HAL
open science

Dickens's Pioneering Rhetoric of Landscape

Nathalie Jaëck, Xavier Amelot

To cite this version:

Nathalie Jaëck, Xavier Amelot. Dickens's Pioneering Rhetoric of Landscape. Représentations : la revue électronique du CEMRA, 2016. hal-01600018

HAL Id: hal-01600018

https://hal.science/hal-01600018v1

Submitted on 3 Oct 2017

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Dickens's Pioneering Rhetoric of Landscape

Nathalie Jaëck, CLIMAS, Université Bordeaux-Montaigne
Xavier Amelot, ADESS, CNRS/Université Bordeaux-Montaigne

Key-words: literature, geography, Dickens, landscape, romantic, sublime, town, country, representation, subversion

Mots-clés: littérature, géographie, Dickens, paysage, romantique, sublime, ville, champagne, représentation, subversion

In this paper, co-written from the double critical perspective of geography and literature, we will develop the idea that Dickens, admittedly a celebrated specialist in portraits, also took an active part in the controversial contemporary redefinition of the rhetoric of landscape. We aim to show that in his fiction, he can be seen to illustrate methodically that landscape is a semiotic structure that needs to be historicized, a culturally constructed process and certainly not a neutral objective reproduction of the land, in other words that "landscape imagery is contested political terrain" (Pugh, 2), a national idiom to legitimize political authority. It was also a burning issue at a time when landscapes were moving fast, made mobile by structural changes in the management of space brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the development of cities. In this light, we will thus show how Dickens staged, discussed and moved away from institutional normative forms of representation, and how he came up with dissident innovative forms, shifting the viewpoint in multiple ways in order to elaborate his own rhetoric of landscape, to contest the ideological bases of dominant representation and eventually to make the notion his own—basically turning landscape into an active site of ideological resistance.

The input of geography in this study of Dickensian landscapes is not to be understood as a way to legitimize literary analysis by resorting to material theories, as a "scientific stamp." It reads more like cross-fertilisation, based on the realization

that Dickens's discussion of landscape coincides with recent evolutions of the notion in academic geography: in both cases though in different ways, landscape is crucially redefined as controversial and multiple, and this is seen as an essential move to understand the shifting nature of landscape, to understand that landscape is always a strategy of representation. Geography has had an interest in literature for a long time: Humboldt, one of Dickens's contemporaries and the celebrated father of modern geography, claimed through the notion of *Weltliteratur* that only literature could account for the sentiment of nature: "Nous ne pouvons juger de la sensibilité des anciens peuples pour la nature que d'après les passages de leur littérature où est exprimé ce sentiment" (Humboldt, 5). ("The only way we can judge the sensibility of ancient peoples for nature is through the passages in their literature where they express that feeling.") In France, the lines of research and the methodological approaches that mobilize works of fiction in academic geography fall into two distinct categories that have been synthesized by several authors (Tissier, Brosseau, Levy). They illustrate the evolution of the conception of the notion of landscape in geography. The first direction, that considers landscape as material, as an objective view of the world, has tended to look into literature as a complement for local, regional geographic knowledge, as an illustrative comfort to objective description. The second one, viewing landscape more as a social and cultural construct, alternately used literature to qualify that process of objectification, and to prove that there is a subjective dimension in geographical space: literature was thus mobilized by *social* or *cultural* geography to account for a new definition of space, as it is *perceived* and *lived in* (Frémont). Recently a third approach, considering landscape as a historical process, as a dialectical interaction between society and space (Bertrand & Bertrand) has brought about a new type of interest in literature: under the influence of Anglo-Saxon critical geography (Cosgrove, Jackson), and centred on the reappraisal of the notion of landscape, it has used literature and the arts as critical approaches to spatial domination, documenting a form of opposition to dominant ideologies (Briffaud). This third approach proves most pertinent to look at the way Dickens describes landscape as an adequate terrain to mark aesthetic representation as a way to vehicle but also to contest and modify power struggles in a society or a nation.

This is achieved through an elaborate attempt to de-romanticize the landscape, through a polemical deconstruction of the romantic convention of seeing nature as

both inspiring and regenerating: the national myth and pastoral ideal of the idyllic retreat in the country is satirized, while the Romantic regeneration in Sublime settings is dismissed. Such deconstruction of traditional and normative imageries leads Dickens to build an alternative, through a major displacement of the viewpoint: seeing from the city and no longer from the typical vantage point of the country house, he writes an aesthetic counterproposal, doing away with panorama, stability and perspective. He crucially levels the viewpoint to propose a fragmented, mobile landscape, a new epistemology in fact to account for the newly born city that cannot be drawn out in an authoritative exhaustive version—*cityscope* more than landscape. This eventually leads to a process of re-appropriation, as in Dickens's novels landscape is no longer the private ground of the happy few: it is inhabited, described as perceived and practised by the people, and quasi systematically returned to the workers. Indeed, this proposal is astonishingly close to the definition of landscape as it was elaborated by contemporary geographers and presented in the 2000 European Convention of Landscape: "*Landscape* means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors."[1]

As the traditional "political landscape" of the outsider is rewritten as "the vernacular landscape" of the insider (Jackson, 1984), aesthetics claim their reforming power.

1. De-romanticizing the Landscape

To illustrate Dickens's deconstruction of the Romantic idea of the country as a place of peaceful retreat and regeneration, we can select two pieces, the first one addressing the Romantic Sublime landscape of the Alps in *David Copperfield*, and the second one explicitly questioning the beautiful representation of the English cottage in *The Chimes: a Goblin Story*.

After his wife Dora's death, David decides to leave England and to travel across Europe, hoping to find solace. Typically, he heads for the Alps and eventually finds himself within the Swiss landscape that had so inspired the Romantics and taught them a higher truth.

> I was in Switzerland. I had come out of Italy, over one of the great passes of the Alps, and had since wandered with a guide among the by-ways of the mountains. If those awful solitudes had spoken to my heart, I did not

[1] European Landscape Convention, Chapter1, Art. 1, a., Council of Europe, 2000, http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/176.htm.

> know it. 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. (ch. 58, 814)

The mysterious tongue of the wilderness understood by Shelley in prototypical "Mont-Blanc" is a foreign tongue to David; he is not part of "the wise, and great, and good" who interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel"[2] the voice of the great mountain.[3] What is remarkable in the extract is its metatextual overtone, showing that Dickens's stance on the landscape was well-informed:[4] it actually reads like a text commentary of Burke's canonical 1757 *Philosophical Enquiry*, studded with obvious and immediately recognizable quotes. "Awful" and "sublimity" make the reference explicit, while the "dread heights and precipices," "the roaring torrents" and "the wastes of ice and snow," some the major elements defined by Burke as Sublime, are conjured up together. The picture is perfect then, the simple clause "I was in Switzerland" gives a sense of obviousness and necessity, and should thus trigger the expected effect—and yet David does not feel the typical delight resulting from the removal of pain. The Sublime as a mode of representation of the landscape is paid a passing tribute to, it is explicitly acknowledged, and then left aside as David moves on. The rest of the passage seems very telling as to how Dickens displaces in a dissident way the classical analysis of the Sublime. To find the solace he expects, David does two unorthodox things—he goes *down* instead of going *up*, he reaches for the valley, and instead of being moved by the immensity of overwhelming Nature, he is moved by the simplest actions and songs of the men working there.

> I came into the valley, as the evening sun was shining on the remote heights of snow, that closed it in, like eternal clouds. […] 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

[2] The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
So solemn, so serene, that man may be
But for such faith with nature reconciled;
Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.
Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Mont-Blanc," lines 76–83.

[3] As Andrew Sanders noted, "Although he readily recognised the Romantic conventions of seeing nature as the inspirer and the regenerator, few of Nature's voices echo directly in his novels. As a writer of fiction, Dickens generally remained distinctly unawed by its phenomena" (91).

[4] Developing Sanders's analysis in his paper "Dickens in the City: Science, Technology, Ecology in the Novels of Charles Dickens," in *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long 19th Century* 10 (2010), *Dickens and Science*, John Parham proves by an examination of Dickens's private collection of books that he owned a good deal of canonical 18th- and 19th-century poetry, and that "he was reasonably well-informed about the debates about the natural world and about the nature of imagination which so preocc upied the first generation of English Romantics" (89).

> 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! (ch. 58, 814-15, our emphasis)

In this typical landscape of immensity, what reaches out to David is human presence; the voice of nature is not immanent, it is crucially transmitted by the songs of shepherds, the cottages are subjective *homes*, and the whole landscape is here occupied by lots of people, "dotted here and there," or gathered in the "clustered village." David does not see them from above: humanity is not slighted by Nature, it fully inhabits and practises the landscape, building a bridge across the roaring stream. From the strategic core of the Alps, Dickens cracks the Romantic stronghold and establishes two elements that are fundamental in his rewriting of the rhetoric of landscape: he levels the viewpoint, renouncing apical panoramic vision in favour of a horizontal vision from the ground, from the inside, and he peoples the landscape.

These two elements are also crucial in another much less famous scene, extracted from the second of Dickens's Christmas novellas, *The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells That Rang An Old Year Out and a New Year In*, published Dec. 16th, 1844. Here again, the extract reads as if Dickens were explicitly commenting upon and then deconstructing another aspect of the Romantic representation of nature—the reactivation of the pastoral idea that nature is a peaceful retreat, a haven from the city, celebrating the beauty of the English landscape. As they listen to revolutionary worker Will Fern, Trotty Veck and Sir Joseph are confronted with quite another version.

> **"Gentlefolks**, I've lived many a year in this place. You may see the **cottage** from the sunk **fence** over yonder. I've seen the **ladies** draw it in their books, a hundred times. **It looks well in a picter**, I've heerd say; but there an't weather in picters, and maybe 'tis fitter for that, than for a place to live in. Well! I lived there. How hard—how bitter hard, I lived there, I won't say". (third quarter, our emphasis)

Quite obviously here, Dickens insists on the fact that pastoral visions of cottages, to be seen from a distance, drawn and then circulated by gentlefolks, do not correspond to the reality of life in the countryside. The charge is heavy: the fence materializes the

separation between workers and "gentlefolks," and highlights the fact that the gap between reality and representation is a product of class-domination, that aesthetics serve to build and impose a political vision of the world, as Cosgrove theorized. Will Fern irrupts into this perfect landscape, the epitome of English peaceful countryside, and claims belonging, as his name allows him to: he returns into the picture, with a vengeance, thus spoiling the image and disenchanting the pastoral. The rest of the passage describes how workers were dislodged from their own habitat, dispossessed of their territory so that it might "look good in the picture," literally drawn out, erased and censored from the picture:

> "Now, gentlemen," said Will Fern, holding out his hands, and flushing for an instant in his haggard face, "see how **your** laws are made to trap and hunt **us** when we're brought to this. I tries to live elsewhere. And I'm a vagabond. To jail with him! I comes back here. I goes a-nutting in your woods, and breaks—who don't?—a limber branch or two. To jail with him! One of your keepers sees me in the broad day, near my own patch of garden, with a gun. To jail with him! I has a nat'ral angry word with that man, when I'm free again. To jail with him! I cuts a stick. To jail with him! I eats a rotten apple or a turnip. To jail with him! It's twenty mile away; and coming back I begs a trifle on the road. To jail with him! At last, the constable, the keeper—anybody—finds me anywhere, a-doing anything. To jail with him, for he's a vagrant, and a jail-bird known; and jail's the only home he's got." (third quarter, our emphasis)

Dickens regularly comments upon the anomaly that English landscapes should either be empty of people, or should represent improbable idle picturesque characters.[5] In his *Book of Memoranda*, Dickens wondered at,

> English landscape. The beautiful prospect, trim fields, clipped hedges, everything so neat and orderly—gardens, houses, roads. Where are the people who do all this? There must be a great many of them, to do it. Where are they all? And are *they*, too, so well kept and so fair to see? (43)

Throughout his novels, Dickens is thus careful both to reintroduce people in his landscapes, and to insist that the countryside was not the image of the paradise the owning classes cared to articulate, making it clear that "the design of landscape and the mode of its representation became signifiers of the way that the countryside and its workers are controlled and how power is structured and made evident" (Pugh, 2). Once more here, Dickens's fight echoes an extremely topical and controversial issue in contemporary environmental geography that highlights the fact that indigenous

[5] For helpful syntheses of Dickens's disenchantment with the picturesque, see work by James Buzard, Michael Hollington and Francesca Orestano, as well as by Alessandro Vescovi, Luisa Villa and Paul Vita.

populations are sometimes outlawed in their own lands, often for environmental "higher reasons," accused of spoiling "wild nature," endangering largely mythical "primary forests" with irresponsible usages of the land, like *shifting cultivation* and *slash and burn* in moist tropical forests. As many geographers and anthropologists have illustrated (Bahuchet and Betsch, Harper, Dounias, Fairhead and Leach), indigenous populations, in a process uncannily similar to what Dickens describes for Will Fern, are then dislodged from their own territories, turned into presumably idyllic and pristine landscapes by international institutions or environmental NGOs, and then publicized—or even sold—as such. This is another instance of how the land is *landscaped*, distanced from its immediate usage and turned into a strategic object of appreciation, inscribing political and economic goals: landscaping is a process, landscape is not a given.

In this respect and by way of example, Gainsborough's canonical painting, *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (1748) quite adequately illustrates this process of appropriation of the country by the ruling classes, as they occupy the foregrounds of the landscape, while any other human presence is erased. As Efraim Sicher developed,

> the rural was represented as an image of the homely, the stable, and the historical roots of nationhood. […] The poor had been generally included as picturesque elements in 18th-century representations of the secluded squares of Palladian estates, like Bloomsbury, but were effectively rendered invisible except as marginalized stereotypes, vagabonds, and deformed curiosities of the capital, or, in the radical forties, as sentimentalized figures of poverty. (74)

Repeatedly in his fiction, Dickens thus deconstructs the myth of the country as haven, and chooses more often than not to depict the country as a desolate place, tough to live in, through the reiterated metaphor of the inescapable marsh. The beginning of *Great Expectations* is famous in this respect, where the marsh landscape is described as a vegetable prison, criss-crossed by angry red and black lines, and where life in the country is certainly no worriless idleness.[6] In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the metaphor of the swamp is taken up, and Dickens ironically calls Eden that insalubrious, decayed, polluted and deprived damp hole, where the poor strikingly suffer from exactly the same evils as they do in the city:

[6] The point is developed in Nathalie Jaëck, "L'infini comme figure de la subversion narrative dans *Great Expectations*," in Shusterman, Ronald (dir.), *L'Infini*. Pessac: PUB, 2001: 263–77.

> 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; where 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. At last they stopped. **At Eden too**.
>
> The waters of the Deluge might have left it but a week before: so choked with slime and matted growth was the hideous swamp which bore that name. (ch. 23, 377, our emphasis)

The represented garden of Eden is here inverted into actual Hell by the omniscient narrator (scorching hot and turning people into spectres), and this deconstructs a typical dichotomy of nineteenth-century fiction, where the imagery of Hell is often superimposed onto the mines and mills of Northern towns. In Dickens's fiction, Hell is to be found in the country as well, and describes equally in both places the dire working conditions of the poor, be they rustic or urban. The irony of the description denounces sentimentality about the delights of nature not only as naïve misrepresentation, but above all as a political stance designed to maintain the national prestige of the Country and the country-house owners, who advertise the country as a picture of idyllic perfection to preserve their own private interests, and to maintain the idea of the desirability of their political model as shown in, for example, Wootton's 1749 landscape painting, *The Beauchamp-Proctor Family and Friends at Langley Park*. The satire of Mrs. Skewton and her "passion for cows" in *Dombey and Son* is a case in point: "I assure you, Mr Dombey, Nature intended me for an Arcadian. I am thrown away in society. Cows are my passion. What I have ever sighed for, has been to retreat to a Swiss farm, and live entirely surrounded by cows—and china" (456). "This calculating false old woman presents us with a travesty of Romantic passion, just as she overwhelms the natural with the artificial" (Parham, 92), and the striking zeugma, "cows and china," signals how her representation of the country is peopled only with animals—and those who possess china.

2. An Alternative Rhetoric of Landscape

Such deconstruction of typical imageries leads Dickens to elaborate his own alternative rhetoric of landscape, and he does so by working on the crucial issue of the viewpoint. As the Oxford English Dictionary defines the word, a landscape is "a view or prospect of natural scenery, such as can be taken in at a glance: a piece of country scenery." Landscape indeed implies prospect, it involves a viewer and a viewpoint, and preferably concerns the country.

Before detailing the characteristics of Dickens's unorthodox viewpoint about landscape, an essential opening remark seems to be that Dickens undoubtedly sees from within the maze of the city, and not from the belvedere of a country height. Dickens's base is rooted in the heart of the city of working London, and in *Sketches by Boz*, the young journalist proclaims his partiality to townscape:

> We have a most extraordinary partiality for lounging about the streets. Whenever we have an hour or two to spare, there is nothing we enjoy more than a little amateur vagrancy—walking up one street and down another, and staring into shop windows, and gazing about as if, instead of being on intimate terms with every shop and house in Holborn, the Strand, Fleet Street and Cheapside, the whole were an unknown region to our wandering mind. We revel in a crowd of any kind—a street "row" is our delight. (231)

Dickens destabilizes here another typical dichotomy, and associates idleness, lounging and—probably as a pert wink of double entendre—vagrancy, to the city, usually connected to hard work: he becomes a *flâneur* in London, trespassing indeed upon the grounds of the leisured classes, claiming idleness for the workers as well.[7] Indeed, the city is very rarely seen from a distance in his fiction, like a looming mushrooming danger threatening to engulf "wild, virgin" nature, approaching closer and closer, "denaturing the landscape" in Wordsworthian terms. To Dickens as well as to contemporary geographers, the idea of virgin Nature amounts to a myth (Amelot & al., Chartier, Adams and McShane, Cronon) and it is from this idea that he distances himself. It is the country that is most of the time in the distance, often assimilated, as has been seen, to a dark threatening region in which individuals were likely to feel alienated and isolated, while the city constitutes both his intimate landscape and his privileged standpoint. In fact, we could even argue that in *A Tale*

[7] As has been emphasised by Sicher, his viewpoint is obviously conditioned by his social origins: "That Dickens did not come from the propertied classes necessarily affected his reception of the literary conventions of the landscape, such as the country house" (25), but he here explicitly embraces the consequences of such determinism in his vision of the city, and defends an alternative viewpoint.

of Two Cities, the country, obviously doubly erased from the title, is captured and preserved as an *artefact* in the museum-city, assimilated to what Derrida calls a mere *archive*, i.e. the ideal conventional representation of a bygone age, thus consigning nature as a model configuration. The house of Doctor Manette is indeed described as a transplant of Arcadian delight within the city, as a bountiful garden of Eden and Lorry's Sunday retreat from the hustle of the city: "Forest-trees flourished, and wild flowers grew, and the hawthorn blossomed. […] It was a cool spot, staid but cheerful, a wonderful place for echoes, and a very harbour from the raging streets" (88). Yet, Dickens is crystal-clear: at the time of the narration, the haven does not exist any more, it has been swallowed by the city, and the blossoming trees are grammatically caught between two explicit prolepses of destruction: "There were few buildings **then**, north of the Oxford-road, and forest-trees flourished, and wild flowers grew, and the hawthorn blossomed, in the **now** vanished fields" (88, our emphasis). It is thus a mirage turned by the book into an *archive*, "un rassemblement des signes en un seul corpus, en un système ou une synchronie dans laquelle tous les éléments articulent l'unité d'une configuration idéale" (Derrida 14), what Derrida also calls a *prosthesis* for the modern world.

The first move about the viewpoint is that in his descriptions of landscapes, or cityscapes then, Dickens does away with the contemporary convention of the vertical panoptic vision from above. Totally in line with the contemporary positivist idea that the city could be closely and accurately mapped, cartographers and painters typically went all the way up to the dome of St Paul's to enjoy a comprehending, all-encompassing view of the city—when they did not climb the air in balloons. As Sicher explains,

> St Paul's, the centrepiece of Wren's city, was a favourite vantage point for medical investigators monitoring urban pollution, as well as tourists, novelists and artists. The panoramas from St Paul's were attempts to control the confusion and contrasts of the modern Babylon, to contain its threatening as well as exciting social diversity and disorienting immensity. (74).

Still higher, still more commanding, "the aerial view from a hot-air balloon was another contemporary attempt to overcome the limits of representation" (Sicher 81), as Jules Arnout's "Balloon view over London" famously illustrated in 1850.

Dickens explicitly acknowledged and refused the convention,[8] making it clear that his rejection was not to be attributed to profane lack of knowledge, but to a dialectical counterproposal. In a scene of description of London in *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens decides to dispense with vertical vision (though it would have provided a clearer view), and to situate the viewpoint at the level of the street:

> From any point of the high ridge of land northward, it might have been discerned that the loftiest buildings made an occasional struggle to get their heads above the foggy sea, and especially that the great dome of Saint Paul's seemed to die hard; but this was not perceivable in the streets at their feet, where the whole metropolis was a heap of vapour charged with muffled sound of wheels, and enfolding a gigantic catarrh. (bk. 3, ch. 1, 420)

Both commanding viewpoints in the country and the authoritative viewing platform from Saint Paul's are dismissed, and the omniscient narrator dispenses with his own prerogative of the bird's-eye view to horizontalize the viewpoint at the very feet of the characters. In Dickens's cityscapes, the viewpoint does not *comprehend* the city, it is *comprehended* by it, within it. Quite radically in his novels, the landscape is very often not *in front of* the viewing characters or narrators, organized by a perspective and a vanishing point; it is *all around* them, it encompasses them and loses them among multiple perspectives, and the vanishing point is multiplied and disorganized by innumerable lines of escape. This is quite telling in *The Old Curiosity Shop*:

> **On every side**, and far as the eye could see into the heavy distance, tall chimneys, crowding on each other, and presenting that endless repetition of the same dull, ugly form, which is the horror of oppressive dreams. […] and still, **before, behind, and to the right and left**, was **the same interminable perspective** of brick towers, never ceasing in their black vomit, blasting all things living or inanimate, shutting out the face of day, and closing in on all these horrors with a dense dark cloud. (ch. 45, 335, our emphasis)

"On every side, before, behind, and to the right and left": obviously, the landscape here is not an object of knowledge, spread at the feet of domineering men of power; it surrounds the characters, it becomes a maze of possibilities, defeating understanding, blurred by fog and smoke, highly opaque.

The same technique is applied in *Little Dorrit*: here again the viewpoint, limited to Mr. Clennan's, concentrates on the lowest point of the city, explicitly leaving St Paul's

[8] In Hollington (*Dickens and the Grotesque*) and Drew (*Dickens the Journalist*) attention is rightly drawn to Dickens's interest in the aerial viewpoint of Asmodeus in *Gil Blas* and to the panoramic view of London offered from the clocktower of St. Paul's, in *Master Humphrey's Clock* no. 45.

aside, and settling by the river: "He crossed by St Paul's and went down, at a long angle, almost to the water's edge, through some of the crooked and descending streets which lie (and lay more crookedly and closely then) between the river and Cheapside" (bk. 1, ch. 3, 31). Here again, the character is totally engulfed in a 360° landscape:

> Mr Arthur Clennam, newly arrived from Marseilles by way of Dover, and by Dover coach the Blue-eyed Maid, **sat in the window** of a coffee-house on Ludgate Hill. Ten thousand responsible houses **surrounded** him […]. Fifty thousand lairs **surrounded** him." (bk. 1, ch. 3, 31, our emphasis)

This is all the more surprising as Clennam stands at the window, with the landscape typically structured by the window-frame. Dickens conjures up the convention of the frame, the better to dispense with it, to introduce landscape *all around*: once more, the landscape is not statically exposed to Clennam's vision, it is Clennam who is exposed to the active landscape.

Such levelling of the viewpoint brings about two major consequences, two further and interconnected elements to deconstruct the conventions of landscape: movement replaces stasis and consequently, fragmentation replaces totality. Quite tellingly, Dickens's cityscapes are both eminently mobile and quite invariably fragmented, both characteristics preventing any stable construction of authoritative representation, and challenging the very possibility of objective knowledge. As characters, or even in a much more narratively unconventional way, the omniscient narrator himself, walk the streets of London, they are unable to build a coherent whole view of the cityscape: they are assaulted by transitory fragments, they catch glimpses of random bits and pieces. As Oliver Twist first arrives in London, by night, there is no wide angle, no panorama, only a succession of disconnected close-ups, only "a few hasty glances on either side of the way, as he passed along" (63). The images pile up like successive flashes that Oliver cannot make sense of: "a good many small shops," "heaps of children," "disconnected little knots of houses," and this is made worse in a typical market scene, some chapters down in the novel.

> It was market-morning. […] Countrymen, butchers, drovers, hawkers, boys, thieves, idlers, and vagabonds of every low grade, were mingled together in a mass; the whistling of drovers, the barking dogs, the bellowing and plunging of the oxen, the bleating of sheep, the grunting and squeaking of pigs, the cries of hawkers, the shouts, oaths, and quarrelling on all sides; the ringing of bells and roar of voices, that issued from every public-house; the crowding, pushing, driving, beating, whooping and yelling; the hideous and discordant din that resounded from every corner

> of the market; and the unwashed, unshaven, squalid, and dirty figures constantly running to and fro, and bursting in and out of the throng rendered it a stunning and bewildering scene, which quite confounded the senses. (ch. 21, 153)

Though here, the first sentence sets an apparently static scene with a state-verb, defining the setting and referring to the well-identified contemporary tradition of the market scene, the cityscape is obviously marked by unceasing movement. The pervasive anaphoric ING forms, the extremely quick rhythm owing to the dominant structure of juxtaposition, the process of acceleration due to the abundance of commas, and the many verbs of movement in random directions all give the sense of an eminently mobile scene, that cannot be stabilized in a static picture. Crucially, landscape is also made mobile by the many contradictory stimuli: the landscape is not only to be seen, it is perceived in a disordered way through all the senses: it is heard, it is smelt, it is felt, and thus made highly subjective—while vision typically passes for the objectifying sense. This line of analysis is taken up by the "sensitive" current in contemporary geography, claiming that landscape involves the active mobilisation of all the senses, that a landscape is also a conjunction of sights, smells, noises (Besse). The picture in *Oliver Twist* is extremely "discordant," senses are "confounded," as the perceived landscape is caught in a continuous process of mutation: there is no possibility of rational composition, no foreground, no background, no perspective, only a shifting surface.

Many more examples of mobility and ensuing fragmentation of the landscape can be found in Dickens's novels. As for mobility, a common characteristic is that most of the time, the viewer is on the move, he does not pause to watch, and this turns the landscape into a sort of never stabilized tracking process, into what has been called "le paysage-itinérance" ("itinerant landscape"), in between landscape as existence, and landscape as experience (Griselin & al.). It is the case, for example, in the already mentioned Alpine scene in *David Copperfield*:

> I see myself passing on among the novelties of foreign towns, palaces, cathedrals, temples, pictures, castles, tombs, fantastic streets—the old abiding places of History and Fancy—as a dreamer might; bearing my painful load through all, and hardly conscious of the objects as they fade before me. (ch. 58, 814)

Such anachronic, highly innovative techniques of tracking and fading highlight the transiency of the landscape, and in the city, the technique is exactly the same. Oliver

"walks on" when he first enters the city, and London is described *along his way*, seen through his moving eye and fleeting perceptions by the omniscient narrator (ch. 5), while in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, London is temporarily captured as a succession of unstable snapshots, "along the way" of the characters, "advancing more and more." They can see only what is "by the wayside," and the cityscape emerges and fades in front of them: "Dismantled houses here and there appeared, tottering to the earth; […] then came more" (ch.45, 335). In *A Tale of two Cities*, the last but one chapter radicalizes the process as the scenery, seen from the coach that brings Lorry and the Manettes back to London, literally flashes by them: it becomes the subject of movement, "une image-mouvement," to use Deleuze's vocabulary, image-perception, image-action, image-affection all at the same time:

> Houses in twos and threes pass by us, solitary farms, ruinous buildings, dye-works, tanneries, and the like, open country, avenues of leafless trees. […] Out of the open country, in again among ruinous buildings, solitary farms, dye-works, tanneries, and the like, cottages in twos and threes, avenues of leafless trees. […] Is not this the same place twice over? (bk. 3, ch. 13, 342)

Still in Deleuze's vocabulary, the landscape "gathers speed," it is completely deterritorialized as it becomes a surface for the projection of perceptions and affects: it further loses the characters instead of constituting objective landmarks of their progress. Typically then, and in virtually all the novels, the city becomes a maze, where progression is necessarily hazardous, random, disordered, and above all where landscape is not a distanced surface to be gazed at, but concrete material that is lived in, and that resists both interpretation and physical practice:

> They **crossed** from the Angel **into** St. John's Road; struck **down** the small street which terminates at Sadler's Wells Theatre; **through** Exmouth Street and Coppice Row; **down** the little court by the side of the workhouse; **across** the classic ground which once bore the name of Hockley-in-the-Hole; thence **into** little Saffron Hill; and so **into** Saffron Hill the Great: **along** which the Dodger scudded at a rapid pace, directing Oliver to follow close at his heels. (*Oliver Twist*, ch. 7, 55; our emphasis)

The cityscape fails to order reality, it becomes an entangled moving space that cannot focus.

At this point, we can add that we can find in the novels the same kind of radicalization as far as fragmentation is concerned: indeed, the selection of fragments is often said to be made at random, the selected bits seem to have absolutely no metonymic or representative quality, they do not enable the viewer to

abstract a wider interpretation or a more general truth. This is perhaps most obvious in *Martin Chuzzlewit*:

> After the first glance, there were slight features in the midst of this crowd of objects, which sprung out from the mass without any reason, as it were, and took hold of the attention whether the spectator would or no. […] The man who was mending a pen at an upper window over the way, became of paramount importance in the scene, and made a blank in it, ridiculously disproportionate in its extent, when he retired. (ch. 9, 130)

Within an unidentifiable "mass," an indiscriminate "crowd," elements are selected randomly "without any reason," and some of them may thus take a totally "disproportionate" importance, which turns the landscape into a highly contingent process, subjected to arbitrary stimuli. As Dickens thus dispenses with such crucial rules as selection, composition and proportion, the conventions of the landscape are given quite a rough ride, and the cognitive process Victorian readers had been trained in when confronted by a landscape, meets with significant resistance.

In the process and crucially, Dickens comments upon, and takes sides in, the politics of taste and knowledge that had governed England since the 18th century. As John Barrell (1990) argues in an extremely enlightening paper,

> For Reynolds, and for almost all writers in the 18th century in England, there should be a distinction between those who can, and those who cannot form general ideas, normally by the processes of abstraction; between those who can compose details into a whole, or compose a whole by the elimination of detail, and on the other hand, the ignorant who, as Reynolds explains, "cannot comprehend a whole, nor even what it means." (24)

Pleasure is thus derived from "abstracting the essential from its confusing particulars, and reducing those particulars to order" (Barrell 25). In Reynolds's model, in this "distinction between panoramic, and ideal landscape, on the one hand, and, on the other, actual portraits of views, and representations of enclosed, occluded landscapes, with no great depth of field" (Barrell 20), Dickens undoubtedly took sides, and decidedly went from the second one, ranking himself among Reynolds's "ignorant," focusing, myopically, on the objects themselves and not on the abstraction of their ideal relations, on "an immense heap of *little* things," as Coleridge disparagingly put it (349): he chooses details versus completeness, accidents versus ideals. Here of course, the theory of taste supports a political stance, a difference between two categories of people:

> Some comprehend, others are comprehended; some are fit to survey the extensive panorama, some are confined within one or other of the micro-prospects which, to the comprehensive observer, are parts of a wider landscape, but which, to those confined within them, are all they see. (Barrell 28)

If for Reynolds, "A hundred-thousand near-sighted men, that see only what is just before them, make no equivalent to one man whose view extends to the whole horizon around him" (Barrell 30), Dickens chooses to be part of the popular hundred thousand. He claims separation from the liberal men and the liberal arts, insisting that he deliberately elects details vs. panorama, inclusion vs. abstraction, accidents vs. ideals as the best way to understand the newly-born cityscape. A passage from *Barnaby Rudge* is extremely clear in this respect:

> **And now he approached** the great city, which lay **outstretched** before him **like a dark shadow on the ground**, reddening the sluggish air with a deep dull light, that told of **labyrinths** of public ways and shops, and swarms of busy people. **Approaching nearer and nearer** yet, this halo began to fade, and the causes which produced it slowly to develop themselves. Long lines of poorly lighted streets might be faintly traced, with here and there a lighter spot, where lamps were clustered about a square or market, or round some great building; after a time **these grew more distinct**, and the lamps themselves were visible; slight yellow specks, that seemed to be rapidly snuffed out one by one as intervening obstacles hid them from the sight. Then **sounds** arose—the striking of church clocks, the distant bark of dogs, the hum of traffic in the streets; then **outlines** might be traced—tall steeples looming in the air, and piles of unequal roofs oppressed by chimneys; then the noise swelled into a louder sound, and **forms grew more distinct and numerous still**, and **London—visible in the darkness by its own faint light, and not by that of Heaven—was at hand**. (ch. 3, 26, our emphasis)

It is only when immersed in the cityscape that the viewer can grasp some of its meaning. From afar, from "Heaven," i.e. a position of representative omniscience, the outstretched city is but a dark shadow, an opaque labyrinth: it is only "by **its** faint light" that it may be adequately approached, and this extremely metatextual quote can read as an elaborate rewriting of the aesthetics of cityscape. Indeed, Dickens shows here that "he doubted whether the omniscience of the panoramic view contained an adequate epistemology for the modern city" (Sicher, 76), and "far from being easily visible, Dickens's London was a changing and confused flux of life, […] a text that could not be decoded by means of conventional representation" (Sicher, 43). In Dickens's novels, no description can give a sense of the totality of the city,

because it is caught in a process of becoming, because it changes so fast. It forces the reader to reconsider the epistemological model of both positivism and the liberal arts, and to renounce the ideal of omniscience—it also celebrates the birth and empowerment of a new social class probably, (partly) disencumbered from its allegiance to liberal men and their dominant ideology.

Indeed and in conclusion, such questioning of the epistemological model of the landscape is a way for Dickens to reappropriate the landscape and offer another, more intimate mode of representation, to question the fact that landscape should be the private representational ground of the landed gentry. He questions the fundamental liberal link between the ability to generalize a correct taste in landscape, and the claim to be capable of exercizing aesthetic and political authority. In his seminal book of geography, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, Cosgrove proved that landscape study was located "within a progressive debate about society and culture," that landscape was "an ideological concept," representing,

> a way in which certain classes of people have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature, and through which they have underlined and communicated their own social role and that of others with respect to external nature. (15)

Quite clearly, Dickens rewrites the representation, and does two crucial things: in Cosgrove's categories, he focuses on *insiders' landscape* and dismisses the authoritative version of *outsiders' landscape*. As Will Fern powerfully argued, as he radically separated himself from the drawing ladies,

> the insider does not enjoy the privilege of being able to walk away from the scene as we can walk away from a framed picture or a tourist viewpoint. He is 'an existential insider' for whom what we may call landscape is a dimension of existence, collectively produced, lived, and maintained. (Cosgrove, 19)

He does lack perspective, but perspective is also an ideological technique of composition that reinforces ideas of subjective control of an objective environment:

> It offers a view of the world directed at the experience of one individual at a given moment in time when the arrangement of the constituent forms is pleasing, uplifting; it then represents his view as universally valid by claiming for it the status of reality. The experience of the insider, the landscape as subject, and the collective life within it are implicitly denied. (Cosgrove, 26)

Dickens rehabilitates and explores the acknowledged subjectivity of the insider, and exposes as an instrument of control the spectatorial distance of the outsider, what Cosgrove calls "the landscape way of seeing" (44).

We could thus propose, by way of conclusion, that Dickens divests on many occasions the landscape of its spectatorial dimension. He favours "vernacular landscape" to "political landscape" (Jackson[9]), that is to say a landscape that is the spontaneous result of a social practice, and not the produce of a centralized form of representation, naturalizing the norms it produces. What is remarkable, though, is that, as opposed to the general direction of Jackson's analysis, which defines "political landscape" as a regrettable modern form of development, Dickens situates it radically and optimistically in the past, as a bygone illusion. To him, the "vernacular landscape" is neither in the country nor in a bygone time, but *right in* the ultra modernity of the newly born city. No nostalgia for arcadian vernacularity is to be found: it is to be built collectively here and now, and the city is the magic lantern that creates it. Dickens *portrays* a landscape[10] that is more lived in than seen, more practised than composed.

Bibliography

ADAMS, Jonathan S., and Thomas O. MCSHANE. *The Myth of Wild Africa: Conservation Without Illusion.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1996. Print.

BAHUCHET, Serge, and Jean-Marie BETSCH. "L'agriculture itinérante sur brûlis, une menace sur la forêt tropicale humide?" *Revue d'ethnoécologie* 768 (2012). Web. 10 August 2014.

BARRELL, John. "The Public Prospect and the Private View: the Politics of Taste in 18th Century Britain". *Reading Landscape. Country—City—Capital*. Ed. Simon Pugh. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990. 19–40. Print.

BERTRAND, C., et G. BERTRAND. *Une géographie traversière, L'environnement à travers territoires et temporalités*, Paris: Arguments, 2002. Print.

[9] Jackson was another of those Anglo-Saxon geographers who, along with Cosgrove, analyzed in the 1980 the political instrumentalisation of landscape, and worked on the link between the naturalisation of representation and the reinforcement of political control. We are indebted to Serge Briffaud, whose "habilitation à diriger les recherches," presented in 2013 under the title "Le Paysage, le regard et le temps: enquête historique et géographique sur l'empaysement des espaces et des societies" and yet unpublished, has been an invaluable help for this paper.

[10] It would be interesting indeed to concentrate on Dickens's blurring of the distinctions between the two categories of portrait and landscape, on the fact that Dickens quite often proposes an anthropomorphic landscape, amounting in fact to a series of monstrous portraits.

BESSE, Jean-Marc. "Le paysage, espace sensible, espace public". META. *Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and Practical Philosophy* 2010.2 (2010): 259–86. Print.

BRIFFAUD, Serge. *Le paysage, le regard et le temps. Enquête historique et géographique sur l'empaysagement des espaces et des sociétés*. Mémoire pour l'habilitation à diriger des recherches (HDR), Pessac: Université Bordeaux Montaigne, 2013. Print.

BROSSEAU, Marc. *Des romans-géographes*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996. Print.

BURKE, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and* Beautiful. 1757. New York: Oxford UP. 2008. Print.

BUZARD, James. *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and the Ways to Culture 1800–1818.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993. Print.

CHARTIER, Denis. "La biodiversité est-elle encore naturelle?" *Écologie & Politique* 30 (2005): 13–110.

COLERIDGE, Samuel T. *Collected Letters*. Oxford: E.L. Griggs, 1956. Print

COSGROVE, Denis E. *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. London: Croon Helm, 1984. Print.

CRONON, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature". *Environmental History* 1.1 (1996): 7–28.

DERRIDA, Jacques. *Mal d'Archive*. Paris: Editions Galilée, 2008. Print.

DELEUZE, Gilles. *L'image-mouvement*. Paris: Minuit, 1983. Print.

——. *L'image-temps*. Paris: Minuit, 1985. Print.

DICKENS, Charles. *Barnaby Rudge*. 1841. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982. Print.

——. *David Copperfield*. 1849. The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981. Print.

——. *Dombey and Son*. 1846. The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982. Print.

——. *Little Dorrit*. 1855. The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1963. Print.

——. *Martin Chuzzlewit*. 1843. The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1959. Print.

——. *The Old Curiosity Shop*. 1840. The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens. London: Oxford UP, 1960. Print.

——. *Oliver Twist*. 1837. The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981. Print.

——. *Our Mutual Friend*. 1864. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.

——. *Sketches by Boz*. 1833-36; 1838 and 1840; 1837-39. The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1957.

——. *A Tale of Two Cities*. 1859. Oxford World's Classics. Ed. Andrew Sanders. Oxford: Oxford UP 2008. Print.

DOUNIAS, Edmond. "La diversité des agricultures itinérantes sur brûlis". *Les peuples des forêts tropicales aujourd'hui. Vol. II: Une approche thématique*. Ed. S. Bahuchet. Bruxelles: APFT-ULB (2000): 65–105. Print.

DREW, John. *Dickens the Journalist*. New York: Palgrave, 2003. Print.

FAIRHEAD, James, and Melissa LEACH. *Misreading the African Landscape: Society and Ecology in a Forest-Savanna Mosaic.* African Studies Series. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 1996. Print.

FREMONT, Armand. "La région, espace vécu". *Mélanges offerts à A. Meynier*. Rennes: PUR, (1972): 663–78. Print.

GRISELIN, Madeleine, Sébastien NAGELEISEN, and Serge ORMEAUX. "Entre le paysage-existence et le paysage-experience, le paysage-itinérance". *Actes sémiotiques, actes du colloque Paysages & valeurs: de la représentation à la simulation*. Web. 17 March 2008.

HARPER, Janice. *Endangered Species: Health, Illness and Death among Madagascar's People of the Forest.* Durham: Carolina Academic P, 2002. Print.

HUMBOLDT, Alexandre de. *Cosmos, essai d'une description physique du monde*. Trans. Ch. Galusky. Milan: Turati, 1848. Print.

HOLLINGTON, Michael. *Dickens and the Grotesque*. London: Croom Helm, 1984. Print.

——, and F. ORESTANO, eds. *Dickens in Italy: Little Dorrit and Pictures from Italy*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009. Print.

JACKSON, John B. *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1984. Print.

JAËCK, Nathalie. "L'infini comme figure de la subversion narrative dans *Great Expectations*". *L'Infini*. Ed. Ronald Shusterman. Pessac: PUB, (2001): 263–77. Print.

LEVY, Bertrand. *Géographie et littérature. Une synthèse historique*. *Le Globe* 146 (2006): 25–52.

PARHAM, John. "Dickens in the City: Science, Technology, Ecology in the Novels of Charles Dickens". *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long 19th Century* 10. *Dickens and Science*. 2010. Web. 2 July 2014.

PUGH, Simon, ed. *Reading Landscape. Country – City – Capital*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990. Print.

SANDERS, Andrew. *Charles Dickens*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.

SICHER, Efraim. *Rereading the City Rereading Dickens. Representation, the Novel, and Urban Realism*. New-York: AMS Press, 2003. Print.

TISSIER, Jean-Louis. "Géographie et littérature". *Encyclopédie de la géographie*. Paris: Economica (1992): 235–54. Print.

VESCOVI, Alessandro, Luisa Villa, and Paul Vita, eds. *The Victorians and Italy: Literature, Travel, Politics and Art*. Monza: Polimetrica, 2009. Print.