

ARTS & LETTERS

English at Boston University, contends that Dickens' landscape writing improved greatly during his career. His increasing interest in nature paralleled his growing concern with psychology.

The country settings of *Oliver Twist* (1838) offer a brief respite from the gritty, teeming urban environment that dominates the novel. But Dickens' countryside seems drawn from a fairy tale, with Oliver spending his time picking wildflowers "for the embellishment of the breakfast-table" and learning how to care for pet birds. The battered young victim of London's cruelties abruptly turns into a middle-class child free of scars. His transformation is not believable.

It was not until *Great Expectations* (1860-61) that Dickens effectively used a nature setting—the novel's unforgettable marshes—to illuminate character, and vice versa. Early in the book, the boy Pip looks out on "the dark, flat wilderness," "the low leaden line of the river," and "the distant savage lair of the sea" and is reminded of his infancy. Later, the marshes reflect Pip's emotional progress and setbacks. The mists symbolize his youthful confusion; the unobstructed path the marshes offer to the sea suggests his expanding ambition. Finally, the emptiness of his life is illustrated during his river escape with Magwitch. The surrounding banks suggest the marsh country beginnings he never truly left. The decaying ballast-lighter and lighthouse nearby symbolize his own decline.

In *Oliver Twist* and other early novels, nature is separated from the "real world" of strife and personal tragedy. But as the marshes are an integral part of Pip, so nature is an integral part of *Great Expectations*.

OTHER NATIONS

*Iraq: New
Arab Power?*

"Iraq—New Power in the Middle East"
by Claudia Wright, in *Foreign Affairs*,
(Winter 1979/80), 428 East Preston St.,
Baltimore, Md. 21202.

Oil-rich Iraq has often been neglected by Western policymakers. In viewing Saddam Hussein, its President since 1968, as just another shaky Arab dictator, American specialists underestimate both his political skills and Iraq's growing influence in the Middle East, says Wright, Washington correspondent for London's weekly *New Statesman*. A former lawyer, Hussein has launched a drive to establish Iraq as Egypt's successor as leader of the Arab world.

Iraq sits atop the world's second largest oil deposits (potential reserves: 95 billion barrels). Yet for two decades after World War II, Iraq was a country of poverty, disorder, and political violence. Ten coups or attempted coups occurred between 1958 and 1978. Chronic border dis-

OTHER NATIONS

*Oil-rich Iraq sits
in the middle of
the Middle East.
Its President
Hussein seeks
Arab unity.*



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putes with Iran, Kuwait, and Syria made Iraq heavily dependent on Soviet military aid.

Since 1968, Hussein has used oil revenues (about \$17 billion in 1979) to feed, educate, and house the population of 11.8 million. Special farm and school programs assist the rural poor. Moreover, Wright says, Iran-style religious strife is unlikely. Iraqi culture has long been more secular than that of its Arab neighbors. The prosperity and youthfulness of the population (two-thirds of all Iraqis are under 25) can only further weaken Islam's influence.

In recent years, border settlements with Syria and Kuwait, and Iran's domestic disarray, have eased Hussein's most pressing foreign policy problems. Moving away from Moscow, he has urged Saudi Arabia to move away from Washington. His aim: a united "Arab nation," unfettered by superpower ties and ready to campaign against Israel. Moreover, Hussein has used oil to secure sophisticated arms and technology from Western Europe.

According to Wright, better Iraqi-American relations in the near future are unlikely. Moreover, excessive American pressure on the Saudis for more oil could push the Saudis closer to Iraq. Hussein's influence can only increase as he awaits 1982, when he succeeds Fidel Castro as head of the Third World's so-called nonaligned movement.

'Consultative' Dictatorship

*"Is It True What They're Saying About East Germany?" by Norman M. Naimark, in *Orbis* (Fall 1979), 3508 Market St., Ste. 350, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104.*

Western perceptions of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) have changed during the country's 30-year history. Until the mid-1960s, many U.S. and European analysts pooh-poohed East Germany's economic prospects and depicted the regime as no more than a Soviet