

Dickens and Italy

Dickens and Italy:
Little Dorrit and *Pictures from Italy*

Edited by

Michael Hollington and Francesca Orestano

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Dickens and Italy: *Little Dorrit* and *Pictures from Italy*,
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IN MEMORIAM SALLY LEDGER

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FOREWORD

CLOTILDE DE STASIO

The essays in this volume began life as contributions to the International Conference “Dickens, Victorian Culture, Italy” held in Genoa in June 2007, organised by Michael Hollington in close collaboration with Massimo Bacigalupo, Francesca Orestano, Alessandro Vescovi, Paul Vita, Luisa Villa and hosted by the University of Genoa. As a matter of fact there will be three volumes covering the whole of the proceedings of the Conference. The present book focuses on Dickens’s response to his experience in Italy as expressed in his letters, in his travelogue *Pictures from Italy* and, later on, in the novel *Little Dorrit*.

One more volume, to be published in Italy, bears the title *The Victorians and Italy: Literature, Travel, Politics and Art* (edited by A. Vescovi, L. Villa and P. Vita) and will deal with a more general view of the relationship between eminent Victorians (Dickens obviously amongst them) and Italy. These will be followed by another Cambridge Scholars Press book entitled *Imagining Italy: Victorian Travellers and Writers*, edited by Michael Hollington, John Jordan and Catherine Waters.

Actually, the aim of the Conference was to provide as rich a cultural context as possible for the study of Dickens in relation to Italy, and to document the role of Italy in Victorian culture, not only as regards literature but also concerning history and the visual arts. Of course, Genoa and Dickens’s stay there were at the centre of the discussion.

That wonderful city, recently refurbished and restored, deserving again its title of “La Superba,” offered plenty of opportunities for the participants to re-experience in imagination the sights and flavours of city life as they were in past centuries. They also enjoyed a number of special events accompanying the Conference. There was the visit to the two houses where Dickens lived, the more humble Villa Bagnerello at Albaro, and the sumptuous Palazzo Peschiere in the city centre, overlooking the harbour and the blue sea. The “Magic Lantern Show” was a fascinating encounter with Victorian visuality, and we must indeed be grateful to Laura Minici Zotti for preserving the unique enchantment of the magic lanterns in her Museum in Padua and for showing this around the world.

The visit to the Autograph Exhibit “Dickens in Genoa” highlighted not only Dickens’s response to Italy but also the Italians’ response to the novelist, especially in the form of numerous translations of his works.

The Genoa event thus carried forward the determination, first signalled perhaps in the Conference “Dickens, Europe and the New Worlds,” organised by the late Annie Sadrin in Dijon in 1996, to view Dickens no longer as an insular, quintessentially English writer, but as someone who should be seen as also belonging to a cosmopolitan milieu.

The numerous scholars convening to Genoa from many parts of the world appeared to confirm the international relevance of Dickens and Dickens Studies, in the context of which the relevance of Italy cannot be overstated. Such work is to be continued in the future by the volumes on the reception of Dickens in Europe to be published by Continuum Press in 2011, and the British Academy sponsored project on the global dissemination of Dickens directed by Professor Regenia Gagnier of the University of Exeter.

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The editors would like first of all to thank the other members of the organising committee that made the June 2007 Genoa conference possible, namely Massimo Bacigalupo, Clotilde de Stasio, Alessandro Vescovi, Luisa Villa and Paul Vita. Revised papers were then submitted to a committee of readers, which selected the essays here for inclusion in the current volume. Again, we should like to thank our fellows on this committee, namely John Jordan, Alessandro Vescovi, Luisa Villa and Paul Vita.

Much of the editing work has been done at the University of Milan. Our thanks go to the Dean of the Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università degli Studi di Milano, Professor Elio Franzini, who kindly offered financial support to the project. At the Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio e Letterature Straniere Compare the administrative staff have at all times been exceptionally kind and helpful.

We should like to express our gratitude to Laura Minici Zotti for her generous support, both at the conference and thereafter, and for giving permission for us to use glass slides from her Collection for the cover of this volume. Our thanks also go to Maria Beatrice Vanni for designing this cover, and last but not least, to Fergus Armstrong of the University of Sydney for his work in preparing our text for publication.

Michael Hollington and Francesca Orestano

INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL HOLLINGTON
AND FRANCESCA ORESTANO

This book represents an initial attempt to gain for Dickens's relationship to Italy the attention it deserves. It focuses primarily on the two major texts that concern Italy – the travel book *Pictures from Italy* of 1846, arising out of Dickens's then recent year-long residence in Genoa, and the novel *Little Dorrit* of 1855–7. The latter is by anyone's standards amongst the finest works of fiction produced by Dickens (and thus by any novelist writing in the English language), so that to gauge and understand the significance of its Italian themes, settings, and characters through reference to the background of its author's Italian experiences might seem a matter of automatic importance to Dickens readers and scholars alike.

And yet, despite his biographer Forster's assertion that the long spell in Italy in the 1840s represents "the turning-point of his career," (Forster 307) the subject of "Dickens and Italy" has suffered curious neglect, appearing to be very much overshadowed in the amount of scholarly work devoted to it by "Dickens and America." The recent, otherwise excellent *Companion to Charles Dickens*, for instance, edited by David Paroissien, contains little or nothing about Italy. There is no entry for "Italy" in its index, and only a very cursory mention of the Italian period in Michael Allen's biographical sketch. Compare that with the attention lavished on America: twelve lines for "America" in the index, a whole contextual essay on Dickens and America, and a good deal more detail in Allen's brief biography.

In suggesting that this example may represent an imbalance in need of correction, we do not of course want to question the interest and importance to a wide constituency, then and now, of Dickens's attitudes towards America. What we do contend, though, is that Italy mattered as much, if not more to him. There is a remarkable superficial symmetry between the two relationships: Dickens made two visits to each country, spending 301 and 338 days on American and Italian soil respectively, wrote one travel book about America and one about Italy, introduced American scenes into

an early novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, in an attempt to boost flagging sales, and, under no such constraint, Italian scenes into a late one, *Little Dorrit*. And Dickens himself seems at moments to have made mental connections, or indeed confusions, between the two places – as for instance in one of the rare letters to his wife after their separation, concerning the death of his mother-in-law and her burial with Mary Hogarth in Kensal Green Cemetery: “When I went to America (or to Italy: I cannot positively say which, but I think on the former occasion) I gave your mother the paper which established the right in perpetuity to the grave” (5/8/63; *Letters X* 280).

But the resemblance between Dickens’s experience of the two countries starts to falter, we think, when we contemplate its political dimensions, and the differing anticipations he carried with him as he set out on his first visit to each. In the case of America he set out with “great expectations,” and was disappointed with what he saw, famously recording his verdict that “This is not the republic I came to see. This is not the republic of my imagination” (to W.C. Macready 22/3/42; *Letters III* 156). The tone of reference to America thereafter contains regular expressions of skepsis about American democracy, or even cynical disillusionment, as at the time of the Civil War, when he finds himself unable to “believe in the Northern love of the black man, or in the Northern horror of Slavery having anything to do with the beginning of the war, save as a pretence” (to Mrs. Kemble 1/3/65; *Letters XI* 21).

The case of Italy follows a quite different trajectory. At the outset, of course, there was no republic for him either to see or to imagine. From English contemporaries and friends he knew before setting out what to expect by way of injustice and oppression, or poverty, dirt and decay. From Lady Blessington, for instance, from whom he sought more frequent and extensive advice about Italy before travelling there than from anyone else, he would have heard, amongst other horrors, of what she had seen at Ravenna in 1828: “the bodies of three men hanging from bars erected for the purpose of suspending them... the deaths of these unfortunate men had been inflicted by order of him who professed to be the Vicar of the Father of Mercy on earth” (Madden I 111–12). Thus his initial reactions upon arrival were predictably negative. In a letter to Blessington’s companion Alfred d’Orsay of August, 1844, for instance, he complains of Genoa that “of all the mouldy, dreary, sleepy, dirty, lagging, halting, God-forgotten towns in the wide world, it surely must be the very uttermost superlative” (*Letters IV* 169).

Gradually, however, that cardinal process of Dickens’s imagination, “the attraction of repulsion,” wrought alchemical change in his view of

Italy. He began to practice a routine discrimination between the natural warmth and kindness of so many of the Italians he met and the thoroughly unpromising material and moral circumstances in which they had to function. “So many jewels set in dirt” was the phrase he hit upon to fix this perception, and despite the perhaps unpromising implications of its characteristic reification of persons as things it led him to identify himself strongly with the central Risorgimento causes of national unification and liberation from foreign and domestic domination. Back in England Dickens would follow that struggle right up until his death in 1870 with increasing diligence and active practical involvement. If in America he experienced chiefly disillusionment with what revolution had produced, in Italy he was galvanised by spontaneous sympathy with its people into progressively aiding and abetting a revolution that he believed would raise and support them, and this even at a time (the 1850s and 1860s) when his views on uprisings elsewhere (India, Jamaica) were becoming distinctly more conservative.

More than once Dickens refers to his Italian *parti pris* by using a word that might itself carry conservative overtones were it not for the contexts in which it occurs – it is for him “natural” to adopt the Italian cause. Writing in 1861, for instance, he employs it twice in one sentence, emphasising “one’s natural sympathies with a people so oppressed as the Italians, and one’s natural antagonism to a Pope and a Bourbon” (to W. W. F. de Cerjat, 1/2/1861; *Letters* IX 381). But “natural” also seems at times to slip over into “native” – in a move that has no counterpart in Dickens’s writing about America, he likes to depict himself as an imaginary Italian. The note of “natural” personal partiality towards a “native” national cause is first strikingly felt, perhaps, in a letter of 1860 remonstrating with Chorley over the negative representation of Italian revolutionaries in the latter’s novel *Roccabella*: “Think if you and I were Italians, and had grown from boyhood to our present time, menaced in every day through all those years by that infernal confessional, dungeons and soldiers, could we be better than these men? Should we be so good? I should not, I am afraid. If I know myself, such things should make of me a moody, bloodthirsty implacable man, who would do anything for revenge” (*Letters* IX 207). Writing in 1866 to other correspondents like Thomas Adolphus Trollope and Emile de la Rue – men who unquestionably shared his sympathies – he goes further in the direction of enrolling himself as an honorary Italian. “I feel for Italy almost as if I were Italian born” he writes to Trollope in July (*Letters* XI 226), and in a letter of the previous month to de la Rue in Genoa he goes further still, removing the “ifs” and simply using the third person plural “we” to convey a “natural” and “native”

identification with Italy so complete that it compels him to use the national language: "May the God of Free nations and just Battles give *our* Soldiers the Victory next time! If Prussia and Austria could destroy each other, and *we* could get and hold Venice and unite Italy – why then (as the Ghost of Gibbs whispers in my ear) 'Vi lascio a giudicare'" (29/6/66; *Letters* XI 218). No wonder, then, that Thomas Adolphus Trollope has left us vivid testimony of Dickens's animated revolutionary fervour in the course of conversations about Italy between the two men: "how well I remember his arched eyebrows and laughing eyes when I told him of Garibaldi's proposal that all priests should be summarily executed!," writes Trollope again (Trollope I 359).

So much, then, for the important and underestimated political dimensions of Dickens's engagement with Italy, ably explored in depth in a number of the essays contained in this volume. The need now is to complement it with a brief sketch of what we see as the importance it held for him – again going far beyond that of America – at quite deep personal levels. At all levels, including the political, we think, Italy signified for Dickens the possibility of a translation of state – the shedding of the past, and the renewal of the self, as artist and man, through the embrace of a beloved "other." Some of its most fundamental associations and metaphors were for him theatrical, by which we mean in particular the theatre of melodrama and pantomime. He was in fact first exposed to Italian culture as a child through the latter, a form imported into England from Italy, and still bearing strong traces of its origins in figures like the great clown Grimaldi, whom Dickens first saw on stage at the age of seven, and whose memoirs he was later to edit. Pantomime, particularly in the more pristine versions of the form with which Dickens became familiar through Grimaldi, hinges upon a "transformation scene" in which the conventional masks are dropped and the "true" identities of the performers or participants revealed.

This structure, we believe, had a profound impact on Dickens's imagination, perhaps even preconditioning his actual responses to Italy when he arrived there in the flesh. The fact that he lived in *two* residences during his year in Genoa, the first thoroughly unsatisfactory, the second by any standards palatial, is the first and perhaps most essential thing to register about Dickens's way of experiencing Italy. The move from the suburban, vermin-infested home of a drunk butcher, the Villa Bagnerello in Albaro, where Dickens lived for not much more than a month, to the palace with the commanding view of the city of Genoa itself, where he spent the rest of his year abroad, seems to articulate the fundamental shape of Dickens's relation to Italy. It is recapitulated in all manner of ways – in

the transition from the initial loathing of Genoa to unconditional love of its people and setting (far more beautiful, Dickens always liked to stress, than the Bay of Naples), in the contrast between arrival in 1844 and rearrival in 1853, when he found the city on his second visit modern, prosperous and transformed, and of course in the binary structure of *Little Dorrit*, the first half focused on a family in prison, the second, opening with that same family in the Alps on a Grand Tour, about to descend into Italy.

For ever after Dickens would remember the Palazzo Peschiere and describe it as the best place he ever lived in. Here, in Tobia Pallavicino's stately pleasure dome built in the 16th century on the proceeds of the Papal alum mine at Tolfa – "something larger than Whitehall multiplied by four," he writes to the richest woman in England, Angela Burdett Coutts (*Letters* IV 277) – the boy who had pasted labels on blacking bottles while his father languished in prison for debt, had clearly arrived. He called it, in a register of childhood wonder, "a Palace in a Fairy Tale." He believed that its frescoes were by Michelangelo, and although they are in fact by Il Bergamasco and Luca Cambiaso, he was by no means wrong in expressing his disgust at the Fine Arts Commission in London for failing to act on the 1840s report describing them as "among the finest in Italy" (*Letters* IV 168). The latest commentators on them, in the catalogue to the Luca Cambiaso exhibition in Genoa in 2007, roundly concur, describing the quality of their design as "unsurpassed in Italy" (Bober 106).

It was in the Peschiere, we believe, that Dickens began to meditate on what can be called "the Italian dream" in his life and work – he refers to it himself as such in a letter stating categorically that "Italy is an abiding dream with me." It was a dream of liberation, literal and figurative, from a past of recurrent nightmares: imprisonment for debt, childhood exploitation and degradation, the death of a loved one in one's arms. It was a dream of artistic renewal, real enough when it is remembered, as it should be, more frequently than appears to be the case, that the first trip to Italy was followed by the crucial breakthrough novel, *Dombey and Son*, and that the second precedes by not much over a year the commencement of one of his greatest masterpieces, *Little Dorrit*.

Yet these are both novels about much more painful and difficult translations of state than that imagined in pantomime. Italy also in fact stood for Dickens as an icon of the weight of the past, and of history's refusal of any simple cancellation and obliteration. This too was reflected for him most fundamentally in its buildings, constantly being altered and added to, and subject to apparently endless transformations of purpose and function, metamorphosing ceaselessly from palace to prison and back

again. He perceived the reality of the country that he was visiting, and attempting to read, in *Pictures from Italy* and the letters on which it is based, as a palimpsest. And its ceaselessly overwritten text was not just for him an opportunity for observation and decipherment of a physical kind, or for the reading of purely visible signs. It was clearly also a challenge to versions of allegorical reading that understood the connection between the external and political and historical and the inner life of individual subjects caught up in 19th century realities.

Italy would in fact remain for ever after as a personal palimpsest for Dickens. The bright "Pictures from Italy" that he wrote about in the 1840s would flash through his brain at regular intervals for the rest of his life. Beginning to write *Our Mutual Friend* in 1864, for instance, and so embarking on his last long novel after two shorter ones in *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*, he suddenly remembers the vast opera house at Naples, and contrasts it to home amateur theatricals, "I have a sensation as of acting at the San Carlo after Tavistock House, which I could hardly have supposed would have come upon so old a stager" (to Wilkie Collins 28/1/64; *Letters* X 346). And to an American sculptor, essayist and poet, William Wetmore Story, who in 1856 gave up practicing law in Boston in order to settle in Italy, he wrote, even of "the golden beauty of an early harvest" in England, that "I shut my eyes for a moment and stand in front of your zebra-like Siena Cathedral, and it is almost as plainly before me as this English landscape" (1/8/63; *Letters* X 278).

The same letter continues by amplifying such pictures into "visions" of return, even of settlement in Italy, of a kind which again are not to be encountered anywhere in Dickens's writing on America. The "Italian dream" in fact seems to crystallise around the *nostos* trope. He was for ever announcing plans of going to Italy again, writing for instance to Mrs Henry Austin from Paris at Christmas 1862 that "it is likely enough that I may go on from here to see some friends in Genoa" (20/12/62; *Letters* X 178). To Thomas Adolphus Trollope in 1863 he declares: "I live in a dream of getting back to Italy; but I am always waking, and never knowing when I shall look on its beloved face again" (to Thomas Adolphus Trollope 16/6/63; *Letters* X 260).

The fact that he never did seems to gain a certain poignancy when we contemplate the very last instances of his urge to get away and head down South. In November 1869, seven months before his death, he replies to an evident invitation to visit Thomas Adolphus Trollope in Florence. He imagines himself once more with the Dorrits, passing through Swiss summits:

Walk across the Alps? Lord bless you, I am “going” to take up my alpenstock and cross all the Passes, and I am “going” to Italy... My only dimness of perception in this wise, is, that I don’t know when. If I did but know when, I should be so wonderfully clear about it all! At present I can’t see even so much as the Simplon, in consequence of certain Farewell Readings, and a certain new book (just begun) interposing their shadow. But whenever (if ever) I change “going” into “coming,” I shall come to see you. (4/11/69; *Letters* XII 434)

And at the very last, the day before his fatal seizure, he reiterates the plaintive note in the parenthetical “if ever” in a letter to Henry Chorley: “I have hardly a thought of getting beyond here this year” (7/6/70; *Letters* XII 545), apparently having to postpone yet once more the encounter with his favourite beloved “other.”

The essays that follow illuminate the importance of Italy for Dickens’s mind and art sketched above in a variety of ways, and are grouped here into clusters that articulate the structure of the volume. Parts I-IV are concerned primarily with *Pictures from Italy*, dating from 1846, and constructed largely out of the letters describing his experiences sent home to his friend John Forster during his year of residence. The work thus has the quality of a writer on holiday, engaged in nothing but the leisurely activity of letter writing during a sabbatical abroad (Dickens in fact completed only one short work, *The Chimes*, during his stay in Genoa). Part I is thus entitled “Dickens’s Italian Holiday,” and focuses on the experience, unusual for Dickens, of leisure and relaxation, and the possibilities of renewal and transcendence it afforded him.

David Paroissien provides a detailed, closely researched account of the expression of that mood in the letters themselves, analysing the pictures they provide of Dickens the tourist, eagerly exploring the territory around him, plunging from the seaside rocks into the blue sea, adventuring in city streets, piazzas, musty alleys, churches and shrines, moving about the surrounding hills and littoral, and stopping at theatres and shops in a thoroughly lounging and flaneurial mode. Nicola Bradbury identifies the prevailing mood of his time abroad as one of “dolce far niente,” but she also uncovers the progress Dickens made in his attempts to come to grips in a serious way with his new environment by his efforts at mastering Italian, linking his rapid improvement in the language with his growing love of and identification with the people who spoke it. For her, the act of linguistic appropriation implies deeper ways of involvement with the Italian landscape: it is no longer simply a picturesque background but becomes a living tissue of human relationships. Chris Louttit’s essay, which completes this section, complicates the picture a little further,

examining in detail the alternations in *Pictures from Italy* between two kinds of response to the stimulus of the new, one restless and active and always on the move, the other that of the contemplative idler taking a pause from life in the fast lane in order to stop and think about all manner of public and personal concerns.

Part II, “Dickens’s Visual Response to Italy,” examines one of the most essential activities of the English tourist in Italy, then and now – sightseeing, and in particular, looking at natural beauties on the one hand and art and architecture on the other. All three contributors to this section attempt to show how Dickens’s *Pictures from Italy* departs from the conventions of travel writing and adopts a more personal and at times quirkily individual manner of presentation, both of nature and of art. He is aware of and makes use of the conventional terms – “sublime,” “picturesque,” and so on – and at the same time tries to reinvent them.

Leonee Ormond draws on her knowledge of the Italian art tradition to provide expert illumination of Dickens’s response to the Old Masters, exploring both his enthusiasms – for Venice and Tintoretto in particular – and his dislikes. She demonstrates how, like many Victorians, Dickens was often ill at ease when confronted with the jumbled perspectives of Mannerist and Baroque art, and had a tendency to sniff out disquieting and repellent whiffs of paganism in the holiest images of religious art. Yet, as Francesca Orestano shows, the visual quality of *Pictures from Italy*, evident from the very title, resides not only in its response to the cultural glories of the past, or to the permanent beauties of nature. Dickens was also highly receptive to modern optical technology and to those machines which, well before the cinema, adapted the picturesque sketching tradition to the techniques of the dissolving view, in magic lantern presentations and elsewhere. The allusions to new kinds of image production, so frequent in *Pictures from Italy*, not only indicate Dickens’s enthusiastic response to popular visual culture, but gesture towards new modes of description which are subversively non-realist, giving his narrative about Italy a distinct flavour of modernity. Nathalie Vanfasse offers further critical and technical evidence for this whole approach through her detailed focus on the apparatus of the diorama which provides scaffolding and inspiration to the last chapters (“A Rapid Diorama”) of Dickens’s travelogue.

In Part III we turn our attention to “Dickens’s Political Engagement with Italy,” whilst retaining our visual emphasis, for it is what Dickens *sees* (and smells, and hears) in Italy that governs his reactions. The late Sally Ledger (a partial version of whose paper was published in 2009 as “‘God be thanked: a ruin!’: The Rejection of Nostalgia in *Pictures from*

Italy" in *Dickens Quarterly* XXVI 79-85) examines Dickens's response to the visible signs of stagnation in Italian society – that sense of stasis and cultural incapacity to embrace progress which the writer registers everywhere, be it in Genoa, Piacenza, Cremona, Modena, Ferrara, Naples, or, last but not least, Rome. Her essay traces Dickens's attitude towards a possible modernisation of Italy, which is also expressed by other contemporary writings, such as his political articles in the *Daily News* and his radical Christmas Book *The Chimes*. Alongside Dickens's commitment to an ideal of progress, and his admiration for Mazzini and "Giovine Italia," there is in *Pictures from Italy*, as noted by Ledger, an attention to aspects of Italian popular culture which makes this travelogue a kind of modern, democratised version of the Romantic Grand Tour. Valerie Kennedy provides a wider background to his allusions to the political state of things in Italy by tracing in Dickens's account his general sense of the country's history, which everywhere seems still to live on and condition its present. While finding evidence everywhere in Italy of the savagery and violence of the past, Dickens also resorts to dream and nightmare imagery – dream-like places, torpor, death-like sleep – to convey a view of the present as still inhabited, and cramped, by the past. This can be argued not only for *Pictures from Italy* but also for *Little Dorrit*, where the violence of the past is unredeemed by, and inextricable from, the present. David Ellison concentrates on Dickens's reaction, in Genoa, to a marionette play about the death of Napoleon, where he wonders at the unexpected reverence of the Italian audience for the martyr of St Helena. The episode brings into critical light one of the most shocking political realities of Italy (at least for Dickens, nursed in dread of "Boney") – namely the devotion to the General and legislator who had given freedom and state rules to a country formerly under the tyranny of absolute powers. Massimo Verzella focuses on the relationship between Dickens and the Italian exile Antonio Gallenga who, besides teaching him Italian, was also the author of *Italy Past and Present* (1841), a book that might have influenced Dickens's conception of history and, in particular, his account of Genoa and the portrait of the Genoese during the first part of his Italian sojourn. But he also has a sharp eye for Dickens's notation of "marks of weakness, marks of woe" on the Italian scene, commenting on the physiognomies that he encounters in his street perambulations and on the weeds and rank vegetation he observes everywhere. Images of impeded walking, slow motion, and hampered progress recur in Verzella's "allegorical" reading of *Pictures from Italy*, speaking for an Italian past still visible in its decay, and for the immobility of the present.

It is again not hard to make the transition to the next section. Part IV concerns “Death and Decay in Dickens’s Italy,” and opens with Victor Sage’s expert “Gothic” approach to *Pictures from Italy*, which argues that its rhetoric is constructed on the model of the phantasmagoria, a spectacular kind of representation whose mechanism is made to evoke in turn images of the demonic and images of death and decay. The devil, already evoked in Lyon under the features of the angel Gabriel, reappears everywhere in Italy under the aspect of goblins and evil spirits in bell steeples, old witches in unswept streets, legions, ghouls or demons in the *confraternita* of the dead. Within the wider context of the theatricality of many religious rites, these demonic instances demonstrate the narrow borderline (indeed the leakage, Sage argues) between holy and unholy, which is further emphasised by frequent imagery of dirt and decay, often turning scenes of the present into funereal re-enactments of the past.

Paul Vita approaches the representation of burial places and funeral practices in *Pictures from Italy* as specific narrative strategies deployed by Dickens to expose cultural differences, and makes reference to his treatment of funeral practices at home, most notably in *The Uncommercial Traveller*. Funeral practices are of course linked to theatrical performance: in Catholic countries particularly, but not exclusively, they reveal the attitude of society towards death and the practices related to dying. Although the representation of Catholic burial practices is largely critical, Vita convinces us that not everything about the funerals Dickens witnesses in Italy is negative. The proliferation of suburban burial grounds in Italy is one example: here, cisalpine practices are greatly to be preferred to the noisome toxicity of city cemeteries in London, as these are depicted in *Bleak House*. Dickens’s attitude to death is further investigated by Dominic Janes, who focuses on the passage in *Pictures from Italy* where the body of San Carlo Borromeo is described in a degree of detail that takes in both the decay of the body itself and the condition of the gold of the precious robes that enwrap the corpse. This passage invites considerations about the cultural interest Victorians took in sacred relics, mummies, and otherwise preserved bodies and corpses generally, which, while marking the difference between Catholic and Protestant attitudes towards them, reveals a degree of ambivalence and anxiety which Dickens would later treat both in his journalism and in his fiction. The whole theme of death and the corpse was to become central to his work – not just to the perception of Italian mores here, especially in Rome, but later, increasingly, to his “pictures of London.”

With Part V we turn to Dickens’s other major writing about Italy, contained in Book Two of *Little Dorrit*, and to a topic not unadjacent to

the dialectic of the same and the other as explored by Vita and Janes. “Italianness and Foreignness in *Little Dorrit*” investigates the categories of foreignness and familiarity as these relate to, and highlight, a novel which probes on the one hand numerous images of imprisonment, of psychic and national self-enclosure, and on the other, the counter-category of cosmopolitanism. Gerhard Joseph provides convincing instances both of this self-enclosed Podsnappery and of the “citizen of the world” attitude, and offers testimony of the value of Dickens’s Italian experience in terms which already prefigure the fictional complexities Henry James would later elaborate in his investigation of the “international theme.” Christine Huguet asks “What’s in a name?,” and explores Dickens’s love of sham and real Italian names through a wealth of examples, reaching valuable conclusions about his delight in onomastics as a source of fictional subplots. Her main focus is on “Giovanni Baptista,” and she traces Dickens’s fascination with the figure of John the Baptist from *Pictures from Italy* to “To Be Read At Dusk” and finally to *Little Dorrit*, where Cavalletto takes up a symbolic role as John the Baptist. The foreignness of his name indicates a kind of innate goodness that, as we have seen, Dickens associated with the Italian people, and which is in opposition to the dark powers of his diabolical enemy Rigaud, even though in London that power is symbolically reduced in influence – he is situated there only in the obscure and recessed hidden backwater of Bleeding Heart Yard.

David Parker’s essay confirms its two predecessors in highlighting Dickens’s fascination with names and things Italian. His panoramic view of the Italian “diaspora” and immigration into London during the first decades of the nineteenth century provides a detailed and vivid background against which one can situate Dickens’s creative passion for Italian names throughout his career. From the areas of the theatre, music, art exhibits, popular prints and puppetry came the inspiration for the adoption of Italian (or Italian-sounding) names which perfectly served the comedy of imperfect understanding, of which *Little Dorrit* provides some memorable instances. Marie-Amélie Coste offers further insights into the nature of the “funny foreigners” in Dickens’s fiction by investigating the categories of familiarity and foreignness as defined by language. This happens in *Pictures from Italy*, whenever the question of national identity, whether English or Italian, is manifested through language. In *Little Dorrit*, Cavalletto and Rigaud may be seen to represent opposing types, the grotesque Italian versus the self-proclaimed cosmopolitan gentleman, but in Coste’s account Dickens is equally concerned, here and in works like *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Our Mutual Friend*, or *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, to satirise the insular Britishness that constructs such stereotypes.

The last two complementary essays in Part VI of the collection, entitled “Dickens’s Italy and Contemporary Intertextuality,” take us beyond a purely 19th century focus. Louis Lo’s subtle, complex analysis of *Little Dorrit* takes us backwards in time to the Rome of honourable, philosophical suicide, like Seneca’s, mockingly compared to Merdle’s sordid modern version thereof in a public bath, and sideways in space to the equally sordid realities of imperial Canton Guangzhou, where Victorians fought two wars in order to ensure imperial control of the opium trade. But Lo also leaps forwards to now, making comparative use of the work of Italo Calvino, and his concept of “invisible cities” hidden beneath the surface representation of London or Rome or indeed of any great city. He makes fascinating and original use of Calvino to uncover the repressed and unnameable crimes and secrets of the Dorrits in China and Merdle and others in the London of *Little Dorrit*. Murray Baumgarten, on the other hand, focuses on Dickens’s representation of Venice – the Venice of the letters Dickens wrote from there in 1845 and the chapter in *Pictures from Italy* entitled “An Italian Dream” in the first instance, and later, its repercussions in Dickens’s own mature work and in that of contemporary writers about Venice. Again, the magic lantern quality of the vision helps generate images of other cities and other Venices, dissolving multiple views into one another and thereby creating a trope of the awesome, indescribable modern metropolis so prominent in Dickens’s later fiction. The Venice that became in Dickens’s words henceforth “a bit of my brain” will later transmute into the London of *Our Mutual Friend*, with its labyrinthine Venetian mysteriousness and invisible “no thoroughfares” as the essential stage of an eternal theatre of opposites. There too, then, we find clear evidence of the long impact of the Italian experience on our writer. But for Baumgarten as for Lo Dickens’s work echoes well beyond the 19th century, its concept of Venice revived in the theatre of exile and homelessness evoked in the lines of Dan Pagis or in Will Wells’s “A Walk to the Ghetto: Venice.” Our concluding double bill shows clearly that Dickens and Italy is a subject that is still very much alive in our own time.

References and Further Reading

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The two main texts referred to in this book, unless otherwise indicated, are cited from the following editions, abbreviated throughout as *LD* and *PI*:

- Charles Dickens. 1996. *Pictures from Italy*. Edited with Introduction and Notes by Kate Flint. Harmondsworth: Penguin
—, 1999. *Little Dorrit*. Edited with Introduction and Notes by Harvey Peter Sucksmith. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Where contributors refer additionally to other editions of these works, these are listed in the References and Further Reading section at the end of each essay.

In addition, all references to Dickens's letters are to the Pilgrim Edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens*. Ed. Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, et al. 1965–2003. 12 vols. Oxford: The Clarendon Press. Abbreviated as *Letters*.

References to other works written or edited by Dickens – to various editions as specified in the References and Further Readings sections – use standard abbreviations, as follows:

<i>AN</i>	<i>American Notes</i>
<i>AY</i>	<i>All the Year Round</i>
<i>BH</i>	<i>Bleak House</i>
<i>CB</i>	<i>Christmas Books</i>
<i>CS</i>	<i>Christmas Stories</i>
<i>CHE</i>	<i>A Child's History of England</i>
<i>DC</i>	<i>David Copperfield</i>
<i>DS</i>	<i>Dombey and Son</i>
<i>ED</i>	<i>The Mystery of Edwin Drood</i>
<i>GE</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>
<i>HW</i>	<i>Household Words</i>
<i>HT</i>	<i>Hard Times</i>
<i>NN</i>	<i>Nicholas Nickleby</i>
<i>OCS</i>	<i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i>

<i>OMF</i>	<i>Our Mutual Friend</i>
<i>OT</i>	<i>Oliver Twist</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>Pickwick Papers</i>
<i>SB</i>	<i>Sketches by Boz</i>
<i>TOTC</i>	<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>
<i>UT</i>	<i>The Uncommercial Traveller</i>

Wherever possible we give full references to Book (where applicable) in large Roman numerals, chapter in small Roman numerals and page number in Arabic numerals – e.g., *TOTC* II ch.xvi 190.

PART I:
DICKENS'S ITALIAN HOLIDAY

CHAPTER ONE

EPISTLES FROM THE PALAZZO: OUR MAN IN GENOA

DAVID PAROISSIEN

Dickens moved his entire family to Italy in July 1844 in order to relax.¹ The time had come, he concluded, to pause from writing fiction, to settle down in the “delicious air” of the Ligurian coast, to stare the blue waters “out of countenance” or walk about “in a dreamy sort of way,” which he found “very comfortable” (*Letters* IV 167, 169). Initially, he had entertained the idea of Nice as “a favorable spot for Headquarters” (*Letters* IV 68); but after sounding out several friends, including Lady Blessington, who had settled in Genoa in 1823,² decided on Albaro and then Genoa as the place to enjoy “*il dolce far niente*,” an appealing city that “grows upon you” every day, one he subsequently quitted with regret. “Beyond the town is the wide expanse of the Mediterranean,” a pure and vivid “prussian blue,” and below the windows of the Palazzo Peschiere “are the gardens of the house,” “with gold fish swimming and diving in the fountains,” and below them walks “marked out by hedges of pink roses.” Writing to John Forster on another occasion, Dickens went on to offer his conviction that spring “is the most delightful time in this country.” “No custom can impair, and no description enhance, the beauty of the scene,” he wrote shortly before leaving his “Italian Bowers.”³ Yet despite evoking associations with Shakespeare, Milton and Goldsmith, within days he confessed in a second letter, “But for all that I am looking with eagerness to the tenth of June [1845], impatient to renew our happy old walks and old talks in dear old home” (*Letters* IV 298–99, 232).

The eleven months Dickens spent in Italy provided the break from continuous novel writing he sought. “I never knew what it was to be lazy, before” (*Letters* IV 170), he wrote in his first rush of enthusiasm, a disengagement from composition he maintained with two exceptions: the six weeks of intense work devoted to the creation of “a small successor to