

ANIMALS IN DICKENS' WORLD VIEW

by

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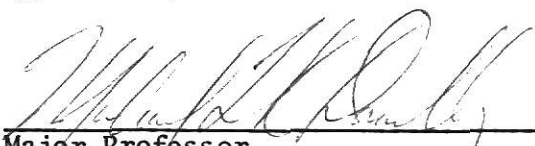
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Several critics in the last century have commented on Dickens' use of animals in his novels. Unfortunately, the critics' treatment has all too often been brief and superficial. Actually, however, the novelist's menagerie deserves more attention. Dickens' animals are hardly ever one-sided portraits; instead, they work actively in the plots and underscore some of the major themes of the novels. At times, they help measure their master's influence on the society around them. At other times, they act as foils to their master's personalities. Occasionally, they work as symbols. Whatever their function, the animals in Dickens are complex creatures. As they interact with the humans in the novels, they become worthy of study.

It is not surprising to find Dickens including animals in his writing. Animals, throughout the centuries, have held a place of honor in the English heart, probably due to the British sporting tradition. It would be difficult, for example, to imagine the English country squire without his fine horses and pack of hounds. These wealthy gentlemen also readily furnished their estates with animal art. For this reason, an eighteenth-century painter such as George Stubbs could gain vast popularity with his horse portraits. In their love of animals and animal art, the Victorians were, to a large extent, merely following a tradition well established in English history. Victorians particularly are known for their preference for sentimentalized, domestic animals. The reasons for this attitude are really rather logical. First of all the Victorians, as we know, placed great value on the domestic. The simple life which centered on home and family was quite attractive to them. Therefore, paintings of domestic, family animals such as dogs, cats, and even

small ponies were especially prized. Also, we must remember that the Victorian Age saw a rise in industrialism; a new middle class was making its impact on the country. Of course, such wealthy individuals needed art for their homes--but their demands were somewhat different from their wealthy predecessors. Kenneth Clark analyzes this shift in the taste of British art patrons:

In the mid-nineteenth century new patrons of art began to lose patience with the mythological and historical subjects that had formed no part of their education, and, as had happened before in Rome, they turned gratefully to the representation of animals.¹ Animal painters made fortunes for themselves and their dealers.

So suddenly, there was a huge market for works which depicted domestic animals, living in their normal environments, engaged in everyday activities. Some of the outstanding painters of the time, who were happy to oblige their wealthy patrons' requests were Charles Hancock, James Ward, and Abraham and T. S. Cooper. It was also quite common during this time to commission these gifted artists to paint a favorite pet--and bend reality to give the animal qualities which simply were not there. Again, Clark notes:

Sentimentality, in which feelings are exaggerated and cheapened to increase their popular appeal, was not unknown in the eighteenth century, but in the nineteenth century, with the growth of a wider public, sentimentality became rampant, and naturally made itself felt in the representation of animals. It was accompanied by the rather irritating habit of inventing animals with human characteristics.²

To some extent, Dickens' use of animals in his art is another example of his natural attunement to his audience. As I hope to show, this aspect of his novels, like the rest of his art, often rose above mere popular treatment. First, however, to appreciate a consideration of Dickens' more sentimental and simple animal scenes, we might compare him to another "animal populizer," Sir Edwin Landseer.

Although Landseer was an incredibly gifted painter and sculptor, he often succumbed to the pressure of his audience to "cheapen" his work through excessive sentimentality. Still, his work was well accepted by the Royal Academy and critics of Ruskin's caliber. And, naturally, the huge success which he enjoyed opened a door for many imitators of his style. As much as he is berated today, Landseer was the quintessential Victorian animal painter. Although he rendered many quite realistic works, it is the sympathetic expression, imbuing his creatures with human qualities, which insures his fame today.

One of the most extreme examples of Landseer's sentimentality is an obviously serious portrait called 'Good Doggie,' which shows a Pomeranian at a prie-dieu, his sparkling eyes raised to heaven in prayer. Of course, this picture was done at the request of a wealthy patron, Lady Marchison. Still, we know that it was displayed at the Royal Academy, so Landseer must have been proud of his work.³ Today, we must feel differently. Since we are inundated by the popular press with countless pictures of cute kittens spilling cream or debonaire dogs playing cards, Landseer's work probably disturbs us. Yet, its success informs us about the tastes of the Victorian public who sought out such unusual portraiture.

Yet, those who sponsored these animal painters were not only the remaining country gentry and provincial nouveaux riches. In fact, Queen Victoria was one of Landseer's regular customers. Time and again, the monarch commissioned the artist to paint a favorite dog, the Prince Consort coming back from a successful hunt with a large stag, or the royal family in the Scottish highlands with their beloved miniature ponies. Naturally, it is easy to see why Landseer appreciated such patronage. And since the Queen had such a great influence on the tastes and lifestyles of her subjects, it

follows that the sentimental art she enjoyed would be greeted well by the people. By pleasing the Queen, Landseer was insuring his reputation with the people.

One gauge of Landseer's skill and wide popular appeal was his generally favorable remarks from the critics. Although Ruskin was not always kind in his critiques of Landseer's works, he did give favorable reviews to a painting entitled The Highland Shepherd's Chief Mourner. Ruskin says of the work, ". . . the picture is separated at once from hundreds of equal merit, as far as mere painting goes, by which it ranks as a work of high art, and stamps its author not as a neat imitator of the texture of a skin, or the fold of a drapery, but as the man of mind."⁴ The art critic is clearly touched by the depiction of this faithful dog, demonstrating that he could accept high sentimentality when it was coupled with a quiet nobility.

Clearly, we cannot say that Landseer's paintings are all identical in their degree of sentimentality. In 1839, he could present the rather frivolous Dignity and Impudence, which shows a bloodhound and a Scotch terrier gazing from the same doghouse. (The modern audience probably objects to the moralistic title of the painting as much as anything.) Then, only twelve years later, in 1851, he could exhibit the majestic deer painting, The Monarch of the Glen, a work which seems to sum up the self-assured confidence of the Victorian Age. Likewise, Dickens' sentimental animal portraits work on different levels--no matter where they appear in his canon. The range of the novelist's creatures includes both light sentimentality and heavy symbolism (and anything between the two extremes).

Indeed, we realize that Dickens shares many of Landseer's qualities as a popular artist. Both men were, in fact, quintessential Victorians, artists similarly influenced by the temper of their times. Both men combined

sentimentality with striking realism to please a wide audience. While I am not suggesting that either artist had a direct influence on the other's work, I feel it is fair to compare them in the way they treat animals. Nor am I the first to make such a comparison. As early as 1851, David Masson, a contemporary critic, saw connections between the work of the two men. Masson suggests that we should look at Dickens "in the figure department." He continues, "Here he can be an animal-painter with Landseer when he likes, as witness his dogs, ponies, and ravens. . ."⁵

If, then, the parallel with Landseer is sound, we can expect animals in Dickens to function in many different ways, from mere ornaments in the background to rather significant symbols. It is my purpose in this essay to prove that expectation accurate with the help of several creations from Dickens' work.

Certainly, Dickens is quite capable of being highly sentimental and moralistic in some of his animal portraits throughout his career, and it is this quality in some of his writing which we can object to as being insipid and contrived. In essence, he is exploiting feelings about animals that he can count on his audience already to possess and share with him. He assumes that we will love them because he says they are lovable. Dickens is, naturally, treading on fairly safe ground here; he can count on a large group of his readers to be sentimental about dogs, for instance. And it must be admitted that it is easy to see dogs as nearly human in their mannerisms. They have large, expressive eyes, and they quickly learn the looks and behavior traits that will please their masters. Dickens is cognizant of our weaknesses for canines, and often he tries for the utmost emotional effect whenever he includes them in the novels.

For example, in The Old Curiosity Shop (1841), Little Nell and her grandfather, while fleeing from London, stop at a roadside inn called The Jolly Sandboys. There, they encounter a man named Jerry, who enters with his troupe of five performing dogs. Immediately, the reader's sympathy is gained for the animals--because the rather bedraggled group must enter the room on their hind legs. Dickens also forces us to pity the creatures for the way they are dressed; their owner has not given them the natural dignity due to dogs:

. . . each of them wore a kind of little coat of some gaudy colour trimmed with tarnished spangles, and one of them had a cap upon his head, tied very carefully under his chin, which had fallen down upon his nose and completely obscured one eye; add to this, that the gaudy coats were all wet through and discoloured with rain, and that the wearers were splashed and dirty . . .⁶

This, then, is a graphic description of the miserable appearance of these dogs, and it gives some indication of the many indignities they are made to suffer. Pedro (the dog with the hat over his eye), Carlo, and the rest are obviously downtrodden and exploited beings. Later in this short episode, Jerry adds further insult when he feeds the dogs. Because one poor dog has lost his owner a half-penny that day, he must go without supper and play the Old Hundredth on a barrel organ while his fellows are thrown scraps of food. Clearly, Dickens has created a pathetic picture of cruelty toward animals here, but as I said before, he is depending on our love of dogs to make that injustice reasonable. At best, the episode in The Jolly Sandboys is a brief sketch to prove a minor point; the episode is one more instance of the inhumanity which Little Nell finds around her in the outside world.

The pleasant Christmas book, The Cricket on the Hearth (1845), also includes a sentimentalized portrait of a dog named Boxer--but, in this case, the dog is far from miserable. This vigorous canine is the pet of John

Peerybingle, the carrier, and he always accompanies his master on his rounds.

When we first see Boxer, we know that he is a dog of explosive action:

Everybody knew him--especially the fowls and pigs, who when they saw him approaching, with his body all on one side and that knob of a tail making the most of itself in the air, immediately withdrew into remote back settlements.⁷

Boxer is completely consistent in his actions, and we may say that he is rather crudely drawn. To a very great extent, he is only in the novella to celebrate marital bliss between the Peerybingles (as is the cricket). When things are bad for the couple, when suspicions of infidelity arise, Boxer does not make an appearance. But when tensions are smoothed over at the end of the book, the dog is there to rejoice:

There wanted but one living creature to make the party complete; and, in the twinkling of an eye, there he was, very thirsty with hard running, and engaged in hopeless endeavors to squeeze his head into a narrow pitcher. He had gone with the cart to its journey's end, very much disgusted with the absence of his master, and stupendously rebellious to the Deputy. After lingering about the stable for some little time, vainly attempting to incite the old horse to the mutinous act of returning on his own account, he had walked into the tap-room and laid himself down before the fire.⁸

In analyzing this short sketch, we can recognize that Dickens has a keen sense of observation. We have no doubt that such active dogs exist, for we have probably encountered them at one time or another. Yet, it must also be apparent that Dickens has exaggerated and personified Boxer to a great degree. Real dogs surely do not consciously go about "inciting horses to mutiny." Yet, this is the sentimental quality which both Dickens and Landseer enjoyed. It is no surprise, then, that Dickens could persuade the great animal painter to do a sketch of Boxer for the first edition of The Cricket on the Hearth--the only illustration that Landseer would ever do for him.⁹ Apparently, the figure of Boxer was close enough to his artistic tastes for him to make the effort.

Another highly sentimentalized portrait of a dog is in Hard Times (1854). Merrylegs is no doubt inspired by the performing dogs in The Old Curiosity Shop; the little dog here is a part of Sleary's circus, and he is owned by Jupe, the circus clown. Actually, we never see Merrylegs per se in the novel, but his presence is very much felt from the way others talk about him. For example, Sissy Jupe tells Louisa about how the unhappy clown used to treat his dog:

'Father, soon after they came home from performing, told Merrylegs to jump up on the backs of the two chairs and stand across them--which is one of his tricks. He looked at father, and didn't do it at once. Everything of father's had gone wrong that night, and he hadn't pleased the public at all. He cried out that the very dog knew he was failing, and had no compassion on him. Then he beat the dog, and I was frightened and said, 'Father, father! Pray don't hurt the creature who is so fond of you! Oh, Heaven forgive you, father, stop!' And he stopped, and the dog was bloody, and father lay down crying on the floor with the dog in his arms, and the dog licked his face.'¹⁰

This is quite a pathetic scene, and Dickens definitely tries to overdramatize it to impress his audience. The excessive sentiment involved in the matter of a despairing clown with his more-than-faithful dog is almost more than a modern reader can take. Although Merryleg's loyalty makes him somewhat more interesting than Boxer, the trouble is that the loyalty theme is stretched beyond reasonable limits. One of the subplots in Hard Times has Jupe leaving the circus accompanied by Merrylegs. Many years intervene before an aging dog comes back to Sleary's circus, searching for his master, now dead and buried. At the end of the novel, Mr. Sleary tells the details of this phenomenal reappearance to Mr. Gradgrind (if the reader can muddle through Sleary's outrageous lisp):

'He had traveled a long way, he wath in very bad condithion, he wath lame, and pretty well blind. He went round to our children, one after another, ath if he wath a theeking for a child he knowed; and then he come to me, and throwed hithelf up behind, and thtlood

on hith two fore-legth, weak ath he wath, and then he wagged hith tail and died.'¹¹

Again, this is well-controlled theatricalism--pressing for the ultimate sentimentality. Throughout, Dickens works like a minister preaching an emotional funeral sermon for someone he has never met. Can we say that we know Merrylegs if we have never seen him? Can we legitimately feel sorry for the dog's death when Dickens is so obviously pulling the strings of our hearts? Perhaps the Victorian audience, already fans of high sentimentality, were moved by the pathetic scenes with Merrylegs. But the modern reader, aware of Dickens' propensity for some rather cheap theatrical pathos, feels at once betrayed and disturbed.

Fortunately, however, Dickens' animal portraits are not always so patently emotional, theatrical, and ready-made. Other creatures in the novels are given more individual personalities, and their presence in the fabric of the prose is understandable and essential. In short, they are a part of the overall view of the novels. They work with the humans there, and can tell us much about these individuals and about society.

Recent critical study of Dickens' world view indicates that my assumptions about the interrelatedness between humans and animals are reasonable. In the twentieth century, critics have often written about everything in Dickens' prose working together--people, inanimate objects, even Nature. Clearly, the unity in the novels runs deeper than the plot level. For example, A. E. Dyson speaks of the symbolism in the writing, a feature which adds a definite resonance to the plots.¹² Dickens undoubtedly tries for a rich texture in his novels; in essence, each novel is a complicated tapestry which shows us a veritable catalogue of the universe as

Dickens sees it. Naturally, animals, because they exist in the tangible world, would find a place in the tapestry.

To reinforce Dyson's views, we can look at the opinions of Edgar Johnson, who also is interested in the richness of Dickens' world view. Comparing the novelist to Whitman, he considers Dickens' "comprehensive delight in all experience."¹³ In every novel, we see Dickens trying to capture life through all five senses--then celebrating what he has isolated. Johnson truly feels that the novelist realizes Walter Pater's goal to lead "a life of constant and eager observation."¹⁴ Again, since animals were such a significant part of Victorian society, Dickens feels compelled to observe them closely and give an accurate account of their association with Man.

Still, that relationship between Man and beast may not be as simple as we might think. Dorothy Van Ghent, in her analysis of Great Expectations, proposes that, due to the ravages of industrialism in Victorian England, people were becoming things, and material objects were acquiring human characteristics. At least, that is the process occurring in several of Dickens' novels. It follows that we can perhaps not always look at animals as mere ornaments in the background. Often, they can take on a much more serious importance in each individual work. It is even conceivable that they could have more "human" qualities than their "dehumanized" homo sapiens cohorts.

Miss Van Ghent obviously subscribes to the notion that Dickens' world view is comprehensive, and that there are firm connections between everything in the novelist's universe. Thus, she dismisses the objections of critics who complain about implausible coincidences in Dickens' writing; the texture of the novels is too tight for arbitrary circumstance:

. . . in a universe that is nervous throughout, a universe in which nervous ganglia stretch through both people and their external environment, so that a change in the human can infect the currents of the air and the sea, events and confrontations that seem to abrogate the laws of physical mechanics can logically be brought about. In this sense, the apparent coincidences in Dickens actually obey a causal order--not of physical mechanics but of moral dynamics.¹⁵

Surely the place which best shows Dickens working out this idea of interrelatedness is in Bleak House (1853). Here, the characters affect each other for the good or the bad. Nature, principally in the form of fog or infected air, also touches everyone and everything. In effect, Dickens spins a web for his characters, and no one is left uncaptured--struggle as they might. Angus Wilson beautifully analyzes the sticky situation Dickens has created in the universe of Bleak House:

. . . he never allows the reader to forget that, however wide the tapestry, it is a vertical web with the Lord Chancellor on his woolsack and Sir Leicester Dedlock in his country mansion at the top of a heavy structure all borne in misery at the bottom on the bony, filthy shoulders of Jo, the road-sweeping boy, in his rags and fever and ignorance. Yet by a terrible revenge the air and the poisoned sewage flow back again from Jo's hideous rookery of down-and-outs and penny-a-nighters in Tom All Alone's to infect the cozy snuggeries of the middle classes--even the paragon of domestic goodness, Dickens's heroine, Esther, is infected by Jo's smallpox.¹⁶

Of course, this example from Bleak House comes from Dickens' later, more pessimistic period. But I think it surely illustrates the idea of inter-relatedness that Dickens was always working with. After all, even Little Nell is forced to encounter the forces of evil in the external world. Good characters are always exposed to some treacherous influences. Still, it is important that they encounter and transcend that evil. If possible, then, they should try to create a community of good. And the happy endings Dickens is known for clearly demonstrate his belief that good characters can have a positive effect on the world around them.

One of the areas in which this influence is dramatically seen is in the conversions of several Dickens' characters. Recently, much critical work has been done on the phenomenon. For instance, Barbara Hardy shows how some characters can be changed by encountering another character with admirable traits. Sydney Carton, in A Tale of Two Cities (1859), is actually saved spiritually by the influence of his twin, Charles Darnay, and the virtuous Lucie Manette. Many other rather evil, and certainly ignorant, characters likewise feel the influence of good from others. We have only to look at Mr. Dombey and Ebenezer Scrooge for two graphic illustrations.¹⁷

Other critics, such as Robert Patten, suggest that one example of the extension of good characters' influence is the hearth. Although the Christmas books usually end with everyone around a fireplace, other works use the technique as well.¹⁸ Actually, the hearth is, more or less, a place which only exists figuratively. It is a place in which the good, happy characters can safely gather and celebrate their family unity. Thus, Little Nell's cathedral town (or even her grave), the Wooden Midshipman in Dombey and Son, and Mr. Jarndyce's cottage in Bleak House can be considered warm, hearth-like places. In such locations, the good characters can exercise their positive influences; they can help heal their misguided brethren and lead them toward better paths. Still, says Patten, the hearth is not totally a self-centered place. Ideally, its magic spreads outward as well:

Good hearts lead good lives and, within the boundaries of their means, furnish brave hearths. The consequences of Dickens's focus on the spirit never take us away from the world; they take us back to it, to refashion in an outward and visible way our inward spiritual change.¹⁹

From all this modern critical opinion, the point should be clear that, in this complex, interrelated world of Dickens, good characters do affect people and things around them. It is also reasonable to infer that bad

characters have the capability to create a diseased environment. Therefore, since animals are so close to the characters, we would expect them to be the first "objects" to be either positively or negatively influenced by the human characters.

Surprisingly, though, none of the critics whom I have read about Dickens' animals have mentioned their place in this universal, interrelated picture. In fact, most of the articles, from the early twentieth century Dickensians, are rather folksy discussions of Dickens' personal pets and how his own animals inspired his animal characters. They do not really pretend to be scholarly. The best that Henry Leffmann, Peggy Webling, Rebecca Gradwohl, and Florence Tylee can do is to make catalogues of the animals in the novels and give short descriptions of how they work in the plots.²⁰ Frank Gibson's 1957 article is much more satisfying because he has avoided much of the frivolous chitchat of the earlier writers. Still, his article is basically another catalogue, which ends with an account of Dickens' dogs at Gad's Hill.²¹ So, even though these articles are interesting, they tell us little about Dickens' menagerie on the deep level I have suggested.

I have already discussed the animals such as Pedro, Carlo, Boxer, and Merrylegs--dogs who work on merely a sentimental level. Now it is necessary to describe some of Dickens' more sophisticated animal portraits. Indeed, several representative animal characters in the novels have more rounded personalities, are more finely drawn, and are coupled more significantly with their masters than someone of Boxer's temperament. Also, in most cases, we can see that these are formerly cantankerous creatures who are, in some manner, changed by the influence of a human character.

Perhaps one of the easiest animals to place in this category is Whisker, the small pony in The Old Curiosity Shop. We first encounter him when Kit

Nubbles sees him pulling his owners, old Mr. and Mrs. Garland, down the street in a chaise. Immediately, Kit knows that the two are having quite a time with their horse:

. . . the pony was coming along at his own pace and doing exactly as he pleased with the whole concern. If the old gentleman remonstrated by shaking the reins, the pony replied by shaking his head. It was plain that the utmost the pony would consent to do, was to go in his own way up any street that the old gentleman particularly wished to traverse, but that it was an understanding between them that he must do this after his own fashion or not at all.²²

This is obviously a comic scene. The relationship between the good-natured Garlands and the rebellious Whisker is really no different from any of the sentimental portraits I mentioned earlier. The quality which clearly distinguishes the pony and makes him a fuller part of Dickens' tapestry is his conversion through the good character, Kit. After the Garlands hire Kit to work at their house, the young man begins to spread his innate goodness to everyone and everything he encounters--especially the horse:

. . . it is certain that no member of the family evinced such a remarkable partiality for him as the self-willed pony, who, from being the most obstinate and opinionated pony on the face of the earth, was in his hands the meekest and most tractable of animals. It is true that in exact proportion as he became manageable by Kit he became utterly ungovernable by anyone else (as if he had determined to keep him in the family at all risks and hazards). . .²³

We know that it could be coincidence which causes Whisker to be so tractable for Kit. All of us know animals who are congenial around some people and vicious toward others. I think, though, that Dickens wants us to see the larger influence of good people on the world in his moral tale. At the end of the novel, he gives us an aging pony who is kind only to Kit, the children in the neighborhood--and the bachelor brother of Nell's grandfather, Master Humphrey (the narrator of the story).²⁴ Whisker, then, becomes something of a gauge for discerning the characters with absolute goodness. We can assume from the information Dickens has given us that Whisker would

have positively refused to cooperate for a villain like Daniel Quilp. It is also easy to imagine the devotion he would have had for Little Nell--if only they had met!

Another animal who has a change of heart in a Dickens novel is Diogenes in Dombey and Son (1848). Actually, this dog makes a rather negative impression on the reader when he is first seen at Dr. Blimber's school at Brighton. Although his description is thoroughly Dickensian, Diogenes (or Di, as he is nicknamed) is much different from any of the dogs I have mentioned so far (unless it would be Boxer):

. . . a blundering, ill-favoured, clumsy, bullet-headed dog, continually acting on a wrong idea that there was an enemy in the neighborhood, whom it was meritorious to bark at. . . he was far from good tempered, and certainly was not clever, and had hair all over his eyes, and a comic nose, and an inconsistent tail, and a gruff voice . . .²⁵

Dickens wastes no time in the conversion of Diogenes to a docile creature, though. The angelic child, Paul Dombey, immediately makes friends with the dog, and we feel the power of the good youth's magnetic influence on the world. Still, we know that Dombey and Son is not meant to be Paul's story; the center of attention must be on Florence and her relationship with her father. To a great extent, Florence is a healer. Her love affects practically every major character in the book, and she is finally able to win over her father as well.

It is not surprising, then, that after little Paul dies, Diogenes becomes a "lady's dog" when Mr. Toots gives him to her. Florence treasures the animal because of Paul's sake, and the feeling is quickly reciprocated:

And Di, the rough and gruff, as if his hairy hide were pervious to the tear that dropped upon it, and his dog's heart melted as it fell, put his nose up to her face and swore fidelity.²⁶

From this point, Diogenes is Florence's only close friend. She tells him of the misery of living in a cold, unloving house with a cold, unloving

father. The tamed dog and the heroine are thus identified, and the canine mirrors Florence's unshaking love and loyalty. However, as we saw in the case of Whisker, it is not only the one good character which the animal becomes attached to. Di is equally congenial around any of the Wooden Midshipman group--Captain Cuttle, Walter Gay, Solomon Gills, and Mr. Toots. He is even kind to the flighty Susan Nipper.

As could be assumed, though, the dog reverts to his obnoxious nature whenever a truly evil character is around the premises. Just as one example, we can observe the dog's reaction to the sour Mrs. Pipchin. Near the end of the novel, when Mrs. Pipchin has driven Susan Nipper to the point of speaking up for her rights, the old lady drives Miss Nipper from the house without much ceremony. It is, understandably, an emotional moment for Florence when she knows she is losing yet another good friend:

Florence had not the courage to go out when she saw poor Susan in the hall, with Mrs. Pipchin driving her forth, and Diogenes jumping about her, and terrifying Mrs. Pipchin to the last degree by making snaps at her bombazeen skirts, and howling with anguish at the sound of her voice--for the good duenna was the dearest and most cherished aversion of his breast.²⁷

The most interesting character that Diogenes must analyze, though, is Edith Dombey. Indeed, even the reader sometimes has a difficult time knowing what kind of a woman she is. She is proud and distant--often bitter and melodramatic. Yet, we recognize that she has been used by her vicious mother as a tool to gain social prominence. In short, Edith is the unhappy product of a parent's insensitivity. Her affinity with Florence is directly related to the fact that she sees the girl in the same situation. Florence loves Edith without reservation; in her lonely state, she quickly shares her love with her step-mother.

I feel that Diogenes' apprehension and final acceptance of Edith is significant. Dickens seems to be suggesting that we approve of Edith--if for no other reason than that she is a good person on the inside. Like Diogenes, we must be perceptive. We must recognize that by 1848, Dickens was creating more complex human characters. No longer can we be fooled by outward appearances:

Florence and Edith, seated before the fire in the remote room where little Paul had died, talked together for a long time. Diogenes, who was of the party, had at first objected to the admission of Edith, and even in deference to his mistress' wish, had only permitted it under growling protest. But emerging by little and little from the ante-room, whither he had retired in dudgeon, he soon appeared to comprehend that with the most admirable intentions he had made one of those mistakes which will occasionally arise in the best-regulated dogs' minds, as a friendly apology for which he stuck himself up on end between the two, in a very hot place in front of the fire, and sat panting at it, with his tongue out, and a most imbecile expression of countenance, listening to the conversation.²⁸

Therefore, like Whisker, Diogenes is used by Dickens as a gauge of character, an indicator of the level of goodness in the humans surrounding him. It is interesting to note in passing, though, that Dickens almost forgot Diogenes when he was writing his final installment. He had to write to Forster to have him insert the line, "And an old dog is generally in their company," in the final reunion scene of the Dombey family.²⁹ It is fortunate that Dickens quickly carried out this inclusion. Otherwise, the reader, who has depended on Diogenes as a judge of character, would perhaps miss some of the genuineness of Mr. Dombey's conversion.

The third animal I will consider in this category is Jip, Dora Spenlow's little dog in David Copperfield (1850). In many respects, Jip (short for Gypsy) is Dickens' most magnificent creation of his kind. Gibson, in fact, calls him "the fullest study of a spoilt dog in the whole of literature."³⁰ We recognize almost immediately that the little dog is meant as a foil to the

innocent and rather inept Dora. Jip has a certain strength in his personality (though it is mostly humorous, for no one takes him too seriously). Jip is a finely-drawn portrait of a feisty dog and his conversion to docility is a long process--and pretty much on his own terms. Since he is so loyal to and protective of Dora, he resists the influence of good characters such as David and Betsey Trotwood as long as he can.

We first encounter Jip during the young lovers' clandestine courtship. David is so euphoric in his love that he does not notice the canine obstacle in his way (a foreshadowing, perhaps, of more difficulties to follow). "I approached him tenderly," relates the narrator of the novel, "for I loved even him, but he showed his whole set of teeth, got under a chair expressly to snarl and wouldn't hear of the least familiarity."³¹ This incident truly shows Dickens' powers of animal observation. Surely the reader feels that it is superior to the sentimentalized and exaggerated dogs I first mentioned.

We can also see the mediatory role of Jip in David's proposal scene,³² surely one of the funniest comic sketches in Dickens because it shows the hero's problems in subduing the little dog:

I don't know how I did it. I did it in a moment. I intercepted Jip. I had Dora in my arms. I was full of eloquence. I never stopped for a word. I told her how I loved her. I told her I should die without her. I told her that I idolized and worshipped her. Jip barked madly all the time. . .

Well, well! Dora and I were sitting on the sofa by and by, quiet enough, and Jip was lying in her lap, winking peacefully at me. It was off my mind. I was in a state of perfect rapture. Dora and I were engaged.³³

If Jip is a significant part of the Copperfields' courtship, he is an even more visible feature in their marriage. First of all, he cannot be left behind on the honeymoon. In fact, in his role of a "honeymoon crasher," the little dog is almost like Fanny Squeers, who accompanies the Browdies to London in Nicholas Nickleby (1838). In addition, Florence Tylee suggests

that Jip later plays, in his own doggie way, the part of the solemn chorus in an ancient Greek drama.³⁴ This is a ludicrous statement, but Miss Tylee is correct in analyzing Jip's role as a significant confidant. Dora is constantly confessing her real feelings to her canine confidant; she tells him things she would never tell her husband.

Jip is also definitely a notable feature of the housekeeping adventures of the young couple. It may be said that Dora's dog is a kind of symbol for the inexperience and disorder at the Copperfield residence. We have his Chinese pagoda with the frightening bells on top, always in the way of traffic. We have Jip running across the table when Traddles come to partake of Dora's miserable dinner of underdone mutton and oysters. We have Jip "helping" Dora with the account book--another truly memorable moment in the novel:

First of all, she would bring out the immense account-book, and lay it down upon the table, with a deep sigh. Then she would open it at the place where Jip had made it illegible last night, and call Jip up, to look at his misdeeds. This would occasion a diversion in Jip's favour, and some inking of his nose, perhaps, as a penalty. Then she would tell Jip to lie down on the table instantly, 'like a lion'--which was one of his tricks, though I cannot say the likeness was striking--and, if he were in an obedient humour, he would obey . . . And then she would give it up as a bad job, and put the account-book away, after pretending to crush the lion with it.³⁵

David Copperfield, I feel, would still be a marvelous book if it had focused in on more of these delightful scenes from a marriage, episodes demonstrating the ineptitude of a child-wife and the husband's loving frustration about her and her dog. Even so, Dickens had a different plan for his story. Dora, basically, was a pleasant--but inadequate--wife. The novelist felt compelled to eliminate her--to let her die in a tasteful manner, because, after all, the novel had to end with the narrator's realization that Agnes was the proper woman for him. So, after a few scenes of the newlyweds' shaky marriage, Dora's health conveniently begins to decline.

As we might expect, Dora's close companion, Jip, also evinces a decline in his general health. Suddenly, his joie de vivre disappears, and his asthmatic breathing replaces the barks in the Copperfield household. For the first time, Jip's spirit has truly been conquered, and we might not like what we see. True, he reflects the love and concern of the good characters (primarily David and his aunt), but we surely regret the loss of some of Jip's obnoxious and humorous ways. For example, here is David's description of the dog as Dora's death is imminent:

He is, as it were suddenly, grown very old. It may be that he misses in his mistress, something that enlivened him and made him younger; but he mopes, and his sight is weak, and his limbs are feeble, and my aunt is sorry that he objects to her no more, but creeps near her as he lies on Dora's bed--she sitting at the bedside--and mildly licks her hand.³⁶

Why does this scene move the reader more than the suffering of the ancient Merrylegs? For one thing, Jip has much more attention in the novel; he holds a more central position. But also, I think that we pity Jip because his conversion entails the sacrifice of the flamboyant personality we have become acquainted with. More than any other animal I have mentioned so far (or, indeed, any animal in Dickens' canon), Jip is depicted as a real dog. The good characters finally do make him into a tractable animal, but in a much different way from which Diogenes is converted. Perhaps Dickens, two years after Dombey and Son, was suggesting that conversion is not always a totally beneficial thing. Sometimes the process can hurt an individual--especially if that individual does not have much choice in his change.

If we are legitimately to pity Jip, as we would a real ailing creature, his death, at the precise moment of Dora's, becomes immensely more plausible--melodramatic though it is. As a loyal companion to Dora and a mirror of her personality, Jip cannot exist without her. We see David waiting before the

fire, fully expecting his wife to die at any moment. Jip slowly crawls out of his house, and whines to go upstairs with his mistress. When David tells him no, the dog demonstrates his complete resignation:

He comes very slowly back to me, licks my hand, and lifts his dim eyes to my face.

'Oh, Jip! It may be, never again!'

He lies down at my feet, stretches himself out as if to sleep, and with a plaintive cry, is dead.³⁷

Immediately, this death reminds the reader of the words that Dora, the invalid, remarks to David's aunt when Betsey suggests that a sprier dog would help her more in her sickness than the pathetic Jip:

'I couldn't have any other dog but Jip,' said Dora. 'It would be so unkind to Jip! Besides, I couldn't be such friends with any other dog but Jip; because he wouldn't have known me before I was married, and wouldn't have barked at Doady when he first came to our house. I couldn't care for any dog but Jip, I am afraid, aunt.'³⁸

The juxtaposition of these words with Jip's death demonstrates how closely loyalty and innocence are tied up in the relationship between the young woman and her pet. Dickens wants us to feel sorry for the deaths of these two friends, but he also expects us to see fate working for the best. As good as Dora is, she will never be a perfect wife; at best, she can only be a matchmaker between David and Agnes from her deathbed. Likewise, Jip, sadly enough, is not really made for the world. For all his blustering viciousness, he is merely pusillanimous at bottom. He has no strength to survive without Dora fawning over him. Therefore, it is certainly appropriate that Dora and her dog are partners in death. This is surely one of the non-coincidences which Dorothy Van Ghent speaks of. If we accept the episode as such, the scene becomes one of the most moving in the novel.

So far, the animal characters I have discussed in this circle-of-influence section have had good personalities (at least after their

conversions). But, as I have suggested, evil characters in Dickens may also have an effect on the creatures in their world. Usually, though, the animals who reflect their human characters do not go through a conversion experience. When they are first introduced, they are evil--and they remain consistent through the course of the novels.

One of the best examples of an evil character's comrade is Lady Jane in Bleak House. This large grey cat belongs to Mr. Krook, the rag and bottle collector. I may note at this point that Krook is not a typically evil Dickens character. Preceding his grisly death, he really does no discernibly evil deeds. Still, we can say that he is a visible representation of all the evil in the Bleak House society. His absolutely disorganized shop, for example, is full of bones, paper of all kinds, and kitchen-stuff. And he is the proper person to rummage through such clutter. A short, withered man, Mr. Krook walks around with visible smoke coming out of his mouth. Understandably, his pet is far from the typical purring pussycat.

The reader's first introduction to Lady Jane is the visit of Esther Summerson and her group to Miss Flite's room in the building owned by Mr. Krook. After surveying the garbage heaps in Krook's shop for a time, the visitors are surprised when the large cat jumps onto the old man's shoulder:

'Hi! Show 'em how you scratch. Hi! Tear, my lady!' said her master.

The cat leaped down and ripped at a bundle of rags with her tigerish claws, with a sound that it set my teeth on edge to hear.

'She'd do as much for any one I was to set her on,' said the old man. 'I deal in cat-skins among other general matters, and hers was offered to me. It's a very fine skin, as you may see, but I didn't have it stripped off! That warn't like Chancery practice though, says you!'³⁹

In a way, Lady Jane is a symbol of those who want to devour those involved with the Jarndyce versus Jarndyce case. If Krook reflects the evil in the society, Lady Jane can be seen as a frightening extension of the

corrupt old man. At one point in the book, Dickens even makes the comment that Krook "might have changed eyes with his cat, as he casts his sharp glance around."⁴⁰ Still, I do not feel that Lady Jane works as a full-fledged symbol in the novel. Primarily, she is just a cat, disagreeable as she may be. As she claws, prowls, and snarls her way around Krook's domain, she has an element of verisimilitude which her master lacks. For example, I do not think she wants to eat Miss Flite's birds so much because she is a symbol; she wants them because she is a ravenous feline. Only in Miss Flite's jumbled mind does the cat take on any great symbolic significance. For instance, Miss Flite expresses her fear for her birds to Esther's group:

'I cannot admit the air freely . . . because the cat you saw downstairs, called Lady Jane, is greedy for their lives. She crouches on the parapet outside for hours and hours. I have discovered,' whispering mysteriously, 'that her natural cruelty is sharpened by a jealous fear of their regaining their liberty. In consequence of the judgment I expect being shortly given. She is sly and full of malice. I half believe, sometimes, that she is no cat, but the wolf of the old saying. It is so very difficult to keep her from the door.'⁴¹

This quote from Miss Flite shows Dickens skillfully working on several levels--performing a virtual juggling act with his prose. Though he has been consciously playing down Lady Jane as a symbol, he still gives us Miss Flite's distorted perceptions of her. In that manner, we are able to feel her symbolic quality--without the novelist himself suggesting that Lady Jane is anything more than a cat.

Lady Jane also behaves very much like a real cat when her master dies from the rather improbable cause of spontaneous combustion. When Tony Jobling and Guppy enter the wretched man's room, they find a pile of ashes on the floor. And the cat is snarling--not at the intruders, but at that horrible heap. It is obvious that the evil character's pet is not true to him, even in his death. In the case of Lady Jane, at least, the animal

mirror of the bad individual is every bit as cantankerous and disgusting as she ever was.

Sometimes, however, the confreres of evil (or ignorant) characters in Dickens put the humans a little to shame. As disagreeable as these creatures may be (due to the influence of their masters), they, nevertheless, have a spark of human-like moral virtue which their owners do not possess. In Dickens' eyes, then, these animals have a superiority over their rather worthless human associates.

I suppose that the classic example of my point here is Bill Sikes' dog, Bull's-eye, in Oliver Twist (1839). Again, this animal falls far short of being a lovable pet. Dickens, in fact, tells us that Bull's-eye is "a dog of misanthropical temperament."⁴² Yet, what other kind of dog would Bill Sikes have? Of all the evil characters in Oliver Twist, the robber is no doubt the worst. He has absolutely no redeeming characteristics; his heart is completely black, and his dirty, hardened appearance totally matches his personality. Naturally, we expect his animal cohort to be similar in looks. Dickens describes him as a "white shaggy dog, with his face scratched and torn in twenty different places."⁴³ We can assume that the creature spends a great percentage of his time fighting for his life in the London streets--not unlike his master.

The reader also cannot expect much tenderness between man and beast in the novel. To illustrate their antagonism for each other, the writer relates their first few moments in Fagin's den of pickpockets. Sikes has just told his downtrodden dog to lie down:

This command was accompanied with a kick, which sent the animal to the other end of the room. He appeared well used to it, however; for he coiled himself up in a corner very quietly, without uttering a sound, and winking his very ill-looking eyes about

twenty times in a minute, appeared to occupy himself in taking a survey of the apartment.⁴⁴

Bull's-eye is not always so submissive to this bad treatment, though. Because of the evil influence of Sikes, he has learned that he must occasionally fight back in order to survive. He knows the time and the place for aggressive action. Like Jip, Bull's-eye has a will of his own, and he will not be totally conquered--even by his master. If Sikes oversteps his boundaries in their relationship, the dog will freely express his objection to his treatment. In one such situation, Dickens justifies Bull's-eye in "biting the hand (or foot) that feeds him":

Dogs are not generally apt to revenge injuries inflicted upon them by their master; but Mr. Sikes's dog, having faults of temper in common with his owner, and labouring, perhaps, at this moment, under a powerful sense of injury, made no more ado but at once fixed his teeth in one of the half-boots. Having given it a hearty shake, he retired, growling, under a form; just escaping the pewter measure which Mr. Sikes levelled at his head.⁴⁵

This is a veritable love-hate relationship. Bill enjoys beating the dog, and Bull's-eye will bite his master--before escaping to roam the slums of London for a few days. But he always comes back, and Sikes will welcome him in a surly manner. We have probably seen this kind of strange friendship between man and beast at some point in our lives, though. Again, Dickens' powers of observation are clearly functioning.

This stormy association continues as Bill gets more and more involved with the shady intrigues of Oliver Twist. Finally, in a moment of frenzy, the robber murders his mistress, Nancy. Now, Bull's-eye is no longer just a convenient outlet for his frustrations. The dog, well known by the law officers in the district, makes it impossible for the murderer to remain under cover. As he escapes from the city, Bill makes a desperate attempt to drown his wretched companion. Unfortunately for him, his plan is a failure:

The animal looked up into his master's face while these preparations were making; whether his instinct apprehended something of their purpose, or the robber's sidelong look at him was sterner than ordinary, he skulked a little farther in the rear than usual, and cowered as he came more slowly along. When his master halted at the brink of a pool, and looked round to call him, he stopped outright.⁴⁶

Bull's-eye runs away from his owner and finds Bill again later in London. By now, we can see that no matter how much at odds the two are, the dog, at least, has a kind of deep feeling for his master. Suddenly, the reader notices that he becomes somewhat sympathetic to the dog's situation. Bull's-eye does have something admirable about him. Rebecca Gradwohl is right when she says, "Bull's-eye appears to have absorbed all the evil of Sikes's character, retaining only one quality common to all dogs--faithfulness to his master."⁴⁷

We cannot count faithfulness among the "virtues" of Bill Sikes. Dickens makes him into a character who only looks out for himself; he will help Fagin, but only on his own terms. Yet, this suspicion is expected among the underworld people Dickens has created. Bill's unforgivably faithless act, though, is killing Nancy, the woman who actually cares for him. Of course, Dickens does lead his villain to a fitting end. As Sikes is trying to escape from the angry mob, bent on revenging Nancy's shameless murder, he is accidentally trapped in a noose and hangs himself. Thus Sikes is justly rewarded for his life of crime.

This, however, is not the end of the action. Bull's-eye, the robber's companion in crime for so long, must be with him at his death as well. Dickens relates the grim details of the dog's death with few traces of sentimentality:

A dog, which had lain concealed till now, ran backwards and forward on the parapet with a dismal howl, and collecting himself for a spring, jumped for the dead man's shoulders. Missing the

aim, he fell into the ditch, turning completely over as he went; and striking his head against a stone, dashed out his brains.⁴⁸

Even though Dickens does not seem to have a great deal of sympathy for Bull's-eye here at the end, I think he intended his reader to see his death as a sacrifice for love. True, Bull's-eye is an unlovely dog; he hates people and has a horrible temper. Yet, we can imagine what his life would have been had he been raised in a better environment, with an owner such as Florence Dombey. Perhaps he does not have the fundamental, innate evil in his heart which makes such a villain of Bill Sikes. He demonstrates the capacity to love--and that spark of merit saves him in our eyes. Compared with Bill's inhumanity, the dog's loyalty is a positive, human-like trait which shines out above our memories of all the one-sided, melodrama villains of Oliver Twist.

Another animal who points out a character trait missing in his master is Henry Gowan's large Newfoundland, Lion, in Little Dorrit (1857). In many ways, Dickens paints Lion with much more care than he does Bull's-eye (understandably, perhaps, because Little Dorrit is a much later work). For one thing, the novelist plays down his importance throughout--saving his powers of perception until one very dramatic moment. Also, there is a broader development of personality in the case of Lion. Whereas Bull's-eye seems stereotyped, a basically evil dog with only occasional glimpses of devotion, Lion is a gentle dog who is able to express violent behavior if he feels it is warranted. One feels that Lion thinks more than Bull's-eye and, to some extent, chooses the proper behavior.

Lion is first introduced in the novel when Henry Gowan goes to court Pet Meagles. We remember that in this scene, Arthur Clennam is also present. The latter character is obviously jealous of this rather lazy, self-assured

painter. Indeed, he deplores the use of Gowan's dog as a tool to win Miss Meagles' attention. She is, after all, easily as fascinated with the dog as her smooth suitor. As Clennam watches the couple converse and play with the dog, the reader cannot miss his feelings of hostility:

He stood at a little distance from them. This Gowan when he had talked about a Paradise, had gone up to her and taken her hand. The dog had put his great paws on her arm and laid his head against her dear bosom. She had laughed and welcomed them, and made far too much of the dog, far, far, too much--that is to say, ⁴⁹ supposing there had been any third person looking on who loved her.

In a way, it is quite humorous (and typical) that Gowan would take his dog to the country to assist him in his courting. It is simply another example of his laziness. The painter, because of his wealthy family's influence, has never really had to do anything of importance in his life. Since he has had everything given to him, he knows he can win Pet's heart with little trouble; Clennam is certainly no serious challenge for him.

Lion's introduction to us, then, indicates that Dickens has thought of him as an extension of Gowan. The dog, when we first meet him is ridiculously gentle. He loves without reservation, and he seems to accept everyone he encounters as a friend. Lion, too, has apparently had an easy life. Living in a rich household has made him as complaisant as his master.

If we see these similarities between dog and master early in the novel, the trouble which Henry Gowan later experiences becomes more understandable. In the second half of the book, Gowan and his new wife go to the Continent to ramble through several cities (although he tells everyone he is going to Italy to study and paint). While they are on their continental excursion, the painter, quite indiscriminately, makes the acquaintance of several individuals. Unfortunately, one of his closest new friends is Rigaud (alias Blandois, alias Lagnier), the chief scoundrel in the novel. Rigaud even

becomes, to a great extent, a permanent feature in the Gowan household. One day in Venice, though, when Gowan is painting his friend's portrait (with Rigaud appropriately dressed in the costume of a stage villain), Lion begins to sense that something is wrong. He feels a quality of evil in Gowan's comrade.

Suddenly, Lion turns into a violent creature. He lunges at the villain to attack him. Fortunately for Rigaud, though, Lion's master intervenes:

The great dog, regardless of being half-choked by his collar, was obdurately pulling with his dead weight against his master, resolved to get across the room. He had been crouching for a spring at the moment when his master caught him.⁵⁰

This dramatic confrontation occasions a change in Gowan's ambivalent character. For a moment, he is angered enough to take some form of concrete action--but it is interesting that he should take out his violent feelings on his dog, a creature who so completely reflects his character. We see the horrible way he treats the canine who has always been gentle to him (all this in the presence of Little Dorrit herself):

The dog, with a ferocious bark, made one other struggle as Blandois vanished; then, in the moment of the dog's submission, the master, little less angry than the dog, felled him with a blow on the head, and standing over him, struck him many times severely with the heel of his boot, so that his mouth was presently bloody. . .

'O pray don't punish him any more,' cried Little Dorrit, 'Don't hurt him. See how gentle he is!' At her entreaty, Gowan spared him, and he deserved her intercession, for truly he was as submissive, and as sorry, and as wretched as a dog could be.⁵¹

Naturally, Gowan does not have the insight to see that he has punished the wrong individual. Rigaud (whom he knows as Blandois) is able to escape and spread his evil influence on the other elements of the society. Before he returns to England, though, he makes the dog suffer for almost exposing his identity. When Lion is mysteriously killed, Rigaud tells Little Dorrit

and her group that, ". . . somebody has poisoned that noble dog. He is as dead as the Doges."⁵²

Therefore, we can see that Lion is depicted as a creature with a quality which is missing in his master--a sense of perception and discrimination. I do not know if Dickens intends us to feel sorry for the dog's death, but I assume he wants us to feel uncomfortable when we are confronted with Gowan's moral blindness. As nonchalant as Lion is most of the time, at least he can recognize the danger of evil. As readers, we admire this one quality more than we do many of Gowan's personality traits. Once again, Dickens has painted an animal who is real enough to make such a comparison between man and beast possible.

So far, I have dealt with animals from Dickens who are either sentimentally rendered or made to work with specific characters in the novels to stress important themes. Although I have hinted that some of these animal characters may be thought of as symbols, I feel that their primary roles as more or less real animals should capture our attention. There are, however, a few Dickens creatures whose primary roles are symbolic. Possessing a supernatural, ethereal quality, these animals (usually birds) seldom have convincingly substantial personalities. And I do not think that Dickens intended their personalities to be perceptible in this way. As rather complex symbols, their purpose is much more complicated. They can stand for a number of abstract ideas in each particular novel, all at the same time. Therefore, the author has less desire to develop their personalities.

One of the best examples of an animal symbol in Dickens is Grip, the ancient raven (apparently a hundred and twenty years old) in Barnaby Rudge (1841). Although the bird is modeled on Dickens' own pet ravens (as he tells

the reader in his preface to the book), it is clear that the novelist immediately thinks of his animal character in symbolic terms. Like Edgar Allan Poe, Dickens was obviously impressed by the mystery of such a bird. At one point, Grip is described as "the embodied spirit of evil biding his time in mischief."⁵³ A raven's actions also can betray a kind of knowingness which can be unnerving. It is not surprising that human beings feel that ravens who have been taught to speak possess a kind of supernatural power.

Although Dickens does not show Grip performing any feats of magic, he tries to give the impression that he could. For example, when we are first introduced to the bird, we find him in thoughtful silence, surveying his surroundings with a bright eye which shines like a diamond. When Grip finally speaks, his voice seems so distant "that it seemed to come through his thick feathers rather than out of his mouth."⁵⁴ Grip's magic in apparently throwing his voice is innocuous, but it still makes him into a target for some distrust.

This is not to say that the raven's life is void of carefree moments; he is not always the solemn kind of bird who would sit on the bust of Pallas. We find the bird a constant companion to Barnaby--being carried on his master's back, rolling in the dusty roads, and imagining himself a dog. Grip also delights in the variety of sounds he is able to make, and one of his favorites approximates a long cork being pulled from a wine bottle. Sometimes, Grip appears as a faithful, cheerful companion for Barnaby, the idiot-boy. Dickens adds much humor to the creature's presentation.

Yet, it is a dangerous thing to be led astray by Grip's charm. Even the "meaningless" sounds which the raven makes can become disconcerting. I am thinking particularly of the slogans the bird has learned over the years. Sometimes, Grip speaks simple phrases such as, "Polly put the kettle on,

we'll all have tea." But when he works himself up to a high emotional level, he screams with glee, "I'm a devil, I'm a devil, I'm a devil. Hurrah!" Dickens is apparently displaying the evil which Grip symbolizes through outbursts such as this, especially when he shows him completely unperturbed by what he has said--"And then, as if exulting in his infernal character, he began to whistle."⁵⁵ As an old bird who is well accustomed to the dark ways of the world, Grip is nonchalant about his rather sinister personality.

If such an interpretation of Grip is accurate, it follows that his relationship with Barnaby cannot be considered innocent. Even the feeble-minded youth is not immune to the influence of evil. Indeed, Barnaby seems to delight in being led by the bird. Acknowledging Grip as his master, the youth tells his mother of all the raven does for him:

'He takes such care of me besides!' said Barnaby. 'Such care, mother! He watches all the time I sleep, and when I shut my eyes and make-believe to slumber, he practises new learning softly; but he keeps his eye on me the while, and if he sees me laugh, though never so little, stops directly. He won't surprise me till he's perfect.'⁵⁶

We do recognize these as the imaginings of a weak-minded young man, but they reinforce the idea of Grip's sinister symbolic function. Grip is Barnaby's leader. Some of the time, his direction is pleasant and enjoyable for his master. For instance, no one is harmed by their excursions in the country. Yet, Barnaby is hurt by his involvement with the Gordon Riots. Grip has obviously led his companion toward the path of evil--from which there is little chance for returning to innocence. Surely, Barnaby's involvement is based on innocence; he is not truly guilty of wrongdoing because of his demented state. We cannot deny the fact, though, that Barnaby is led to commit criminal acts, no matter how pure his motives. Thus, Grip, standing for the force of evil in this eighteenth-century English society, treats his

owner in a truly shameless manner. Under the guise of another exciting adventure, he leads him to make the wrong choices and to commit crimes in the name of loyalty.

On another symbolic level, we can see Grip representing the general insanity of the populace which follows the strong-willed, power-hungry Lord Gordon in his war against Roman Catholicism. In many ways, Barnaby Rudge is a novel which charts the growth and development of a popular movement based on fear--similar to our modern Naziism. At first, the anti-popish rumblings are quiet; propaganda is discreetly distributed to select individuals. Soon, though, riots are taking place in London; Newgate prison is stormed, and the officers of the law can do little to stop Gordon's frightening plans. In truth, there is no danger of a Catholic takeover. The people are merely led astray by their vivid imaginations. They have come to believe the slogans they have heard around the city.

Grip, like the people, is also influenced by what he hears. In fact, he is quick to add the anti-Catholic talk to his vocabulary. And again, it seems that his most meaningful words are spoken when he is most moved by excitement:

'Never say die, bow wow wow, keep up your spirits, Grip Grip Grip, Holloa! We'll all have tea, I'm a Protestant kettle, No Popery!' cried the raven.⁵⁷

The raven's words, then, indicate to a great extent the turmoil of the people in England at this time. London was a free-for-all; in the country, Catholic landowners' houses were being burned down. Confusion reigned. In the meanwhile, Grip is there to summarize these feelings of purposelessness.

Finally, Grip seems to serve one more symbolic function for Dickens in Barnaby Rudge. After some law and order is restored to London, many of Gordon's key rioters are thrown into prison. Because Barnaby has been so

witlessly devoted to the cause, his sometimes violent activities sentence him to death. Now in prison, with his raven beside him, Barnaby does not have the sense to fear his approaching doom. Thus, Grip must become a visible representation of the gloom in the hearts of the good characters--the people who are trying everything to obtain the youth's release. Grip mirrors this despair in several obvious ways.

For one thing, he becomes quite listless in his captivity. All the vitality we are used to with Grip suddenly ceases. For the first time, he seems to show his one hundred and twenty years. Also, the reader is struck by the fact that the raven is now completely silent. His despair is no doubt so deep that he cannot find any appropriate words in his vocabulary to express himself.

Understandably, Barnaby does not feel the dejection of his friend (just as he cannot comprehend his mother's tears for him). All he can do is observe his bird's actions and describe them with a sense of alarm to his mother:

'Who cares for Grip except you and me?' said Barnaby, smoothing the bird's ruffled feathers with his hand. 'He never speaks in this place; he never says a word in jail; he sits and mopes all day in his dark corner, dozing sometimes, and sometimes looking at the light that creeps in through the bars, and shines in his great eyes as if a spark from those great fires had fallen into the room and was burning yet. But who cares for Grip?'⁵⁸

Salvation from prison does come for Barnaby and his raven in Dickens' happy ending to the book. And the half-witted hero loses no time in fitting himself right back in his former situation--a place which is complete without Gordon and No Popery. Grip, though, still as a symbol of gloom, cannot forget things so easily. Only after a long while can he regain the vigor he had at the beginning of the novel:

Grip soon recovered his looks, and became as glossy and sleek as ever. But he was profoundly silent. Whether he had forgotten the art of Polite Conversation in Newgate, or had made a vow in those troubled times to forego, for a period, the display of his accomplishments, is a matter of uncertainty; but certain it is that for a whole year he never indulged in any other sound than a grave, decorous croak. At the expiration of the term, the morning being very bright and sunny, he was heard to address himself to the horses in the stable, upon the subject of the Kettle, so often mentioned in these pages; and before the witness who overheard him could run into the house with the intelligence, and add to it upon his solemn affirmation the statement that he had heard him laugh, the bird himself advanced with fantastic steps to the very door of the bar and there cried, 'I'm a devil, I'm a devil, I'm a devil!' with extraordinary rapture.⁵⁹

Thus, everything appears to have worked out well for the good characters in Barnaby Rudge. Nevertheless, one cannot help but remember that Grip has acted in a similar loud and obnoxious manner at his first introduction. If the bird stands for the dark forces in the novel at that point, we can infer that those forces are somehow still at work at the end. I think that Dickens puts much emphasis on Grip as an ominous shadow of evil here at the end of the book. In fact, the novel's last words place all the attention on Grip:

From that period . . . , he constantly practised and improved himself in the vulgar tongue; and, as he was a mere infant for a raven when Barnaby was grey, he has probably gone on talking to the present time.⁶⁰

Ultimately, we are left with the feeling that evil is always present--as are confusion and despair, the other mysterious forces which Grip represents.

In general, the raven is a successful symbol for Dickens. Some readers might say, of course, that Dickens is not always clear about what he intends Grip to symbolize; sometimes the various symbolic qualities in the book seem a bit discordant. Other readers will maintain that a symbol should be vague and multifarious. I can easily understand both points of view. I can detect some awkwardness with symbols in this early work of Dickens. Yet, I also think that Grip is an admirable milestone in the novelist's progress; several

years before his "dark period," he was using symbols fairly effectively to represent evil forces in the world. By the time he arrived at a novel such as Bleak House, his flair for symbolism in his writing had come of age.

As I have mentioned previously, Bleak House is a novel in which everything is well connected. One of the reasons we feel this interrelationship so strongly is because of the symbols used. The fog has been discussed extensively as a major image in the novel which serves a symbolic function. It spreads gloom and disease to every level of society.

As important as the fog is to the novel, it is not the only significant image. Cynthia Dettelbach has pointed out that bird imagery also works in every part of the novel. Almost every character in Bleak House is referred to as either a predatory bird or as a victim of these birds of prey. For example, the sinister lawyer, Mr. Tulkinghorn, is dressed like a large rook, and his actions resemble those of a great bird hovering over his victims.⁶¹ Also, there is the odious Mr. Smallweed, who, when he angrily claws the air in Miss Flite's room, "looks like a hideous bird of prey newly added to her aviary."⁶² Another kind of "bird" is Harold Skimpole, Mr. Jarndyce's friend who lives his life without taking any responsibility for his actions. He lives, as it were, in a gilded cage, and he does not mind his situation. He tells Esther about his comfortable life when she visits his house:

'Yes, . . . this is the bird's cage. This is where the bird lives and sings. They pluck his feathers now and then and clip his wings, but he sings, he sings! Not an ambitious note but still he sings.'⁶³

With this constant bird imagery in the novel, the reader should carefully notice when birds actually appear in Bleak House--because their symbolic qualities will be heightened. For example, when Esther Summerson's aunt dies at the beginning of the book, the young girl must leave home to

begin a new life. She disposes of all her belongings--except for one. In Esther's narrative, she tells the reader, "I had no companion left but my bird and him I carried with me in his cage."⁶⁴ Miss Dettlebach suggests that Esther's bird represents the guilt Esther carries with her through life because of her doubtful parentage.⁶⁵

The most important birds in the novel, naturally, are those which belong to old, insane Miss Flite. These larks, linnets, and goldfinches are kept in cages in her room--and they are practically the only possessions she has. Thus, the reader cannot miss the importance Miss Flite (as well as Dickens) has placed on them. The woman obviously thinks of them in symbolic terms; she keeps their cages behind a curtain and shows them to visitors with an air of mystery. I believe that Dickens wants us to think of the birds in symbolic terms as well. For instance, he gives none of the creatures personalities. Instead, they are thought of as a collection, a group of caged birds who, when there is a decision someday in the Jarndyce case, will be set free.

To get an idea of what these birds represent, we have only to look at their names: Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach. This is a marvelously powerful list--one that is thoroughly Dickensian. It moves with remarkable precision from Man's ultimate optimism to complete absurdity in only twenty-five names.

The first six names refer to man's dreams of a good life; the last two come from the refrain of the nursery rhyme, "The Frog He Would A-wooing Go." The others, then, cleverly chart the steps between these two extremes. First of all, Man starts out with hope in his life, but then such basically evil

things as Despair and Death stop these dreams from coming true. Yet, Man can accept these natural forces because they are inevitable; we know that they have as much a place as do Joy and Peace. What Man in the Bleak House society cannot accept as natural, though, is the interference of Chancery (hence the abundance of legal terms in the list). Must Chancery add to the despair in the world? Must it intensify the already existing evil? These are questions all the good characters in Bleak House ultimately ask. They see that Chancery has perverted the natural process of life until nothing is left but folly. It is no wonder that Miss Flite, whose entire life has been ruined with the long court case, is reluctant to tell their names. The depressing list tells her own story too well.

The birds, then, serve a double symbolic function in the novel. First, they represent the people who are psychologically imprisoned in their futile search for their dreams. And the names of the birds stand for the process which leads them to the point of hopelessness and nonsense. Richard Carstone is a good example for illustrating Dickens' symbolic plan here. At the first of the novel, he is a pleasant, optimistic youth, bent on making his fortune. Unfortunately, the temptation of the "easy" money he could win in the Jarndyce versus Jarndyce case begins to enslave him. In the end of the novel, Richard dies, a poor, broken man with no purpose in his life. There is little doubt that the process he has gone through has made him into a trapped creature.

Despite her depressing feelings about her birds, however, Miss Flite imagines it is her duty to keep her little symbols around her; perhaps her actions will somehow hasten the inevitable Judgment Day:

'I began to keep the little creatures,' she said, 'with an object that the wards will readily comprehend. With the intention of restoring them to liberty. When my judgment should be given.

Ye-es! They die in prison, though. Their lives, poor silly things, are so short in comparison with Chancery proceedings that, one by one, the whole collection has died over and over again. I doubt, do you know, whether one of these, though they are all young, will live to be free! Ve-ry mortifying, is it not?'⁶⁶

Thus, Miss Flite expresses more and more pessimism about a decision ever being reached. With sadness, she eventually adds two more birds to her collection, whom she calls the Wards of Jarndyce. By now, the reader knows exactly what is implied by her symbolic action. He is well acquainted with the misery which Chancery has brought into the lives of Richard Carstone and his wife, Ada. Now, Miss Flite's bird collection is truly a ghastly symbol for the sense of entrapment which every character feels.

At the end of the book, however, a decision is finally reached in the suit--although no one is the better off for it. The years of court costs have completely eaten up the once sizeable fortune. But what other outcome could be reached? The lawsuit, which must surely parallel the progressive list toward nonsense, cannot end fortunately. Still, true to her word, the crazy old woman releases her symbolic birds into the skies of London--although she does it with much reservation. Esther relates Miss Flite's emotional condition when the deed is finally done, "When all was still, at a late hour, poor crazed Miss Flite came weeping to me and told me she had given her birds their liberty."⁶⁷

Perhaps (suggests Miss Dettiebach) one reason for Miss Flite's weeping is that she knows the true consequences of the birds' liberty. She knows that, although the good characters are determined to "begin the world" again, that world has not changed remarkably.⁶⁸ There are still birds of prey, and there are still helpless victims. For all Miss Flite's grim, dark optimism, she recognizes that Krook was right when he explained earlier in the book:

'When my noble and learned brother gives his judgment, they're to be let go free, . . . And then,' he added, whispering and grinning, 'if that ever was to happen--which it won't--the birds that have never been caged would kill 'em.'⁶⁹

Of course, the judgment is handed down, but I am inclined to agree with Krook's analysis of the fate of the symbolic birds. In Dickens' evil world in Bleak House, there is little hope for a complete transformation to goodness in society. Again, the animal symbols he uses help convey on a whole that idea of despair. Miss Flite's birds, although we do not know them as well as we know Grip, are at once stark, straightforward representations of the evils of Chancery, man's futile dreams, and the ultimate hopelessness of good people to entirely eradicate the evil forces.

In conclusion, the examples I have given in this essay have shown that Dickens has gone further than mere Victorian sentimentality in his animal portraits. He has used them as tools for analyzing their masters' effectiveness as good or bad characters. He has used them to comment negatively on human nature. He has also made them into workable symbols--usually to highlight the evil in society. Yet, I should repeat that there is no chronological progression to these various functions of animal characters. After all, Merrylegs, one of Dickens' most sentimentalized animals, was created one year after the birds in Bleak House. The novelist apparently felt that a different situation called for a different kind of animal.

For whatever reason he created his animals, all of Dickens' menagerie should be interesting to the reader of his novels. It has often been said that Dickens has invented enough well-developed human characters to fill a small city. If we can imagine such a fascinating place, filled with characters with distinct personalities, we can surely imagine their animal

companions also roaming the streets by their sides. This is only natural. Dickens, as we know, created a rich view of life in his writings; he reveled in life's experiences. A large part of that experience, then, must be the animal kingdom--the horses, the dogs, the birds. It is truly to Dickens' credit as a novelist that he gave these creatures their just place.

Notes

¹ Kenneth Clark, Animals and Men (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 31.

² Clark, p. 50.

³ Campbell Lennie, Landseer: The Victorian Paragon (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976), p. 89.

⁴ John Ruskin, quoted by Frederic G. Stephens, Sir Edwin Landseer (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1883), p. 77.

⁵ David Masson, quoted by Philip Collins in Dickens: The Critical Heritage (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), p. 255.

⁶ Charles Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop (New York: Penguin, 1972), p. 200.

⁷ Charles Dickens, The Cricket on the Hearth, in The Christmas Books, Vol. 2 (New York: Penguin, 1971), p. 67.

⁸ The Cricket on the Hearth, p. 118.

⁹ Lennie, p. 125.

¹⁰ Charles Dickens, Hard Times, in The Works of Charles Dickens (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, n.d.), pp. 205-6. In the interest of consistency, and because most of the editions of Dickens' works I have used are Penguin editions, I have followed the Penguin method of using single quotation marks for all indented quotes--even if they come from other editions.

¹¹ Hard Times, p. 447.

- 12 A. E. Dyson, Introd., Dickens: Modern Judgments (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 25.
- 13 Edgar Johnson, "Epilogue," in Dickens: Modern Judgments, ed. A. E. Dyson, p. 278.
- 14 Johnson, p. 279.
- 15 Dorothy Van Ghent, "On Great Expectations," in The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1953), p. 132.
- 16 Angus Wilson, The World of Charles Dickens (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1970), p. 231.
- 17 Barbara Hardy, The Moral Art of Dickens (London: Athlone Press, 1970). See especially the two essays on "The Change of Heart," pp. 27-77.
- 18 Robert L. Patten, "'A Surprising Transformation': Dickens and the Hearth," in Nature and the Victorian Imagination, ed. U. C. Knoepfelmacher and G. B. Tennyson (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977), pp. 153-70.
- 19 Patten, p. 170.
- 20 Henry Leffman, "Charles Dickens as a Nature-Faker," Dickensian, 5 (1909), 213-6; Peggy Webling, "Dickens on Animals," Dickensian, 11 (1915), 292-5; Rebecca J. Gradwohl, "The Dogs in Dickens's Books," The Catholic World, 123 (1926), 466-70; Florence Tylee, "'Going to the Dogs'--with Dickens," Dickensian, 29 (1933), 267-75.
- 21 Frank A. Gibson, "Dogs in Dickens," Dickensian, 53 (1957), 145-52.
- 22 The Old Curiosity Shop, p. 164.
- 23 The Old Curiosity Shop, p. 364.
- 24 The Old Curiosity Shop, p. 667.
- 25 Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (New York: New American Library, 1964), pp. 269-70.
- 26 Dombey and Son, pp. 270-1.

27 Dombey and Son, p. 642.

28 Dombey and Son, p. 526.

29 Gibson, p. 148.

30 Gibson, p. 148.

31 Charles Dickens, David Copperfield (New York: Penguin, 1966), p. 454.

32 As a biographical note, I might add that Jip is apparently modeled on Maria Beadnell's dog, Daphne. We can imagine that Dickens several times experienced the dubious pleasure of going courting with a canine chaperon. He must have felt the frustrations of sharing his devotion with such a ridiculous "middleman."

33 David Copperfield, pp. 549-50.

34 Tylee, p. 269.

35 David Copperfield, p. 712.

36 David Copperfield, p. 834.

37 David Copperfield, p. 838.

38 David Copperfield, p. 768.

39 Charles Dickens, Bleak House (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 67.

40 Bleak House, p. 154.

41 Bleak House, p. 71.

42 Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist (New York: Penguin, 1966), p. 349.

43 Oliver Twist, p. 136.

44 Oliver Twist, p. 136.

45 Oliver Twist, p. 153.

46 Oliver Twist, p. 432.

47 Gradwohl, p. 469.

48 Oliver Twist, p. 453.

- 49 Charles Dickens, Little Dorrit (New York: Penguin, 1967), p. 247.
- 50 Little Dorrit, p. 546.
- 51 Little Dorrit, p. 546.
- 52 Little Dorrit, p. 556.
- 53 Charles Dickens, Barnaby Rudge (New York: Penguin, 1973), p. 254.
- 54 Barnaby Rudge, p. 99.
- 55 Barnaby Rudge, p. 99.
- 56 Barnaby Rudge, p. 188.
- 57 Barnaby Rudge, pp. 518-9.
- 58 Barnaby Rudge, p. 656.
- 59 Barnaby Rudge, p. 738.
- 60 Barnaby Rudge, p. 738.
- 61 Cynthia Dettlebach, "Bird Imagery in Bleak House," Dickensian,
 59 (1963), 180.
- 62 Bleak House, p. 475.
- 63 Bleak House, p. 601.
- 64 Bleak House, p. 38.
- 65 Dettlebach, p. 179.
- 66 Bleak House, pp. 70-1.
- 67 Bleak House, p. 873.
- 68 Dettlebach, pp. 180-1.
- 69 Bleak House, p. 213.

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ANIMALS IN DICKENS' WORLD VIEW

by

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Although several critics in the last century have commented on Dickens' use of animals in his novels, this critical work has usually consisted of superficial catalogues of animal characters. Many of Dickens' creations, however, deserve much more attention because they are far from one-sided portraits. Admittedly, Dickens often appealed to the Victorian Age's penchant for highly sentimentalized portraits of domestic animals in his writing. To this extent, he shared qualities with other popular Victorian animal artists. The paintings of Sir Edwin Landseer, for example, are especially helpful in a comparison with Dickens' sentimentalized animals. Yet, we recognize that Dickens intended several of his animal characters to serve a higher, more complex purpose. Pets of important characters, we find, often work actively in the plots of the novels and underscore some of their major themes. At times, they help mark their master's effect on the society around them; they measure that human's circle of influence. At other times, they act as foils to their master's personalities--whether the persons be good or bad. Sometimes, Dickens uses the creatures to comment negatively on human nature. Finally, he has made a few animals into workable symbols--usually to highlight the evil in society. Whatever their function, there is no clear chronological progression to the types of portraits employed. Dickens clearly felt that a different situation called for a different kind of animal. None of the novelist's creatures are ultimately uninteresting portraits--even if they serve a mere sentimental purpose. Dickens tried to include all aspects of the world in his novels, so it is natural that the animal kingdom would hold a significant place there. Because of his keen sense of observation and lively description, Dickens presents animals which are worthy of our attention and study.