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## **“Influence of Locality” in Dickens, Austen, and Hardy: Placing Nineteenth-Century British Literature**

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“Influence of Locality” in Dickens, Austen, and Hardy: Placing Nineteenth-Century British  
Literature

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Charles Dickens begins his longest and last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), rooted in place. The opening line reads:

In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames, between Southwark bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in. (13)

The visceral presence of place, of the Thames, specifically situated between two central bridges in London, locates the novel, orients the reader, and introduces the culturally and historically complex ideas of where, when, and how this novel unfolds. The Thames acts as the source of income for the two figures in the boat in this opening scene, Gaffer Hexam and his daughter, Lizzie, who dredge the Thames for the drowned. The river is also the conduit that brings people from all socioeconomic classes together. Later in the novel when Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood, when Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood, gentlemen of the law, are about to search for Gaffer Hexam's missing body (later discovered in the Thames), Wrayburn has a bodily response to his proximity to the Thames when he sips at a beverage that tastes like "the wash of the river"; Lightwood assures him he feels the "Influence of locality" (166). Place in *Our Mutual Friend* constructs the backdrop, the setting, of Dickens's narrative while, at the same time, it reflexively affects the actions, moods, and heritages of the people who inhabit it.

The perspective of place theory, or geocriticism, seeks to understand both how people interact with and make meaning of space—thereby creating meaningful "place"—and how place then reflects that meaning onto constructed narratives, such as fiction. As Tim Cresswell explains in his book *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004), "place" is too complicated for a single definition or explanation because "Place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of

power” (19). Place is thus both a social and cultural environment and the political manifestation of human interaction within space.

Dickens’s Thames in *Our Mutual Friend* as well as the worlds of Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* (1818) and Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891), which I explore in this paper, use the natural geography of Southern England in various ways to affect characterization, plot, and theme. By applying Cresswell’s definition of place alongside theories of geocritics Raymond Williams and Franco Moretti that address place theory through literary analysis and GIS mapping, respectively, I argue that these three novels treat place as an actor or character in the nineteenth-century British novel. In turn, the three novels rooted in specific locations shape a representation of nineteenth-century England. A distinct and central place in each novel—the Thames in *Our Mutual Friend*, Lyme Regis in *Persuasion*, and Stonehenge in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*—interacts with the social constructions of the fictional narrative in which it operates.

Each place is a real English location, tied to unique histories with particular social, cultural, political, and/or religious contexts. The Thames acts as an actual and major character in *Our Mutual Friend*, manifested in the relationships it has with the other human characters and in unraveling the mystery of John Harmon, heir to the Harmon estate who is presumed drowned. Lyme Regis, a more minor actor, serves as the catalyst of climactic action in *Persuasion*, reuniting Frederick Wentworth and Anne Elliot in various love triangles to allow the novel to reach its happy end. Stonehenge encompasses the final pivotal moments of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* as a resolution to Tess’s harrowing ordeals and the acceptance of Tess’s spiritual identity as connected to the natural geography of her ancestors. Just as a real place defines each novel, these locations are likewise defined by the novels themselves, which fictionally

reconstruct each place. These three novels that span the long nineteenth century use place not only as a backdrop or setting for the narrative but also as a mode for discussing English cultural heritage—the Thames as an integral part of life and death in industrial London, the seaside resort town of Lyme Regis as a secluded place to vacation away from the prying eyes of society, and Stonehenge as a relic of an ancient spirituality that has been all but lost to archeologists, anthropologists, and historians, but which lives on in the subliminal memories of the English people. The result is a complex intermingling of the locational realities that represent England across the long nineteenth century and the fiction that seeks to present and remake these places for its own purposes.

To develop my argument, I disrupt history and chronological order by beginning with an 1865 novel followed by an 1818 work and concluding with an 1891 novel. I privilege *Our Mutual Friend* because Dickens immediately introduces the river as an animate character that subsequently meanders throughout the narrative by appearing and disappearing as if mimicking the river's tides. The tidal river is a major dynamic character that moves from the urban city to the coast and the countryside and allows us to see how one fluid place can traverse different topographies become a site of darkness and death but also of provision, nurture, and rebirth. *Persuasion*, unlike in *Our Mutual Friend*, focuses on one specific site—the Cobb at Lyme Regis. However, Austen shows how one important location can propel the plot forward, facilitating a climax that catalyzes the final resolution, Anne and Wentworth's reconciliation and reunion. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* makes a fitting close to this analysis of literature of place for several reasons. It moves us to the end of the long nineteenth century, a time when the idealized rural countryside became a site of nostalgia in England's increasingly industrialized world. *Tess* also shows how a late scene builds upon all the nuances of plot that precede it to offer a final

resolution. Hardy presents Stonehenge as Tess's spiritual resting place where she feels at peace with the trials and tribulations of her life, the crime she has just committed, and the punishment that she must face by law. The order of these three works thus forms an arc of place as character, climax, and resolution.

### Place as a Character: *Our Mutual Friend*

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens recreates the River Thames as an omnipresent character, not merely a powerful, flowing tidal river. He introduces the Thames with a purpose, a personality, and human emotions. He often describes the river as "agitated," "solemn," or "fierce" (Dickens 168, 731, 363). Likewise, the river acts as if it were a body. As a tidal river, it moves oddly and unpredictably, as if sentient and self-aware, creating the dramatic effect of moving dangerously quickly at one moment and staying calm and placid at another. It shivers, it speaks, it draws people near, and it drowns its victims or spares their lives. The Thames is also the locus for the "Harmon Murder," which sets the plot into motion. John Harmon, the heir to a huge fortune made in rubbish removal in London, is believed drowned in the river on his way home to claim his inheritance. The discovery of what is presumably his body triggers a series of events. Old Harmon's working-class employees, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, receive the Harmon inheritance and take in young Bella Wilfer as a ward. Gaffer Hexam is accused of murdering "Harmon" by drowning him, which leaves his daughter Lizzie to find her own housing and income. The murder on the Thames also allows John Harmon to disguise himself as John Rokesmith and take a position under the Boffins' employ where he falls in love with Miss Wilfer, the very woman his father's will stipulates he must marry in order to inherit the fortune. Likewise, the Thames indirectly introduces Eugene Wrayburn, a young lawyer brought to the

scene of the crime, to his eventual love, Lizzie Hexam. The Thames thus curates the setting and manipulates the romantic and economic elements of the plot, taking an active role in the novel.

As Williams postulates in *The Country and the City* (1973), Dickens dramatizes the “relation between persons and things” (158). To Williams, “The physical world is never in Dickens unconnected to man. It is of his making, his manufacture, his interpretation” (161). In *Our Mutual Friend*, the physical place of the Thames embodies a projected humanity much as it at times moves as a body. The river is an actor in so far as it influences plot, reflects human emotions, and seemingly empathizes with the characters who inhabit or come into contact with it. However, in *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens connects humans and the physical world a step further. The Thames not only embodies projected humanity, but is an independent non-human actor, a motivator, a performer.

The Thames moves freely through the landscape of London and the surrounding suburbs like any other character, but it also meanders through the narrative. After introducing the Harmon Murder, Dickens writes:

Thus, like the tide on which it had been borne to the knowledge of men, the Harmon Murder—as it came to be popularly called—went up and down, and ebbed and flowed, now in the town, now in the country, now among palaces, now among hovels, now among lords and ladies and gentlefolks, now among labourers [*sic.*] and hammerers and ballast-heavers, until at last, after a long interval of slack water it got out to sea and drifted away. (40)

Here the language pictures an errant stream, flowing from place to place and disappearing into the abyss, bringing news of murder that passes among people of all social classes. The river is itself a sentient character, capable of taking in and distributing sensational information.

The Thames is not a lifeless body of water, but a direct actor in Lizzie's life, helping her along her journey to adulthood and romance. In the very first scene depicted by illustrator

Marcus Stone, the Thames becomes a provider. Gaffer Hexam, the lowly river body snatcher and scavenger, says to his daughter and companion, Lizzie:

“It’s my belief you hate the sight of the very river.”

“I—I do not like it, father.”

“As if it wasn’t your living! As if it wasn’t meat and drink to you!...How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie? The very fire that warmed you when you were a babby, was picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very rockers that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut of a piece of wood that drifted from some ship or another.” (Dickens 15)

The river provides for her as a young girl by supplying her father with the scavenged goods that warm and protect her, but it is also the place of her father's eventual death, which sets in motion her own journey as an independent adult woman. Though Lizzie resents the river, her connection to the murky water cannot be denied. She says to her brother, Charley, after their father's death, “I can’t get away from it [the river], I think,” said Lizzie, passing her hand across her forehead. “It’s no purpose of mine that I live by it still” (Dickens 228).

The river is a part of Lizzie just as much as she is a part of it, and, in the end, it becomes her oldest and “best friend,” as her father prophesizes. When Charley Hexam’s schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone, jealously attacks Lizzie’s lover, Eugene Wrayburn, and pushes him into the Thames, Lizzie saves him without a second thought by using the strength and skills that she has gained from a lifetime of living on the river. The Thames makes Lizzie strong, as evidenced in Stone’s opening illustration for the serial publication titled “Bird of Prey” (Fig. 1). Stone captures Lizzie with muscular arms, exposed by rolled-up sleeves, straining powerfully in an effort to row the little boat in which she and her father sit steadily and adeptly. Later, when Wrayburn falls into the water after his altercation with Headstone, a similar power comes over Lizzie: “Her old bold life and habit instantly inspired her...A sure touch of her old practised [*sic.*] hand, a sure step of her old practised foot, a sure light balance of her body, and she was in



the boat” (682-683). The river reveals in her a “supernatural spirit and strength,” which enables her to save her lover from certain death (684). The near dead, insolent Wrayburn emerges from the river reformed; he lives and marries Lizzie, although she is socially beneath him, suggesting the baptismal powers of the tidal river.



Figure 1 "The Bird of Prey" by Marcus Stone. Wood engraving by Dalziel. 1864.

The Thames also acts as a moral figure in *Our Mutual Friend*. Granted, Dickens continually compares the river to human filth: it is covered in “slime and ooze” and “scum,” where the “scum of humanity seemed to be washed from higher grounds, like so much moral sewage” (Dickens 13; 781; 30). However, since the river represents the “social and moral world in physical terms” as Williams puts it, it has its own subjective moral code. The Thames passes judgment. It drowns Gaffer Hexam, to whom Lizzie is devoted, thereby freeing Lizzie from the terrible life he provides for her of scavenging and robbing corpses. The Thames also embraces. For Betty Higden, the widowed foster mother of the orphans the Boffins attempt to adopt, the

Thames is her final companion. Higden fears the poor houses of London above all else. She spends her years taking in poor and orphaned children in order that they might escape the terrible lives that await them in the workhouse. When she herself becomes ill, Higden flees the city and the threat of being placed in a poor house to die. She walks along the riverbank out of the city and through the countryside until she collapses and eventually passes away:

The poor old creature had taken the upward course of the river Thames as her general track; it was the track in which her last home lay, and of which she had last had local love and knowledge... she heard the tender river whispering to many like herself, "Come to me, come to me! When the cruel shame and terror you have so long fled from, most beset you, come to me! I am the Relieving Officer appointed by eternal ordinance to do my work; I am not held in estimation according as I shirk it. My breast is softer than the pauper-nurse's; death in my arms is peacefuller than among the pauper-wards. Come to me!" (Dickens 496-497)

The river offers Betty Higden a peaceful and natural place of release, nicer than the manmade structures to house the poor. It speaks to her kindly and coaxingly, and though she does not drown in the river, she chooses to lay herself down against a tree facing a pool created by a waterwheel on the river. She dies removed from the scummy banks of the industrial city, surrounded by the clean and serene countryside of her youth.

In contrast, the Thames punishes two of the most despicable characters in the novel, Rogue Riderhood and Bradley Headstone, who also die alongside the Thames, removed from London. However, unlike the serene tone of Betty Higden's death, Riderhood and Headstone drown in the river, "lying under the ooze and scum behind one of the rotting gates" of the lock where Riderhood worked (Dickens 781). Though removed from the city docks, Riderhood and Headstone still drown in the mucky and murky water, a physical manifestation of their reprehensible characters and schemes. The Thames acts as a versatile character in these various instances, fluid enough to be both a serene comfort and a vengeful killer.

The Thames stretches beyond the city where the novel initially takes place. Like Higden and Headstone, the Thames begins in the city and moves outward towards the countryside. The Thames stretches out west beyond the boundary of London. The transitory and omnipresent nature of the river—an ever-moving form of natural geography—becomes illuminated by Franco Moretti’s examination of *Our Mutual Friend* through mapping and GIS (Geographic Information Systems) in *Atlas of the European Novel* (1998). To Moretti, Dickens in his last completed novel constructs a multi-dimensional and normalized middle class which “[unifies] the two halves of the city,” creating “not only a larger city...but a more *complex* one” (86). He writes, “*Our Mutual Friend* is caught between the fraudulent arrogance of the West End and the physical violence of the Docks” (117). The Thames stretches beyond even those two markers both physically and socially and acts as a conduit among the socioeconomic classes. The Thames brings all of the characters together—first to the Docks where working-class Gaffer finds the alleged body of the heir to the Harmon estate, and finally to the outer reaches of the city and into the surrounding country where Lizzie nurses the financially superior Wrayburn back to health, and Bella, born into poverty, marries Harmon, born into privilege, in secret at Greenwich.

For both Moretti and Williams, the landscape of Dickens’s novel represents the economic classes of industrializing London: “place” projects socioeconomic stigmas and relationships back onto Dickens’s characters. However, in *Our Mutual Friend*, the Thames, a natural feature of London’s geography, transcends the locus of the nineteenth-century British class system and becomes instead a mediating character within the system, bringing members across the social classes into contact within a stratified society. The River Thames is, undoubtedly, “our mutual friend.”

## Place as Climax: *Persuasion*

Place greatly influences Anne Elliot in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, though as a catalyst of action rather than a character. Anne's location and its environs affect her social circles, her sense of belonging or usefulness, and her emotions and feelings towards others. Displaced from her family's ancestral seat at Kellynch Hall, Anne travels between her sister's home at Uppercross Cottage, to Lyme Regis on the Dorset Coast where the climax of the novel occurs, to Bath where resolution becomes possible, all the time floating placeless among the various circles of friends and family. Austen begins the novel emphasizing Anne's familial sense of place in describing the Elliot lineage in *Debrett's Baronetage of England* that outlines her family history, crest, and motto: "Then followed the history and rise of the ancient and respectable family, in the usual terms: how it had been first settled in Cheshire... and concluding with the arms and motto: 'Principal seat, Kellynch Hall, in the county of Somerset'" (Austen 6). However, most of the novel is spent away from Kellynch Hall. Anne transitions from place to place, and each place becomes integral to her moods, her emotions, and her social interactions.

Seven years before the novel begins, Lady Russell persuades Anne to give up her attachment to Captain Wentworth because he has no prospects. When Anne reluctantly dissolves her engagement to Wentworth and visits Bath almost immediately after, she remembers that "no aid had been given in change of place" (Austen 28). In this case, place did not lift her spirits as she had hoped it would. Later, as Anne moves into Uppercross Cottage with her sister Mary, she remarks that "Her own spirits improved by change of place and subject" (44). Place has the opposite effect on her than it had after the dissolution of her engagement seven years earlier. Most remarkably, Anne is acutely aware of herself and how "place" affects her emotions, moods, and interactions. Lastly, with the dramatic change of place from Uppercross to Lyme Regis after

Wentworth's return to the neighborhood, "place" instigates the climax of the novel. By removing Anne from the familiarity and social stability of Uppercross, Austen uses Lyme Regis as a means to detach Wentworth from an unfortunate tie to Louisa Musgrove and direct his attentions back to Anne.

The group from Uppercross makes a journey to the sleepy seaside resort of Lyme Regis when Wentworth—having come to Kellynch Hall to visit his sister who now occupies it with her husband, Admiral Croft, and to seek a wife—wants to visit an old friend, Captain Harville who lives there. Austen describes the party as follows:

The young people were all wild to see Lyme. Captain Wentworth talked of going there again himself; it was only seventeen miles from Uppercross; though November, the weather was by no means bad...and to Lyme they were to go—Charles, Mary, Anne, Henrietta, Louisa, and Captain Wentworth. (88)

Austen initially introduces Lyme Regis as a place of excitement and romance for the group of young friends. Louisa Musgrove views it as a jaunt with her suitor, Captain Wentworth; although Wentworth flirts with both Musgrove sisters, he is considered to be Louisa's suitor when Harriet becomes engaged to her cousin, Charles Hayter. Anne cautiously accepts the proposal, fearing the awkwardness of being in such close company with her former fiancé.

The seaside resort is eerily empty of tourists as it is the off-season for vacationers. Nonetheless, Lyme seems alive because it is part of the living landscape that includes cliffs, beaches, and sea:

They were come too late in the year for any amusement or variety which Lyme, as a public place, might offer; the rooms were shut up, the lodgers almost all gone, scarcely any family but the residents left—and, as there is nothing to admire in the buildings themselves, the remarkable situation of the town, the principle street almost hurrying into the water, the walk to the Cobb, its old wonders and new improvements, with the very beautiful line of cliffs stretching out to the east of the town, are what the stranger's eye will seek. (89)

Removed from the society of Uppercross, Lyme becomes the perfect landscape for unsupervised adventure. Literally, being “out-of-place,” the characters experience a landscape devoid of social pressures that allows them to act freely and “transgress,” which, as Cresswell writes, “is an inherently spatial idea. The line that is crossed is often a geographical line and a socio-cultural one” (165). The climax of the plot comes when Louisa transgresses and actually crosses a geographical line when insisting on being “jumped down” a second time from the narrow jutting steps of the Cobb. Here, Louisa transgresses the geographic boundary of the steps to the Cobb, while at the same time, she transgresses the social norms of budding womanhood with her silliness, resulting in a transformative moment for the entire group.

The climactic jump happens after the little group spends time wandering the natural and man-made geography, and the wild landscape becomes a private place all their own: “They went to the sands, to watch the flowing of the tide, which a fine south-easterly breeze was bringing in with all the grandeur which so flat a shore admitted. They praised the morning; gloried in the sea; sympathized in the delight of the fresh-feeling breeze—and were silent” (Austen, 95). The group’s silence, influenced by a reverence for the natural wonders before them, reflects Anne’s own introspection about her relationship with Captain Wentworth. As Peter W. Graham notes in his essay “Why Lyme Regis?” “The excursion from Uppercross lies at the exact center of the novel...[and] Anne’s feelings about her relationship with Wentworth frame the section” (33). Secluded and rich in natural landscape, Lyme Regis is a place suited well for introspection. There, the characters’ innermost feelings emerge and rise to the surface when place facilitates the natural conditions that form the climax of the novel.

As the group comes to the end of their walk along the beach, they turn back to the Cobb, “a curving 870-foot jetty and promenade. Reputed to be the only structure of its kind in England,

the Cobb seems to have been built in medieval times from rows of oak-tree trunks driven as pilings into the sea floor, with massive boulders called cowstones and cobbles filling the gaps” (Graham 28). There, the slippery stone structure catalyzes the dramatic incident where Louisa falls onto the hard pavement, an accident which ultimately leads Anne and Wentworth to realize their true feelings for each other. As with the Thames in *Our Mutual Friend*, “The physical world is never...unconnected to man. It is of his making, his manufacture, his interpretation” (Williams 161). The manmade and natural geography of the Cobb becomes an actor in the climactic scene: it is both a setting and an instigator.

Austen describes the scene cinematically, composing the setting, the circumstances, and the action with great detail:

There was too much wind to make the high part of the new Cobb pleasant for the ladies, and they agreed to get down the steps to the lower, and all were contented to pass quietly and carefully down the steep flight, excepting Louisa; she must be jumped down by Captain Wentworth...The hardness of the pavement for her feet, made him less willing upon the present occasion; he did it, however; she was safely down, and instantly, to shew her enjoyment, ran up the steps to be jumped down again. He advised her against it, thought the jar too great; but no, he reasoned and talked in vain; she smiled and said, “I am determined I will:” he put out his hands; she was too precipitate by half a second, she fell on the pavement on the Lower Cobb, and was taken up lifeless! (102)

The place catalyzes the accident, with its “too much wind,” the “steep flight,” and the “hardness of the pavement,” creating the perfect setting for danger and disruption. Hugh Thomson captures many of these elements in his illustration for the 1898 gift book edition of *Persuasion* (Fig. 2) He features the hard and uneven cobblestones, the jagged, steep steps, the limp form of Louisa’s “lifeless” body, and the deep concern on Wentworth’s face. The place poses bodily danger to Louisa, but in doing so, it disturbs the social dynamics among the group. The events that follow Louisa’s fall, particularly Anne’s capable response to the crisis to get help for Louisa, lead

Wentworth to rethink his relationship with foolhardy Louisa and reconsider his real love for Anne.



Figure 2. "Looking on her with a face as pallid as her own" by Hugh Thomson. 1898.

The first hint of a change occurs as Wentworth devises a plan for the group. Wentworth “[turned] to her [Anne] and [spoke] with a glow, and yet a gentleness, which seemed almost restoring the past” (106). Later, Anne would learn that that moment sparked a feeling that Wentworth would only admit after the fact: “only at Lyme had he begun to understand himself” and his deep feelings for Anne that remained since their first attachment (226). Austen explains that “He found too late, in short, that he had entangled himself [with Louisa]; and that precisely as he became fully satisfied of his not caring for Louisa at all, he must regard himself as bound to



her” (227). The incident at Lyme reveals to Wentworth the predicament that his bitter heart has forced him into: instead of rekindling his former relationship with Anne, he chose silly Louisa. The steep jutting steps have worked to his advantage.

Place in *Persuasion* allows the eventual resolution between Wentworth and Anne in Bath at the end of the novel where Anne says to Wentworth: “One does not love a place less for having suffered in it, unless it has been all suffering, nothing but suffering—which was by no means the case at Lyme.” (173) Though Lyme Regis might be associated with suffering for Louisa, the place is beneficial to the recovery of Anne and Wentworth’s relationship, and therefore Anne does not regard it in the context of suffering. As Gillian Beer remarks in her introduction to *Persuasion*, “the value of this ending is that *place* is wherever Wentworth and Anne can be together” (xxv), which speaks to the end of the novel where Anne and Wentworth marry and set off together at sea. Although their place as a couple is no longer tied to geography, Lyme is the place that actively facilitates their reunion.

### Place as Resolution: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Stonehenge offers Tess Durbeyfield a resolution to her inner conflicts resulting from a bodily crime. Different from *Our Mutual Friend*, where a place becomes a major character through the entire novel, or *Persuasion* where a place becomes a plot device to separate and reconnect characters, this novel uses place as the answer to Tess’s suffering. This late scene in the novel builds upon the misfortunes Tess faces from the novel’s opening. Motivated by her parents’ desire to reclaim their ancestral name, D’Urberville, and rise among the social classes, Tess secures a place with her supposed distant cousins, resulting in a sexual assault by Alec D’Urberville, who violates her body and her soul. After the death of her illegitimate child by Alec, Hardy grants Tess a new start at Talbothay’s Dairy where she meets

her lover, Angel Clare. Angel cannot reconcile himself to the idea that Tess had relations with another man and considers Alec Tess's "husband in nature," and so he leaves her only days after their wedding to find his fortune in Brazil (190). With her family's worsening economic desperation following her father's death, Tess agrees to live with Alec and masquerade as his wife in exchange for his support of her family. When Angel returns and asks her forgiveness, Tess murders Alec, believing she can now truly be with Angel. After escaping to the countryside with Alec, Tess reconciles herself to her fate as a murderess and finally becomes one with her ancestral land on the Great Plain of Stonehenge where she is arrested. The holy place of sacrifice for ancient Brits becomes the place of Tess's resolution, where she wrestles with the tragedies of her life, her circumstances, and her inevitable death, while at the same time being cradled by the landscape, the night sky, and the ancient, holy monoliths. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Stonehenge is her final spiritual resting place.

Tess and Angel stumble upon Stonehenge by accident in the dead of night after being detected by a housekeeper of an old estate they take refuge in. Angel suggests, "I think we may as well steer in a general way towards the interior of the country, where we can hide for a time, and are less likely to be looked for than anywhere near the coast" (305). The two traverse the countryside, travelling deeper and deeper into the heart of Wessex, a fictional construction in many of Hardy's novels. Williams discusses Hardy's Wessex as a liminal place: "the real Hardy country, we soon come to see, is that border country so many of us have been living in: between custom and education, between work and ideas, between love of place and an experience of change" (197). When Angel and Tess travel through the countryside, crossing from Upper to Mid-Wessex, a transformation comes over them realized only when they stumble upon Stonehenge by accident in the dead of night. Hardy writes, "They had proceeded thus gropingly

two or three miles further when on a sudden Clare became conscious of some vast erection close in his front, rising sheer from the grass. They had almost struck themselves against it” (309-10). Tess experiences an immediate bodily response to Stonehenge, claiming that ““It hums,”” and the entire landscape seems to react positively to her presence as well: “The wind, playing upon the edifice, produced a booming tune, like the note of some gigantic one-stringed harp” (310). Here, unlike at Lyme Regis, the musical winds comfort the two lovers and make the place gentle, welcoming, and almost holy. Angel aptly calls this place “A very Temple of the Winds” (310).

The two explore the site in the dark, wondering at its mystery and majesty though unaware of its identity. Hardy describes it as “all doors and pillars, some connected above by continuous architraves” (310). Stonehenge is a prehistoric standing stone circle. The moss-covered stones, weathered by age, create the formation of a roofless temple made of empty doorways, and twice a year the sun lines up perfectly with the middle stone, the so-called “Sunstone.” Several horizontal stones lie dramatically in the middle of the circle, some having fallen over throughout the years, others possibly acting as platforms or altars. Finally, the two ascertain their location:

“It is Stonehenge!” said Clare.

“The heathen temple, you mean?”

“Yes. Older than the centuries; older than the d'Urbervilles!” (310)

Tess immediately attaches herself to this place that is both sanctified and pagan. She finds solace in the presence of her ancient pagan ancestors and the expansive landscape and reconciles herself to her fate.

First, Tess tells Angel, ““One of my mother's people was a shepherd hereabouts, now I think of it. And you used to say at Talbothay's that I was a heathen. So now I am at home”” (310-311). Throughout the novel, Hardy and his characters reinforce Tess's connection to the

Wessex countryside and to her pagan roots. Compared to plants and animals (e.g. a cat sunning herself), Tess is Hardy's "new-sprung child of nature" and a "daughter of the soil" (182, 100). To Hardy, "women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers" (81), and Tess is such a woman. Williams notes that "There is always a great deal in [Hardy's Wessex Novels] of an old rural world: old in custom and in memory...the oldness of history and indeed of prehistory" (197). Here, Hardy not only expresses the oldness of place, but also makes place integral to the identity of his titular character. At Stonehenge, the center of pagan England, Tess finds a transcendental comfort as she becomes inextricably and spiritually linked to her ancestors and the earth.

The landscape itself seems to lull Tess into a solemn calmness. She lies down on the large horizontal stone in the middle of the formation; "I think you are lying on an altar," Angel says to her (311). Though the purpose of the altar stone is unknown to historians and archaeologists, Tess's placement here is key: she is offering herself as a sacrifice to the earth and her ancestors at Stonehenge. Physically and emotionally comforted by the cold, mossy stone, Tess responds, "I like very much to be here," she murmured. "It is so solemn and lonely—after my great happiness—with nothing but the sky above my face. It seems as if there were no folk in the world but we two" (311). The landscape provides a vast and secluded place for Tess and Angel to share their final moments together before her capture. Every person who has caused them harm throughout the novel seems to disappear completely from existence. Tess actually falls asleep on the sacrificial altar, soothed by its silent, stoic presence. Unlike the Thames which takes life and the Cobb at Lyme Regis which nearly causes death, Stonehenge relieves Tess of

her physical and emotional exhaustion. It refreshes her, heals her, so that she might rise and confront her fate of hanging.

Before she falls asleep upon the altar, Tess asks Angel, “do you think we shall meet again after we are dead?” to which he does not respond (311). Though Tess finds his silence devastating, she eventually calms herself and falls into sleep, comforted by Angel’s presence beside her in life if not in death. D. A. Wehrschmidt captures this moment in the final illustration for the serialized version of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (Fig. 3). Tess lies cradled by the large stones that surround the altar, her relaxed posed suggesting Stonehenge’s acceptance of her as its own. Angel stands stoically over her sleeping form as the night goes on.

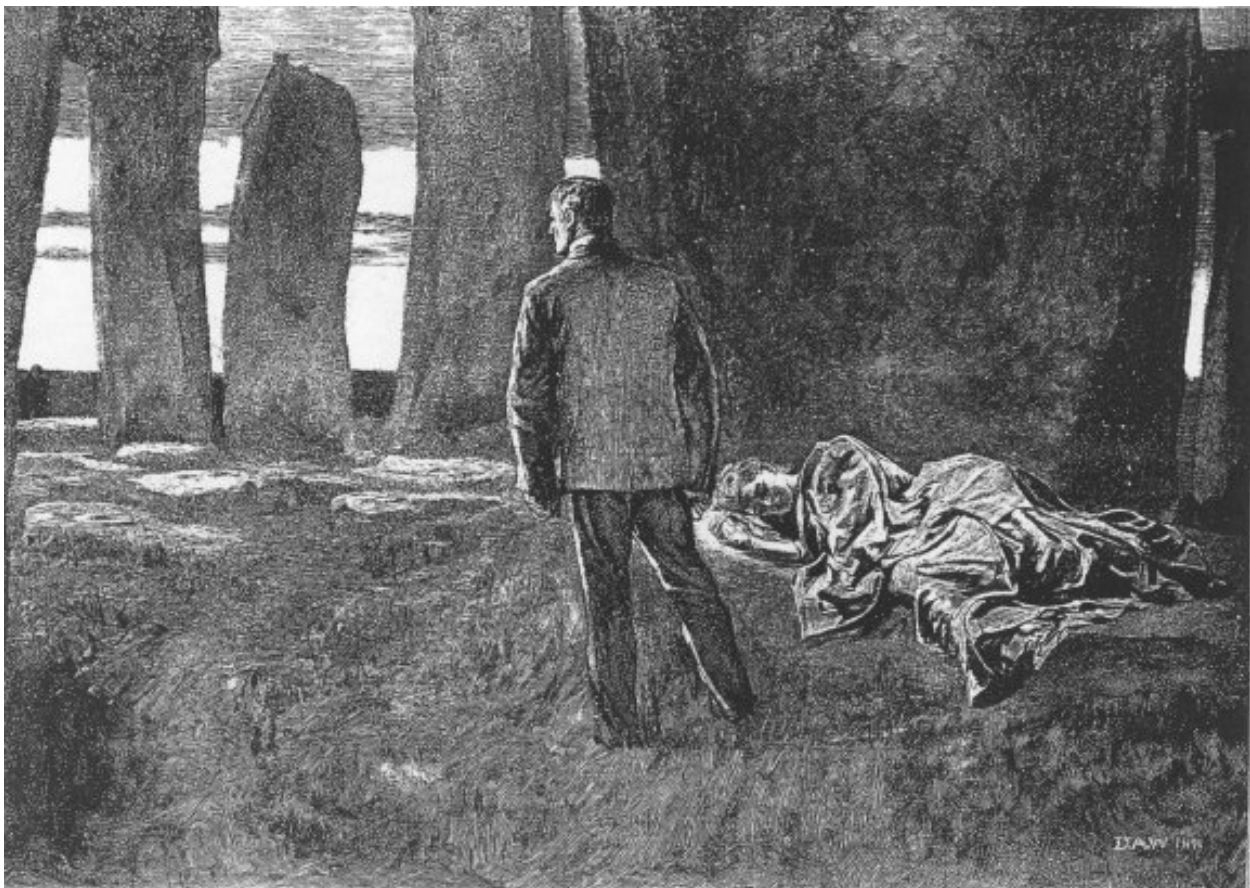


Figure 3. "Something seemed to move on the verge of the dip eastward -- a mere dot..." by D.A. Wehrschmidt. 1891.

While she sleeps, Hardy describes how the landscape begins to transform from the dark of night into the early light of day:

The band of silver paleness along the east horizon made even the distant parts of the Great Plain appear dark and near; and the whole enormous landscape bore that impress of reserve, taciturnity, and hesitation which is usual just before day. The eastward pillars and their architraves stood up blackly against the light, and the great flame-shaped Sun-stone beyond them; and the Stone of Sacrifice midway. Presently the night wind died out, and the quivering little pools in the cup-like hollows of the stones lay still. At the same time something seemed to move on the verge of the dip eastward—a mere dot. It was the head of a man approaching them from the hollow beyond the Sun-stone. (312)

The landscape hesitantly gives up Tess, and yet the sun rises slowly and majestically, lighting the stones and creating great foreboding shadows over the earth. Stonehenge prepares itself for another sacrifice, that of Tess to the law and her eventual punishment. Tess, in turn, changes with the landscape as she sleeps. Place transforms her, giving her a stoic resolve, allowing her to face the consequences of her turbulent past with a confidence and surety that she lacks throughout the novel. As the policemen who tracked their journey approach and the sun emerges, Tess wakes and rises from the sacrificial altar:

"It is as it should be," she murmured. "Angel, I am almost glad—yes, glad! This happiness could not have lasted. It was too much. I have had enough; and now I shall not live for you to despise me!"  
She stood up, shook herself, and went forward, neither of the men having moved.  
"I am ready," she said quietly. (312-313)

Refreshed and resolute, Tess walks away from her ancestral pagan landscape and her lover and is “ready” to accept her fate.

Williams argues that Hardy’s portrayal of Stonehenge is “empty,” describing the landscape as “the uncultivable heath, the bare stone relics,” and as a “deliberate reversal of pastoral” (211). However, Stonehenge is not an empty, barren heath. It is very much alive in the penultimate scene of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. It is alive with the wind, with the night sky and rising sun, and with humming of the ghosts of the past, Tess’s ancestors. The landscape of the Great Plain where Stonehenge stands provides Tess with the ultimate resolution to her life.

Shortly after the scene at Stonehenge, Tess is put to death under the law. Tess physically walks away from this place, but the landscape of the Great Plain provides Tess with the ultimate resolution to her life story. Her night at Stonehenge provides her with a peaceful landscape tied to her true ancestry and a sacred moment with her beloved Angel.

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Place inextricably ties landscape, history, and characters in nineteenth-century British literature. Cresswell writes that place is explicitly defined by how we experience it and make meaning of it (19). However, we do not solely experience or make meaning of place through the built environment or in nature but also through literature of place. Place acts as a main character in *Our Mutual Friend*, as a catalyst for narrative climax in *Persuasion*, and as a resolution to the developments in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, all within the English landscape in which each novel is set. All three of these novels center around a natural landscape that has been curated by the built environment of human experience: the Thames with its locks and boats, the Cobb with its steep steps, and Stonehenge with its ancient monoliths.

That these landscapes are real logically prompts the question of how the initial readers of these works who likely knew these places first-hand considered how the authors fictionalized actual places, in some cases romantically or lyrically. Historians know well that it is extremely difficult to ascertain how the Victorians regarded these three natural landscapes or, in turn, how these novels influenced their readings of these places. Letters, and diaries, and reviews can give insight into the mindset of a contemporary readership, although that research lies outside the scope of this analysis of literature of place from a theoretical perspective. Of relevance, however, is that the authors were each familiar with the places they include in their novels as, respectively, character, climax, and resolution. Dickens was intimate with London's streets, river, and

environs. Austen visited Lyme Regis twice in 1803 and 1804. Hardy visited Stonehenge several times and had two Sarsen stones in his garden at Max Gate, his home on the outskirts of Dorchester. The authors experienced these landscapes that inspired them and found their way into the novels. Thus, the locations that the novelists perceived first hand represent an English heritage as it appeared in the nineteenth century and that is still tied to place as part of its identity: its urban and rural geographies, its cultural and religious heritage, and its economic history.

As Raymond Williams notes in *The Country and the City*, the nineteenth century saw the final stages of the Industrial Revolution in England, which disrupted the social and economic systems that had been in place for all of the country's previous history. England experienced a mass migration out of the countryside and into the industrial urban centers such as London. However, Williams argues that a sense of rural heritage never left the English zeitgeist. It appears in the writings of Dickens, Austen, and Hardy, among others, though the idealized and beloved countryside of pre-industrial England essentially disappeared long before these authors were writing. Williams writes:

For it is a critical fact that in and through these transforming experiences, English attitudes to the country, and to ideas of rural life, persisted with extraordinary power, so that even after the society was predominantly urban its literature, for a generation, was still predominantly rural...All this gives the English experience and interpretation of the country and the city a permanent though of course not exclusive importance. (2)

Dickens, Austen, and Hardy not only respond to an idealized rural England in their novels, but also their fiction reifies these places as central to a kind of ahistorical mythos about English heritage that still exists today.

I will go one step further than Williams in emphasizing the significance of place in literature as a transgenerational mode of heritage-making. By giving these landscapes



significance in their novels, Dickens, Austen, and Hardy endow the Thames, the Cobb, and Stonehenge, respectively, with cultural and historical meaning that transcends the reality of these locations from the nineteenth century to our current moment. These three nineteenth-century novels still inspire literary tourism at the banks of the Thames, the steps of the Cobb, and the Great Plain of Stonehenge; in doing so, they perpetuate what can now be thought of as the myth of the idealized English countryside. Visitors to London regularly walk along the Thames using self-guided tours that take visitors from the Southwark bridge where Gaffer and Lizzie Hexam dredged out the supposed body of John Harmon, to the locks to the west of the city where Rogue Riderhood worked and died, to Henley-on-Thames outside of the city where Betty Higden finally collapsed and died. Tourists promenade along the Cobb at Lyme Regis in the autumn and climb the steep steps nicknamed “Granny’s Teeth” from which Louisa Musgrove jumped and fell on her head. Some visiting groups of college students on study trips even “act out” the scene of Louisa’s fall. And though tourists can no longer walk through the stone circle at Stonehenge, they can circle it while listening to the audiobook version of the scene in which Tess and Angel spend their final moments together at the sacred stone circle.

These novels inform the kind of literary tourism that takes place in England. It allows visitors to experience real places they have read about and their beloved authors wrote about. These novels allow visitors to experience these places not only in the present but also in their idealized pasts and through the eyes of their nineteenth-century authors. Just as Hardy perpetuates an idealized past for his contemporary readers, so too does each author create a now mythologized world lost to history, but which remains in the cultural heritage of England. That myth becomes reality in *Our Mutual Friend*,

*Persuasion*, and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* for the modern reader. Likewise, the Thames, the Cobb, and Stonehenge become places engrained in English culture and heritage for perpetuity.

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# Placing Nineteenth-Century British Literature

Jessica Shapiro, '18  
English Senior Project



Cover Art: William Morris Design, “Sunflower Wallpaper,” web.



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# Introduction

Tim Cresswell explains in his book *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004) that “Place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power” (19). In fiction, place influences how we experience a constructed narrative. In the nineteenth-century British novel, place becomes a part of the narrative, and the narrative, in turn, informs England’s geographical heritage making.

This exhibition explores how three nineteenth-century British authors—Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and Thomas Hardy—use the natural geography of Southern England in various ways to affect characterization, plot, and theme. The Cobb at Lyme Regis in Austen’s *Persuasion* (1818), the River Thames in Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), and Stonehenge in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891) are natural landscapes built upon by human experiences: the Thames has locks and boats, the Cobb its steep constructed steps, and Stonehenge its carefully arranged ancient monoliths. These landscapes are representative of an English heritage that is tied to place as part of its identity: its urban and rural geographies, its cultural and religious heritage, and its economic history. The nineteenth century saw the final stages of the Industrial Revolution in England, which disrupted the country’s social and economic systems. England experienced a mass migration out of the countryside and into industrial urban centers, such as London. However, literary critic Raymond Williams argues in *The Country and the City* (1973) that a sense of rural heritage never left the English zeitgeist. It appears in the writings of Austen, Dickens, and Hardy, although the idealized and beloved countryside of pre-industrial England essentially disappeared long before any of these authors were writing.

These three novels that span the long nineteenth century preserve and redefine real locations in England and have inspired literary tourism where visitors can reenact Louisa Musgrove’s fall from the steps of the Cobb, walk along the banks of the Thames that Lizzie and Gaffer Hexam dredge for corpses, and stand on the Great Plain of Stonehenge while listening to the dramatic climax of *Tess* through an audio guide. Fiction thus perpetuates what can now be thought of as the myth of the idealized English countryside. That myth becomes for the modern reader a reality in *Persuasion*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Likewise, the Cobb, the Thames, and Stonehenge become places engrained in English culture and heritage for perpetuity.



The three-part exhibit that this booklet accompanies looks at the novels chronologically in terms of date of publication, exploring place in British literature throughout the long nineteenth century. The first part features *Persuasion* and the Cobb at Lyme Regis where the climax of the novel takes place. Lyme Regis is a seaside town on the Dorset Coast in the south of England. The Cobb is a manmade stone harbor built into the natural seascape of the coast. There, Austen places the event that sparks the rekindling love between her protagonist, Anne Eliot, and Anne's estranged former fiancé, Captain Wentworth. This first section explores not only how Austen places *Persuasion* at the Cobb in Lyme Regis, but also how *Persuasion* has since influenced the town's literary tourism.

The second part of the display discusses *Our Mutual Friend* in which the River Thames plays a crucial role in the plot as a nonhuman actor. The Thames gives life and takes it away and acts as a lifelong friend and arbiter of justice. Dickens places his entire novel on the banks and tides of the Thames, which meanders from the center of London, an industrialized urban hub, into the heart of the pastoral countryside untouched by smog and scum. This second section explores the length of the Thames from Southwark Bridge to

Henley-on-Thames and the self-guided tours along Dickens's Thames that have become popular since the completion of his last and longest novel.

The third part of the display showcases Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Stonehenge where the resolution to the novel takes place. There, Tess finds solace in the ancient monoliths after running from the law after murdering her rapist. She finds connection to the landscape as part of her ancestry and spirituality and resolves herself to her fate of hanging as punishment for her crime. There, she and her husband, Angel Clare, have their final moments together. The section explores Stonehenge and its history and importance in English heritage as well as Hardy's idealized English past in the world of the *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.



Figure 1

This exhibit is presented by Jessica Shapiro, Class of 2018, as a part of her interdisciplinary English Senior Project under the supervision of Professor Catherine J. Golden, Department of English, with special thanks to Professor Golden and Professor Tillman Nechtman, Chair of the Department of History.



Figure 2.1

## Jane Austen

Jane Austen (1775-1817) wrote six major British novels, two of which (including *Persuasion*) were published posthumously. During her lifetime, Austen lived in Bath and visited Lyme Regis, two of the most important places in *Persuasion*. Likewise, other aspects of Austen's life influenced her novel. Her brothers Frances and Charles were in the Royal navy, just like Captain Wentworth. Austen, like Anne Eliot's old friend Lady Russell in *Persuasion*, tried to persuade her own niece, Fanny Knight, not to enter into a long engagement with her naval suitor. *Persuasion* is also Austen's only novel that is remarkably contemporary to the year in which it was written. As the novel ends in 1815, Captain Wentworth is again off to sea to enter the final Napoleonic War, which ended in 1815.

# *Persuasion*

In Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot's family is removed from the family estate, Kellynch Hall, and forced to rent it out due to financial problems. Anne goes to live with her sister Mary Musgrove at nearby Uppercross Cottage and soon learns that her former fiancé, Captain Wentworth, has returned from active service to the neighborhood to stay at Kellynch with his sister and naval brother-in-law. Wentworth flirts with both Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove, Mary's two sister-in-laws, though he turns his attentions to Louisa when Henrietta becomes engaged to her cousin, Charles Hayter. Silly, naïve Louisa convinces a group of their friends, including Anne, to accompany Wentworth on a trip to Lyme Regis to visit his friend Captain Harville, who has retired there. In Lyme, Louisa takes a fateful fall from the jagged, steep steps of the Cobb, and Captain Wentworth cannot catch her in time. She falls onto the hard stones of the lower Cobb, hitting her head. In the ensuing chaos, Anne rallies the group, finds help, and makes sure of Louisa's safety. Later, when Anne and Wentworth meet again in Bath, Anne learns that it is this moment that makes Wentworth realize his true love for her. Austen uses place as a catalyst for the climax of the plot: The Cobb facilitates the reunion between Anne and Wentworth by rekindling their true feelings for each other, ultimately leading to the novel's happy conclusion.

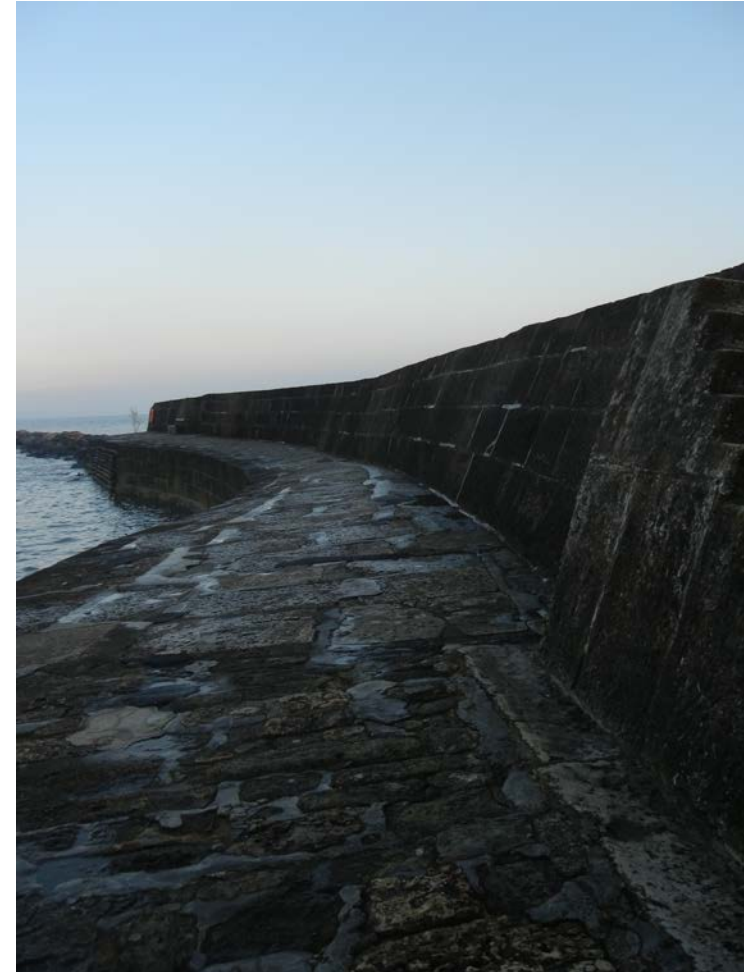


Figure 2.2

# Illustration in *Persuasion*

Hugh Thomson (1860-1920) illustrated *Persuasion* and Austen's other five completed novels in the 1890s. The Irish-born Thomson began his career as an illustrator for *English Illustrated Magazine* and quickly began illustrating books by some of the most famous English authors including Elizabeth Gaskell, Jane Austen, and George Eliot. Thomson is best known for his authentic detail in costume and domestic interiors (see figs. 2.4 and 2.5) and his pastoral style in portraying the idyllic English landscape.

In the illustration of the fall (fig. 2.3), Thomson skillfully portrays the uneven cobblestones, steep steps, limp form of Louisa Musgrove's "lifeless" body, and the concern on Captain Wentworth's face. The landscape poses danger to Louisa, but in doing so, it disturbs and improves the social dynamics among members of the party. The events that follow Louisa's fall, particularly Anne's capable response to the crisis, lead Wentworth to rethink his relationship with foolhardy Louisa and realize his real abiding love for Anne.



Figure 2.3



Figure 2.4



Figure 2.5

*\* In the name of heaven, who is that old fellow?*

*Placed it before Anne.*

# Lyme Regis

Lyme Regis is an old seaside town on the Dorset Coast in Southern England. The town has, on several occasions, been integral to Britain's naval history as the most important shipbuilding port city in Britain until about 1780, though it remains today a mostly quiet, residential town. The town is now most famous for its centrality to paleontological history in Britain and its inclusion in *Persuasion*. Here in 1811, the young Mary Anning discovered a full fossilized skeleton of an ichthyosaur, a marine dinosaur. It became a national sensation, and the town has been known for its fossil finds ever since.

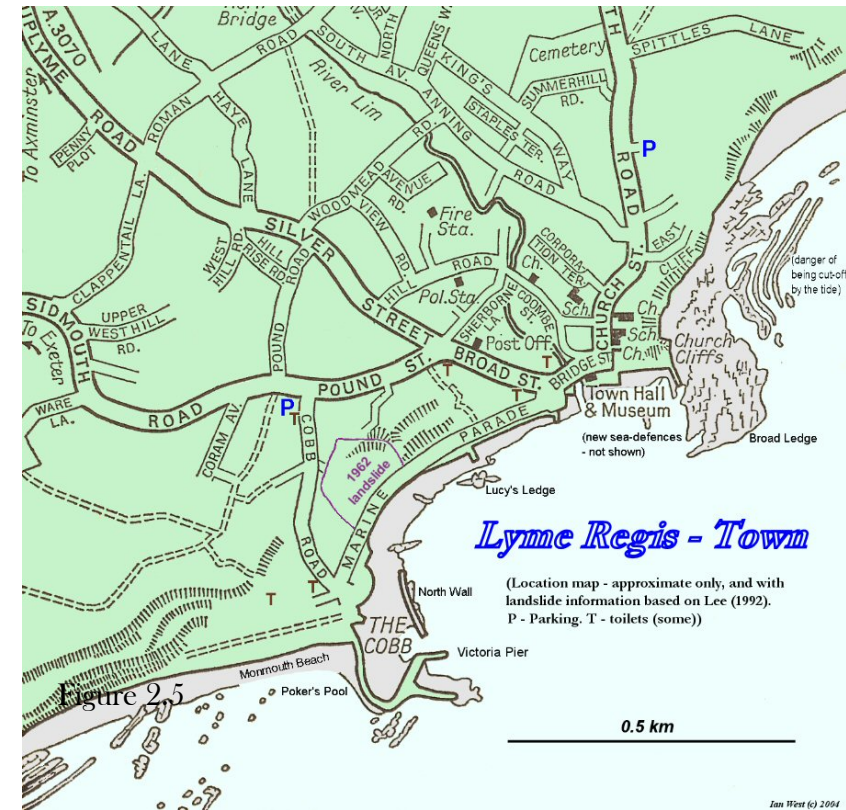


Figure 2.6

# The Cobb

The Cobb is an 870-foot, two-tiered, manmade jetty built around the town's natural harbor and used as a breakwater to protect the town from storms and launch boats more easily. The Cobb was first built in the thirteenth century under King Edward I and has since been rebuilt several times. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Cobb was an important structure to Lyme Regis's shipbuilding industry. Visitors can walk along both of the Cobb's two promenades, upper and lower, though one must climb one of the steep, jutting sets of stairs in order to get to the upper promenade. The most precarious set of steps, nicknamed "Granny's Teeth," is where Louisa jumps and falls onto the hard pavement.

*Persuasion* has also reanimated tourism in Lyme Regis since its publication. Tourists can visit the town's history museum, which showcases exhibits about Jane Austen and her own visits to Lyme Regis. Austen visited the town several times in 1803 and again in 1804. There, she presumably walked along the promenade of the Cobb and found inspiration. Now, tourists can walk along the Cobb and see the town from Jane Austen's perspective and climb the treacherous "Granny's Teeth" just as Louisa does in *Persuasion*.

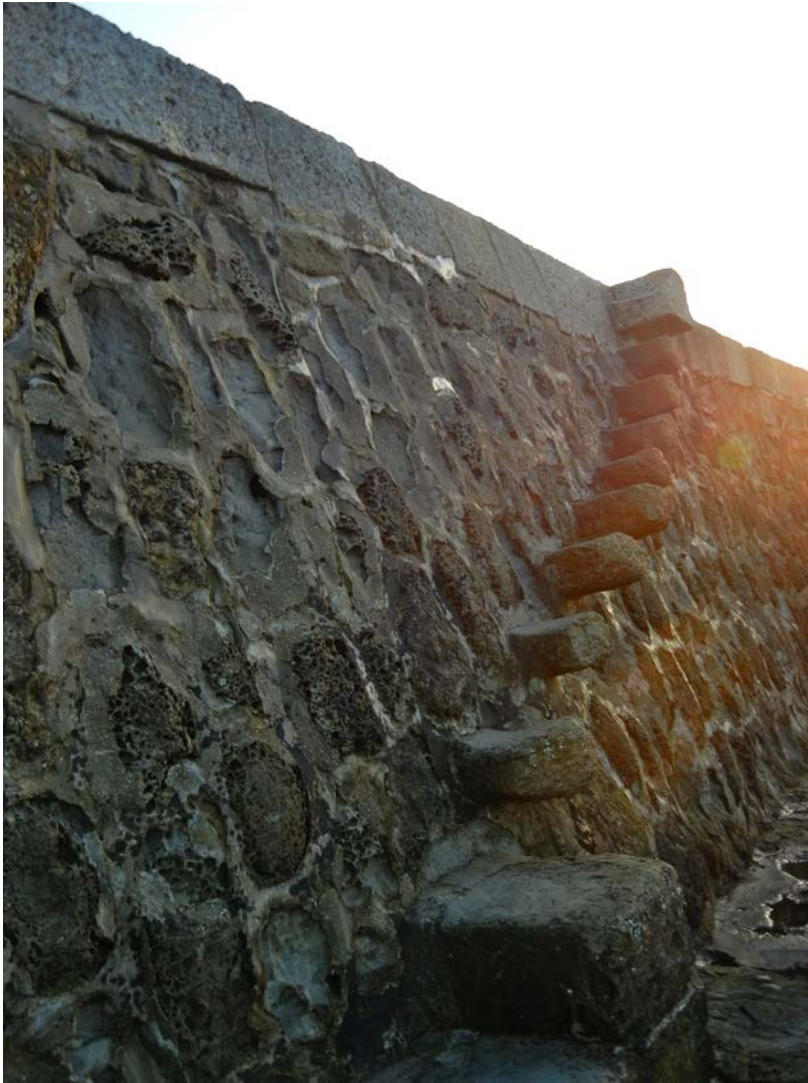


Figure 2.7



Figure 3.1

## Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) is one of Britain's most famous authors. He worked on various journals as a writer (under the pen name Boz) and editor. He wrote fifteen novels and over a hundred short stories. Despite his successes, Dickens suffered an unfortunate childhood. He used his experiences to inform his writing, especially in his portrayal of how different social classes relate. In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens's longest and final novel, Dickens explores the lowest level of the working class in London (the Hexams, etc), the emerging middle class (the Wilfers), and the nouveau-riche (the Boffins, etc). The social strata interact frequently in the novel, which was quite innovative for its time. Dickens creates in *Our Mutual Friend* a glimpse of his city and people across the social classes who inhabit it.

## *Our Mutual Friend*

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens imagines the River Thames as an omnipresent character throughout the novel. The river is the locus for the “Harmon Murder,” the impetus for the novel’s central plot. John Harmon, heir to a huge fortune, is believed drowned in the river on his way home to claim his inheritance. This triggers a series of events. Old Harmon’s working-class employees, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, receive the Harmon inheritance and take in young Bella Wilfer as a ward. Gaffer Hexam, a river scavenger and bodysnatcher, is accused of murdering “Harmon” and eventually drowns in the river, freeing his daughter Lizzie from her life of squalor. The murder on the Thames allows John Harmon to disguise himself as John Rokesmith and take a position under the Boffins’ employ where he falls in love with Bella (whom the will stipulates he must marry). Likewise, the Thames indirectly introduces Eugene Wrayburn, a young lawyer brought to the scene of the murder, to his eventual love, Lizzie Hexam. Later, the river allows Lizzie to save Wrayburn from drowning, while at the same time, it condemns the despicable Rogue Riderhood (another river scavenger) and the ghoulish Bradley Headstone to its watery depths. However, the Thames is also a comforting friend: when Betty Higden, the widowed foster mother of the orphans the Boffins attempt to adopt, becomes ill, she escapes the city by following the river west. She dies on the banks of the river, comforted by its soft, pastoral flow. The Thames thus curates the setting and manipulates the romantic and economic elements of the plot, taking an active role in the novel.

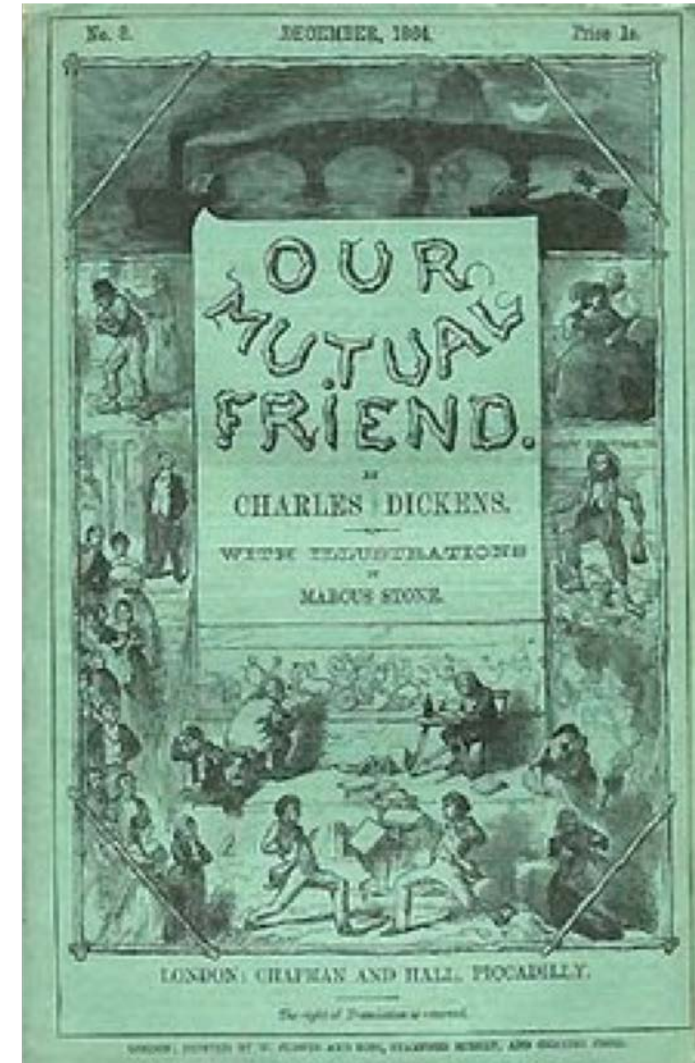


Figure 3.2





Figure 3.3

## Illustration in *Our Mutual Friend*

*Our Mutual Friend* was first published in serial form and accompanied by Marcus Stone's illustrations. Marcus Stone (1840-1921) was the son of Frank Stone, a close friend of Dickens's. Stone succeeded Hablot Knight Browne ("Phiz") as Dickens's illustrator. Dickens even let Stone take liberties with his illustrations, which subsequently influenced the details of the narrative. Stone's illustrations are notably realistic and a sharp departure from Phiz's, which adhere to the waning caricature style of illustration.

In his frontispiece for *Our Mutual Friend*, Stone portrays Gaffer Hexam, the lowly river scavenger and bodysnatcher, surveying the "slime

and ooze" of the River Thames for bodies. His daughter, Lizzie Hexam, adeptly navigates the river. This scene foreshadows Gaffer's death by drowning in the Thames and Lizzie's rescue of her lover, Eugene Wrayburn, who nearly drowns. Stone, a Royal Academy-trained painter, calls attention to Lizzie's strength in depicting her in the act of rowing; her rolled-up sleeves reveal muscular arms full of strength and power. Lizzie uses the physical strength and rowing skills learned from her years on the river to rescue Wrayburn, ultimately leading to their marriage and her happy end.



Figure 3.4

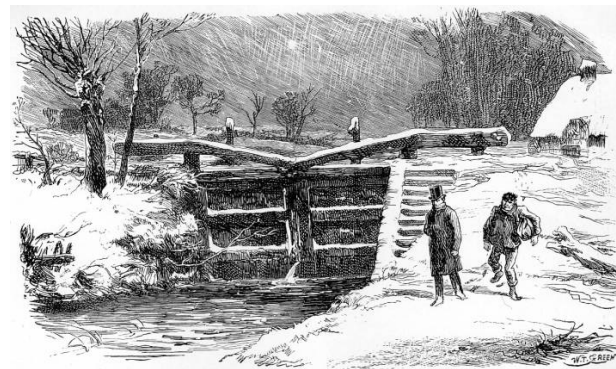


Figure 3.5



Figure 3.6

# The River Thames

The River Thames is a tidal river and the longest river in England. It stretches from the tidal reach on the eastern coast of England all the way through Reading, Oxford, and Swindon in the interior of the country. The Thames has provided a critical mode for trade and transportation throughout human history and is mostly responsible for London's prestige as one of the greatest cities in the world.

During the Industrial Revolution, the river boosted London's economy by providing water, energy, and a source for dumping refuse for the numerous factories, docks, and workhouses that were popping up throughout the city. This is the London about which Dickens writes. In *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens portrays a river that is not just an integral resource, but also alive with all forms of human activity and imbued with a kind of sentience, proving that the Thames is not a lifeless body of water.

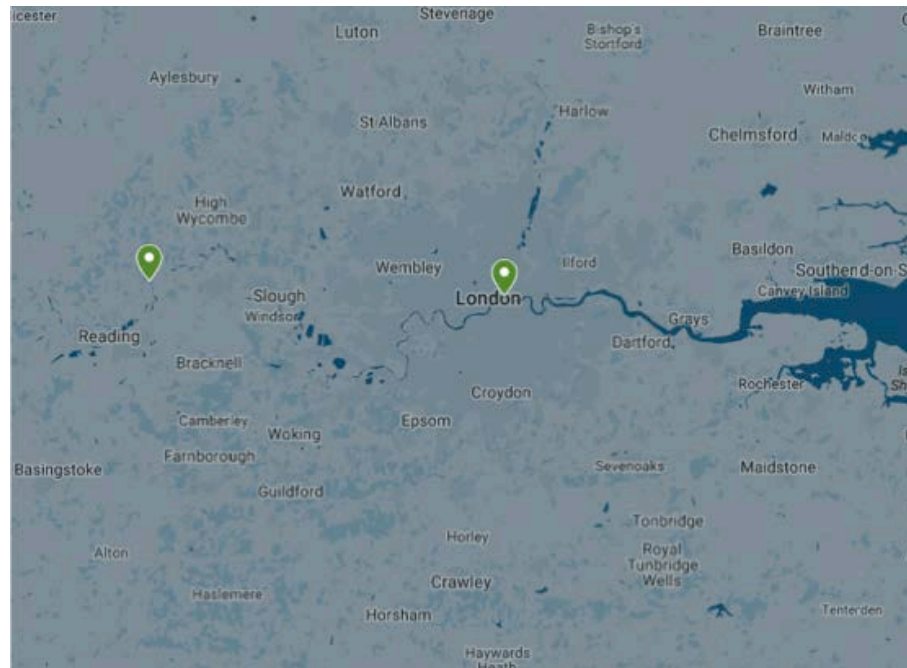


Figure 3.7

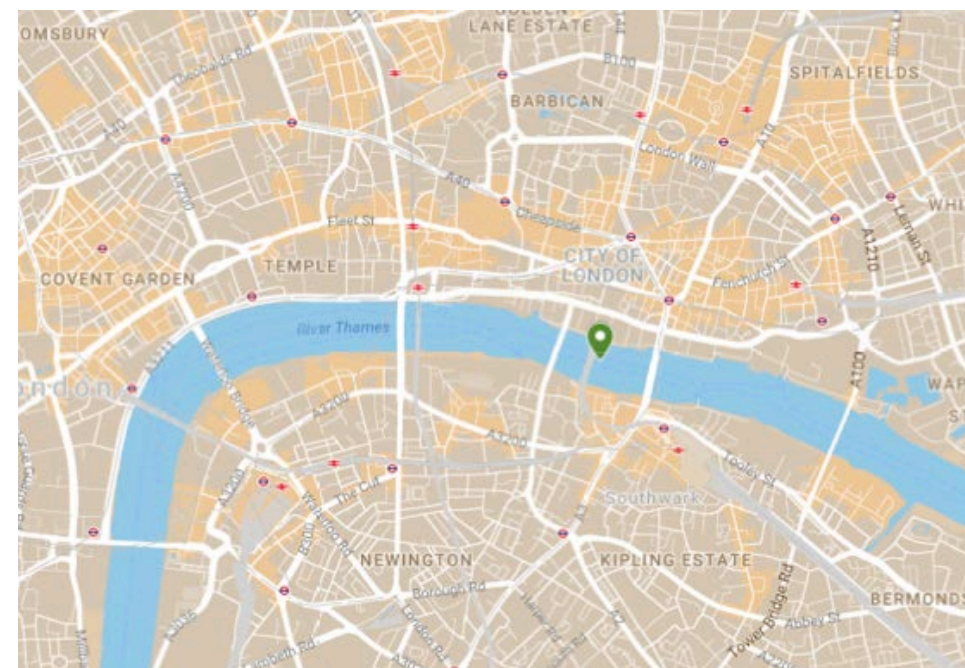


Figure 3.8

# The River Thames

The River Thames is present throughout the entirety of *Our Mutual Friend*. The characters in the novel traverse the banks of the Thames from the Southwark Bridge (Fig. 3.8) in central London where Gaffer and Lizzie Hexam first discover the supposed body of John Harmon, to Greenwich in the east where Bella Wilfer and John Rokesmith marry, to Henley-on-Thames (Fig. 3.7) to the west where Betty Higden dies. Today, visitors can walk along the Thames and experience the places highlighted in Dickens's novel with the aid of various self-guided tours and maps such as this one by Peter Biggins (Fig. 3.9).

Figure 3.9

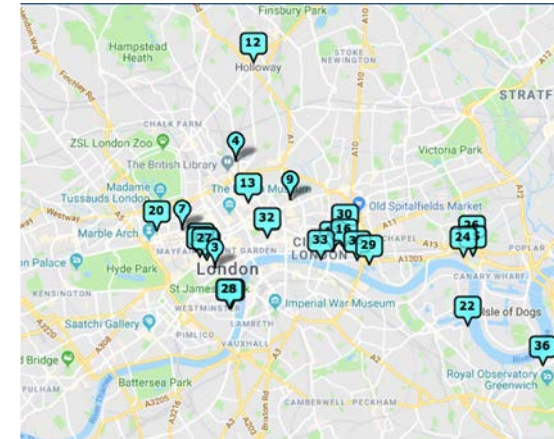


Figure 3.10

# Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was an English writer famous for championing an idealized past of rural and pre-industrialized England. In his novels and short stories, he created a fictionalized county in the south and southwest of England named Wessex after the real Anglo-Saxon kingdom of the ninth century that made up the region. Hardy's Wessex replaces the names of real towns in England with fictional names that maintain the Anglo-Saxon linguistic heritage of the region. For example, the city of Winchester, the capital of the real kingdom of Wessex, becomes Wintoncester, its old Anglo-Saxon name for the city. Hardy's Wessex, though fictional, highlights the beauties and trials of the agrarian working class that no longer exists because of the Industrial Revolution and the migration of rural laborers to urban factories.

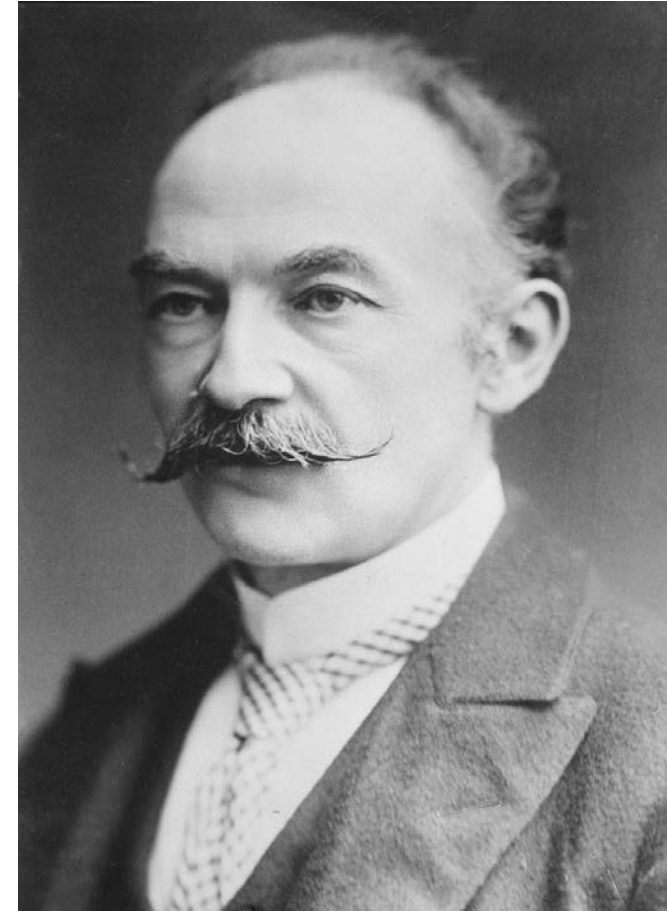


Figure 4.1

Figure 4.2

## *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, a Wessex novel, follows the unfortunate life of a working-class girl in England's southern countryside. Motivated by her parents' desire to reclaim their ancestral name, D'Urberville, and gain much needed income, Tess secures a place with her supposed distant cousins, resulting in a sexual assault by Alec D'Urberville. After the death of her illegitimate child by Alec, Tess becomes a dairymaid at Talbothay's Dairy where she meets her lover, Angel Clare. Angel cannot reconcile himself to the idea that Tess had relations with another man, so he leaves her only days after their wedding to find his fortune in Brazil. With her family's worsening economic desperation following her father's death, Tess agrees to live with Alec and masquerade as his wife in exchange for his support of her family. When Angel returns and asks her forgiveness, Tess murders Alec, believing she can now truly be with Angel. After escaping to the countryside with Alec, Tess reconciles herself to her fate as a murderess and finally becomes one with her ancestral land on the Great Plain of Stonehenge, where she is eventually arrested. Stonehenge becomes the place of resolution in Hardy's novel and his titular character's final spiritual resting place.

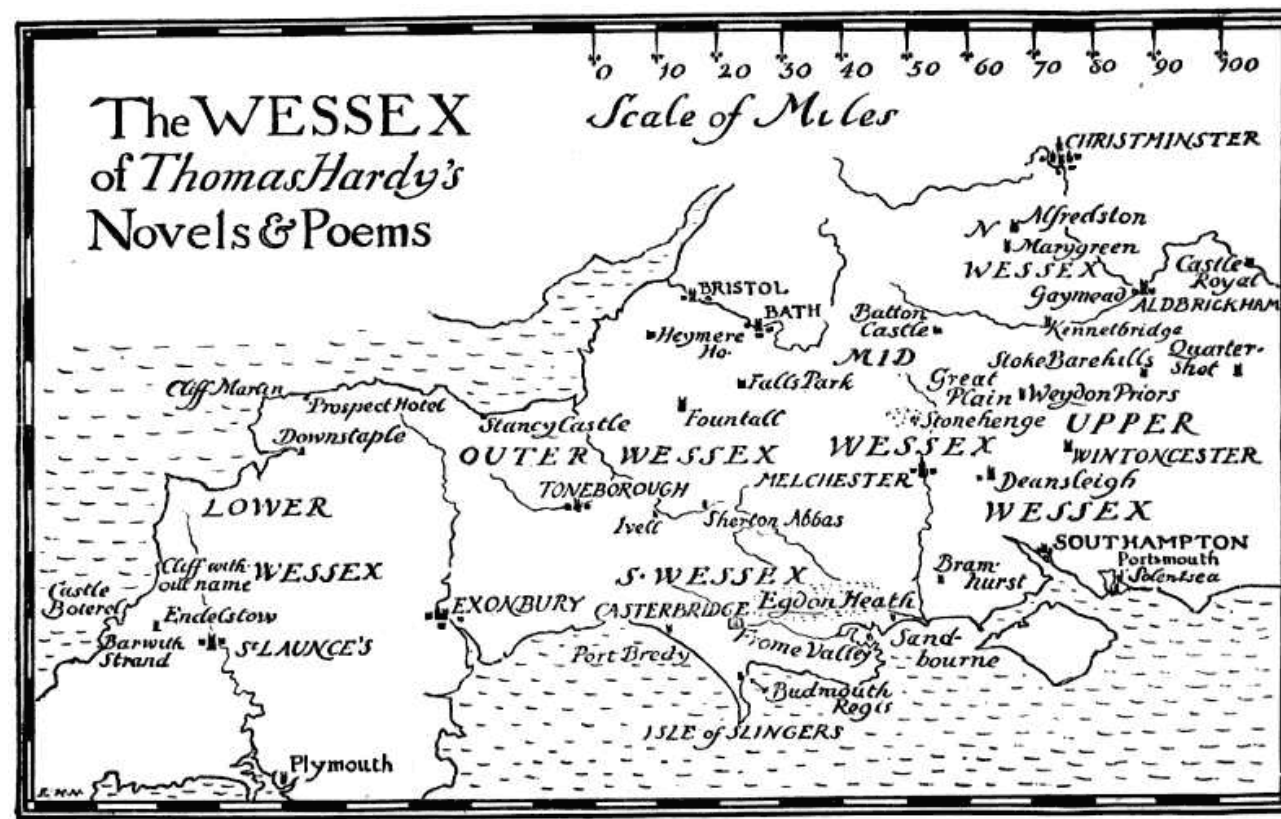
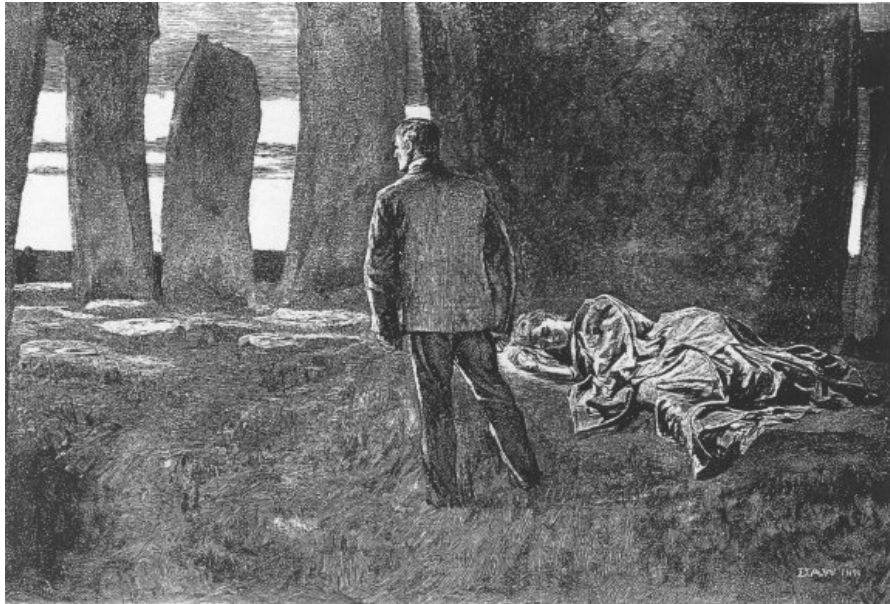


Figure 4.3



## Illustration in *Tess*

Daniel A. Wehrschmidt (1861-1923), an American émigré to Britain, specialized in portraiture and illustration. He taught at and eventually co-owned a school for illustrators and painters in Hertfordshire, England. During his years at the school, Wehrschmidt produced seven of the twenty-five illustrations in the serialization of Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in *The Graphic* in 1891. His illustrations reflect his own experience living in rural central England by expressing the yet untouched landscapes and the rusticity of the people. However, like in the text of Hardy's novels, the idealized English landscapes are not always bright and beautiful. They are often dark, shadowed, and chaotic, portraying the trials and hardships of agrarian life.

In this illustration, which appears in the penultimate chapter of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess sleeps peacefully beneath the central stone at Stonehenge while her husband, Angel Clare, watches over her. The two are escaping the law after Tess murders her rapist and supposed cousin, Alec D'Urberville, when they come upon the Salisbury Plain and Stonehenge. There, Tess reconnects with her spiritual ancestry. She sleeps, after which she wakes resolved and resigned to her fate of hanging for her crime. "I am ready," she says, before the men of the law take her away. Here, Wehrschmidt expertly portrays the delicate ruffles of Tess's gown making the fallen Tess look angelic as she sleeps; depicted stoically, Angel steadfastly watches the sun rise and the men approach; the ominous and yet comforting stones cast long shadows on the two lovers in their final moments together.

# Stonehenge

Stonehenge is one of the oldest built sites in the United Kingdom, the earliest structures going back to 8500-7000 BC. The landscape surrounding Stonehenge is low and flat. The earliest structures were mounds and earthen rings, but around 2500 BC the stone circle we recognize today was constructed. The larger sarsen stones come from about 20 miles away from the site and weigh about 25 tons. The smaller “bluestones” come all the way from southwest Wales (about 155 miles away) and weigh 2-5 tons.

In 2016, Stonehenge received an estimated 1 million visitors. It is one of the top ten paid attractions in the United Kingdom. This is not a new phenomenon. The site officially opened to the public under the National Trust in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but people have been coming from far and wide to visit Stonehenge since its inception in the Mesolithic period as a site for healing and burial. The legacy of spiritualism and mystery have continued throughout history to today. However, visitors now walk around the perimeter of the site and can no longer enter the stone circle. The site promotes literary tourism by allowing tourists to experience *Tess* through an audio guide that includes a dramatic reading of this climactic scene.



Figure 4.4

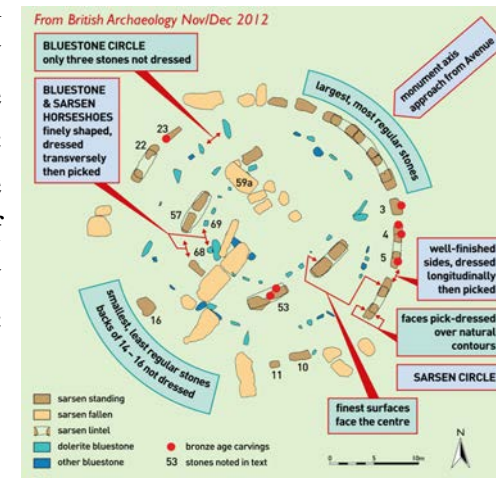
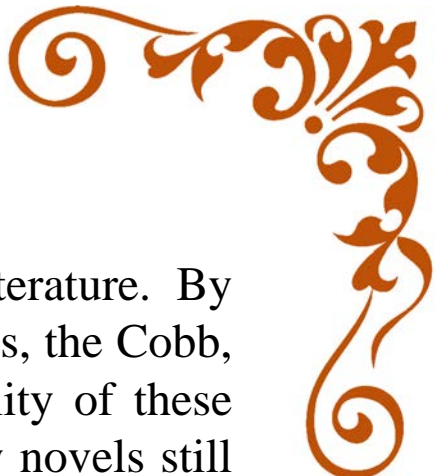


Figure 4.5



As this exhibit shows, place inextricably informs nineteenth-century British literature. By giving landscapes significance in their novels, Dickens, Austen, and Hardy endow the Thames, the Cobb, and Stonehenge, respectively, with cultural and historical meaning that transcends the reality of these locations from the nineteenth century to our current moment. These three nineteenth-century novels still inspire literary tourism at the banks of the Thames, the steps of the Cobb, and the Great Plain of Stonehenge; in doing so, they perpetuate what can now be thought of as the myth of the idealized English countryside. That myth becomes reality in *Our Mutual Friend*, *Persuasion*, and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* for the modern reader. Likewise, the Thames, the Cobb, and Stonehenge become places engrained in English culture and heritage for perpetuity.



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Class of 2018



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# Placing Nineteenth-Century British Literature

Tim Cresswell explains in his book *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004) that “Place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power” (19). In fiction, place influences how we experience a constructed narrative. In the nineteenth-century British novel, place becomes a part of the narrative, and the narrative, in turn, informs England’s geographical heritage making.

This exhibition explores how three nineteenth-century British authors—Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and Thomas Hardy—use the natural geography of Southern England in various ways to affect characterization, plot, and theme. The Cobb at Lyme Regis in Austen’s *Persuasion* (1818), the River Thames in Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), and Stonehenge in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891) are natural landscapes built upon by human experiences: the Thames has locks and boats, the Cobb its steep constructed steps, and Stonehenge its carefully arranged ancient monoliths. These landscapes are representative of an English heritage that is tied to place as part of its identity: its urban and rural geographies, its cultural and religious heritage, and its economic history. The nineteenth century saw the final stages of the Industrial Revolution in England, which disrupted the country’s social and economic systems. England experienced a mass migration out of the countryside and into industrial urban centers, such as London. However, literary critic Raymond Williams argues in *The Country and the City* (1973) that a sense of rural heritage never left the English zeitgeist. It appears in the writings of Austen, Dickens, and Hardy, although the idealized and beloved countryside of pre-industrial England essentially disappeared long before any of these authors were writing.

These three novels that span the long nineteenth century preserve and redefine real locations in England and have inspired literary tourism where visitors can reenact Louisa Musgrove’s fall from the steps of the Cobb, walk along the banks of the Thames that Lizzie and Gaffer Hexam dredge for corpses, and stand on the Great Plain of Stonehenge while listening to the dramatic climax of *Tess* through an audio guide. Fiction thus perpetuates what can now be thought of as the myth of the idealized English countryside. That myth becomes for the modern reader a reality in *Persuasion*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Likewise, the Cobb, the Thames, and Stonehenge become places engrained in English culture and heritage for perpetuity.

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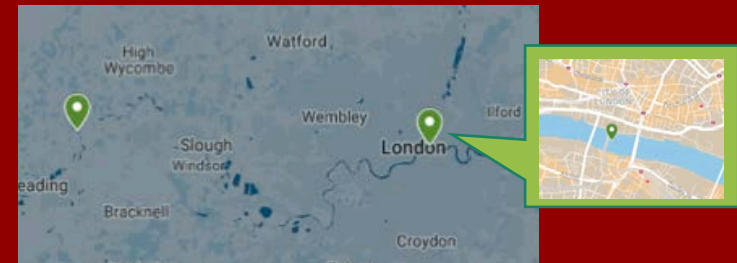
**A. Lyme Regis** is a small fishing village on the Dorset Coast in the Southwest of England. It is best known for fossil findings (the Ichthyosaur found by Mary Anning in 1819) and its inclusion in *Persuasion*. The town is protected by the Cobb, an artificial harbor dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The fortified harbor has made Lyme Regis an important port in England’s naval history, though today, the town relies most heavily on tourism. Visitors come from all over to look for fossils and climb the steep, jagged steps of the Cobb just like Louisa does.

Map courtesy of Ian West, *Geology of the Wessex Coast of Southern England*



Courtesy of British Archaeology and National Geographic

**C. Stonehenge:** In 2016, Stonehenge received an estimated 1 million visitors. It is one of the top ten paid attractions in the United Kingdom. This is not a new phenomenon. The site officially opened to the public under the National Trust in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but people have been coming from far and wide to visit Stonehenge since its inception in the Mesolithic period as a site for healing and burial. The legacy of spiritualism and mystery has continued throughout history to today. However, visitors now walk around the perimeter of the site and can no longer enter the stone circle. The site promotes literary tourism by allowing tourists to experience *Tess* through an audio guide that includes a dramatic reading of this climactic scene.



**B. The River Thames** is present throughout the entirety of *Our Mutual Friend*. The characters in the novel traverse the banks of the Thames from the Southwark Bridge in central London where Gaffer and Lizzie Hexam first discover the supposed body of John Harmon, to Greenwich in the east where Bella Wilfer and John Rokesmith marry, to Henley-on-Thames in the west where Betty Higden dies. Today, visitors can walk along the Thames and experience the places highlighted in Dickens’s novel with the aid of various self-guided tours and maps such as this one by Peter Biggins.