News from the Dead: Archaeology, Detection, and 
The Mystery of Edwin Drood

The pictures of the Dedlocks past and gone have seemed to vanish into the damp walls in mere lowness of spirits, as the housekeeper has passed along the old rooms, shutting up the shutters. And when they will next come forth again, the fashionable intelligence – which, like the fiend, is omniscient of the past and present, but not the future – cannot yet undertake to say.

Bleak House

I

Charles Dickens’s Bleak House (1852–53) was, to the end, to resist a resolution between the two, opposing worldviews embodied in Esther Summerson’s self-styled Progress and in the present-tense narrative of the “unknown friend” of undetermined sex with whom she has been in correspondence. The novel was to suspend its readers in a state of doubt, transforming them into versions of those “chance people on [London] bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds” (Bleak House, p. 1). By the time that Dickens turned to The Mystery of Edwin Drood (1870) some sixteen years later, Charles Darwin’s Origin of Species (1859) and Charles Lyell’s Antiquity of Man (1863) had been published, the nearly final consolidation of a paradigm shift to a uniformitarian worldview of a universe governed solely by natural law. Darwin had dispensed with the doctrine of special creation and the immutability of species. Lyell had argued for the existence of prehistoric peoples, living long before events recounted in the Old Testament, therefore dismissing scripture as a true history of the human race from its beginnings. Although Lyell was not publicly to accept
Darwin’s evolutionary hypothesis until the tenth edition of his *Principles of Geology* in 1868, the die was cast for those ready to embrace a thoroughgoing naturalistic worldview. Together, Darwin and a reluctant Lyell had effectively subverted the synthesis of science and revelation that had constituted the Natural Theology of Hugh Miller (1802–1856), Adam Sedgwick (1785–1873), and William Whewell (1794–1866).

Both the *Origin of Species* and the *Antiquity of Man* were reviewed in *All the Year Round*, the weekly periodical that had succeeded Dickens’s *Household Words*. Darwin was himself dismissive of “Species,” the first of the two-part review of the *Origin* that appeared on 2 June 1860. However, the unidentified reviewer had a sure sense of Darwin’s “one long argument.” In introducing readers to the transmutation of species in the first review article, the reviewer made the by now obligatory acknowledgment of Pierre Simon Laplace (1749–1827) in familiar language: a universe forever in the process of change had been anticipated by “Laplace’s celebrated comparison of the nebulae, in what are supposed progressive stages of forwardness, to the trees of different ages growing in a forest. . . . Certain stars called nebulae. . . have an ill-defined and cloudy look; others are less and less so, till we arrive at the perfect, point-like, glittering star, or cluster of stars, shining like diamonds in the sky.” In such a universe “God is Continuous and Unyielding Law, and Incessant Energy, and All-pervading Life” (“Species,” 176). With such a vision, according to the reviewer, Laplace and Darwin had forever dismissed the transcendent Deity of “[William] Paley’s Natural Theology” (175).

In the second of the two-part review, the reviewer suggested that Darwin was to be seen as a nineteenth-century heretic, “opposed to the belief of philosophers who hold that the various species of plants and animals have been independently created, and have been purposely fitted and adapted to the place in creation which they were intended to occupy” (“Natural Selection,” 296). In the concluding paragraphs of “Natural Selection,” the reviewer suggested a sure understanding of Darwin’s heresy by paraphrasing, almost verbatim, a central passage from the “Recapitulation and Conclusion” of the *Origin*:

[Darwin’s] theory . . . entails the vastest consequences. We are no longer to look at an organic being as a savage looks at a ship – as at something wholly beyond his comprehension; we are to regard every production of nature as one which has had a history; we are to contemplate every complex structure and instinct as the summing up