

‘A GHASTLY AND BLASPHEMOUS NIGHTMARE’: ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN DICKENS’S JOURNALISM

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Abstract. In the article ironically entitled *A Monument of French Folly*, published in *Household Words*, 8th of March, 1851, Charles Dickens targeted a number of civic reforms in municipal abattoirs located within the city walls of London as well as the English arrogant reluctance to adopt the hygienic measures practiced in French slaughterhouses. Dickens’s article was part of the foregoing struggle to relocate the Smithfield livestock market and surrounding slaughterhouses from the City of London in the city outskirts, so as to prevent ventilation problems and the risk of miasmatic infection. The aim of this paper is to examine Dickens’s article in the light of contemporary environmental concerns. I will particularly focus on his journalism as a token of modern social-ecology and environmental ethics, as shown by the administration and government policies he suggests to be implemented.

Key words: Charles Dickens, Victorian journalism, ecocriticism, environmental ethics, Francophilia

Dickens’s well-known passion for France has been profusely documented in his fiction, journalism and correspondence. The French revolution centres *A Tale of Two Cities*, and French eminent characters pepper *Little Dorrit*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Our Mutual Friend*. Similarly, a myriad of newspaper articles published in *Household Words*, *All the Year Around*, *The Examiner* and *The Daily News* revolve around French customs in contrast with his homeland’s, and his correspondence details with visual precision travel experiences and personal impressions in France that constructed a cultural, Francomaniac persona of which Dickens was fully aware, as proved by the words with which he defined himself to his friend and biographer John Foster in the letter ‘Charles Dickens, Français naturalisé et Citoyen de Paris’ (Forster, 1873, II: 330). This profound interest in France and the French was also remarked by his son, Henry Fielding Dickens, who noted that although his father had a very ‘strong love of his country’, he used to say, laughingly, ‘that his sympathies were so much with the French that he ought to have been born a Frenchman’ (Dickens, 1928: 28). In anticipation of the elite of English-speaking nineteenth-century authors who would constantly oscillate between their Irish, English or American national identities and their French cultural credentials, Dickens created a multiple self encompassing the cultural

attributes of both countries. More than a specific location, Paris and France represented in Dickens's work an idealistic aspiration the aim of which was to attack his compatriots' insularity, or, in Edmonson's words, 'to highlight what is wrong with the British system' and to ridicule 'the dismissive and xenophobic assumption of British superiority' (2007: 268).

This is particularly noticeable when Dickens attempts to redefine English nationhood in terms of urban sanitation and public health security. The article ironically entitled *A Monument of French Folly* which appeared in *Household Words* on the 8th of March, 1851, targeted a number of civic reforms in municipal abattoirs located within the city walls of London and the English arrogant reluctance to adopt the hygienic measures practiced in French slaughterhouses. The largest wholesale market in the United Kingdom at the time, the Smithfield market, based in the City of London since the Middle Ages, was the focus of his contempt. The market was originally built in the outskirts of London, yet the massive growth of the city's population steadily modified its first emplacement until it eventually came to occupy a nuclear position in the capital. As a result, the animals were brutally driven through the narrow and heaving streets crammed with local trades and industries associated with the market, hence becoming a hazard to public health and security. Ironically enough, as Dickens wrote in 'The Heart of Mid-London' (*Household Words*, 4 May 1850), the market stood close to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, whose gate was 'in the midst of this devilry' (Dickens, 1850: 122). Such physical proximity made him wonder about the tragic conjunction of human and animal pain, turning the 'Market of the Capital of the World' into a 'ghastly and blasphemous Nightmare' (Dickens, 1850: 123).

Dickens's reflections were triggered by his first-hand experience of abattoirs on both sides of the Channel. As a result of a trip to Paris in February 1851 to conduct research on municipal markets and slaughterhouses, he visited the cattle market at Poissy and the abattoirs at Montmartre and Grenelle. His conclusion was as emphatic as categorical: in France, 'of a great Institution like Smithfield, they are unable to form the least conception. A Beast Market in the heart of Paris would be regarded as an impossible nuisance. Nor have they any notion of slaughter-houses in the midst of a city' (Dickens, 1851: 427). Dickens was particularly astounded by ventilation problems and animal-welfare issues, and his article aimed at proposing a myriad of amendments to improve the living conditions of citizens and animals surrounding these areas. As will be shown, his statements may be reconciled with current environmental concerns, inasmuch as his urban environmental descriptions manifested his commitment with the preservation of nature, both from a legal and a philosophic standpoint. Thus, *A Monument of French Folly*, stands for the deep ecological preoccupations underlying his conceptualization of modern civilization as well as for his belief in a pioneering yet controversial recuperation of the natural world.

1 DICKENS'S PROTO-ENVIRONMENTAL THINKING: THE AUTHOR AS A SOCIAL-ECOLOGIST

Dickens's pioneering ecological sensibility has been traced in many of his novels mostly as a result of what John Parham terms, quoting Paul de Man, 'a return to a certain form of naturalism after the forced abstraction of the Enlightenment' (De Man, 1989: 198, quoted by Parham, 2010: 1). According to Parham, Dickens was an heir to the Romantic age, and his love of nature originates in the cultural climate that preceded him and that appeared in the works of many Romantic writers of the mid-nineteenth century.

However, whether the author was a lover himself of nature as an abstract, supra-human entity is a much more complex question, which inevitably connects with Dickens's understanding of urbanism and modern civilisation. In John Parham's words, what can be found in Dickens's proto-ecological thinking is the axiom by which 'a degraded physical environment equates to a hazardous human one' or what he terms a 'Victorian risk society' (2010: 2). In other words, Dickens's preoccupations focus on the human side of the equation. Preserving nature is just a means of preserving mankind, for it is mankind that occupies his social reflections. This is why most critics coincide in stating that Dickens was *not* necessarily a nature-lover. 'Rather', Hugh Cunningham argues, 'his responses to particular issues were shaped by his abiding concern for decency and humanity' (2008: 159). Being more of a resolute urbanite, his views on nature actually resemble Baudelaire's dislike of the wild in favour of the city. As Andrew Sanders notes, 'the more placid rhythms of rural life elude him as much as does an ability to observe and record the delicacies of a flower or the contours of a working landscape' and 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'. The critic concludes that 'as a writer of fiction, Dickens generally remained distinctly unawed by its phenomena' (2003: 91). On a similar note, Scott Russell Sanders observes that in Dickens, 'the social realm – the human mortality play – is a far more powerful presence than nature' (1996: 183). Man, rather than nature, or nature *through* man, is therefore the object of his anthropocentric thoughts. This would rally with a brand new concept inaugurated by ecocritical thinkers that transcends the classic divides between man and nature to coin a fresh ontological description of their symbiotic reconciliation, termed *urbanature*. For Ashton Nichols, the tangled relationship between man and the natural environment is much more complex than what the traditional Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment binary split has mistakenly argued, for 'nature and urban life are not as distinct as human beings have long supposed' (2011: xiii). Consequently, the so-called 'return to nature' is but a 'category mistake' as the borders of both have been made obsolete by modern technologies, namely nanotechnology and genetic manipulation (Nichols, 2011: xiii, xiv).

That 'urban culture and wild nature come to much the same thing' (Nichols, 2011: xiv) in the works of Dickens can be observed in his enthusiasm

in the integration of science as a mediator of the cosmic reconciliation between man and nature. In this sense, Parham reads Dickens as a forerunner of Murray Bookchin's social ecology thesis stating that, more than focusing on the literary recuperation of nature, this branch of ecocriticism aims at establishing 'a deep-seated continuity between nature and society' (Bookchin, 1987: 59) mostly consolidated by new technology. According to Parham, scientific knowledge aims at unveiling the secret of nature in order to respect its basic organic principles (2010). Dickens's well-known allusions to scientific subjects and characters in his fiction and journalism have been thoroughly studied (Levine, 2006; Winyard and Furneaux, 2010; Parham, 2010). Similarly, in *A Monument of French Folly* he refers in many an occasion to the statement proffered by the Head of the Natural History Section of the British Museum, Professor Sir Richard Owen. According to Owen, mistreatment and abuse of animals backfires in the form of fatal meat consumption for men, for after being brutally hastened and beaten, the cattle is 'in a most unfit state to be killed, according to microscopic examinations made of their fevered blood' (Dickens, 1851: 428). As will be shown, scientific instruments are not only vindicated but also *imitated*. In his detailed portrayal of abattoirs' putrefaction, Dickens's eye incarnates the microscopic accuracy of the eminent physiologist. In the article, optic technology acts as a scientific and literary guardian of both men and animals, and so, in spite of the fact that Dickens's main interest are humans, his discourse reveals a concern for animals as rightful beneficiaries of the alternative procedures he proposes. Such a stance reflects the 'ecological interdependence' of society and nature characteristic of many of Dickens's works (Parham, 2010: 9).

2 VENTILATION ISSUES AND THE POLITICS OF RECYCLING

Just as much as his novel *Our Mutual Friend* is permeated by the idea of matter recycling and waste renewal, Dickens's views on improving markets' and slaughterhouses' sanitary conditions reveal a deep belief in air circulation and ventilation that strictly follows classic Darwinistic ideas of substance re-use and state regeneration, or what Joe Amato terms 'the popular mid-century belief in the cyclical quality of all natural things' (Amato, 1998: 45, quoted by Macfarlane, 2007: 54). In the novel, Mr. Venus's taxidermist skills lie in 'creating an integrity for that which has been disintegrated, and in procuring value from that which has been used' (Macfarlane, 2007: 50). The recurrent metaphor of recycling and renewal pervades the novel, and erases the traditional Romantic hierarchy inherent to the notion of artistic, *ex nihilo origin* in favour of that of derivative *conversion*. In *A Monument of French Folly*, Dickens enthusiastically endorses a similar argument when advocating for ventilation and air renewal as a healthy source of life and urban progression. As Robert MacFarlane observes, Dickens was mostly influenced by contemporary medical science's 'miasmatic theories of

infection, which attributed not just the spread but also the generation of disease to the accumulation of waste matter,' that had come to be perceived 'as a symptom of societal disorganization and ill-health' (2007: 52).

Much has been written on Dickens's involvement in the mid-Victorian sanitation movement, as shown from his early interest in the Metropolitan Improvement Society and the Metropolitan Sanitary Association. Furthermore, Dickens's brother-in-law, Henry Austin, was the chief inspector to the General Board of Health, and was 'influential in forming the novelist's interest in these issues' (Smith, 2008: 63). An *avant-la-lettre* advocate of air purification, Dickens contended that ventilation problems both within over-populated markets and inside the slaughterhouses caused diseases for humans:

Into the imperfect sewers of this overgrown city, you shall have the immense mass of corruption, engendered by these practices, lazily thrown out of sight, to rise, in poisonous gases, into your house at night, when your sleeping children will most readily absorb them, and to find its languid way, at last, into the river that you drink. (1851: 429)

The domestic threat that the author addresses derives from the inexorable cycle of decomposition and composition, the menace of metamorphosing diseases which engenders a discourse of urban hazard in which clean and fresh air acts as a revitalising element. From a metaphoric perspective, Macfarlane argues that in Dickens's work, 'circulation plainly emerges as a desideratum' while

Circulation's obverse, blockage, is figured as hateful: the images of grease, fat, ooze, and miasma [...] are the physical consequences of congestion, all designate moral or metaphysical stagnancy or some sort. (2007: 55)

Unopened spaces, such as English markets and slaughterhouses, are 'victims of their own stasis' (Macfarlane, 2007: 61). They emerge as specific places where concentrated gases saturate the regeneration process: 'the slaughter-houses, in the large towns of England, are always [...] most numerous in the most densely crowded places, where there is least circulation of air. They are often underground, in cellars; they are sometimes in close back yards; sometimes (as in Spitalfields) in the very shops where the meat is sold. Occasionally, under good private management, they are ventilated and clean' (Dickens, 1851: 428).

Clean air and the recycling of oxygen turned out to be one of Dickens's foremost interests in his article, to the extent that the whole narrative on English hermetic markets and slaughterhouses tends to penetrate his actual writing style, which becomes spirally asphyxiating as it condenses images and ideas within the insulating syntax:

The busiest slaughter-houses in London are in the neighbourhood of Smithfield, in Newgate Market, in Whitechapel, in Newport Market, in Leadenhall Market, in Clare Market. All these places

are surrounded by houses of a poor description, swarming with inhabitants. (Dickens, 1851: 428)

His claustrophobic account of an area densely infested with dwellings, inhabitants and slaughterhouses takes on his description, which becomes as circular, accumulative and suffocating as the locations appearing in it. Verb tenses and syntactic profusion of nouns, adjectives and compounds act as intensifying vehicles of sweltering condensation:

Prosperity to cattle-driving, cattle-slaughtering, bone-crushing, blood-boiling, trotter-scraping, tripe-dressing, paunch-cleaning, gut-spinning, hide-preparing, tallow-melting, and other salubrious proceedings, in the midst of hospitals, churchyards, workhouses, schools, infirmaries, refuges, dwellings, provision-shops, nurseries, sick-beds, every stage and baiting place in the journey from birth to death. (Dickens, 1851: 429)

This nauseating piling of men, pestiferous animal corpses and remains, and live animals in a deplorable state suggests a significant correlation between humans and nonhuman others: Dickens's animalisation portrays humans incarcerated within the walls of oppressive areas, thus recreating an incestuous atmosphere of a deterministic nature. Within the limits of such specific urban arrangements, men's death sentence is comparable to that of beasts about to be slaughtered in the abattoir, and the apocalyptic link with an imminent death is even made more explicit by the author when disclosing that some of these slaughterhouses are 'close to the worst burial-grounds in London' (1851: 428).

According to Dickens's personal experience, French abattoirs proved to be the exact opposite of their English counterparts. Despite being built within the city walls, they stood in the borders: the Abattoir of Montmartre was located 'in a sufficiently dismantled space' which covered 'nearly nine acres of ground' (1851: 434). Full ventilation was then assured for buildings of magnificent dimensions standing 'in open places in the suburbs, removed from the press and bustle of the city'. Contrary to the 'unventilated and dirty' London slaughterhouses with 'reeking walls, putrid fat and other offensive animal matter clings with a tenacious hold' (1851: 428), the interior design of the French abattoir, made up of a number of opposite doors and windows, helped air circulation, preventing aerial corruption: 'there may be a thorough current of air from opposite windows in the side walls, and from doors to the slaughter-houses' (1851: 435). Corollary to his extensive animalisation of humans in his novels, the French abattoir's airing system seems to imitate a human organism. Dickens's personification of the slaughterhouse shows it as a breathing space, a physical location endowed with autonomous respiration and, therefore, with life. Unlike English abattoirs and markets, defined by their insulation and claustrophobic close-mindedness, their French counterparts were breathing edifices, 'open on all sides' (1851: 432), inhaling new fresh air and exhaling corrupted winds.

3 ANIMA MUNDI AND POETIC ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Dickens's organicist metaphor of markets and slaughterhouses as fully ventilated, 'lunged' bodies preventing aerial corruption and putrefaction may have been ignited by the reading of Poor Law Commissioner Edwin Chadwick's 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, and the 'exposure to the socio-political discourse of circularity and circulation' prominent during the 1840s (Macfarlane, 2007: 54). Slow as political action was to follow, the politics of public health inevitably 'began to shape his imagining of the disposition and regulation of society' (Trotter, 1988: 104). *A Monument of French Folly* credits this defence of motion and change as natural life renewal when the author endorses professor Owen's ideas on chemical conversions and transcendental biology, demonstrating that

Nothing in Nature is intended to be wasted, and that besides the waste which such abuses occasion in the articles of health and life [...] they lead to a prodigious waste of changing matters, which might, with proper preparation, and under scientific direction, be safely applied to the increase of the fertility of the land. Thus [...] does Nature ever avenge infractions of her beneficent laws, and so surely as Man is determined to warp any of her blessings into curses, shall they become curses. (Dickens, 1851: 279)

It is easy to deduce that Dickens's understanding of the circular essence of nature seems to be impregnated with a peculiar sense of poetic justice associated with the divine character of nature itself and the devilish portrayal of the city as an 'unnatural [...] perverted and perverting environment' (Andrews, 1979: 78). His biblical personification of Nature as an entity deemed to 'avenge infractions of her beneficent laws' on those who 'determined to warp her blessings into curses', for they shall 'become curses' (Dickens, 1851: 430), reveals a religious style that goes deeper than a mere neo-platonic conceptualization of Nature frequently observed in the German Romantic revival of the *anima mundi* myth. George Levine contends that Dickens yokes together the axioms of natural theology and Darwin's sense of scientific progression. As Levine puts it, 'he yearns for a "nature" that is indeed God's second book, as in the tradition of natural theology. But, like Darwin, he describes a world that resists such ordering' (Levine 2006: 159). In *Dombey and Son* (1848), an analogous metaphorical image of London as the source of corrupted nature is provided, and dirt is interpreted as man's interruption of the natural cycles designed by God: 'Vainly attempt to think of any simple plant, or flower, or wholesome weed, that, set in this foetid bed, could have its natural growth, or put its little leaves forth to the sun as God designed it'. The product of filth, Dickens narrates, is 'the ghastly child, with stunted form and wicked face' (1848: 684). The effects of human corrupting nature cyclically attain man himself. Nature being construed as a god-like force

capable of chastising those contravening its original godsend, its main role is that of imposing divine order upon the earth. The natural cycles lose their original Rousseauian benignity – the gracious attributes of ‘morality and good health’ Smith finds in nature in *Dombey and Son* as the inverse of city’s dirt (1848: 66) – to become an ominous presence menacing mankind and foreshadowing a natural catastrophe.

The world soul theory permeates his reading of Nature, yet he tends to define man’s relationship with it as one that has diverted from its natural origins due to its cultural state. That is why, when arguing in his article that ‘it is quite a mistake [...] to suppose that there is any natural antagonism between putrefaction and health’ (1851: 429), Dickens perpetuates the classic Romantic schism between nature and culture messianically contending that ‘you may talk about Nature, in her wisdom, always warning man through his sense of smell, when he draws near to something dangerous; but that won’t go down in the city. Nature very often don’t mean anything’ (1851: 429). Dickens’s prophetic tone unveils a fate-like retaliation from Nature on Man that openly contrasts with his scientific style and establishes a sort of poetic ‘environmental justice’ that has been deemed essential in social ecology thinking. In his article, Levine states, ‘material reality corresponds meaningfully to moral reality’ (2006: 173). Dickens’s apocalyptic views on nature foreshadow the destruction of man as a consequence of its own devastation, establishing a sort of deterministic fatality between man’s irresponsibility towards nature and the results of his acts, where scientific discourse alternates with prophetic, religious rant in an attempt to reconcile social reforms with natural theology’s anthropocentrism.

4 DICKENS AS A SOCIAL REFORMER: ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Dickens’s was ‘a world in transition’ (Baumgarten, 2001: 111) and, as noted above, many of his reflections on nature derive from his conceptualisation of modern civilisation. His agenda of reforms deals with urban and sanitary amendments that tend to implement a more active presence of the government bodies within the meat industry. According to Dickens, the state needs to interfere directly in the physical and economic arrangement of the meat business in order to guarantee efficiency and productivity. Social economy principles lead his thoughts, as stated by James Edwin Thorold Rogers in 1872 as the number of laws and regulations ‘which are needful for the security of society’, so that ‘the largest of persons can live in the greatest plenty, can look forward to the greatest regularity, and can do their work in the greatest safety’ (1872: 14). In line with modern social economists, Dickens contends a firmer administrative organization of the meat industries analogous to that seen in France to increase social benefits and objectives. Throughout his article, his interest in a number of measures and regulations to be implemented by the governing

body (namely an effective time arrangement for cattle trading, a geographic readjustment of markets and slaughterhouses in the city outskirts, a quasi-Keynesian distribution of tasks amongst workers leading to an industrial chain implying a major productivity, a deeper sensitizing of individual responsibility towards institutions and animals, and a stricter enforcement of regulations and surveillance) aim at implementing a state-like organization within markets and slaughterhouses which is construed as 'natural' for mankind. In other words, following the theses of classic British rational materialism, *order* (in any field of human co-habitation) is inexorably required for the prevention of the disintegration, either by cause of disease or social chaos, of the community bond. Such a state-like organization of the meat industries as micro-societies needs to be interpreted as an unavoidable, inner disposition of humans similar to human nature. 'The drovers can no more choose their road, nor their time, nor the numbers they shall drive, than they can choose their hour for dying in the course of nature' (1851: 434). The State must replace Nature and provide for men. Nature, in its State-like form, was conceived as an inner progression, a goal of improvement in itself that needs to be struggled for.

However difficult it may be to discern whether Dickens was really a nature-lover – a statement rendered much more obscure when bearing in mind that Dickens, 'although opposed to animal experiments, never became actively involved with the RSPCA' (Ryder, 1989: 100) – his arguments may be rallied to a number of contemporary environmental issues. Nonetheless, the originality of his remarks is a controversial matter. Rather than fresh, new-fangled claims, Dickens's petitions for improving abattoirs and urban markets in London took after the general opinion of his time, as summarized in Reach's conclusion to his 1847 essay, written four years earlier than Dickens's newspaper article:

Establish abattoirs in the outskirts of London. Place them under strict rule. Take care that the animals to be slaughtered are – until the last moment – furnished with all which can be demanded by their natural wants, and which is necessary to make their flesh wholesome. Introduce the method of killing which physiological science demonstrates to be the quickest and the most painless. Suppress private killing-places as you would suppress private stills. The public health requires it – the public safety calls for it – common humanity demands it. (Reach, 1847: 122)

Reach accurately stated Dickens's claims, and it seems that the latter's contribution to the anti-Smithfield campaign was but following the general civic-minded opinions of his epoch, rather than updating the previous tone of sanitary reformers. In this sense, Dickens's role in the anti-Smithfield campaign seemed to be that of a social catalyser and amplifier, whose claims helped popularise and spread prior theoretical standpoints.

Nevertheless, although his originality may not lie in his reflections as a forerunner of 21st-century environmental issues, he certainly achieves a highly

creative brilliance when supporting his arguments through ironic journalism. By comparing English with French abattoirs, the novelist aimed at enriching his reasoning with a contrast provided by his continental experience in France, 'Britain's direct comparator and erstwhile rival' (Clemm, 2009: 103), and thus attack John Bull's insularity. In other words, on a literary level, Dickens's article gives away more about the author's praise of France as an idyllic, eco-friendly country than about the actual reforms he meant to implement.

It is noteworthy to observe that Dickens's considerations seem to contradict contemporary research on abattoir history, contending that, far from proving to be such 'roomy, commodious buildings' (Dickens 1851: 436), if not blatantly utopian spaces, French slaughterhouses in the second part of the nineteenth century were actually killing factories infested with disease and corruption. Kyri Claflin describes the brand new Paris abattoir La Villette in the late 1860s as a 'city of blood' the design of which was, more than traditional, 'irrational' (2008: 27). Claflin's portrayal of French abattoirs matches exactly Zola's photographic sketches of the boulevard Rochechouart in his novel *L'Assommoir* (1877), where Gervaise remarks the presence of 'groups of butchers, in aprons smeared with blood' hanging about in front of the slaughterhouses, 'and the fresh breeze wafted occasionally a stench of slaughtered beasts' (Zola, 1877: 2). In both cases, French slaughterhouses proved to be galaxies away from the Arcadian killing places depicted by Dickens, not only in the mid-nineteenth-century, but also at the turn of the century, thus evincing that France was far from leading the Continental public health policies. In 1906, an observer claimed that La Villette had 'no unity of design'; rather, there were 'groups of pavilions [...] crowded together, separated by streets where animals, vehicles, meat, manure, all mix and mingle' and where 'surveillance is impossible, sanitary inspection is insufficient, and filthiness is the rule' (quoted by Claflin, 2008: 27).

5 CONCLUSION: DICKENS'S ECO-COSMOPOLITANISM

To conclude, Dickens's urban environmental descriptions cannot therefore be detached from his fiction outtake. Cosmopolitanism went hand in hand with proto-ecology founding what could be termed 'eco-cosmopolitanism' or, most specifically, 'eco-Francomania'. As contended at the beginning of this paper, France was a narrative space intensifying his Englishness. Yet such Englishness was a composite instance made up with a myriad of foreign qualities. In his appropriation of French surroundings and customs, Dickens seems to be, eventually, 'an Englishman for whom France is not really very foreign – or, perhaps, for whom France is no more foreign than England' (Rainsford, 1999: 12). Dickens would emphasise himself the relative and elusive notion of Englishness in his article *Why*, published on 1st March 1856 in *Household Words*:

Why does that word 'un-English' always act as a spell upon me [...] A hundred years ago, it was un-English not to love cock-fighting,

prize-fighting, dog-fighting, bull-baiting, and other savageries. Why do I submit to the word as a clincher, without asking myself whether it has any meaning? (1856b: 147)

As Clemm argues, beyond its arbitrary, fluid nature, the term 'un-English' encapsulates 'the importance of contrast – of "others" – in the formation of a national character: what is English is most easily expressed in terms of what is *not* English' (2009: 8). Such an assumption should also contemplate its exact opposite: for Dickens, as seen above, rather than 'a static fact determined by geographical origin or parentage' (Clemm, 2009: 48) being English was a dynamic goal incorporating utopian, teleological aspirations aiming to inculcate concern amongst his compatriots about how to make England a better place to live in. Francomania and environmentalism thus yoked together in his journalism so as to dismantle the 'insular', cultural association of his time equating 'that what is not English is not natural' (Dickens, 1856b: 2).

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