books, 1970) calls Dickens' novels religious in their demand for contact with the transcendent (p. 315).

[5]But Miller believes that nature is not benevolent in Our Mutual Friend as in Bleak House, for example (p. 312). Thus he minimizes nature's role in spiritual transformation.

[6]Miller in "Our Mutual Friend" (The Victorian Novel. Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Ian Watt [London: Oxford University Press, 1971]) discusses the "otherness of elemental matter" including the river, mounds, fire, wind. He considers these substances, not symbols, thus contrasting with the insubstantiality of society (p. 131).

[7]Our Mutual Friend (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 1. All future references are to this edition.

that the man Gaffer Hexam is a river scavenger, towing ashore the bodies of the drowned after robbing them. He is content with himself and grateful to the ugly river that keeps him alive. Lizzie, his daughter, on the other hand, hates what her father does, despite her love for him, and she extends that hatred to the river itself.

The complexity of this novel makes it possible for Dickens to show the validity of Lizzie's reaction to her father's work and the river while indicating that her feelings about the river are excessive. A "slant of light from the sun glanced into the bottom of the boat, and, touching a rotten stain there which bore some resemblance to the outline of a muffled human form, coloured it as though with diluted blood. This caught the girl's eye, and she shivered (p. 2)." The conversion of a random stain into a dead body is a trick of Lizzie's overwrought conscience because she feels guilty in an unfocussed way for her father's actions. The narrator admits only "some resemblance" to a body. Lizzie's mind fills in the outline. Gaffer has no such troubles. Totally unimaginative and hardened, Gaffer sits facing the corpse his boat tows, unmoved. The narrator adds, "a neophyte might have fancied that the ripples passing over it were dreadfully like faint changes of expression on a sightless face; but Gaffer was no neophyte and had no fancies (p. 5)." These reactions establish father and daughter's relationship to the river, Gaffer's unchanging till death and Lizzie's marking the beginning of painful self-discovery. On another level, the stain in the boat and the corpse bleeding in the water in the boat's wake prefigure the climax when Lizzie no longer shrinks from a real bloodstain and even kisses the disfigured face of the critically wounded man whose life she saves.

Eugene Wrayburn's acquaintance with Lizzie begins as a result of Gaffer's catch, the dead man identified as John Harmon. The Hexams' modest dwelling is also allied to the elements, made of wood mouldering in the damp, with "a look of decomposition" inside and out. The red stain imagined by Lizzie in the boat is reproduced on the floor in the house. But she does not see it; it is idly noted by the so-far uninvolved Eugene as "red-lead (or some such stain which it had acquired in warehousing)." The ubiquitous redness is repeated in the "red fire" which warms the household and in which Lizzie sees pleasant or pathetic visions of the future (p. 21).

But it is not as easy to assign moral values to the Hexams on the basis of their surroundings as, for example, to characterize Mrs. Clennam through her house. Despite the dampness and the stain, their house is a home because of Lizzie's efforts. Gaffer, with all his roughness, always speaks softly to his daughter. Both of Gaffer's children nourish desires to rise in society though he has sought to stifle their ambition. What becomes of Lizzie and Charley after his death depends not on their leaving the river but on how successfully they can assimilate it into their new lives. Charley drops out of our concern when it is clear he has lost himself in evading the river.

The river's power over Lizzie seems mightiest in the moments of greatest crisis. When Gaffer is accused of murdering Harmon, Lizzie feels trapped by the elements. "As she came beneath the lowering sky, a sense of being involved in a murky shade of murder dropped upon her; and as the tidal swell of the river broke at her feet without her seeing how it gathered, so, her thoughts startled her by rushing out of an unseen void and shrieking

at her heart." Again the trap is in her mind, among her fears that either her father is guilty or, if innocent, unable to prove it. But the elements in their ominous unconcern seem to hint that her worst suspicions may be confirmed. As she loses sight of "the great black river with its dreary shores," she stands on the brink of the river of life "unable to see into the vast blank misery of a life suspected, and fallen away from by good and bad, but knowing that it lay there dim before her, stretching away to the great ocean, Death (pp. 70-71)."

The last time Lizzie sees Gaffer rowing home in the morning after a night on the river, he comes out of a primal background of ships like "black substances" and the sun "blood-red on the eastern marshes behind dark masts and yards, seemed filled with the ruins of a forest it had set on fire (p. 74)." This image of destruction foreshadows Gaffer's death and hints at Lizzie's intuitive knowledge of his fate.

Primal nature has its way on the night of Gaffer's death. The outsiders Eugene and Mortimer contend against hailstones and furious wind. But the disorder below is insignificant compared to the disorder in the sky where the wind demolishes clouds and rocks the moon so "that it seemed as if the streets were absorbed by the sky, and the night were all in the air (p. 175)." Being buffeted in the air is part of the initiation Eugene must undergo before descending into the depths of the river and passion. After he has glimpsed Lizzie sitting alone by the fire, waiting for Gaffer, Eugene feels guilty, that is, involved, however peripherally, in the plot against her father. Eugene's drink "tastes like the wash of the river." He feels as if he had been "half drowned, and swallowing a gallon of it (p. 164)."

Before dawn when Eugene joins the police inspector in a boat to search for Gaffer on the river, he comes close, for the first time, to the river, seeing "the spoiling influences of the water--discoloured copper, rotten wood, honey-combed stone, green dank deposit--so that the consequences of being crushed, sucked under, and drawn down, looked as ugly to the imagination as the main event (p. 172)." At least Gaffer's soon-recovered body is spared the full horror of this aftermath although Gaffer himself could not avoid death by entanglement in his own lines. As he lived, so he died. The importance of Gaffer's death is that it shows the power of primal nature; it also frees Lizzie from filial bondage to his way of life. She must decide how to live and whether to leave the river.

But primal nature in Our Mutual Friend is not confined to the river. The physical quality of sogginess is equated with moral wavering in other settings and situations. The despicable Lammles who have tricked each other into making a supposedly rich marriage are undeceived on a beach at low tide where the far-off careless waves seem to mock them. The cliffs barring their escape to land exude dampness while the pair appear to have been "thrown together high on the bare shore" by the receding waters (p. 124).

Dickens' equation of money lust and boggy wetness becomes explicit in the chapter "A Dismal Swamp."[8] The newly rich Boffins are attacked by "all manner of crawling, creeping, fluttering, and buzzing creatures,

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[8]Cockshut says that the chapter links the dust mounds and "the primeval slime--an idea at this date already alive with haunting evolutionary echoes, as we can see from In Memoriam (p. 180)."

attracted by the gold dust (p. 209)." Worst of all is Silas Wegg whose wooden leg attaches him to elemental nature. At one point Boffin hiding behind a stuffed alligator in Venus' shop overhears Wegg plotting against him. Clearly Wegg himself is the alligator with his smile that implies, "all this was quite familiar knowledge down in the depths of the slime, ages ago (p. 583)." If not an alligator, then Wegg is, as Boffin suggests, The Serpent.

Primal nature as wind, already acknowledged on the night of Gaffer's death, makes its presence felt everywhere in London. It provides the motive power for "that mysterious paper currency" that covers all things. Cultivated nature can offer no defense against either wind or paper. On the contrary, it is being smothered.[9] "The shrubs wrung their many hands, bemoaning that they had been overpersuaded by the sun to bud; the young leaves pined; the sparrows repented of their early marriages, like men and women; the colours of the rainbow were discernible, not in floral spring, but in the faces of the people whom it nibbled and pinched (p. 144)."

But the currency itself is merely the lightest part of the dust or garbage of London collected by Harmon Senior and transformed into a fortune. The mounds of dust are his monument. They are also the best evidence of primal nature's triumph. The broken artifacts of civilization amalgamating with organic wastes are changed by the help of wind, rain, and time into mud or slime, that is, primal nature. Were Our Mutual Friend no more than what I have described so far, it might well be Dickens' darkest novel.

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[9]Dyson, for example, sees a blight on nature in Our Mutual Friend (p. 282). But this is no longer true in the country sections of the novel.

The miracle is that out of the slime come not only figures like Lizzie but especially the Boffins who are not burdened by the romantic heroine's traits of beauty and good grammar. Peculiar in appearance and speech, the Boffins seem at first to come from the Plornish and Chivery mold, comic figures with a touching but absurd hankering for pastoral ease. They are more than that, being eventually the purifiers of dust and money. They exemplify Dickens' belief that the human spirit can transform reality through acceptance of it.[10] Whatever passes through their hands is cleansed. Thus the path to Boffin's Bower, marked by "two lines of broken crockery set in ashes," is the entrance into a better world (p. 55). The ugly and noxious mounds are changed by "a serpentining walk up each . . . that gives you the yard and neighborhood changing every moment." The highest mound proudly sports "a lattice-work Arbour," a delightful place for reading according to Boffin (p. 57). The magical power of the Boffins is best seen in the Bella Wilfer plot. They play out an elaborate comedy to restore that young woman to a healthier way of thinking about money. The Boffins represent Dickens' lasting belief in the human power to overcome evil. They live on the edge of the swamp, they even have to swat an insect or two, but their souls are not muddy.

In London cultivated nature is a memory or a dream. The homey old waterfront tavern, The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, is an ancient wooden building, so old that it is returning to nature. However, this is not a return to primal nature; it is not decomposing. Rather it seems to be returning to relative youth, becoming "gnarled and riven, according to the

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[10]Miller, Charles Dickens, The World of His Novels, p. 327.

manner of old trees; knots started out of it; and here and there it seemed to twist itself into some likeness of boughs." Some of the regulars even maintain that with a light shining on certain panels, one can "trace little forests . . . and tiny trees like the parent-tree, in full umbrageous leaf (p. 61)." The tavern is a vital place to which the near-drowned, fished out of the river, are brought. The villain Rogue Riderhood is recalled to life there.

A more significant example of the survival of cultivated nature in the imagination is provided by Jenny Wren. The crippled, hard-working child says she smells flowers in the summer, rows and rows of beautiful flowers. This is preliminary to our first view of her garden, the rooftop refuge she frequents with Lizzie. Though there are but "a humble creeper" climbing "a blackened chimney-stack" and "a few boxes of humble flowers and evergreens," it is more than enough for two bruised spirits (p. 279).

From this vantage point Jenny enjoys "the quiet and the air." Interestingly, we do not have Lizzie's comments; she has no reason to consider the city's din quiet nor the smoky air pure. But Jenny's dream expresses her need, which Lizzie would never ridicule. Moreover, Jenny's dream modulates into a transcendent vision, which suggests how much she longs to leave her sordid and painful life even at the price of death. "'And you see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and you feel as if you were dead (p. 281).'" The clouds which earlier suggested the havoc of primal nature to Eugene are now evidence of a transcendent order to a differently situated character. Because of Jenny's visionary imagination, she is able to assist

in pulling Eugene up from death's grasp later in the novel.

In Our Mutual Friend Dickens reverts to the narrative strategy of his second novel Oliver Twist, in having his main character spend a good deal of time outside of the city which has nearly destroyed him. But Dickens is no longer an apprentice novelist. He does not repeat the mistake of separating his hero from all the interesting characters. The last third of the novel takes place in a pastoral environment, cultivated nature ever on the verge of becoming transcendent.[11] All of the significant figures journey upstream to encounter lovers and enemies amid natural beauty. It begins with two exiles, Betty Higden and Lizzie, whose paths cross at Betty's death. The one woman is running from official charity, the other from the false charity of Eugene's love. Each finds a brief respite from cares and then must survive her greatest crisis before achieving lasting peace.

> In those pleasant little towns on Thames, you may hear the fall of water over the weirs, or even, in still weather, the rustle of the rushes; and from the bridge you may see the young river, dimpled like a young child, playfully gliding away among the trees, unpolluted by the defilements that lie in wait for it on its course, and as yet out of hearing of the deep summons of the sea. (p. 504)

In this region after successfully evading Riderhood's blandishments, Betty dies in Lizzie's arms. That death draws Bella and John Rokesmith (Harmon) to the scene.

Having struggled to understand one another in the dismal swamp, Bella and John are aided by the unselfish examples of Betty and Lizzie

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[11] Annabel M. Patterson makes an interesting case for Dickens' having organized Our Mutual Friend in terms of a running analogy with Walton's Compleat Angler. The pastoral setting allows escape from the Veneering world (pp. 254, 256, and passim).

and by the qualities of the new setting. The river is a "great serene mirror" reflected between those placid banks, and brought nothing to the light save what was peaceful, pastoral, and blooming (p. 522)." Considering what follows, this is overly hopeful but still broadly true. Nature in itself cannot make a murderer into a saint; it can, however, affect the circumstances of the murder to the extent that the perpetrator's goals are circumvented.

In the novel's fourth and last book the movement to the country includes all the main characters outside the Veneering dinner circle except for the Boffins. These last, of course, hardly need the country. They are as happy in their stiff London house as they were in the Bower under the shadow of the dust mounds. Contact with cultivated nature affords physical freedom, as in Oliver Twist, but freedom is a more engrossing concept than picking flowers and listening to birds. For good characters it means leaving various social prisons. For the others it means letting one's real desires emerge into the light from the recesses where they have lurked all the while.

Bradley Headstone comes to Plashwater Weir Mill Lock on the trail of his enemy and rival Eugene. Like every other potential murderer we have seen in Dickens' novels, Bradley has no eyes or ears for the scene. "A soft air stirred the leaves of the fresh green trees, and passed like a smooth shadow over the river, and like a smoother shadow over the yielding grass. The voice of the falling water, like the voices of the sea and wind, was an outer memory to a contemplative listener (p. 269)." Bradley's moral deafness is also a trait of his final victim Rogue whose callousness let him rob the dying Betty of her money, though not of her

self-respect, in broad daylight. Previously Rogue had robbed and killed in the dark. As often happens in Dickens' novels, murderer and victim are linked by common attitudes as well as by hatred.

The additional complication in Our Mutual Friend is that Bradley has two victims, Eugene whom he hates most and Rogue whom he kills in a final suicidal act after all else is lost. Neither victim is an innocent but Eugene has it in him to be regenerated, thus increasing the moral distance between himself and Bradley. However, when we first see Eugene rowing past Plashwater Weir Mill Lock, he is indifferent to the setting and bent on having his way with Lizzie whatever the cost to her.

Behind the solitary boatman nature signals that there will be bloodshed. No one imagines bloodstains here. The narrator tells us that the setting sun "went down and the landscape was dyed red (p. 634)." Another signal is seen by Rogue who watches Bradley sleeping during a thunderstorm, illuminated by lightning alternately red, blue, and white. Sometimes Bradley seems annihilated "in the blinding glare of palpitating white fire." Or the rain returns "and the river would seem to rise to meet it, and a blast of wind, bursting upon the door, would flutter the hair and dress of the man, as if invisible messengers were come around the bed to carry him away (p. 639)."

These are the elements of primal nature, water, wind, and fire, which have followed Bradley upstream. Unlike Lizzie he has never been aware of the primal depths within and without. His acquaintance with Lizzie, for instance, dates from her post-Gaffer days when she is more socially acceptable. Now nature is punishing him for his neglect of her. Eugene, on the other hand, has met Lizzie on her own ground. Her

evolution out of the river's mud has only confirmed Eugene's original respect for Lizzie. Her rise and then his are opposed by Rogue's and then Bradley's descent. They die sinking in the water from which others emerge triumphantly new.

When Eugene approaches Lizzie in the pastoral setting of the mill town by the river, he is part observer, part subject, satiric and passionate all at once. The quiet of the evening has broken through his self-confidence as has the glimpse of mill hands going home, tranquil and content, Wordsworthian figures in a gentle landscape.

> The mingling of various voices and the sound of laughter made a cheerful impression upon the ear, analogous to that of the fluttering colours upon the eye. Into the sheet of water reflecting the flushed sky in the foreground of the living picture, a knot of urchins were casting stones, and watching the expansion of the rippling circles. So, in the rosy evening, one might watch the ever-widening beauty of the landscape--beyond the newly-released workers wending home--beyond the silver river--beyond the deep green fields of corn, so prospering, that the loiterers in their narrow threads of pathway seemed to float immersed breast-high--beyond the hedge-rows and the clumps of trees--beyond the windmills on the ridge--away to where the sky appeared to meet the earth, as if there were no immensity of space between mankind and Heaven. (p. 689)

Yet Eugene is ever ready to turn life into a joke, taking the time to address some sheep grazing by the river. "'You are stupid enough, I suppose. But if you are clever enough to get through life tolerably to your satisfaction, you have got the better of me, Man as I am, and Mutton as you are! (p. 690)'" There is a difference, however, in Eugene, marked by his observing these same sheep very closely. "It seemed to him that he had never before heard the crisp, tearing sound with which they cropped the grass."

Add to this the influence of Lizzie's strength of self-abnegation

and constancy of love, and Eugene is torn between admiration and desire for her. Yet he is still the tormentor, remembering the chase he has led Bradley. Observing a man in a distant field, he languidly asks, "'What's here to do? . . . No jealous paper-miller? No pleasures of the chase in this part of the country?'"

Resolving the contradictions of Eugene's life requires nothing less than an apparent upheaval of nature. Just before it comes, Eugene approaches the point of greatest moral danger. "The rippling of the water seemed to cause a correspondent stir in his uneasy reflections . . . As the ripple under the moon broke unexpectedly now and then, and palely flashed in a new shape and with a new sound, so parts of his thoughts started, unbidden, from the rest, and revealed their wickedness. 'Out of the question to marry her,' said Eugene, 'and out of the question to leave her. The crisis!'" The next moment as he looks down into the dark water, "with a dreadful crash, the reflected night turned crooked, flames shot jaggedly across the air, and the moon and stars came bursting from the sky (p. 698)." The forces that Eugene did not fully recognize deal him a near-fatal blow. Before he can rise from the water, Eugene must redress all past errors, especially towards Lizzie and Jenny.

Lizzie herself is fully reconciled to the dark side of nature and life at the moment of her apotheosis. In saving Eugene she is finally grateful for "that old time" that lets her preserve her lover's life. Her sure and swift action in saving him contrasts with her reluctance in the novel's opening chapter to even look at, much less touch, a corpse. She lifts Eugene in the boat so that he faces her, that she may row the faster for seeing his mutilated visage. She does not shrink from his

blood but kisses his "disfigured forehead" as she blesses him. Possessed with strength beyond her own, Lizzie manages to carry Eugene into the inn and delivers him to the doctors.

Near death for many days, Eugene finally returns to life, emerging from the depths which sought to claim him into the light world and aware of the presence of transcendent nature. For this is the implication behind his desire to hear Jenny tell about the angels in her visions. Eugene's newfound awareness of religion pervades the sickroom. And we cannot dismiss it as the usual words of illness to be forgotten in health. Eugene's decision not to hearken to the voice of society is made in behalf of a greater good, the worth of Lizzie.

Back in London after their marriage and his recovery, Eugene praises her to Mortimer. As he does so, he is lit by the sun, that last reminder of transcendent nature in urban life. "The glow that shone upon him as he spoke the words so irradiated his features, that he looked for the time, as though he had never been mutilated (p. 813)." That is the genuine Dickensian note of transcendence, spiritual and earthly at once. The sunlight creates momentary physical and moral perfection, reminding us of Woodcourt's last words to Esther in Bleak House about her restored beauty. The novel's final chapter in which Mortimer seeks the opinion of the voice of society validates Eugene's rejection of it for a higher truth. Only the superannuated ineffectual Twemlow turns out to be gentleman enough to recognize the moral beauty of Eugene's marriage to Lizzie.

However, the consolation of transcendent nature is not a universal reality. It has no relation to Bradley after his murderous attack on Eugene. When he comes again to Plashwater Weir Mill Lock, he is an outcast

and nature itself seems to be infinitely remote and even deathlike.

> The moon had gone down, and a mist crept along the banks of the river, seen through which the trees were the ghosts of trees, and the water the ghost of water. The earth looked spectral, and so did the pale stars: while the cold eastern glare, expressionless as to heat or colour, with the eye of the firmament quenched, might have been likened to the stare of the dead. (p. 703)

There is to be no further contact for Bradley with cultivated or transcendent nature. The last time we see him he approaches the Lock in the winter. Spiritual deadness has stiffened him as the cold has frozen the ever-flowing river. Bradley's world has shrunk to the limits of the Lock. "The ice, and the snow, and he, and the one light, had absolute possession of the dreary scene (p. 796)." It only remains for him to put an end to his and Rogue's immoral lives. "The scene was a mere white and yellow desert" as in one frenzied motion Bradley drags Rogue into the water where they drown and come to rest on the bottom "under the ooze and scum behind one of the rotting gates (pp. 801, 802)." At last the two are part of nature, achieving in death the relationship neither could sustain in life.

Our Mutual Friend represents the culmination of Dickens' lifelong exploration of the relationship between man and nature. Perhaps because he felt he could not better portray the system of mutual interconnections than he had in this novel, Dickens turned in his last work to a significantly different kind of story in which moral and religious issues are subordinated to the fundamentally logical problem of uncovering a secret. For all we actually know, of course, The Mystery of Edwin Drood as it developed might have become another novel of man and nature. In any case, I think we can agree that Dickens' career was remarkably consistent in continually

adumbrating certain key themes and that the role of nature in the life of man is one of the most important and most interesting.

When we recognize the persistence of nature in the novels of Dickens, we also extend our definition of the Victorian novel and fill in a bit more the still-existing gap between the Romantics and the Moderns. Nature is not simply discovered by Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Shelley and passed on by them to Modern novelists like Conrad and Lawrence. To the list of Victorian intermediaries such as Meredith and Hardy who treated nature seriously in novels and thus prepared the way for the Modern novel and our contemporary literature, we must add the name of Charles Dickens.

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