

Chapter 3:

Barnaby Rudge and Bleak House:

Haunted Worlds

Dickens's view of the world, as many critics have noted, became increasingly cynical as the years rolled on. We become gradually aware of a pervasive sense of desolation. Although Barnaby Rudge and Bleak House were written at different phases of Dickens's writing career, with a span of over ten years in between, both

involve Dickens's attempts to grapple with dark forces, forces which he found difficult to comprehend. Devendra Varma maintains that Gothic novels embody "a surrealistic expression of those historical and social factors which the ordinary chronicle of events in history does not consider significant" (Literature of the Occult 46). Dickens, in the course of his novels, documents what he envisions as gradually declining morality, a social concern ignored by the "ordinary chronicle of history".

In Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop, innocence prevails in its purest form amidst the evils of the world. Oliver kneels down to pray frequently, asking to be saved from the powers of evil. Nell is also portrayed as prayerful especially in the chapters leading up to her premature death. Both children escape to better worlds than that of the nightmare that England was fast becoming. Oliver retreats to the heaven-like world of the Maylies. Nell is forced a step further and has to die even though a wave of protest from the reading public clamoured for her to be saved. Dickens himself found it increasingly difficult to "murder" her. He told George Cattermole that he was "breaking [his] heart over the story, and cannot bear to finish it". He

told Macready, "I am slowly murdering that poor child and grow wretched over it. It wrings my heart. Yet it must be". It must be because Nell exemplifies innocence and has no place in the living nightmare of Dickens's world. She has premonitions of death and visions which are strikingly different from Nancy's. She has dreams of the little dead scholar, and of a "column of bright faces, rising far into the sky, as she had seen in some old scriptural picture once" (485). She passes the remainder of her life amidst serene surroundings. "The neighbouring stream sparkled and rolled onwards with a tuneful sound, the dew glistened on the green mounds like tears shed by good spirits over the dead " (490). The supernatural is enlisted here to create a picture of hope and of heavenly bliss, a bliss which contrasts with the ugliness on earth. Nell dies peacefully and happily and is apotheosized. In both Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop the pure at heart manage to emerge unadulterated as there is the sense of an omnipotent divine force, a force which is felt on earth as well as in the spiritual realm. In Barnaby Rudge and Bleak House however, there is the overwhelming sense of the presence of dark powers in place of the good. Dyson, in his analysis of the former novel,

links these powers with the "fermenting and destructing power" of hatred, and cites the hate which drives such characters as Rudge, Hugh, Haredale, Barnaby, Dennis, Chester, Gashford, Staggs and Sim (52). The allusions to the demonic powers of hell throughout the novel, however, contribute towards a far more horrific picture of life. In his later novels, Dickens found it increasingly difficult to envision characters who were fit candidates to represent a symbolic "principle of good". Critics may see this as an improvement as Dickens seems to have progressed towards making his "good" protagonists more human, merging traits that are both positive and negative, but I feel that this is sinisterly symptomatic of an increasing disillusion on the part of the author as he seems to have no trouble depicting characters who would appear to be representatives of principles of evil. Barnaby, for one, is seen by many critics as an innocent. He is far from spotless, as he has been tainted both spiritually and intellectually by the murderous deeds committed by his father. Although he is basically a naif, his association with Grip and the raven's ceaseless screams identifying itself as a "devil", as well as his role in the riots prove that he is, at least on a subconscious

level, in league with the same demonic forces which drove his father. He is, in effect, scarred in a spiritual sense as well as in a physical sense. This spiritual scar is just as conspicuous as the scar upon his arm. Barnaby has "phantom-haunted dreams" (108) and is even described by his creator to be horribly soulless- "*...the absence of the soul is far more terrible in a living man than in a dead one; and in this unfortunate being, its noblest powers were most wanting*" (74). Mr. Rudge Senior, in murdering his employer and the hapless gardener who happens to witness his deed, has awakened an inherent evil within himself and aligns himself with dreadful powers. He is thus constantly reminded of his guilt, and is haunted ceaselessly by visions of his victims. "I have seen him at sea, come gliding in the dead of night along the bright reflection of the moon in the calm water;" he tells Stagg in chapter 62, referring to one murdered man, "...and I have seen him on quays and market places with his hand uplifted, towering, the centre of a busy crowd unconscious of the terrible form that had its silent stand among them" (560). The Gothic projections of guilt which assailed the likes of Bill Sikes and other Dickensian villains have been taken a step further and killers are not only haunted by spectres

of those they have murdered, but become in themselves ghost-like due to their association with the immoral. Dickens's notion of the supernatural is similar, in this respect, to Shakespeare's in Macbeth. Macbeth suppresses what was a vital part of his character, "[t]he milk of human kindness", in order to commit regicide. In doing so, he unleashes dark powers, causing supernatural chaos. Animals behave in an unnatural way, the country is inundated by freak storms, and the murderer himself is terrified by what seems to be Banquo's ghost. Murderous and evil deeds are linked to supernatural dark forces as Lady Macbeth shows when she calls upon spirits and "murth'ring ministers" to fill her with "direst cruelty" (I iv). In the performance of heinous deeds, these latent powers are released. Both Macbeth's and his wife's lives consequently become as insubstantial as "walking shadow[s]". Elizabethans believed that the microcosm of man is indelibly linked to the macrocosm of nature. Any disruption in the natural make-up of man is reflected in macrocosmic chaos, in the subversion of all that was natural, creating supernatural occurrences. Macbeth suppresses his innate kindness, and causes such a disturbance. Similarly, Rudge, in his cold-blooded murders, exposes himself to the supernatural.

Like Jonas Chuzzlewit, whom Dickens describes as "his own ghost and phantom and was at once the haunting spirit and haunted man", Rudge, when he is seen, terrifies superstitious villagers like Solomon Daisy, in moments of horror capable even of enthralling Edgar Allan Poe, himself a master of horror and suspense (The Critical Heritage 106). Solomon Daisy relates his experience to a petrified audience at the Maypole on the anniversary of the double murders:

"... when I opened the church door to come out, which I did suddenly, for I wanted to get it shut again before another gust of wind came up, there crossed me- so close, that by stretching out my finger I could have touched it- something in the likeness of a man. It was bare-headed to the storm. It turned its face without stopping, and fixed its eyes on mine.

It was a ghost- a spirit." (323)

Here, Rudge is perceived as a ghost, a concept which is reiterated throughout the novel. He is earlier described as riding "more like a hunted phantom than a man", looking like a "bloodless ghost, while the moisture, which hard riding had brought out upon his skin, hung there in dark and heavy drops, like dews of

agony and death" (65). He is capable of ruthlessly petrifying Mary Rudge. Gabriel Varden is witness to the effect Rudge has on her. She stands "...frozen to the ground, gazing with starting eyes, and livid cheeks, and every feature fixed and ghastly...". Her face is marked by a "stony look of horror" and she shudders "as though the hand of death were on her" (91). Rudge envisions himself as a man who is, in the body, alienated from the rest of humanity, "...a spirit, a ghost upon the earth, a thing from which all creatures shrink save those cursed beings from another world, who will not leave me..." (185). In both Rudge and his idiotic son, we have instances of senseless, irrational evil, a sort of evil which is to resurface in several other, more minor characters, a sense of evil which becomes apparent in an increasingly larger scale as the novel progresses. Dickens often uses physical descriptions of buildings to mirror the depravity associated with them. Early in Barnaby Rudge, the mansion in which the double murders take place, the Warren, is described as being imbued with psychic traces of evil. The house has "fantastic monsters on the walls". It is seen as "the very ghost of a house, haunting the old spot ..." (154). A room within is "dull, dark and sombre ; heavy with worm-eaten

books; deadened and shut in by faded hangings, muffling every sound; shadowed mournfully by trees whose rustling boughs gave ever anon a spectral knocking at the glass; wore beyond all others in the house, a ghostly, gloomy air". Barnaby's raven, when in the room, looks like "some old necromancer... the embodied spirit of evil, biding his time of mischief" (254). A culmination of the powers of moral darkness results in the sense that these powers have permeated the bastions of civilisation. Varden, as he travels towards London sees it before him

...like a dark shadow on the ground, reddening the air with a deep dark light that told of labyrinths of public shops and swarms of busy people. Approaching nearer and nearer yet, this halo began to fade, and the causes that produced it slowly began to develop themselves ... [F]orms grew more distinct and numerous still, and London - visible in the darkness by its own faint light, and not by that of Heaven was at hand. (71)

Hornback, in Noah's Arkitecture, interprets heaven to mean "both Heaven and the stars, surely; thus, London's phosphorescent glow is the sign of its corruption" (39).

London is illumined, then, by "its own faint light" of moral depravity, and not by the light of heaven. Dickens, in using this image, hints that London lies steeped in moral decay.

When the riots erupt, Dickens's imaginative vision transforms London into a pandemonium of furies. He writes of a chaos which spreads, slowly, with the riots, to the city's outskirts and threatens the idyll of the countryside. In his letters Dickens reveals that his object was "to convey an idea of multitudes, violence and fury; even to lose my dramatis personae in the throng or only see them dimly through the fire and smoke" (Letters 2 : 418). Individuals are lost among the "savage faces" of the rioters who thirst "like wild animals" for blood. London itself seems "to be peopled by a legion of devils" (618). The flames and smoke make up "such a sum of dreariness and ruin that it seems that the face of heaven were blotted out..." (618). Heaven has been "blotted out", both literally and figuratively, as there is no place for heavenly powers in the souls of the rioters. *Smoke hides the results of destruction from heaven and "the gentle stars" (508). We* feel the painful truth behind one soldier's remark that

"[t]he devil's loose in London somewhere" (538). Much has been said of Dickens being imaginatively on the side of the rioters. His letter to Forster, saying, "I have let all the prisoners out of Newgate, burnt down Lord Mansfield's and played the very devil...I feel quite smoky when I'm at work," has been much quoted. (Letters 2:385). Bearing in mind that the writing process was always intensely personal for Dickens, the rioters and the riots could be seen as yet another instance of the author expressing his innermost savage desires. The sadism of Quilp, as he torments a leashed dog is recognisable in the relish in which Dickens writes about the trapped birds, shrieking as they are burnt alive in the fires of the riots. The idea of an inherent, irrational savagery beneath the façade of civilisation, apparent in Dickens's writing, both in a poetic and a personal sense, is certainly not new. We see traces of this in characters like Fagin, especially as he sits, like a caged animal in his cell, and in Quilp. The macabre, supernatural depictions of warped humanity and portrayals of the innate, evil nature of man in the Gothic novels were an early explication of this theory, and Dickens was to be followed by the likes of Dostoevsky, in The Devils, R.L. Stevenson in The Strange

Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Joseph Conrad in Heart of Darkness. Dickens writes of a seeming breakdown of the foundations of society, and of a "moral plague" (484). In Barnaby Rudge, even the fulcra on which Victorian society was precariously suspended, such as the systems of law and order, and of justice, are seen in a sinister light due to the organic evil of its propagators. The gallows, supposedly an instrument for the upholding of order, and of justice, are constructed by "dusky figures which might have been taken for those of shadowy creatures toiling at midnight on some ghostly, unsubstantial work..." (688). Dickens, although he was irresistibly compelled to watch executions, was, for most of his life, principally against capital punishment and saw hanging as a barbaric solution. He writes further that the gallows, as an instrument of death, was better "haunting the streets like a spectre, when men were in their beds, and influencing the city's dreams, than braving the broad day, and thrusting its obscene presence upon their waking senses" (689). Representatives of the forces of the righteous are as sinister as the forces they are designed to counter. This affirms the idea, in Oliver Twist, that the crowd pursuing Fagin is no better than Fagin is. Chitling describes the crowd as

a mob, "jumping up, one behind another, and snarling with their teeth and making at him; I can see the blood upon [Fagin's] head and beard, and hear the cries in which the women worked themselves into the centre of the crowd at the street corner, and swore they'd tear his heart out" (445).

The idea of a dearth of justice plagued Dickens. During the course of his life, he was to come into contact with the law and lawyers and was well aware of the injustice inherent in legal systems. In Bleak House, the representatives of the manmade systems of law and justice are seen in a sinister light, as if Cimmerian forces have filled in a moral vacuum. The passionless Tulkinghorn seems hardly human, and is even described as akin to the grim reaper, with a "countenance imperturbable as death" (541). "Conversation" Kenge is seen as perpetually wearing black. Wholes, a lawyer, is portrayed as a Gothic vampire, foreshadowing, perhaps, Bram Stoker's creation. He is described as

...a sallow man, with pinched lips that looked as if they were cold, a red eruption here and there on his face, tall and thin about fifty years of age, high shouldered and stooping.

Dressed in black, black gloved and buttoned to the chin, there was nothing so remarkable in him as a lifeless manner, and a slow, fixed way of looking at Richard. (589)

Richard drives Wholes back to London in a "morning-coach"- a hearse, and there are repeated references to Wholes's desk as a "coffin". Dickens skilfully draws on a stock Gothic motif, a vampire, which Peter Penzoldt describes as an "'un-dead' corpse of a deceased person who comes back to feed upon the blood of the living, sometimes a 'psychic vampire' drawing the vital blood from his victims" (37). The influence of the Gothic, when it comes to Wholes and various other characters in Bleak House has been noticed by Christopher Herbert, in his brilliant analysis of "The Occult in Bleak House", and Allan Pritchard, in his enlightening study of "The Urban Gothic of Bleak House". Pritchard goes on to point out that Esther explicitly says : " I felt as if Richard were wasting away beneath the eyes of this adviser, and there were something of the Vampire in him" (876). Wholes indeed preys on Richard, drawing him, too, to be ghost-like, a shadow of his former, exuberant self, and leading him to an untimely death. Both Pritchard and Herbert however, fail to

deal effectively with the most obviously Gothic character in the book, Krook. Herbert dismisses Krook's spontaneous combustion as a "(comic) macabre episode ... an eruption of horrific black magic that might have come from a Gothic fantasy like Melmoth the Wanderer" (Modern Critical Interpretations 124). Pritchard makes the statement that "...the bizarre death of Krook makes an important symbolic point about the corruption that destroys itself" but does not elaborate (443). Krook, the owner of a rag and bottle shop, is nicknamed "The Lord High Chancellor". This, together with his unhealthy obsession with the Court of Chancery makes him a symbolic representative of the Court and all the evils engendered in it. Esther Summerson reveals:

One had only to fancy, as Richard whispered to Ada and me while we all stood looking in, that yonder bones in a corner, piled together and picked very clean, were the bones of clients, to make the picture complete. (99)

Krook is described as mediievally wizard-like, and even owns a grey cat. His death by spontaneous combustion symbolises the very destructive nature of the corruption inherent in all that is associated with the Court of Chancery. The whole episode of his death is written in

Gothic-inspired detail, and it is the central image of the entire novel. Krook arranges to meet Tony to hand over letters that will incriminate Lady Dedlock, at midnight. There are strange creaks and noises. Guppy and Tony are visibly affected by the "ghosts of sound": "So sensitive the two friends happen to be, that the air is full of these strange phantoms; and the two look over their shoulders by one consent to see that the door is shut". There is a strange, unexplained "liquor" about the place, "offensive to the touch and sight and more offensive to the smell. A stagnant, sickening oil, with some natural repulsion in it that makes them both shudder" (509). The clock strikes twelve, and Tony goes down to Krook's chambers for his appointment. Krook has indeed died from Spontaneous Combustion, prepared for earlier in the story when Esther remarks that Krook's breath issues from him like invisible smoke, "as if he were on fire from within" (99). Dickens follows this horrible discovery with a typically Dickensian apostrophe:

The Lord High Chancellor of that court, true in title to his last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names

soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done ... inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupt humours of the vicious body itself- and that only- Spontaneous Combustion and none other of the deaths that can be died. (512)

The demonic, fiery powers of corruption, born of "false pretences" and "injustice", which ensued in the fiery riots of Barnaby Rudge, are, in this instance, directed inward, in what J. Hillis Miller sees as the "inescapable fulfilment of an inner principle of corruption" (Modern Critical Interpretations 82). Ackroyd is accurate in observing that "[i]t was in terms of the movement ... that Dickens believed in the phenomenon [of spontaneous combustion]; everything in the book leads up to that point, and if spontaneous combustion had not existed, Dickens might well have wanted to invent it" (697). Krook's supernaturally bizarre end is indeed integral to the very structure of Bleak House. Evil, degenerative forces are at work, forces which permeate and propel even the courts of law. Characters who represent the system, like Vholes and Krook illustrate this idea. Also, the story is peopled with those who have fallen prey to the evil power of the system. Gridley, the suitor from

Shropshire, is consumed with irritability and eventually dies because of his ridiculously complex case in Chancery, in which he has to prove that he is his father's son. Tom Jarndyce commits suicide, while "Tom-all-alone's", the row of houses named after him, disintegrates into ghostly ruin. Miss Flite is rendered insane, and Richard is drawn to a slow, painful death. Ada, because of her relationship with Richard, does not escape- Esther remarks often that she sees a "shadow" in Ada's face. The "system" has putrefaction at its heart, and exerts an irresistible, magnetic, demonic force as seen in Miss Flite's words. She tells Esther that the "Mace and Seal" are demonic forces which can

Draw people on, my dear. Draw peace out of them. Good qualities out of them. I have felt them even drawing my rest away in the night. Cold and glittering devils! (554)

Jarndyce appeals to Richard not to place his hope on "the family curse"- the suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. "Whatever you do on this side of the grave, never give one lingering glance towards the horrible phantom that has haunted us so many years," he exclaims, but his warning comes too late (393). The chaotic, dark powers of Barnaby Rudge, inherent in the Gordon riots, have

assumed a different, more organised guise, that of a "system". It is a guise that is no less dangerous.

Dickens's perception of the inadequacies of the legal system is evident in his shorter works, in which justice has to be meted out by other, more sinister means. In "The Bride's Chamber", an interpolatory tale in The Lazy Tour of the Two Idle Apprentices and "To be taken with a Grain of Salt", in Doctor Marigold's narrative, Dickens subscribes to a far more efficient form of justice than the corrupt methods of man. In stories such as these, Dickens typifies Devendra Varma's theory of "other-worldly gratification" in Gothic works in which pressing needs, needs which are not met in this realm, are met, in fiction, in the realm of the imagination. These needs include not only emotional gratification, like that supplied by supernatural terrors, but also the need for some sort of release from the horrors of real life. Dickens saw the legal system as a part of this horror as it seemed to be propelled by the more monstrous of man's impulses, that of selfishness and greed. In "The Bride's Chamber", Francis Goodchild is confronted with a spectre at the Lancaster Inn. The apparition reveals that it has been

doomed to roam the earth and tell the story of his crime until he can tell it to two people simultaneously. He had married a young girl out of a thirst for greed and revenge, as her mother had inadvertently spurned his amorous advances. He forces his reluctant bride to write a will leaving all her worldly goods to him, and mentally tortures her, willing her to die. She suffers and wastes away. He kills a young man who witnesses his heinous deeds, and is caught and hanged only after a freak bolt of lightning splits the tree under which he has buried the young man's body. Goodchild, throughout this horrific narrative, believes that a friend, Thomas Idle, is listening to the story with him. He suddenly realises that Idle has fallen asleep and he is alone with the ghost.

The judicial system seems to have been impotent until the freak lightning-bolt exposes the crime. This uncanny occurrence, as well as the fact that the murderer's spirit is doomed to roam the earth, gives rise to the possibility of supernatural intervention, common in the Gothic genre. Supernatural intervention is also apparent in "The Trial for Murder", in which the ghost of a murdered man appears to a juror throughout his

murderer's trial. Whenever the judicial process is hampered by lawyers of the defence, or by benign members of the jury, such as an "idiot" of a vestryman who meets "the plainest evidence with the most preposterous objections", the spectre of the victim "invisibly, dumbly and darkly overshadow[s] their minds" (Christmas Stories and Pictures from Italy 342). When a witness attests to the character of the accused, her eyes seem to follow the direction of the spectre's finger, and rest, "in great hesitation and trouble on the prisoner's face" (342). This idea, that of a higher form of justice, is evident also in Sikes' visions after Nancy's murder: "Let no man talk about murderers escaping justice and hint that Providence must sleep. There were twenty score of violent deaths in one long minute of that agony of fear" (428). Sikes' freak death is also, Dickens hints, supernaturally ordained. "[L]ustreless and glassy eyes" staring at him make him lose his balance and plunge to his death. Quilp dies, on an unnaturally dark, "black, devil's night", with a "thick cloud which then rested on the earth", shrouding everything from view (619). Justice, in other Gothic fiction of the nineteenth century, is also seen to be meted out through freak accidents and uncanny coincidences. In

Frankenstein, the monster comes across his creator's younger brother by chance and seizes him on impulse. The monster kills the boy, and his triumph brings about a thirst for more revenge (137). This seems to be the retribution for Frankenstein's Faustian pride. In Wilkie Collins' Woman in White, the villainous Sir Percival dies a frightful death in a freak fire in a church vestry while he acts upon his cunning plans- Walter Hartright hears Sir Percival's voice, "raised to a dreadful shrillness, screaming for help" as he suffocates and burns (466). In Sheridan LeFanu's Uncle Silas, the wicked governess who terrorises Maud Ruthyn, Madame de la Rougierre, is killed in a foiled attempt by her accomplices to murder her young charge. Only through the acceptance of the existence of realms other than the one we know can we concede to the fact that the concept of justice need not be limited to the justice of the courts of law. This may be seen in the guise of preternatural ordinance, or interpreted as fate, or viewed from a religious angle, as in the concept of divine justice, inherent in Oliver Twist, The Old Curiosity Shop, and, of course, Bleak House. When Jo, the unfortunate crossing-sweeper lies dying, Woodcourt teaches him to say the "Our Father". As the boy breathes his last, agonising breath,

Dickens writes that, finally, only in death does he find peace: "The light is come upon the dark benighted way" (705). Richard's death similarly leads to his "beginning the world". "Not this world, O not this! The world that sets this right" (927).

The sense of the unreal, a sense which permeates most of the works I have discussed during the course of this study is essential for Dickens to exploit the supernatural. This surrealism is prominent also in Bleak House. Esther Summerson, at one juncture in her narrative, says: "I was far from sure I was not in a dream" (827). It is important to note that imaginative references to the unreal and the supernatural in Bleak House are not limited to the areas in which the omniscient narrator is involved. Esther has been given the privilege of sharing her creator's dark imagination.

It is she who first draws attention to the uncanny natures of Krook and of Vholes. Barnaby, too, possesses this sort of vision, but is incapable, due to his mental disability, of channelling it effectively. He randomly bestows supernatural qualities on both the animate and inanimate as he does with clothes on a clothesline, fluttering in the wind. He tells Mr.

Chester that it is "better to be silly" than to be "wise" and blind to fantastic sights:

You don't see shadowy people there, like those that live in sleep - not you. Nor eyes in the knotted panes of glass, nor swift ghosts when it blows hard, nor do you hear voices in the air, nor see men stalking in the sky- not you!

(33)

This sort of dark, imaginative vision is essential, Dickens hints, as it is linked to the conscience, and an acute sensitivity to the feelings of others as well as an awareness of oneself. Esther Summerson, as I have already shown, shares Dickens's dark imagination and this, along with images linked to the supernatural leads her towards an awareness of her role in her world. Her hallucination, as she lies ill with smallpox, illustrates this:

... I am almost afraid to hint at that time in my disorder - it seemed one long night, but I believe there were both days and nights in it - when I laboured up colossal staircases, ever striving to reach the top, and ever turned ... by some obstruction, and labouring again. I knew perfectly at intervals, and I think

vaguely at most times, that I was in my bed, and I talked to Charley ... yet I would find myself complaining, "O more of these never-ending stairs, Charley,- more and more- piled up to the sky I think!" and labouring on again.

Dare I hint at that worse time, when strung together somewhere in great black space, there was a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind in which I was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the rest, and it was such inexplicable agony and misery to be part of the dreadful thing. (544).

She is subconsciously aware that, however difficult her life is, she has her own role to play in her bleak world. The element of the unreal in Dickens's works allows the supernatural to be a part of this dynamic creation of awareness. Dark, distorted images visualised through his heroine reveal his view of what his society was fast becoming, and what the world could become if his contemporaries were, like Esther, to accept the message of these imaginative, haunting, dark visions, and act upon them to make the world a better place.

A reading of the works I have mentioned in my study will inexorably allow the reader to notice that Dickens uses supernatural images, like the writers of the Gothic school, to plunge into the depths of the imaginative inner self and expose the savagery of some of the baser human desires. The diversity and complexity of human life is revealed in dark, nocturnal images when darkness releases the psyche from inhibitive societal constraints. On a personal level, Dickens uses such images to reveal his own, savage nature, through characters like Quilp and the rioters of Barnaby Rudge. The feeling of terror which imbues such dark visions is expressed in this way.

Dickens also extends the use of preternatural devices to reveal his view of the world, a world plummeting into chaos due to the advent of materialistic thought and the lack of justice. An exploration into the complexity of human life not only involves the exposure of negative impulses but also the more positive impulses. These impulses were viewed as dark and sinister and were relegated to the nocturnal domain due to a puritanical sense of guilt in the Victorian era. In Bleak House, Dickens, through an authorial intrusion in his description of the Chesney Wold gallery of Sir Leicester's ancestors shows his readers the ghostly

liberation which accompanies the setting of the sun:

Then do the frozen Dedlocks thaw. Strange movements come upon their features, as the shadows of leaves play there. A dense justice is beguiled into a wink. A staring Baronet, with a truncheon, gets a dimple in his chin. Down into the bosom of a stony shepherdess there steals a fleck of light and warmth, that would have done it good, a hundred years ago.

(620)

We suspect that the passionless Sir Leicester needs a dose of these shadowy, albeit liberating powers. He is almost described as lifeless and zombie-like, a member of the living dead, because of a lack of vital passion in his nature. His elegant wife is also seen as emotionless, and often has a "perfectly still" demeanour. Freud believed that an uncanny terror arises from "something repressed which recurs" (363; Freud's emphasis). What is repressed by Lady Dedlock is her passionate sexuality, seen in the manner in which Dickens constantly associates the passionless Lady Dedlock with the Ghost's Walk at the Dedlock estate in the country. In a symbolic stroke of genius, the footsteps on the walk represent the nocturnal release of her own repressed

passion, a passion she undoubtedly possesses. Esther, borne from her mother's passion, sees herself as the ghost, haunting her mother, whose past reveals a tremendous capacity for such passion, as seen in her affair with Captain Hawdon, Esther's father. Her inherent yearning for freedom is symbolised in ghostly, disembodied steps, steps which she tries not to hear. The steps, according to Dedlock legend, belong to the ghost of Sir Mowbury Dedlock's wife, who possessed a freedom and vitality during the reign of King Charles, and, in her quest for independence, was a traitor to King Charles' cause, bringing disrepute to the Dedlock name.

The steps plying the Walk are a symbolic representation of a timeless thirst for freedom from the constraints of a passionless society. A thirst for freedom echoed in other Gothic - inspired works in similar images of the night. In Wuthering Heights, the passionate love between Catherine and Heathcliff is realised through spectral images. In Villette, the repressed Lucy has a nocturnal, hallucinatory vision of heated, "sylvan courtship" (485).

Dickens's novels are populated by characters who do not give in to the freeing powers of the night and are

rendered lifeless due to a recurring lack of vivifying emotion and passion. Bleak House is haunted by the emotionless spectres of Tulkinghorn, Sir Leicester, Vholes, and even the imperturbable, shadowy police inspector, Bucket. The world of Barnaby Rudge is haunted by the likes of the hangman Dennis, who is a passionless being, clad in the clothes of those he has executed, suggesting that he, too, is lifeless. The Old Curiosity Shop, in the chapter concerning industrial England, is beset with automatons, conditioned to work without thinking, and passionless spooks like Sally and Samson Brass.

It is Dickens's dark imagination which allows for the expression of what he saw as the terrors of a haunted world, an imagination he shared with writers of the Gothic. One wonders what his writing would have been like were it not for the dark, supernaturally inhabited corners of his mind, and were it not for an unsuspecting little nursemaid called Mary Weller.