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editors

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Introduction

Alessandro Vescovi, Luisa Villa and Paul Vita

The present volume contains a number of contributions to an international symposium on Victorian literature and culture and Italy hosted by the University of Genoa in 2007. The collection features research on the perception of Italy and the reception of Italian culture by English writers, as well as on the reception of Victorian writers in Italy. These papers highlight the complex relationship between English and Italian literature, English culture and Italian Risorgimento, Roman Catholicism and Italian history and art. All major Victorian authors are represented along with lesser-known ones.

To the Victorians, Italy was what the Orient is to Europeans of the twentieth century, a mixture of attraction and repulsion: attraction for the ancient civilization and for Italy's contemporary struggle to put an end to a period of political and economic subjugation and, at the same time, repulsion to its chaotic roads, dirty inns, stinky slums, crime and depravation. While generally prompted to admire the former, the Victorian traveller was advised to put up with the latter or, better still, to find it characteristic and picturesque. In many ways this attitude was a hardly escapable by-product of the colonial and imperialist mind. The English were used to measuring other societies against their own standards of modernity and could not help finding fault. Yet a few Victorian writers raised their voices against such stereotypes and, by doing so, challenged contemporary attitudes towards Italy and exposed assumptions about England's social and cultural supremacy.

According to McAllister, whose essay opens this volume, Italy was not a novel concept for Victorians. It had been long constructed by eighteenth-century pastoral, the Gothic and romanticized accounts

by Byron and Shelley, who wrote paeans on its fecund landscape. The pastoral trope in particular achieved tremendous popularity, thanks to the availability of printed images in Victorian times. These images, whether visual or verbal, no doubt strengthened a middle-class self-consciousness and a notion of the superiority of the English race. Only a few voices, including that of Dickens, tried to deconstruct the stereotype, blaming their own countrymen for their inability to go beyond the pre-digested experiences set forth by tourist guides – i.e. beyond the stereotypes. From this starting point, McAllister shows how Dickens's attempt to criticize the stereotypically picturesque, though intensely personal, clearly belonged to a discursive arena where representations of Italy underscoring backwardness and social degradation coexisted with the celebration of its beautiful natural environment and of its cultural heritage. His “almost pathological listing of dirt, squalor, indolence and mendacity” as well as the “naked legs” and unshod feet often foregrounded in popular illustrations of Italian locations, are part of the complex representational strategies by which “English communal identity” (with its concern for order and cleanliness) is constructed in relation to Italy and Italians. Dickens's participation in a more general discourse on Italy is underscored by McNees's study of Badham's articles, which reveal a kindred sensibility. Badham was not a professional writer, but a physician who lived in Italy and wrote for English magazines. While there is no evidence that Dickens knew of Badham's works, their responses were strikingly similar: their critique of national stereotypes share a certain degree of ambivalence in the attitude towards Italy, though neither can be said to have been an enthusiast of the country.

If Dickens's aesthetic of the picturesque can be said to be inflected by his personal idiosyncrasies, the same is true with a vengeance in the case of Edward Lear, a compulsive traveller and representative of eccentric masculinity, who roved the peninsula from the Sicilian coasts to the Ligurian Riviera, where he took up residence. His “schizoid-rhizomatic genius” – as Palumbo calls it, after Deleuze – inevitably destined him to a nomadic lifestyle, but he found Italy a congenial destination and even, for longish spells, a congenial place of residence where the soothing and nurturing Mediterranean landscape fostered both painting and an amazing linguistic creativity which he deployed in his limericks, nonsense

verse, journals and letters. His quest for the picturesque – “an aesthetic category suggesting variety, smallness, irregularity” – can be viewed as part of his revolt “against the tyranny of symmetry”, his attempt to find “elsewhere” a compensation for one-sided rationality which seemed to be on the rise in contemporary Britain.

Ouida’s response to Italy, investigated by Jordan, shares the personal intensity of Lear’s and was similar to those of Dickens and Badham. The novelist spoke Italian fluently and knew the country well. Jordan points out how Ouida belonged to a small circle of guide-book writers who wanted to show Italian landscape off the beaten track. Likewise, she tried to direct her readers’ attention to the countryside rather than the cities and to the rural context which she knew and appreciated. Signa, near Florence, for instance, was one of her favourite places. Her firsthand knowledge of the country allowed her to describe the lives of Italian peasants and sympathize with them, especially in her novel entitled *A Village Commune*, where the protagonists endure hardships resulting from unjust treatment – similar to that described by Italian authors like Carlo Levi and Ignazio Silone about half a century later. The writer, however, did not sympathize with the peasants when they raised their voices in protest. In her non-fictional prose, she compared the Italian tenants to the Irish, praising the former for not revolting against the social order. Like Dickens, Ouida was horrified at the prospect of a revolution, but nonetheless advocated change in the social conditions of the poor.

An important difference with Dickens is that Ouida was a woman, and found living in Italy to be a liberating experience. The association of Italy and women’s freedom and self-realization (as opposed to Britain and patriarchal oppression) had been forcefully stated in Madame de Staël’s *Corinne* (1805), a celebrated work of fiction that had a significant impact on Victorian constructions of Italy and Italians. According to Russell, Dickens’s (national and masculine) identity was to some extent destabilized by his trip to Italy, making him – like de Staël’s Lord Nelvil – even more inclined, in his fiction, to rely on the icon of the submissive and fully domesticated woman as a “security blanket” against the perplexities of modernity. By contrast, it was in Italy, as Nayder shows, that Catherine Dickens first asserted her own sense of self, by resisting

her husband's mesmerism and the subjugation of her personality it implied. If Catherine Dickens's self-assertion eventually led to her refusal to return to Italy, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's, like Ouida's, made her choose Italy as her permanent residence. Camus shows, by analysing Barrett Browning's letters, the intensity of the poet's response to Italy and the exhilarating feeling of enfranchisement that she experienced, very different from Victorian straight-laced conventions. She was also affected at a creative level, and her time in the country helped her establish her own politicized stance as a poet. This freedom is underscored in Cordery's essay on *Casa Guidi Windows*, the most *engagé* of Elizabeth Barrett's poems. Here the author addresses political issues linked to the Italian Risorgimento that other poets, most notably Matthew Arnold, spurned as a poetical subject. In *Casa Guidi Windows*, Barrett Browning exposes England's sexist and ultimately colonial view of Italy, linking it with the plight of the female subject. Cordery closes her essay pointing out the relationship between the author's predicament and that of Anita Ribeiro Garibaldi, who appears in the poem as a mother and a revolutionary woman long before her persona earned any recognition.

Though British expatriates could hardly be directly involved in the Italian Risorgimento, the cultural debate that the struggle for liberty entailed could not fail to interest them. Arthur Hugh Clough's poetical response to the Risorgimento, studied by D'Agnillo, can be viewed as a distinct contrast to Barrett Browning's, as Clough and his hero tilt between commitment and cynical skepticism. It is hard, D'Agnillo contends, to tell the author's from the character's views, but it is worthwhile to trace Clough's responses to the Mazzinian Republic to shed light on his poetry. Similarly, Cerutti delves into Anthony Trollope's longstanding and ambivalent relationship with Italy in search of his opinions on the political situation, specifically, under Austrian rule. The English novelist did not approve of the Austrians in Italy, but his detachment allowed him to see further and to identify a number of problems Italian patriots would soon have to face. Henrietta Jenkin's novel, *Who Breaks – Pays*, studied by Christensen, testifies to the attention that the Italian Risorgimento may have received in Britain. This novel, a sequel to another popular novel written by the Italian expatriate Giovanni Ruffini, who, disappointed by the turn events had taken, refused to go back to his

narrative, depicts a love story against a pan-European backdrop, which parallels the events of the Italian struggle for liberty.

If the plight of Italians fighting for freedom and national unity or even facing post-unification troubles attracted the Victorians, stimulating sympathetic identification, political debate and a variety of creative endeavours, it is no surprise that Italian culture – both past and contemporary – exerted an even more pervasive fascination. Of course, it was often the experience of travelling to Italy that led British writers to develop an interest in and draw inspiration from Italian history, art and literature. A well known example is John Ruskin, whose early Italian travels, especially his 1845 tour, were a crucial component of his formative years, since they triggered many of the reflections which he would gather in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. According to Boucher-Rivalain, Ruskin's conception of architecture as a poetic text, his campaign against restoration and his ideas about architectural (and social) reform can be traced back to these early impressions.

For George Eliot, on the other hand, the journey to Italy seems to have marked a veritable watershed in her artistic development: her visit to Florence in 1860 prompted her to write an historical novel based on late-fifteenth-century Florentine history, thereby enlarging the scope of her fiction and inaugurating a new, more ambitious phase in her approach to realist representation. Villa's investigation into the Italian sources of *Romola* in search of the elusive historical "original" for "Camilla Rucellai" focuses on the meticulous dovetailing of historical "truth" and fictional creation out of which the novel is shaped, thereby underscoring George Eliot's immersion in Italian Early-Renaissance culture and its impact on her imagination. Both Jumeau and Brattin also examine the Italy of George Eliot, its appearance in her novels, and its use as both setting and contrast to the British figures whose continental experiences challenge their own provincialism. Jumeau explores Genoa as the setting where the intertwining plots of *Daniel Deronda* converge, while Brattin surveys the references and allusions in Eliot's *Middlemarch* to Italian culture and history back to ancient Rome.

In other cases, however, it was due to the presence of a large number of Italian immigrants and refugees (including intellectuals, professionals, artisans, dress-makers, and theatrical performers) in

Britain that the meaning of “Italian” made its way into British literature. Italy was, in other words, very much part of the Victorian cultural experience, and one did not need to set foot on Italian soil to come under Italian influence. The young Dickens, for instance, is clearly a case in point, as both Martino and Severi persuasively argue. Martino’s survey of *Sketches by Boz* and *Oliver Twist* highlights frequent references to Italy in Dickens’s early fiction, which testify to the fledgling novelist’s need “for a location larger than Britain”, a “European space” for his fiction such as he would be able to use convincingly only after his Italian experience. Likewise, Dickens’s early dramatic works, according to Severi, show that he was familiar with various aspects of Italian theatre, especially with the tradition of the *Commedia dell’Arte*. Thus, well before his first-hand encounter with Italy, he perfected a control of dramatic situations that he would later deploy in his fiction and learned “to mirror life through minor theatrical genres, mostly of Italian origin”.

It was, on the other hand, Dickens’s residence in Italy that seems to have favoured his imaginative encounter with Alessandro Manzoni, whose *I promessi sposi* (1827) he read while staying in Genoa in September 1844. Manzoni’s historical novel, though highly acclaimed and promptly translated into English, never became popular in Britain because – Vescovi argues – of the “highly competitive English book market”, the poor quality of the translations, and the British reader’s “instinctive distrust” of Roman Catholics, an attitude which did not prevent Dickens from reading (and liking) the novel, but perhaps induced him to be reticent about it. The impact of Manzoni’s work on Dickens, an issue surprisingly overlooked by scholars, can be traced in *A Tale of Two Cities*, a novel that in general design and in minor incidents bears a striking resemblance to *I promessi sposi*.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s connection with the Italian expatriate intelligentsia in London and Italian culture in general is, of course, much more direct and obvious. However, his *Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante* (1852) – a minor watercolour Camilletti chooses to foreground in his essay – provides a productive point of entrance into the history of the reception of *Vita Nova*. Dante’s “book of youth” surfaced suddenly as a literary fashion in the 1840s: this vogue foreshadowed a new aesthetic sensibility which favoured the

image of Dante as a young lover – so different from the “stern” exile cherished by the Romantics – as well as a more self-reflective approach to artistic creation.

With the Victorians’ response to Italy as picturesque (or not), as politically unstable, as an inspiration, alternative or other, the contrast between British and Italian cultures in the nineteenth century offers the opportunity to form new perspectives and to make connections across cultures and periods. Smith, for example, traces the links between Dickens and Italian cinema, illustrating what he argues are correspondences between different historical periods and “interpenetrations” across different media. Majer’s reading of Dickens’s “The Italian Prisoner” makes clear how crossing national boundaries exposes “the susceptibilities of that power, its excesses and its vulnerabilities”, characteristic both of “the English gentleman” within the narrative and of the narrative itself. And Parisi compares a nineteenth-century Italian translation of Dickens’s *Carol* to one published in the late twentieth century, showing a heightened awareness of the complexity and richness of his prose in Italy.

Thus, this collection sets forth both Victorian assumptions and their subversion, an age’s interest in and construction of Italy and itself. The writers’ sympathy and sensitivity go beyond the binaries of north versus south, Protestantism versus Catholicism, political stability versus stagnancy or oppression, stoicism versus unleashed passions. The essays in this volume and the texts they consider champion and challenge the understanding of self and other, something possible only by crossing national boundaries and prejudices, and invite readers to reconsider the role of Italy in the Victorian imagination.

The editors would like to take this opportunity to thank their fellow scholars who organized the Dickens, Victorian Culture, Italy conference in June of 2007 and contributed to the selection of essays in this volume: Michael Hollington, John Jordan, Francesca Orestano, David Paroissien, Cathy Waters, Massimo Bacigalupo, and Clotilde de Stasio.

1. The Image of Italy: Reformulating the Picturesque

“A Pair of Naked Legs and a Ragged Red Scarf”: An Overview of Victorian Discourses on Italy

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Pictures from Italy, Dickens’s idiosyncratic account of his reactions to a journey through the peninsula, offers a lively alternative to the more prosaic contemporary guidebooks such as those produced by Baedeker or Murray.¹ As many more readers were likely to consume Dickens’s work than would ever venture abroad with the aid of the guidebooks, these *Pictures* provided influential material for the creation of discourse about Italy and Italians. In a typically ingenuous strategy, Dickens constructs himself as a plain man who is frequently shocked by his Italian experiences, cutting through any supposed cultural pieties or conventional listing of beauties by his plain speaking. Indeed, conventional beauties or supposedly pleasurable experiences are frequently used as a foil for his outspoken judgements on the Italian people, their qualities and their mode of life. Dickens’s (partial) view can thus be accorded prestige as an exposé of the “real Italy”, effectively discrediting accepted wisdom as well as claiming superior authenticity. An example from his discussion of Naples illustrates the initial enumeration of exotic or pastoral pleasures (with “begging and stealing” subversively inserted in the midst of the catalogue of attractions), only to be mocked by the superior “reality” he discerns and the moral lesson he draws:

All this, and every other kind of out-door life and stir, and macaroni-eating at sunset, and flower-selling all day long, and begging and

¹ The book was originally published in 1846; Murray’s first guidebook to Italy (in competition with Baedeker’s) had appeared four years earlier.

stealing everywhere and at all hours, you see upon the bright sea shore, where the waves of the bay sparkle merrily. But, lovers and hunters of the picturesque, let us not keep too studiously out of view the miserable depravity, degradation, and wretchedness, with which this gay Neapolitan life is inseparably associated! It is not well to find St. Giles so repulsive, and the Porta Capuana so attractive. A pair of naked legs and a ragged red scarf, do not they make all the difference between what is interesting and what is coarse and odious? (166-7)

This trope of contrast between paradisiacal natural environment and degraded inhabitants, or indeed contrast between perceived characteristics of England and Italy, was a key feature of the discourse about Italy and Italians in the mid-nineteenth century. Such oppositions were certainly not new; earlier in the century Shelley, in an 1818 letter to Leigh Hunt, had used similar adjectives to declare that:

There are two Italies; one composed of the green earth & transparent sea and the mighty ruins of antient times, and aerial mountains, & the warm and radiant atmosphere which is interfused through all things. The other consists of the Italians of the present day, their works and ways. The one is the most sublime & lovely contemplation that can be conceived by the imagination of man; the other the most degraded disgusting and odious. (Quoted in Kemp 152)

This equivocal pastoral discourse was presented by widely-circulated texts in the public domain, by such writers as the Brownings and Bulwer-Lytton. The pronouncements of Ruskin, advocating a prelapsarian simplicity, also influenced the opposition in industrial/pastoral discourse. However, there was also a wealth of other material featuring the pleasures of the Italian landscape – and the pleasures of despising the Italians situated within it – and this provides a valuable context for accounts of visits to Italy by public favourites such as Frances Trollope and Charles Dickens.

By the mid-century, Italy was already constructed in pastoral narratives by powerful residual discourse. The earlier taste for the Gothic, such as the novels of Ann Radcliffe, had inscribed in English culture a grammar of dramatic Italian landscapes, as well as dramatic behaviour and events. Pictorial descriptions of Italy by Romantics

such as Byron and Shelley had also made available a range of readings of the landscape, from the sublime to a comfortable, easeful, fecundity.² The development in range, intensity and use of pastoral discourse between 1840 and 1870 draws on, but also transcends, preceding cultural narratives, however. Within the setting of pastoral Italy, the popularity yet instability of Italians as cultural signifiers at this period demands examination.³ One factor in this was undoubtedly located outside England, as the Risorgimento progressed and arguments about the future of Italy were brought to public notice by writers as diverse as Carlyle and Barrett Browning, ensuring that Italy was foregrounded in the cultural field. But in the creation and use of English narratives about Italy, cultural, political, economic and technological developments in England itself were just as significant.

A practical agent of the increasing middle-class awareness of the pastoral landscapes of Italy at this period was the growth in availability of illustration in books and, even more, in papers like the *Illustrated London News (ILN)*. Such images could enable the wider diffusion of cultural tropes, such as the pastoral, which were thus made available to middle-class readers. But perhaps the most obvious factor influencing a contemporary fascination with the Italian rural scene was England's rapid urbanization. John Bull may have been idealized as a country squire, but by 1851 the majority of his countrymen inhabited towns or cities, as the census of Great Britain that year revealed. Given what Lowe calls the rural idyll at the heart of the English national narrative, it is thus not surprising that excursions into the (English) countryside and paintings of rural scenes grew in popularity, providing a self- and national image of connection with the land.⁴ For example, William Collins made his name with *The Dispersal of a Favourite Lamb* in 1813, engraved twice with 15,000 smaller prints being sold, and capitalized on the theme with subjects like *Rustic Civility* (1832), *Cottage Hospitality* (1834) and *Happy as a King*, shown at the Royal Academy in 1836

² For discussion of the early nineteenth-century attitudes to Italy as revealed in travel writing see O'Connor, Chapter 2, and also Brand, Chapter 1.

³ For further detailed examination of these issues, see McAllister.

⁴ On rurality identified with Englishness, see Thomas, and on increased visiting of the country (which ironically was aided by railway development), see Mingay 10 and Keith 81.

but much more widely known through the popular engraving of 1839. In 1847, still popular, a replica of this painting was presented to the Tate Gallery for the nation. Rosemary Treble in her study of Victorian rural paintings concludes that “this prettily sentimental view of country life was almost as mythical to its contemporaries as it is to the twentieth century, and seems to have owed its popularity as much to its unattainability as to the evident charm of the pictures it produced” (53). In *Aurora Leigh*, although poor Marian Earle is “worse than orphaned”, at least her negligent parents sometimes take her “Emerging from the social smut of towns/To wipe their feet clean on the mountain turf” (Book 3; 959-60). The idea of Pastoral offers an escape from the urban but also a reminder of, or tribute to, a world which has been lost. It can therefore act as a critique of the current state of society. This traditional cultural form was therefore available in this period, to be re-used or transformed, to embody such concerns about urbanization and indeed industrialization, whether evincing nostalgia or more apocalyptic concerns.

Such a pastoral vision finds an outlet in Golden Age rural nostalgia, or the image of England as a garden, but it could also find a satisfying location in the Arcadian pastoral of another country. And additional concerns in England about the deteriorating urban climate made the contrasting climate of Italy seem even more paradisiacal. In *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*, for example, Dickens uses fog, dirt and squalor not merely symbolically but as a realist device, to anchor the story in the readers’ experience. In *Aurora Leigh*, later rhapsodies over Italian countryside are set against Aurora’s early memories of London, chiefly consisting of “Fog only, the great tawny weltering fog [...] as if a sponge/Had wiped out London” (Book 1, 3; 179, 182-3). Far more tangible dirt and squalor than mere fog, of course, were produced by urbanization and industrialism, and Chadwick’s 1842 Sanitary Report revealed the unpleasant truth that London, at least, was far removed from the green and pleasant land with which England liked to identify itself. After the second cholera epidemic in 1848-9 the attraction of depictions of rural scenes, signifying healthy living, increased in imaginative power.

Pastoral images of Italy and Italians, whether conveyed visually or verbally, could perform many functions for the mid-nineteenth-century

consumer. A double cultural distinction was conferred by their possession and enjoyment, as by the initial selection of such material the viewer is separated from other consumers with less cultural discrimination and is also distinguished from the objects depicted, diminishing them. The power relations implicit in representation mean that although Italy was not in a colonial relationship with England, the strategies seen in colonial discourse of transforming foreign space into controlled, known, and therefore inferior space can also be seen operating (Bhabha, *Location* 110-1). Representations acted to reinforce the reader's own social and cultural assumptions, as any behaviour outside the rules of “human nature” or “correct behaviour” as currently perceived in England could be constructed as barbaric or absurd. Every time a pictured Italian scene included inhabitants in bare feet, for example, current concepts of primitivism were likely to be invoked.

Ruskin's notorious exhortation to racial excellence, delivered in 1870 to Oxford students, beginning “We are [...] a race mingled of the best northern blood” drew on beliefs about national racial identity which had been current since much earlier in the century (Ruskin's Slade speech was later published as *Lectures on Art* in 1894, 41). This anthropological/racial debate formed a significant strand of the English cultural climate against which Italians were presented “in their own habitat”. Representations not only drew on the grammar of primitivism and savagery with which the middle-class reader of *Punch*, for example, was increasingly familiar, but were likely to be read against concepts of differentiated orders of culture in which the Italian “race” scored less highly than the Anglo-Saxon. From 1840 to 1870 there was a development in “racial” theories, as each decade saw the publication of seminal ethnological works, although already “by the late 1840s, the idea of the Anglo-Saxon ‘race’ was an intellectual commonplace” (Stocking 63). From Grey in the 1840s to Galton and Spencer in the 50s and 60s, the cultural remained interwoven with the biological in many of these theories, as the instinctive “savage” was set against the steady, reasoning English, and a moral determinism linked virtues or vices with degree of “civilization”. Civilization was often seen in particularly English terms:

Although the ostensible reference was still to a generalized progress of knowledge, technique, social organization, and morality, civilization often tended to imply [...] the factory system and free trade; representative government and liberal political institutions; a middle-class standard of material comfort and the middle-class ethic of self-discipline and sexual restraint; and the Christian religion in its Protestant form. (Stocking 35)

In 1851 Herbert Spencer in *Social Statics* entitled a chapter “The Evanescence of Evil”, advancing the argument that men (sic) would distance themselves more from the instinctive, animal way of life, be drawn to progress, and “evil and immorality disappear” (65). Evil and immorality are thus satisfyingly located in the less evolved, who display less “progress”, in Spencer’s terms. The very title of Edward Tylor’s influential study *Primitive Culture* in 1871 reflected beliefs in the link of culture with ethnology, and also in the evolution of cultures and races, in which the “primitive” were less advanced along the path of progress than “civilised” nations. Indeed, Tylor succeeded in constructing a “rough scale of civilisation” which located “the educated world of England and America” at one end of a continuum, with “savage tribes at the other”. Between these poles, examples are given of the Australian [Aboriginal], Tahitian, Aztec, Chinese, and Italian “races” in this “ascending order of culture” (23-24). Italians were thus almost, but not quite, as civilized as the English, and as G. W. Stocking points out, “the European peasantry now served as a crucial link between modern civilized and primitive savage man”. Such inscription provided a safe location of “primitivism” outside England, invaluable at a time of concern about statistics showing disturbing working-class behaviour and moral and physical degeneracy.⁵ Yet, even without such “scientific” support, Anna Jameson in the 1820s had anticipated Tylor’s theories in her fictionalized diary of a visit to Italy:

Let the modern Italians be what they may, – what I hear them styled six times a day at least – a dirty, demoralized, degraded, unprincipled race, – centuries behind our thrice-blessed, prosperous, and comfort-

⁵ On concerns about internal “primitivism”, see Stocking 212-16. There is also of course the ambiguity of projection onto the Irish, discussed by many writers from Curtis 1955 to De Nie 2004.

loving nation in civilization and morals: if I were come among them as a resident, this picture might alarm me [...] (293)

However, the discourse in which examples of Italian pastoral participate is one of greater complexity, diversity and ambiguity than a purely anthropologically-informed analysis might suggest. To contain Italians within the boundaries of the page was to establish the superiority of the reader by the controlling gaze, yet also, paradoxically, to allow readers to participate in Italian Otherness. Positive qualities, such as liveliness and spontaneity, could be gained by imaginative participation, whilst retaining the powerful distancing of the observer. Homi Bhabha stresses the ambivalence of national representations and traditions, “as much acts of affiliation and establishment as they are moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion, and cultural contestation” (*Nation* 5). Qualities selected for marking might be open for association or disavowal, or simultaneously available to signify both, such as the childishness which constituted Italians as contentedly pre-lapsarian but also implied their unreliability and inability to survive in the modern world. As Graham Dawson remarks, when discussing T. E. Lawrence’s fascination with Arabia and the popularity of his myth in England:

Representations furnish a repertoire of cultural forms that can be drawn upon in the imagining of lived identities. These may be aspired to, rather than ever actually being achieved, or achievable. And into this gap flows the element of desire. (118)

Desire, predicated upon a lack, can encompass attraction and repulsion simultaneously. Such desire is evident in the mixture of fascination and fear which depicts behaviour that transgresses contemporary English self-ascribed norms, such as moderation or self-control.⁶ In what must have acted as a mimetic narrative for some readers, Aurora Leigh’s father, the “austere Englishman” is “flooded with a passion unaware” at the sight of her Italian mother who “shook with silent clangour brain and heart/Transfiguring him to music” (Book 1, 68; 88-89). But however attractive the flirtation

⁶ On desire, the work of Lacan and Derrida is summarized and developed in Chapter 3 of Belsey.

with such an existence might be, the reader is recalled by the narrative to the cultural assumption that “normal life” in such a setting is impracticable. Leigh dies and his half Italian daughter is sent to England, to be formed and develop her vocation as a writer.⁷

Italy’s potential for such equivocal imaginative identification perhaps contributed to the popularity in the mid-nineteenth century of personal or anecdotal accounts of travel which created a construct of “Italy” for the middle-class audience, the majority of whom would still never see Italy themselves. As John Pemble in his study of Victorian travel to the Mediterranean comments:

The presses plied the reading public with *Sketches, Notes, Diaries, Gleanings, Glimpses, Impressions, Pictures, Narratives, and Leaves from Journals about Tours, Visits, Wanderings, Residences, Rambles, and Travels* in all the quarters of the South (7)

Travel writers commented on “scenery” as if set out on a stage for their delectation, and on the inhabitants anthropologically, inscribing them as objects and therefore constructing the reader in a position of superiority. Roland Barthes has written of the mastery implicit in panoramic views such as that from the Eiffel Tower. In a dialectical process, we are lost in the overall experience, our “euphoric vision” (10), yet are simultaneously trying to impose a pattern, make sense, tie it down to what we already know. Such a process uses the view as material for our exercise of control. Once Baedeker had been joined by the reliably English Murray, guidebooks occupied the ground of factual description of Italy, and the individual writer was freed to make impressionistic and idiosyncratic comments, frequently using informal structures as the titles quoted above suggest – including “Pictures”, in Dickens’s case. By the mid-century the alterity of the Italians, and a certain typology, was firmly established in such texts. Appreciation of the culture and environment was tempered with the moral lessons, implicit or at times explicit, which the visiting English could teach the Italians.⁸

The idyllic physical environment of Italy was inscribed firmly in English mythology by residual cultural discourses, and frequently

⁷ This is in many ways an echo of Corinne’s story in the novel by de Staël.

⁸ O’Connor contrasts eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attitudes, making a similar point (18).

reconfirmed in visual and verbal texts. In 1860, for example, just after a detailed news article on the “Proposed Italian [political] Settlement”, the *ILN* found an excuse to show a pastoral scene (Figure 1).

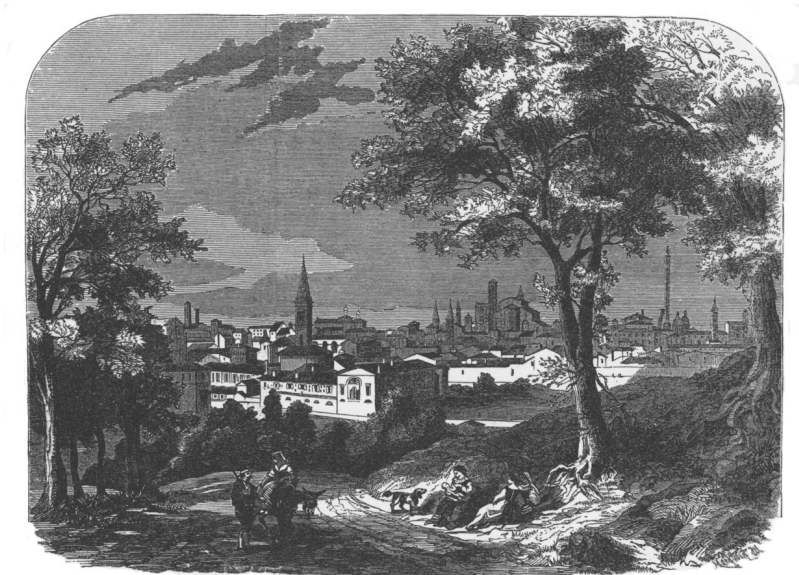


Figure 1. “View of Bologna” *ILN* 3 March 1860, 205.

“As Bologna is now the centre of the Italian movement, we give a View of the exterior of the city, which, like the majority of Italian cities, offers a rich and picturesque outline” (3 March 1860, 205). It is an odd view of a city, as well over half of the illustration depicts a rural landscape, with a donkey in the foreground and peasant women drowsing in the shade of the large trees. The skyline of the city seems contained by the surrounding countryside and relaxed atmosphere, and thus the very concept of a city is inscribed in a fundamentally different way to that in which most English readers would understand the term. Indeed, the whole process of containment within frames, whether of paper or of trees, underlines the power relations in such apparent appreciation of the Italian landscape.

The trope of a “view” itself implies boundaries, by being presented for purchase, consumption and use, by being selected and put into a frame. The Italians in the picture are bounded by being set in a context of larger forces – in fact in hundreds of such illustrations, the figures are invariably small and set amidst mountains, trees, the sea, or of course ruins. This objectifies, and introduces scale to render the object less impressive. They are also bounded performatively by signifiers of simple rural life – transporting goods (or people) by donkey, gathering nuts, fishing, and herding animals. These figures could not be imagined performing the duties of a clerk or a shopkeeper. But in an illustrated paper such views are bounded in still other ways, by being juxtaposed with apparently unrelated material against which they may be read. The “View of Bologna”, for example, appeared below a similar sized but much more formally impressive illustration of Christchurch Cathedral, Montreal, and text enumerating the splendid architecture and artefacts (many English in origin). Thus a narrative is inscribed intertextually, contrasting the sophisticated, productive North to the “primitive”, static South, should the viewer choose to read it so. It must be remembered, however, that such material offers ambivalent pleasures, and so alternatively available is the myth of the warm, organic life of the Italians in which even the cities are set relaxedly within their environs, in contrast to the cold artifice of more Northern peoples. As Pamela Gerrish Nunn points out, it was “the imagined timelessness of Italy and its picturesqueness, which British gallery-goers were used to seeing” (122). As a location for day-dreaming or fantasy, Italy offered much, and there were undoubted delights to be gained by imaginative identification with carefree Italians in such an idyllic setting.⁹ They could be accompanied by the (perhaps more satisfying) sense of power conferred by the status of privileged observer from a position of self-ascribed superiority. Representations which might challenge the reader’s own social and cultural practices could thus be recuperated and made to serve several needs. Verbal descriptions of the physical attractions of Italy ranged from those in guide books to depictions in poetry, but almost all were appreciative,

⁹ On longing or daydreaming, and its place with disillusionment in the cycle of consumption, see Storey 14-16.

indeed lyrical. Writing with a more personal tone than Murray’s or Baedeker’s handbooks, A. T. Gregory, the author of the *Practical Guide for Italy* of 1859, indulged in effusive comments, “gradually the road rushes astonishingly down a stupendous gorge with glorious prospects” (28) or added personal codas to descriptions such as “– most romantic” (108).

But it was probably through poetic descriptions that the English reader would be most likely to be seduced by the pleasures of the Italian landscape. Robert Browning’s evocation of fertility and abundance in *The Englishman in Italy* depicts Italians as rooted in their community, involved in a relaxed way in activities such as fishing or wine-pressing, and above all enjoying fresh produce:

[...] gourds fried in great purple slices,
 That colour of popes,
 Meantime, see the grape-bunch they’ve brought you:
 The rain-water slips
 Oe’r the heavy bloom on each globe [...]
 And end with the prickly-pear’s red flesh
 That leaves thro’ its juice
 The stony black seeds on your pearl-teeth. (99-115)

Sensuality is clearly evoked here, but Browning’s emphasis upon the availability, freshness and sheer naturalness of food adds a further aspect to the myths about Italians – one which is unequivocally enviable. In the increasingly urban living conditions of England, such “living off the land” had receded, for many, into folk memory, and contemporary English concerns about hygiene and the adulteration of food demonstrated dissatisfaction with this situation (Wohl 52-3). The reader of this poem, published in 1845, would thus have been confronted with an attractive mode of life which the English could be seen as having lost. This attraction, as well as providing an alternative reality, also fed insecurity about nationality and status and created a need for self-validation which in turn fed the construction of Italians as “primitive”.

One strategy by which the pastoral landscape could be contained and managed verbally, as it was visually, was by its being defined in relationship to England. In the first part of *Casa Guidi Windows*,

published in 1851 although written in 1848, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's argument relies upon underlining the links between England and Italy, and in stanza XXIX she uses the description of her first sight of Vallombrosa to allude to Milton's use of its famous "beechen leaves". Here the beautiful environment is positioned not merely as a "view", but one which "helped to fill the cup of Milton's soul", and thus has earned a place in English history. There is little actual description of the scene, as if it exists fully only in the simile in *Paradise Lost* which has created it for the English: "Therefore is/The place divine to English man and child – /We all love Italy" (1156; 1162-4). To love a landscape, or country, largely because of its status as a source of intertextual references in one's own national literature places the reader firmly in control of the environment. John Pemble underlines this search for recognition rather than discovery, commenting that "indifference or hostility was aroused when landscapes failed to match preconceptions derived from art or literature and appeared strange when they should have been familiar" (126).

Even more overtly, in the majority of the 48 letters which compose Frances Trollope's *A Visit to Italy*, explicit comparisons with England are used to place Italian scenery and climate on a scale of worth. A few Italian sights are deemed to be incomparably beautiful, such as the "soft, liquid, rosy radiance, as I watched floating over the white mountains round Turin" (I: 28) or the setting of Genoa:

It is the overflowing fertility of the golden garden in which she lies basking, with its orange-groves, its lemon-trellises, its myrtles, oleanders, and pomegranates, which altogether give it an aspect and a charm, that would be sought in vain elsewhere. (I: 43)

But such unequivocal appreciation is rare, and the outstanding feature of her construction of Italy is the inferiority of its climate. England may seem grey:

but turn the medal, and you will see amidst the amber, jasper, topaz and lapis lazuli of Rome the demon of disease, lurking where all seems fairest, and turning the air, that looks like an elixir extracted from diamonds and pearls, into a draught of venomous poison, and untimely death [...] while the reverse of our humbler medal shows

health and exercise, labour and its sweet reward, a paler sun, but a more ruddy cheek. (II: 286)

Pisa is supposed by English visitors to be a very healthy location, but “I have seen a meteorological calculation, the result of which is to prove that twice as much rain falls at Pisa within the year, as in London” (I: 71) and according to “a certain Dottore Berliini [...] pulmonary affections of the most fatal kind are frequent at Turin” (I: 20). Trollope exclaims at one point in amazement that the English climate is so misjudged:

How singular it is that England, whose defective climate is the theme of such an enormous proportion of all foreign observation upon her peculiar and characteristic features, how singular it is that the gardens of this poor, cold and foggy England should as much excel all others in every species of beauty, as in every species of produce. But so it is, beyond all reach of decently-plausible contradiction; and the consequence is, that it is very difficult for any of us, on being led into a garden on the Continent, to say, honestly, that we see any thing to admire in it. (II: 284-5)

The defence of English gardens, here, is a defence of English values, and the value of such a work for the reader may well lie in the confirmation of superiority conferred. The hyperbolic denial of admiration for any continental gardens whatsoever (at this point Trollope is discussing the Borghese gardens, renowned for centuries) inscribes writer and reader as “plain men” on a Dickensian model, insightfully exposing cant. The introductory summary of this particular letter’s contents presents a representative sample of the significant juxtapositions and explicit moral standpoint to be found informing Trollope’s commentary:

Disappointment in the Borghese Gardens.–Gardens of England.–Necessity of Scientific Cultivation everywhere.–The unwholesome Beauty of the Campagna.–The Pincio Hill.–View of Rome from the Terrace.–The English Church.–English Equipages.–Numerical Proportion of Priests.–Forests.–Crimes of Violence.–State of Roman Morality.–The Statu Quo System.–Roman Catholic Sermon.–Roman Catholic Faith. (II: x - Table of Contents)

And yet ambivalence persists, and the softer pleasures of escapism are provided in comments such as “the towns, the villas, the villages, the air and sky, gave me, I think for the first time, fully to understand what people meant by talking of the surpassing beauty of Italy” (II: 173).

Another way in which the reader can contain the pleasures of escapism within a structure of superiority is to include signifiers of poverty or primitivism within representations of the idyllic environment.



Figure 2. “Under the Vines–Italy” *ILN* 17 March 1860, 268 (detail).

The engraving of the painting shown in Figure 2 was printed in the *ILN* with certain prestige conferred through its having been exhibited in the British Institution. Appearing in 1860, such an illustration was bound to be read against knowledge of the recent successful Italian campaign and the declaration of the Italian state – a constitutional monarchy like Britain. The picturesque components of lake, mountains and pergola with vines are combined in a beautiful framing device, but the composition foregrounds the sun-dappled space under the vines, and I would argue that this is the most

significant space for the reader, which is shown in detail. Here the main figure of a woman stands, looking out across the water, and a barefooted child crouches, perhaps with responsibility for the surrounding animals, as he holds a stick. There are no walls as such, just stone piers, but this is clearly an outdoor living space – yet it is also home to a herd of goats. An item of farm machinery lies derelict, and birds peck the ground. This is clearly a “primitive” level of life, in Tylor’s terms. But to point the comparison, the illustration is encountered on the same page as a detailed account of a grand English society ball and a brief mention of the several hundred rifle volunteers drilling in London. There is a brief commentary on the picture, enumerating the vines, lake and “goats and birds completing the pastoral scene”, yet it is the description of the human element in the painting which is most instructive. The anonymous writer begins:

BELLA ITALIA! So richly endowed with every gift of nature, with bright skies and bounteous soil, ’tis man alone that prevents your beauteous land from becoming a perfect paradise. (*ILN* 3 March 1860, 268)

This could be read as a reference to recent political oppression, but I would argue that, given the iconography of the picture, it is just as likely to link with the prevalence of animals, lack of civilized comforts and the bare feet depicted to connote innate Italian primitivism. Particularly in the late 1850s and early 1860s, it is actually very rare to see any representation of an Italian scene in the *ILN* which does not include either animals or bare footed humans – or both, indeed. Even in a sumptuous supplement on Rome (26 March 1859) the Piazza del Popolo is robbed of some of its splendour by the appearance in the foreground of peasants bearing produce, one of them a woman who is riding a hefty looking ox.



Figure 3. “The Piazza del Popolo, Rome” *ILN* 26 March 1859, 313.

Bearing in mind contemporary concerns in the 1850s and 60s about the definition of a gentleman and the recognition of professional status, the importance for a middle-class reader of being distanced from such manual labour would be vital (Gilmour 92). Such images, contrasting with a desired self-image, would degrade Italy and the Italians by association. When the reader of the *ILN* for 14 May 1859 discovered in the piece “Statistics of Italy” that the population in 1858 was 27,107,047 and that Italy is “one of the countries in which the largest cities and towns are to be found”, with 19 having more than 50,000 inhabitants and 8 cities exceeding 100,000 (474), these facts of Italian urbanization would seem hard to reconcile with the preceding illustrations.

When constructing the rural landscape, the trope of English/Italian contrast also applied – in other words, even the rural inhabitants of England could be read as superior. The casual reader opening the 26 March 1859 of the *ILN* would be convinced of this directly, seeing Figures 4 and 5 on the same page:



Figure 4. “Pifferari playing to the Virgin” *ILN* 26 March 1859, 305.



Figure 5. “The Cottage Door” *ILN* 26 March 1859, 305.

It is stressed in the accompanying description that Figure 5 shows a “little family party” in England, whereas the former focuses more on the Madonna and child iconography so common in “Old Master” paintings and therefore Italian by association. The English family are all conspicuously, nay gleamingly, shod, although we cannot see the infant’s feet, of course. They stand at the eponymous door, symbol of their security, and we see signifiers of cleanliness such as the broom and child’s pinafore, and the books and newspaper of literacy. Nature is further tamed in the symbol of the birdcage. Although set in “great” Rome, the Italian grouping stand or kneel in the street, outside a decaying public building with a faded fresco of the Virgin. The shepherd/pipers’ clothing is worn and patched, and the woman and child are bare to a degree which would not have been thought suitable in England, and might connote licentiousness. The centrality of a sheep to the picture should prepare the reader for the child’s indicative lack of shoes. Both of these engravings are taken from paintings, displayed at contemporary exhibitions, and the powerful discourse about rural life in England and Italy which they exemplify is set in perspective by the third element in the double-page spread, a very impressive full page view of “Exeter College, Oxford University” with an accompanying article about its extensive history and the care taken over recent renovation and improvements. Comparisons with Italy might suggest themselves.

Images of otherness and difference which seek to keep the other firmly in its place are rarely unproblematic. Such inscriptions also serve as a site for the location of fantasies for a bourgeois audience – for example, the fantasy of being free, instinctive and without anxiety about social status or gender roles. Representations of Italians in pastoral settings, especially large and complex visual images in which the reader could lose himself, offered a stage upon which to play another part for a brief time, almost a holiday in which he too could be capricious and dance the tarantella. But the demands of constructing one’s own identity in the world outside the text also required satisfaction of the powerful needs to project fear and guilt, to validate one’s desired self-image, and to achieve distinction. There is a complex dialogue in such reading, between the desire to be like and the desire to show oneself unlike, and superior. Sussman, in his study of Victorian masculinities, points out the

“complex mix of repulsion and envy for what [readers] saw as the relaxed and undisciplined physicality of working-class manliness”, and this, despite images of loungers in pastoral landscapes, could operate just as powerfully in an Italian setting (12). The English reader could shuttle between repulsion and envy, or even hold both in creative tension as the texts do, constructing Italians as lazy, yet relaxed, mired and yet grounded in their environment, and culpable yet strangely innocent.

One of the ways in which this tension could be managed was to figure Italians as inherently dirty, disreputable, and villainous. Poverty too near to home would evoke fears and concerns and might signify contagion in more than one sense, and a general questioning of English probity would be similarly threatening. A useful strategy was to project these fears and concerns onto another group, and to experience the pleasures of discovering the primitive status of the Other, especially when that Other, the Italians, had traditionally been represented as historically advanced and culturally superior. The attractions of a state of nature might well be seductive; such images possess an ambivalence and are open to a variety of uses by maker and consumer. In particular, the attribution of villainy or cunning to Italians figured them as culpable if honesty was privileged, but might well have positioned them as more sophisticated than the rather stolid John Bull and have provided an alternative model of masculinity for those who felt him rather limiting. But there was a further refinement in the case of “the Italian”, who had been used conventionally as a signifier for amorality since the first English readings of Machiavelli in the sixteenth century. Amorality can be even more threatening than deliberate evil. Its unpredictability can call into question the foundations of morality upon which “our” society rests. If there is a possible way of viewing moral issues, or everyday *mores* from outside our framework, our construction of reality, this raises very uncomfortable questions. A more manageable distinction can be based upon the attribution of external dirt or lack of hygiene, however, which might even be seen as an outward indicator of moral laxity in some cases. Mary Douglas’s work on taboos and pollution eschews a simple binary opposition, but does stress the uses of such a dual structuring of experience, with particular reference to cleanliness:

As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder [...] eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment [...]. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created. (2, 4)

It is clear that the differentiation of needs of any group means that if an opposite is identified and constructed as disordered, the result will be improved bonding, and feelings of order, cleanliness and superiority. Certainly these symbolic boundaries are key points from which to investigate cultural values and assumptions. The likelihood would be that insecurities, particularly those of a “new” middle class, focusing upon social and moral status, would give rise to the negative attribution of dirt to others.

At periods when social boundaries are rapidly shifting and the middle classes have perhaps recently “escaped” from relatively primitive conditions, dirt, poverty or other forms of disrepute, this protective mechanism is likely to be called into place frequently. Chadwick’s crusade against dirt in the 1840s constructed water as an agent of purification, in a secular form of sacrament, and cleanliness came into an intimate relationship with godliness. This is well illustrated by the surprising amount of coverage in newspapers and magazines of concern about the state of the Thames, especially during the cholera outbreak of 1848-9. The population of London seemed to be seized by sudden indignation, no doubt proving how refined, clean and particular they were by their disgust at the filth so near to them (as Freeland says, “The Victorians made dirt itself a crime” [805]).

In Anne Manning’s 1865 *Selvaggio*, Miss Sparkes, a visiting Englishwoman, embarks on a campaign to improve the village. (As *Selvaggio* means “wild, savage, or uncivilised”, she has clearly taken on a massive task.) Entering a cottage, where “dirt and discomfort so evidently reigned within that Miss Sparkes hesitated”, she bribes a child to wash himself, and adds “and look here, I am going to give your sister all these *centesimi*, to give one at a time to good boys who wash their face and hands” (173-4; 176-7). By the end of the improbable plot which features coincidences, conversions and battles, the author tells us that:

Selvaggio looked just as seedy and weedy as when we first made acquaintance with it. But there was a noteworthy change at the inn. [...] The Crane became as distinguished for cleanliness as it had been notorious for dirt; as famous for its excellent cookery as it had been infamous for its horrid minestra and risotto [...] for Rosina had lived so long in England, that she knew and had acquired English tastes. (299)

And an approving Miss Sparkes is Rosina's first guest. The positioning of the English as superior in hygiene and cuisine might have been surprising to some readers, especially those who remembered the cholera outbreaks fifteen or so years ago, and various readings of this tale are possible. But the rather caricatured representations in this text do draw on current discourses about national attributes, real or imagined.

This may give some insight as to why foreign filth is one of the main themes, surely comfortingly for the English reader, in Dickens's *Pictures from Italy*. As he enters Genoa (his *favourite* Italian location), Dickens bursts out:

I never in my life was so dismayed! The wonderful novelty of everything, the unusual smells, the unaccountable filth (though it is reckoned the cleanest of Italian towns), the disorderly jumbling of dirty houses, one upon the roof of another; the passages more squalid and more close than any in St. Giles's or old Paris; in and out of which, not vagabonds, but well-dressed women, with white veils and great fans, were passing and repassing [...] and the disheartening dirt, discomfort, and decay; perfectly confounded me. (29)

There are plentiful examples of this focus on dirt and squalor throughout his tour of the peninsula, and in all contexts; the houses, great or humble, the churches, and above all "whole worlds of dirty people" (40), although at least the Genoese are industrious, he tells us. Immediately this is qualified by "industry has not made them clean, for their habitations are extremely filthy, and their usual occupation on a fine Sunday morning, is to sit at their doors, hunting in each other's heads" (46-7). Other destinations reinforce the association of Italy with dirt: "the beggars seem to embody all the trade and enterprise of Pisa"; "Ronciglione; a little town like a large pig-sty" and in Fondi "a filthy channel of mud and refuse

meanders down the centre of the miserable streets, fed by the obscene rivulets that trickle from the abject houses” (109, 114, 163). Dickens’s description of a sunlit Rome is certainly inimitable, if not unrecognizable, “every squalid and desolate hut in the Eternal City [...] was fresh and new with some ray of sun”, he admits, grudgingly (159). *Pictures from Italy* has been read as a typical Dickensian celebration of variety and as a series of oppositions between conventional representations and their antitheses (e.g., Churchill 137; Bann 206). But the options Dickens offers us on how Italians can be constructed are severely skewed, if only by sheer frequency, towards an almost pathological listing of dirt, squalor, indolence and mendacity. Dickens, characteristically, is as prodigal with his distaste as with other emotional responses. However, similar judgements about the Southern European character were quick to spring from the pens of English travellers. For example, Frances Trollope briskly remarks of Rome that “the only place outside the drawing-room doors, that is really clean, is St. Peter’s” (II: 263). One may posit a relationship to current concerns about the place of cleanliness (and godliness) in the English communal identity. Kate Flint has remarked on the “protean function” of racial others in Dickens’s work, acting as “less a subject in themselves than agents utilized within other debates [...] invoked in order to feed specific cultural demands” (103), and the dirty and disreputable Italians we meet in *Pictures from Italy* are certainly drafted into service in several current debates about what it meant to be English. They reveal as much about the needs of the English producer and consumer of these pictures, as they do about any “real” Italians, however naked their legs.

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Accounts for the Arm-Chair Traveller: The Italy of Badham and Dickens

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Charles David Badham (1805-1857), a virtually unknown contemporary of Charles Dickens, was for a decade – from 1839 to 1849 – one of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine's* steadiest and most prolific writers of articles on Italy. A graduate of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, with a further degree in medicine from Pembroke College, Oxford, he became in 1834 a fellow of the College of Physicians and held a Travelling Fellowship that permitted him to practice medicine in Rome and Paris during the first half of the 1840s. By 1845 he had returned permanently to England where he was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1848. Though he never returned to Italy after 1845, he continued for several more years to contribute entertaining essays on often peculiar aspects of his Italian journeys to *Blackwood's*. Gradually, however, Badham turned to natural history and published a series of articles in *Fraser's Magazine* (later collected in a book, *Ancient and Modern Fish Tattle* [1854]) as well as one book on insect life and another on edible mushrooms.

The brief entry on Badham in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* gives his occupation as “naturalist” and relies for much of its information on a memorial tribute in *Fraser's Magazine* of August 1857. There, after offering pertinent biographical details, the author writes poetically of the quiet obscurity of Badham's life:

The lives of such men as the friend of whom we have been endeavouring to give a sketch, are not fruitful in external events. They do not accumulate great fortunes, or push forward into dignified positions. Doctor Badham would never have been either physician to the Queen or one of the Episcopal bench. But they belong to a very valuable class – their influence lives after them; insensibly they

soften and refine and render more hopeful and more truthful all with whom they happen to be brought into contact. (163)

Badham's writings, if not his life, would have garnered him a sizeable middle and upper middle class readership given the popularity of both *Blackwood's* and *Fraser's* magazines. Though his naturalist articles would appear to be radically different from his depictions of Italy, his preoccupation with animals and plants pervades his Italian essays and provides a frequent recourse to zoological metaphors.

Following *Blackwood's* policy of anonymity, Charles Badham was only belatedly identified as the author of the series of *Sketches of Italy* long after both he and Dickens had died. My assertion of the possible influence of Badham on Dickens's *Pictures from Italy* thus rests on uncertain ground. Dickens never mentions either Badham or any of the Italian sketches from *Blackwood's* in his letters or in any of the versions of *Pictures from Italy* from the first pieces in the *Daily News* to their collection in one volume in 1846. That he read *Blackwood's* at least occasionally we know from his letters: in 1857 *Little Dorrit* received a negative review to which Dickens alludes, and at least once he suggested *Blackwood's* to an aspiring writer.¹ *Blackwood's* had published reviews of a number of Dickens's other works, including a composite review of *American Notes* and *Pictures from Italy*, and ones of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son*, as well as several generally negative assessments of Dickens's works by Margaret Oliphant. In spite of the timing – Badham's *Blackwood's* essays appearing just prior to and during Dickens year-long residence in Italy in 1844-45 and the remarkable similarity in style and content – it is possible that both Badham and Dickens simply marked a specific moment in British travel writing: the brief span between the demise of the Grand Tour and the construction of railways across Europe and the subsequent proliferation of mass tourism assisted by Thomas Cook's tours.² This

¹ See Dickens's letter to Forster in which he admits to "stumbling" on an extract from the *Blackwood's* review quoted in the *Globe* (*Letters* VIII: 309).

² A host of critics refer to the impact of Thomas Cook's organized tours which began in response to rail travel. John Pemble claims that Cook's tours provided the major link between Grand Tourism and the mass tourism of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I am interested in the gap between the Grand Tour and

period – post Napoleonic, pre Italian unification – witnessed, as a number of critics have noted, a turn in travel writing from aristocratic to middle class accounts, from detached classical observation to more intimate focus on the customs and character of the Italians.³

As John Urry, author of *The Tourist Gaze* (1990; 2002), announced in a later essay, “The year 1840 [...] is that moment when the ‘tourist gaze’ emerges, involving the combining together of the means of collective travel, the desire for travel, the techniques of photographic reproduction and the notion of landscape” (“Consuming” 21). In other words, the invention of the early camera, the ocean steamship, the stagecoach and the railway, Urry argues, transformed both the way travellers travelled and the accounts they penned of their travels. Perched on the edge of this era, Badham’s and Dickens’s accounts of Italian cities, religious ceremonies, prisons, madhouses, executions and (more distantly perhaps because the typical target of guidebook accounts) museums capture a specifically English attitude toward a country replete with classical associations though tainted, if also enlivened, by Roman Catholic practices and seasonal ceremonies. Travelling just before the opening of railroads connecting principal Italian cities, both Badham and Dickens find themselves closer to the landscape and the people, more subject to local contact and more dependent on couriers, *vetturini*, valets de place than their descendents. Middle class themselves, both are attracted to and critical of the English tourists they encounter; both disdain identification with these tourists in a move labelled by MacCannell and Buzard, among others, as “anti-tourist”.⁴ Though

Cook’s tours, in a small slice of time when travel accounts proliferated and when the principal guides were Murray’s and Baedeker’s travel handbooks.

³ See especially Andrew M. Canepa’s study of the shifting Italian stereotype in English travel writing; Barbara Korte’s notion of the blend of instruction and entertainment in nineteenth-century tourist accounts that are nevertheless still tinged with nationalism (98-99); and David Paroissien’s introduction to the 1973 edition of *Pictures from Italy*, where he alludes to the new traveller’s tendency to avoid the “prescribed itinerary of best-known cities, monuments, and works of art” (10) in favour of smaller, less well known sites.

⁴ MacCannell first enunciated this term in his 1976 study, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, where he blamed this phenomenon on the increasingly large number of tourists who appear to infringe on the authentic traveller searching for a “back” region experience where one could “share in the real life of the places visited, or at least [...] see that life as it is really lived” (92). Buzard elaborates this

Badham and Dickens appear to fall into the “anti-tourist” camp, their writing about Italy is frequently ambivalent, hovering between guide and cultural commentator, critical observer and enthusiastic participant. It is this ambivalence that ultimately unites their accounts and characterizes their visual and rhetorical devices. It also engenders uncertainty – of style, point of view, genre, not atypical of the travelogue which Manfred Pfister calls a hybrid genre moving somewhere “between fact and fiction, autobiography and topography, narration and exposition, one’s own and the other culture [...]” (11) and what Kristie Siegel terms a “strategy of circling the center” as opposed to the more linear arrival-return pattern of the typical guidebook (8).

This ambivalence of the English traveller in Italy in the early Victorian period quite naturally leads to a variety of attempts first to perceive and then to translate that perception of sites, people and events into a form at once entertaining and enlightening. If, as John Urry argues, the tourist gaze “in any historical period is constructed in relationship to its opposite”, based more on the “difference between one’s normal place of residence/work and the object of the tourist gaze” than on a search for authenticity, then Badham’s and Dickens’s gaze is far from steady (1, 3). Constantly moving, juxtaposing home to other, individual character against stereotype, it often appears schizophrenic and always difficult to anchor. The objects of their gaze suddenly obtrude and just as suddenly vanish, and their impatience with any single object or static subject lends to their accounts a sort of breathlessness punctured by hyperbole and digression. In their accounts the visual is reinforced by an often self-conscious rhetoric that alternates between immediacy and critical detachment. Badham not only describes constantly moving scenes and events; his sentences, like those of Dickens, pile verb upon verb, shift from first to second person, from past to present

in regard to the “new touring atmosphere of the post-Napoleonic period” (156) where British travellers sought to diverge from the beaten path to become *travellers* instead of *tourists*. Finally, Manfred Pfister’s introduction to his anthology of British travellers in Italy, *The Fatal Gift of Beauty*, argues that this division resulted in another division within the middle class – that between the slavish follower of Murray’s or Baedeker’s and the “traveling connoisseurs and the resident expatriates” who “tend to dissociate themselves from, or even sneer at, each other” (16).

tense, capture fragments of Italian dialogue and very occasionally move toward reflective and meditative conclusions.

In his fifth travelling essay for *Blackwood's* in February 1842, "Roadside Sketches", Badham announces his intention to collect his travelling pieces into a book: "We design", he says, "some roadside pictures on foreign roads – appeals to the *memory* rather than the imagination of the courteous reader, whose vote and interest, thus propitiated, we ask with our excellent publishers, to enable us to stand forth, some day or other – as we think we are strong enough to do – in the full-grown stature of 'Travels in Italy'; to which consummation our ambition has been long since tending – and wherefore not?" (153). Dickens, anxious about how to assemble his letters to Forster and others, at first titled his pieces in the *Daily News* "Travelling Letters Written on the Road" (Paroissien, "Stages" 254), only later renaming them *Pictures from Italy*. His "Reader's Passport", like Badham's introduction to "Roadside Sketches", addresses his audience, announcing his intention and at first reversing Badham's elevation of memory over imagination: "This Book is a series of faint reflections – mere shadows in the water – of places to which the imaginations of most people are attracted in a greater or less degree, on which mine had dwelt for years [...]" (6). Yet, these "faint reflections" in the next sentence become "descriptions [...] written on the spot" which were "penned in the fullness of the subject, and with the liveliest impressions of novelty and freshness" (6). Whether or not Badham's sketches became Dickens's pictures, both writers sought to secure the approbation of their English audience and to thrust that audience into the midst of the chaotic cities – Rome, Venice, Naples – through prose that captured that chaos and the writers' (Protestant) ambivalence toward those cities and their inhabitants.

Between November 1841 and March 1848 Badham wrote six sketches of Rome for *Blackwood's*. The first sees him departing on 30 April at the end of what the English termed the season, after the Easter festivities. Glad to leave this city of "Cardinals, and Carnivals, and Easters", he dwells on the departure of the English tourists laden with souvenirs not unlike those of the Meagles' household in *Little Dorrit*: "Fifteen very pale *Cencis*, all first-rate; ten Sybils, elaborately bad; the usual batch of Fornarinas; Fauns

with, and Venuses without *foliage*; engravings, as untrue to art in general as to Rome in particular; body-colour eruptions of Vesuvius” (571). Proceeding in reverse from Dickens’s *Pictures* out to the Campagna, he comments on the “curse of malaria” which has “hovered for ages”, and the tedious barrenness of the landscape (571). Travelling the same route in January 1845, Dickens too remarks the “monotony and gloom”, and the “malaria-shaken” public house on the way to Rome (*Pictures* 114).

Badham titles his two principal essays on Rome in March and September 1842 “Roamings in Rome”, and it is in these two pieces that one finds the most striking similarities between his work and that of Dickens. In his first essay, Badham demonstrates both his anti-touristic and anti-Catholic stance. He mentions the English tourists in St. Peter’s who “swarm” as thickly as the gilt Barberine *bees*” of the Baldachino (347) and the oddity of the Italian custom of kissing the bronze foot of St. Peter. Dickens too alludes to this custom of the “good Catholics” thinking that neither statue nor practice contribute to the “high purpose” of the basilica. In recurrent moves, both Badham and Dickens dramatize Catholic ritual in order to position their readers as spectators after which they comment on the false pageantry of an inferior and gullible public.

This invitation to spectacle, followed by a frequently derogatory commentary, allows these writers to substitute entertainment for didacticism, showing for telling. At the same time, however, the pattern reinforces an English sense of Protestant superiority. As both Stephen Bann and Joseph Phelan argue in essays on the visuality of *Pictures from Italy*, the early Victorian writers understood the difficulty of rendering static and detached descriptions of their travels. For Bann, the “ambiguities of visuality” (212) are evident in Dickens’s cinematic treatment of his pictures: “Dickens, on the threshold of an age of mass tourism, constantly enacts and displays in his text the operation of converting the experience of otherness into visual schemata. It is at the price of this resourceful and continuous conversion that the rapid succession of stimuli becomes assimilable” (215). Bann argues for Dickens’s familiarity with the Victorian panoramas and dioramas, precursors of photography and film, as visual models for his writing. Phelan concurs, adding to the visual aids the magic lantern and the phantasmagoria, and noting

that Dickens used “verbal equivalents” of these visual tools in order to refute the static picturesque description of scenes (125). Both Bann and Phelan, however, confine themselves largely to Dickens’s visual/verbal techniques while I argue that these consciously rhetorical techniques in Badham and Dickens frequently serve as cultural critiques of a country which both as mid Victorian Protestant Englishmen find difficult to assimilate.

One of the best examples of the two writers’ ambivalence toward Italian customs – their simultaneous attraction and repulsion – occurs in their two accounts of public executions in Rome. Badham’s version constitutes a large part of his essay, from his encounter with an executioner in St. Peter’s who uses part of his income to buy “masses and prayers for the condemned” (“Roamings” 348), to his walk through Roman streets to the actual site of public execution followed by his severe condemnation of this barbaric practice. Midway through his account of Rome, Dickens offers a surprisingly similar version. After detailing the crime – the murder by a young man of a Bavarian countess on the Campagna – Dickens plants the reader directly on the spot in front of the scaffold. Both Badham and Dickens describe the rudely constructed scaffold, the long wait for the actual event and the indifference of the Italian crowd. Badham compares the spectators to their ancient ancestors at the Colosseum, “fast collecting to see blood spilt” (“Roamings” 349), and Dickens is equally struck by the indifference of the crowd to the actual event: “Nobody cared, or was at all affected” (*Pictures* 144). Badham and his party leave before the actual execution, but Dickens remains to detail the decapitation which he views through a “large grated window” (*Pictures* 141). The purposeful framing device reinforces Dickens’s (and the reader’s) role as spectator, a role that becomes blurred with that of the participants when Dickens leaves the window and walks up to the scaffold to inspect the body. Like Badham, Dickens dramatizes this spectacle in order to denigrate the Italian crowd and to distinguish himself from them: “It was an ugly, filthy, careless, sickening spectacle; meaning nothing but butchery beyond the momentary interest, to the one wretched actor. Yes! Such a sight has one meaning and one warning. Let me not forget it” (*Pictures* 144). Likewise, Badham’s parenthetical comment about the crowd – “the unworthy, priest-

ridden, untaught, ill-fed, and worse-clothed descendants of whom we had passed two hours” (“Roamings” 350) – seeks to separate the English spectator from the Roman masses. These Roman executions allow both Badham and Dickens to position the English reader in the midst of a Roman crowd while simultaneously reinforcing the reader’s separation from and moral superiority over that crowd. This stance introduces a trope both authors use repeatedly as they describe specifically Italian events and festivals.⁵

The Roman Carnival and the events of Holy Week provide a happier analogue to the accounts of the executions, but here too Badham and Dickens manage to mock the crowd and affirm English superiority. Yet in their separate renditions of these events, the two also become participants, Dickens leaving the safety of the balcony to plunge “up to his middle in flowers and sugar-plums, like the wildest Roman of them all” (*Pictures* 125), and Badham in his first “Roamings in Rome” learning from a local *fuochista* and his son how to make fireworks like those used in the “Girandola” – the final firework display on Easter Monday. Badham surveys the last day of Carnival from his balcony surrounded by English ladies. He remains separate from the crowd pointing out the awkwardness of the English “distinguishable already by the jerk with which they return the gentler sprinkling of a handful of *confetti*” (“Roamings” II: 405). Yet both Badham and Dickens are clearly enthralled by the unrestrained and un-English enthusiasm the crowd embodies. Both describe the last evening of Carnival when the *moccoli* burn in each window and among the throngs of people in the streets. To Dickens the spectacle “is one of the most extraordinary that can be imagined” (*Pictures* 127), and to Badham (in one of his numerous naturalistic metaphors), the scene gives “the appearance of armies of human fire-flies” (“Roamings” II: 406).

⁵ Dickens remained a fierce opponent of public executions in England as well until their removal in 1868 to the inside of prisons. In an editorial to *The Times* on 14 November 1849 he describes a “scene of horror and demoralization” in witnessing the public execution outside Horsemonger-lane Gaol of a married couple who were hanged for murder (4). In *Pictures from Italy*, however, he uses the execution to reinforce negative stereotypes of Italians: “Fierce-looking Romans of the lowest class [...]. Priests and monks” (142).

The excitement of Carnival is followed after the interval of Lent with the events of Holy Week culminating in the Pope's appearance at his balcony window on Easter Sunday. Though both writers frequently describe the confusion and profusion of church decorations and innumerable masses, they reserve their harshest criticism and their most lavish figurative language for the Pope. They detail, not unlike their suspenseful narratives of the public Roman executions, the theatrical quality of the preparations and the eager anticipation of the crowd before they purposely deflate the scene by an anticlimactic description of the Pope himself. Both describe the enormity of the colourful crowd in the piazza of St. Peter's Basilica, the elaborate hangings on the balcony, the drums and bells, the cardinals and the Swiss guards. Their prose swells to reflect the anticipation of the crowd; both Badham and Dickens render the scene hyperbolically with sentences that juxtapose and jostle visual images with commentary as in Badham's observation of the long wait for the Pope to appear: "[...] for the church knows what she is about, and makes her masses and her girandoles of sufficient length to leave no fugitive impression; and so the bells went on, presenting us their open mouths for the thousandth time, and swinging backwards and forwards to show how happy they were on this great occasion" ("Roamings" II: 407). When the Pope finally appears to bless the crowd, he looks to Dickens like a doll in a chair "with the gigantic fans of peacock's feathers" who "stretched out its tiny arms, while all the male spectators in the square uncovered, and some, but not by any means the greater part, kneeled down" (*Pictures* 159). To Badham the Pope is "a huge white bird [...] with some strange plumage on its crest" who rises to bless the crowd (extending the ornithological simile) "like a large white albatross on a rock, preparing to descend over the sleeping waters below" ("Roamings" II: 408). Immediately after the blessing, the crowd disperses looking to Dickens "like parti-coloured sand" (*Pictures* 159). Badham remarks that "secular affairs are resumed as if nothing extraordinary had happened" ("Roamings" II: 408). Both writers end their Roman pieces with the final display of Easter – the "Girandola" of Easter Monday with the firework display from the Castle of St. Angelo. Again they describe the anticipation, the sight and sound of the fireworks and the finale followed by immediate

darkness and dispersal of the crowd. To Dickens, the castle becomes “one incessant sheet of fire, and labyrinth of blazing wheels of every colour, size, and speed: while rockets streamed into the sky, not by ones or twos, or scores, but hundreds at a time. The concluding burst – the ‘Girandola’ – was like the blowing up into the air of the whole massive castle, without smoke or dust” (*Pictures* 160). Shifting to the direct address of the second person pronoun, Badham provides similar if longer and more profuse description here: “[...] and while you gaze, and gaze, and gaze, your ears are stunned by a last outburst of prodigious violence – 10,000 missiles are launched at full speed in the air, and the next moment all is dark, and silent, and cold – and Easter is over” (“Roamings” II: 409).

This conclusion of the English tourist season with the fireworks of Easter Monday provides both Badham and Dickens with a grand finale to their Roman sketches and echoes the smaller fires of the *moccoli* that end Carnival. Both authors return to the quiet of their favourite Roman haunts, for Dickens the Colosseum, for Badham the Quirinal to bid goodbye to the city. Their Rome has been constructed for the reader of spectacles that repeat the same pattern of build-up, climax and anti-climax frequently followed by social commentary. Badham and Dickens have drawn the reader into the ambivalent position of spectator/participant, always slightly separating the two and always distinguishing the superiority of the former. Their descriptions reveal a Rome of constant contrasts – between peasant and cardinal, fire and darkness, executed and executioner. Their prose surges with phrases piled one on top of the other, exclamation points, an almost breathless sense of anticipation so that when they suddenly close a scene, the reader comes abruptly to a full stop. Often this stop affords the opportunity for the writer to reflect on the character of the Italian people or their religion; sometimes it simply allows Badham and Dickens to pan to another scene.

Though they dedicate more pages to descriptions of Rome than to Venice and Naples, their depictions of these latter two cities reinforce their visual and rhetorical techniques. Dickens ventures further from the guidebook tradition than does Badham in his account of his journey through Venice as a dream. Badham’s sketch of Venice is his most traditional travelogue although he takes pains

in his portrayal of the city in *Blackwood's* in June 1842 to berate both the idealized versions of that city perpetrated by such literary predecessors as Byron and by the numerous lady travellers who “regularly fall into hysterics of several pages of inverted commas and *inverted* common sense; when we, or if we, publish our travels, they shall be at least safer guides through these dangerous shallows” (722). Both Dickens and Badham would have been painfully self-conscious about depicting a city so over-described by guidebooks, writers, artists and amateur travel/memoir writers.

As Marjorie Morgan explains in her study of Victorian travelling and national identity, accounts of travel before the advent of the guidebook tended to be more practical and objectively detailed. After the proliferation of Murray's handbooks, especially from the 1830s on, travel writers felt freer to recount selective and subjective impressions.⁶ Writing several years earlier than Dickens, Badham seems to find himself at a crossroads when describing Venice for his English audience back home. He moves the reader through the same sites as Dickens will do – from the Rialto to the prisons, to Tintoretto's studio to San Marco, the Armory, and the Bridge of Sighs – but he zigzags uneasily between description and personal impression and social commentary. Throughout his essay one detects a metatext on how to write a successful travel account. This metatext erupts most frequently as criticism of previous travel writers, themselves unable to chart a balance between objective description and subjective impression: “[...] some give you so much of the dimensions of a building that you heartily wish it had never been built; others write inventories of the curiosities contained in churches and convents, and distribute, as if it were so much transferable stock, *their* notes of admiration, or rather exclamation” (726). Badham is unable however to avoid his own exclamatory style when he confronts his favourite Venetian painter Tintoretto's *Crucifixion* in the Scuola di San Rocco: “The moment – such a moment! – could only have been dared by a painter who had the

⁶ James Buzard comments in “The Grand Tour and After” that the publication of such guides as Murray's Handbooks from the late 1830s allowed travel writers to record their own impressions without feeling responsible for guiding the reader through pre-selected sites (49). See too my recent essay on Dickens's relationship with the Murray's Handbooks.

command of resources such as his” (727). When Badham views the Treasury of San Marco, he finds his own descriptive powers inadequate to echo the voluptuousness: “the writer”, he confesses, “must possess a whole Stephens’s Thesaurus of words, or the reader must suppose some scenes in the Arabian Nights [...]” (732).

In his attempt to merge a novel impression with a familiar description Badham often resorts to ingenious comparisons with British landmarks. He compares the Rialto to a big Regent Street with “bits of Alhambra” (722) and the Regatta ceremony of the Doge marrying Venice to the sea as “the empty pageantry of [the] Lord Mayor’s show” (736). Only his depiction of the violence of the prisoners’ punishments closely foreshadows that of Dickens in the latter’s “Italian Dream”. Like Dickens, Badham has a penchant for vividly describing torture. His mental recapitulation of an execution in a Venetian prison is as vivid as Dickens’s description of the real execution in Rome: “Here rolled the head from the decapitated trunk; through these round holes fell the ensanguined sawdust into the sea, ‘making the green one red’ [...]” (725). Both authors are fascinated by the instruments of torture on display at the Armoury, and both are compelled to recreate and dramatize particularly sadistic instances. Viewing a cabinet of poison needles, Badham remarks, “Whoever received the puncture, which fell light as an insect’s sting, turned pale, sickened, and died, as if bitten by the *cobra di capella*” (734).

If indeed Dickens read Badham’s account of Venice, he might well have heeded the latter’s criticism of both the guidebook and lady traveller and determined instead to adopt the distinctive style of *Pictures from Italy*. In fastening onto the metaphor of Venice as a dream, Dickens is able to avoid or at least sidestep most of Badham’s criticism of previous travel writers. On the one hand, as Stephen Bann suggests, Dickens’s method may be directed at taming a radical sense of otherness by reverting to “visual schemata” like the popular nineteenth-century diorama or, as Dickens himself states, the “magic-lantern” (Bann 215). On the other, I believe Dickens desired to find a new style and method for describing a by now too familiar place. He anticipates here the impressionist technique of such later writers as Joseph Conrad and even the modern stream of consciousness authors of the twentieth century. His prose (“On we went, floating

towards the heart of this strange place” [79]) flows like the canal waters – alliterative, filled with assonance, piling image upon image. He qualifies his description, diminishing the factual guidebook quality further by reiterating throughout his own uncertainty: “I thought I [...]” prefacing most of the principal sites. By the last two pages of his Venetian dream, Dickens reverts to fragments and anaphora. Each fragment begins with the word “Past”, a multivalent word that acts as both preposition and noun, directional marker and nostalgic echo. These fragments draw the reader (by now his gondola companion) through narrow canals of the less touristy sections of Venice before exiting onto the Grand Canal and confronting Shakespeare’s Shylock and Desdemona in a characteristically English allusion to the Rialto. In his Venetian sketches Dickens has achieved an originality that failed Badham. Yet both Dickens’s and Badham’s sketches of Venice reflect the dilemma of the belated Victorian travel writer burdened both by the guidebook and romantic poetry and struggling to find a new mode for an old pursuit.

For both Dickens and Badham the beauty of Naples picturesquely situated on the bay is belied by the filth, poverty and illegal pursuits of its inhabitants. Dickens criticizes the romantic tendency of “painting and poetizing” Naples and, more generally, Italy when the city is so full of “depravity, degradation, and wretchedness” (166). Badham focuses on Naples as the site of pickpockets and forgers and views forgery as “a branch of the national industry” (659), concluding that “whatever is antique is also forged” (659). An assiduous collector himself of antiquities, Badham is at his most distinctive when he describes his meetings with Italian antiquarians and antique dealers.

This notion of forgery, in this case the realistic replication of valuable antiques, lends an additional criterion to the Victorian travel writer’s repertoire of stylistic techniques and genres used to describe Italy. Both Dickens and Badham are captivated by the wall paintings found in Pompeii and Herculaneum because of their presumably realistic depiction of life more almost 2000 years ago. They are likewise drawn to recreate their own word paintings of the Colosseum crowds, the invidious tortures of criminals, the Catholic pageants and ceremonies of Holy Week. Ever worried about their own recreations as forgeries of previous travel accounts of Italy,

they try to effect a compromise between external description and subjective impression, realizing, however, that even individual impressions can lack authenticity. As Badham concludes rather ruefully, “You arrive, you behold, you feel the feeling that has been agreed upon, and which you must be a very coxcomb to refuse; and it is not likely that you will add any particularly *discriminative* criticism to your general act of homage” (“Sketches” 663). Yet, more optimistically in the same sketch, he gives his prescription for the best kind of travel writing: “for those who point out to us such objects as we might *else have overlooked*” (664). He would go on in several later essays to describe his encounters with Italian taxidermists, coin collectors and antiquarians who, distinctive personalities in their own rights, would show and attempt to sell him both authentic and forged pieces of the Italian past. In these later essays, Badham, unlike Dickens, comes face to face with a variety of Italian citizens. He invites the reader to enter their houses and overhear their conversations which he dramatizes in a mixture of Italian and English phrases. He goes further to demonstrate that first impressions are often superficial as, for example, in his description of an Italian mother who works as a taxidermist:

She was swathed from head to foot in coarse soiled dimity; in one hand she was holding a half stuffed hawk, in the other a sponge, dipped in some arsenical solution to preserve it. Our eyes had never rested upon so wild, so plain, so apparently hopeless a slattern; but these unpromising appearances were soon forgotten, and amply made amends for by the intelligence of her remarks, and the sprightliness of her conversation (“Taxidermy in Rome” 294).

Though he reserves similar portraits for his novels, in *Pictures from Italy* Dickens too conjures for his readers the overlooked aspects of Italian sites and scenes. In this he follows Badham’s prescription, but he goes further to manipulate the genre of travel writing itself. He stretches the style; moving beyond photographic representation, he is able to avoid explicit accusations of forgery or plagiarism in his descriptions of much described places. He adopts a new angle, hones in on a specific event, immerses himself in the crowd or the spectacle, yet he remains always the spectator with just enough distance to assert his own view. Together Badham’s and Dickens’s

dramatic accounts of Italy allow their readers to travel imaginatively and adventurously to a country beyond the purview of the traditional guidebook.

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The Peasant and the Picturesque in Ouida's Italy

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“Ouida” (Louise de la Ramée, 1839-1908)¹ was a Victorian phenomenon. From a provincial lower middle-class upbringing in Bury St Edmunds, unusual only in that she had a French father, she became a highly successful, highly paid, popular novelist and something of a literary celebrity – in certain circles. She had friendships among the more risqué members of society, people like Richard Monkton Milnes and Richard Burton and, later, Oscar Wilde. Her novels were romances which dealt with high-life among the aristocratic and officer class. They were written for a lower middle-class readership and rather sniffily regarded by the literary establishment. She was a parvenu, distinctly not one of them – and she was made to feel it.

In 1871, at the age of 32, Ouida moved from London to Florence and spent almost all of the remainder of her life in Italy. She died in Viareggio, in 1908. The move to Italy brought new departures in her fiction. She continued to write romances, which tended to deal with Italian artistic life, sculptors, musicians, actors. These were interspersed with novels exposing the lax sexual morality of the Anglo-Florentine community (*In a Winter City*, 1876, and *Friendship*, 1878), although she was now writing with the knowledge of an insider. Her good friend and ally was the wife of the British Ambassador in Rome, Lady Walpurga Paget. Ouida was also well

¹ In the profile “Ouida at Villa Farinola”, Ouida revealed that her pseudonym derived from her childhood inability to pronounce Louise, or Louisa (243). Since two of Ouida's earliest novels were about the adventures of young officers, and many of her short stories were published in the *British Army & Navy Review* (her most popular novel, *Under Two Flags*, 1867, was serialized in this magazine), she was for some years supposed to be a male author.

acquainted with Italian nobility and was received at court in Rome. In *Unfolding the South: Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers and Artists in Italy*, Alison Chapman and Jane Stabler explain that for so many women writers in Italy, the experience of observing another culture “enabled them to articulate the sense of deracination they endured as middle-class women who had exposed themselves to display at home in the literary market place” (12). This appears to have been particularly true of Ouida. She was more sure of her place and there was a new authority to her writing.

The most remarkable new departure was a series of socially realistic novels, works such as *Signa* (1875) and *A Village Commune* (1881), which dealt with the impoverished lives of the Italian peasantry. She continued publishing stories about Tuscan peasant life until the end of the century: the last of these, *The Waters of Edera* (1900), tells of a peasant revolt against a scheme to divert the river that irrigates their land. It was, though, Ouida’s poetic evocation of Italy that won the regard of fellow writers, and it is this tension between her instinct for the socially realistic and the more scenic qualities expected of an expatriate writer in Italy that needs to be explored.

Vernon Lee, an acquaintance of Ouida’s, spoke of her definitive vision of Italy, “After the Italy of Goethe, of Byron, of Alfred de Musset, and George Sand (let alone Ruskin’s) [...] comes the Italy of Browning, and of Ouida” (2). Henry James, who had also met Ouida, wrote to Ouida’s first biographer, Elizabeth Lee, “The best and most sincere thing about her I seemed to make out was [...] her original genuine perception of the beauty, the distinctions and quality of Italy” (James 10 February 1913). These were also qualities appreciated by London reviewers. *The Times* favourably compared Ouida’s first Italian novel, *Pascarèl* (1873), with George Eliot’s *Romola*, and judged it “a great improvement on some former novels” (4). The *Spectator* concurred, saying that it was “more graceful than anything ‘Ouida’ has yet written”, and that “there is a great deal of poetry in it also [...] its enthusiasm, its vitality, its wild imaginativeness are captivating” (409). An article on Ouida’s novels in the *Westminster Review* called it “a paean in praise of Italy”, which “abounds with eloquent description of landscape and of the ancient historic cities” (“Ouida’s Novels” 381). The publication

of Ouida's second Italian novel, *Signa* (1875), aroused even greater interest. Edmund Yates, editor of *World*, contracted Ouida to write her own profile, "Ouida at Villa Farinola" for his series "Celebrities at Home" in 1876; an article on her Italian novels, "Les Romans Italiens d'un Auteur Anglais", appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1877; and the *Whitehall Review* published another, and what can only be described as a eulogistic profile of the author, accompanied by a specially commissioned portrait of Ouida, in 1878.

Ouida's reputation was rising, and, no doubt because of this, the copyrights of her complete backlist, including her most recent works, *Signa* (1875) and *In A Winter City* (1876), set in Florence, were bought up by the firm of Chatto & Windus. So determined was Andrew Chatto to secure the rights to publish Ouida's new works that he offered to buy from Chapman & Hall (her publishers since 1865) the rights to publish her next novel, *Ariadnê*, set in Rome. Moreover, he accepted Chapman's unorthodox proposal that the book be published under their joint names with Chatto covering all costs. Chapman had paid Ouida £800 for the rights to the first edition, and she submitted her revised proofs to his printers, Bradbury, Agnew, & Co; Chapman was then paid £1,000 by Chatto for the joint rights to the novel, and both publishers' names appear on the frontispiece. These transactions had taken place without Ouida's knowledge or consent. For Chatto, the investment was a good one. Sales of Ouida's Italian novels in the three-volume library edition, Chatto's 5s. "Uniform Edition", and his 2s. "Cheap Edition" with illustrated boards, remained buoyant, and, more importantly, constant, over the next decade.²

Undoubtedly, there was money to be made from printing cheap editions of Ouida's early novels, but the takeover seems also to have been prompted by the remarkable critical reception of her novels about Italy. Yates's *World*, for example, gave *Ariadnê* a brilliant review in May that year, saying that it stood "on an altogether loftier

² Although there was a clear disparity between sales in the 2s. edition of Ouida's Italian novels and her sensational novels of the 1860s (on average, the early titles sold twice as well), the figures for Ouida's Italian romances show little sign of decline in popularity: Chatto ordered a total of 15,000 copies of the first novel in this series, *Pascarêl*, between 1880-1885, and 14,000 copies of *In Maremma* (1882) in its first five-year period, 1883-1887.

level than anything previously attempted by the author”, and that “In an aesthetic age like the present, the artistic element in the book will be generally a commendation” (Rev. “Ariadnê” 500). Within six months, Chatto began printing an affordable one-volume edition priced at 5s. Interestingly, he also commissioned a non-fiction work to complement Ouida’s poetic vision of Italy, Alice Comyns Carr’s travels along the Genoa coastline, *North Italian Folk: Sketches of Town and Country Life* (1878), to which I will later refer.

As James Buzard has demonstrated, English travellers in Europe in the nineteenth century encountered an already “scripted continent”: indeed, continental travel “seemed to be surrounded and regulated by a variety of guiding texts”. For those travellers who then went on to publish records of their experiences, the pressures were twofold: one had somehow both to “stake out new territories with one’s own text”, and yet “work within the boundaries mapped out by those prior texts” (156). At the time Ouida’s post-1870 novels were produced, “new territories” were becoming accessible by means of the rapidly expanding Italian railway network. This led to a demand for more localized travel writing describing out-lying districts not mapped by Murray or Baedeker. Thomas Adolphus Trollope’s *Lenten Journey in Umbria and the Marches* (1862), which departs from Florence, is recommended to those travellers who have chosen to winter in Italy, and are no doubt sated with metropolitan carnivals, balls and concerts (Trollope 5). In a similar manner, Alice Comyns Carr recommends stopping off at coastal villages on the railway line between Genoa and La Spezia. She, too, addresses readers already familiar with the region, but is keen to offer experiences off the beaten track, as an antidote to pleasure beaches like Pegli, which were entirely populated in the winter months by British tourists (Comyns Carr 130).

Ouida’s descriptions of Italian cities, but more importantly, villages, and village life served a similar purpose to this latest crop of tourist guides. It was her desire to write about an Italy unknown to travellers. In the novel *Signa*, she writes about the medieval walled town of Lastra a Signa, five miles outside Florence, which foreign travellers would pass by rail on their way to the city or the coast, and in doing so she puts herself forward as an authoritative guide: “Assisi has her saint, and Perugia her painters, and Arezzo her

poet, and Siena her virgin, and Settignano her sculptor [...] Signa has found no poet [yet it is] worthy of a scholar's thought and of an artist's tenderness" (5-6).

Evidence of this interest in a newly accessible Italy can be found in the three-volume *Cities of Central and Northern Italy* (1876) by the prolific travel writer Augustus Hare.³ Hare interspersed his guidebook with extracts from a variety of sources, relying heavily on Perkins's *Tuscan Sculptors* and Jameson's *Sacred Art*, but also including the Brownings' poetry, Eliot's *Romola*, and Dickens's *Pictures from Italy*. As well as offering the standard tourist fare of churches, art galleries, train times and estimated lengths of journeys, Hare's study encourages visitors to travel beyond the city walls, to take excursions into less well known regions. In doing so he included a number of extracts from *Pascarèl* and *Signa*. Lastra a Signa is one such infrequently visited town, and in place of pen and ink drawings, Hare quotes several extracts from Ouida's novel – passages that give particular emphasis to the unchanged appearance of the town, "The hills lie quiet and know no change. [...] Signa] lets this world go by, and sleeps", and to the area's picturesque qualities: "the summits of the hills gleam here and there with a white monastery, or a mountain belfry, or a cluster of cypresses seen through it, hung in the air as it were, and framed like pictures in the silvery mist" (Hare 215, 228; vol. 3).

Of all the literary works Hare makes use of, *Pascarèl* is the most heavily mined, in particular for its imaginative descriptions of Florence and Bologna, cities in which the nineteenth-century traveller "plunge[s] into the depths of the middle ages" (Hare 250; vol. 2). Here again, Ouida stresses Italy's unchanging character: "It is as peaceful as simple, as homely, as closely girt with blossoming boughs and with tulip-crimsoned grasses now as then [...]. Who may will see the scene today" (Hare 207; vol. 3). Such passages are characteristic of the novel. Italy's past is present "at every step":

Buy eggs in the market, and you buy them where Donatello bought those which fell down in a broken heap before the wonder of the

³ This popular work was subsequently reissued in 1884 (with different publishers) as the two-volume *Cities of Central Italy* (Smith, Elder & Co) and the separate study, *Florence* (George Allen). Both books went through a number of editions.

crucifix [...]. Stray into a great dark church at evening time, where peasants tell their beads in the vast marble silence, and you are where the whole city flocked, weeping, at midnight, to look their last upon the dead face of their Michael Angelo [...] Ask for a shoemaker, and you shall find the cobbler sitting with his board in the same old twisting, shadowy street-way, where the old man Toscanelli drew his charts that served [...] Columbus. (Hare 14; vol. 3)

In the estimation of *The Times*'s reviewer, "the most important, as also the most attractive, portion of [*Pascarèl*]" was the quality, and quantity, of descriptive writing in which "words flow like water in descriptions of scenery", so that "the characters stand against an Italian background painted in glowing and effective colour" (4). The 1876 article on Ouida's novels commissioned by the *Westminster Review* reprinted two long descriptions of the scenery in and around Signa ("exceedingly picturesque and natural"), in order "to show that in the treatment of scenery Ouida is not wanting" ("Ouida's Novels" 365-366). Certainly, she took great care to be accurate in her descriptions of the countryside. She was prepared to set back the publication of *In Maremma* (1882) by six months, so she informed Chatto, in order to "verify the scenery [...] by visiting those places again previous to printing" (Ouida, Letter to Chatto & Windus c. mid. Dec. 1880). Yet the very accuracy of her writing led the *Saturday Review* to accuse Ouida of pitching her novels at the tourist market: "So dexterous a book-maker as Ouida knows the value of local colour dashed over the pages" (Rev. "Signa" 830). The *Revue des Deux Mondes* agreed that such was the power of Ouida's descriptive writing that "Whoever reads '*Pascarèl*' is tempted to take him for a guide and to follow his itinerary", but, once again, concern was expressed that the device of the eponymous *Pascarèl*'s wandering troupe of players was "a simple pretext to show us Bologna and Florence, the countryside of the Val d'Arno, Pisa, Assisi [and] Urbino [...]" (Bentzon 384).⁴ However, to equate Ouida's picturesque novels with the guide-book literature available to British tourists is to undervalue her. She cautioned

⁴ "Ce n'est peut-être qu'un prétexte pour nous faire connaître Boulonge et Florence, la campagne du Val d'Arno, Pise, Assise, Urbino [...] Quiconque lira *Pascarèl* sera tenté de la prendre pour guide et de suivre son itinéraire". I am grateful to Elizabeth Dreyer for the English translation cited in the text.

readers against believing in their “conventional Italy, with ruins, and brigands, and a saffron sky” (Ouida, “Umiltà” 157), and was intent on giving them an authentic account of the country and its people.

T. A. Trollope had argued in 1862 that the established tourist route, which started from the Appenines and took the English tourist first through Florence and then south to Rome and Naples, had effected a “complete separation of the mass of foreign travellers from the life around them. An Englishman, especially one of station and wealth, passes from one end of Italy to the other without having come in contact with genuine Italian life at any one point in his career” (4-5). The tourist experience in Italy did take in the cultural spectacle of the seasonal migration of the rural population to the cities on market days or those days sacred to the Church Calendar, but the rural poor remained just that – a spectacle. Baedeker's *Central Italy and Rome*, for example, recommended to tourists the best locations within Rome from which to observe “Street Scenes”, the “favourite haunts of the country-people”, whose “costumes are a well-known subject of photographs and pictures” (Baedeker 169). The author of “Holiday Customs in Italy”, published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in February 1881, notes that the regional customs of the common people, ostensibly devotional, but appearing in some cases to be rooted in much older pagan or at least secular observances, add “to the charm of travel in the country, giving variety of local colouring, and bringing the visitor into contact with a fresh set of feelings and traditions at each stage of his journey” (209). In such a view the poor do no more than represent a rolling panorama for the benefit of the English tourist. Ouida's intervention was unique, and timely. What sets her novels apart from tourist literature of the period is her portrayal of the Italian peasantry, not as figures in a tableau, as was so often the case, but as psychologically complex characters in a realistic social context.

Signa has a rather unlikely plot, fairly typical of Ouida, involving seduction and betrayals. A village girl is seduced by a predatory artist, and abandoned. She dies, leaving a child, Signa, to be brought up by his uncle, an uneducated peasant farmer. The boy has musical talent, becomes a composer, and then falls in love with a girl from his peasant village, who has also become the mistress of the artist – who, we realize, is Signa's father! It all ends in murder and suicide.

Yet, the dramatic centre of the novel is not in these sensational developments but in Signa's uncle Bruno, whose ambition is to provide for his dead sister's child in the only way he knows how: to buy a strip of land for Signa to farm and pass on to his own children. For seven years Bruno slaves on a piece of land adjoining his own, giving up half its yield to the owner, as well as annual payments of money, until it is his own. For Bruno this small plot means "freedom": "With his foot on its soil he had felt rich" (Ouida, *Signa* 301). Signa will never be well-off, but he'll be "no beggar, and no bondsman – always free" (227). For the boy, though, the prospect of being tied to a primitive life is unbearable: "He felt as if a great chain had been flung round him, fastening him down on to the hill-side" (226). He sells the land in order to further his musical career. It is Bruno's ambition for Signa and its betrayal by the young man, rather than the complex of sexual betrayals, that drives the narrative.

Bruno's distress at the cultural gulf that emerges between himself and Signa, in his recognition that the boy has gone "beyond me" (289), is acutely realized by Ouida, as is the fact that Signa, for all his education, "could never measure the depth of Bruno's nature" (296). Bruno is unable to articulate his anger and resentment and what the loss of the land fully means to him – Ouida holds back from speaking for him – and we are left a convincingly authentic portrayal of Bruno's broodingly suppressed emotion.

The kind of awareness to be found in Ouida's novel may be best understood if it is compared with works dealing with peasant life by two other British women, Alice Comyns Carr's *Northern Italian Folk* and a similar work by Janet Ross, *Italian Sketches* (1887). Like Ouida, these were women with privileged access to the villages of the rural poor, whom they give an element of identity, but to a very limited degree. In *Northern Italian Folk*, each of Comyns Carr's chapters is essentially a discrete character sketch, in which the female type (Lucrezia the lace maker, Rosina the flower girl, and so on) is accompanied by a pen and ink likeness which frames the subject. "Watch her now at work", urges the narrator, "that tall and massive figure, those heavy coils of bright, black hair with the broad waves, that smooth skin with the faint fresh colour, those even rows of white teeth that appear so often when the merry

smile parts her rosy lips!" (Comyns Carr 24). As the text proceeds the narrative begins to gain coherence, and types become more individuated characters. These individuals are understood as members of a cohesive rural community, familiar figures reappearing in later sketches, so that the whole grows organically in a way that borders on the novelistic. *Northern Italian Folk* concludes with something that is very like an Ouida short story, the love story of Nettina who requires the help of the village letter writer to persuade her suitor to return home. In a similar way, one of Ross's *Italian Sketches* (sketches of Tuscan rural life published separately in British journals from 1875 onwards), which, with an informed seriousness, describe scenes of communal activity, such as the olive or grape harvests, concerns the love story of a girl she knows, who is unable to marry the man she loves because neither has the permission of their *padrone*. Ross's "sketches", like Comyns Carr's, are a peculiar commodity, part reportage, part fiction. The hybrid nature of these narratives is an indication of Ouida's influence, and testimony to how popular Ouida's picturesque novels and short stories were both in England and in the expatriate community in Italy.

Consistently, the peasants portrayed by Comyns Carr and Ross are apolitical. It is as if this is in reaction to the political consciousness aroused by industrialism in Britain or the agrarian discontent in Ireland. Both writers state that the Italian people are "thorough Conservatives", simple, moral (affianced couples "keep aloof") – a people whose every working hour is structured by the Church calendar and ringing of Church bells (Ross 112, 122). They also assume, most significantly, that the people are content to live under a form of Patriarchy close to mediaeval feudalism – a system of farming the land (land tenure hardly describes it) known as *mezzadria*, or *mezzeria*. Ross, in particular, approves of this system under which the landowner, or *padrone*, is regarded as the father of his tenant farmers (his *gente*, or people) who, for their labours, are permitted to keep back half the harvest or half the profit made from the sale of livestock, but who have no rights to the land upon which they live and labour. This relationship between landowner and tenant is, says Ross, the most "wholesome of systems", and in all "very pleasant to see". She sums it up: "Altogether a very pleasant and easy-going life is the Tuscan peasant's" (Ross 111, 21, 123). It

does need to be said that she had a close relationship with a particular Tuscan landowner, as did Ouida, the Marchese della Stufa.⁵

Ouida's *A Village Commune* (1881) was a striking departure from such a conception of Italy in its understanding of the political oppression of the rural poor. She, too, did not attack the system of *mezzadria*, but rather the despotic treatment of the Italian peasantry by certain provincial Communes under whose authority a pervasive system of petty rules, surveillance, corrupt taxation, and inhumane punishment was allowed to establish itself unchecked: an Italy of which "Travellers, and even foreign residents, do not, as a rule, know anything" (Ouida, *Village Commune* 352). She wanted English readers to "look into these million humble homes, darkened and naked, and see these children without food, these men without hope" (366).

Its story is one of the persecution (mirrored by a seduction plot, common in such narratives) of the peasant families by the newly appointed head of the Commune, an ambitious politician who is on his way to a career in Rome. Old occupations, such as Pippo Manzetti's wicker work and basket-making, in his family for generations, are newly taxed. Reed-cutting, carried on for hundreds of years, now requires a permit. For those driven to utter poverty, begging is a crime, even though "There is no poor rate, and no workhouse, and nothing for the honest poor except a metre or so of ground in the cemeteries" (Ouida, *Village Commune* 205). The community is destroyed. An old woman, arrested for begging, dies in prison. The young "hero", Carmelo, son of a mill-owner, is sent to a labour camp for his part in a failed uprising. His wife, Viola, and their child die from poverty and grief. Pippo is evicted from his home for non-payment of taxes and fines. He loses his mind and ends up in an asylum, but not before making the following speech, worthy of Gaskell or Dickens: "There's a law for this and that and t'other, till the land is sick; but there's no law against the poor

⁵ Janet Ross was the daughter of the travel writer Lucie Duff Gordon, and herself wrote many books about Italy. With her husband, Henry, Ross rented one wing of an ancient villa owned by the Marchese della Stufa which was in walking distance of Lastra a Signa. Ross learnt all she knew about Tuscan agricultural practices from her landlord, as did Ouida, who fell in love with della Stufa and was a frequent visitor at Castagnolo in the early 1870s. Evidently, Ross's and Ouida's approving accounts of the system of land tenure in Tuscany are based upon their personal knowledge of the Marchese's relationship with his tenants.

starving to death; there's no law against their dying naked on the naked floor" (268).

As has been suggested, the interest in the Italian peasantry which emerges in these texts of the late 1870s and 1880s needs to be seen in the context of the land agitation in Ireland which sought to give greater protection from eviction to the smallest tenant farmers by strengthening their rights to the land on which they worked, and also in relation to Britain, where there was a politicized working class, and where the suffrage was about to be extended to smallholders in the Third Reform Act of 1884. The rights of the rural, as opposed to the urban, poor were of topical interest at this time, and in Ireland, even to a greater degree than in Italy, "agricultural pursuits are the only pursuits" (O'Connor 987).

In Ireland, as in Italy, the crucial issues were the rights of tenant farmers, security of tenure, and fair rents, particularly pressing issues with a succession of bad harvests. In 1879 the Irish National Land League was set up to protect tenant farmers from eviction, and a parliamentary campaign, led by Charles Stewart Parnell, secured for them fixity of tenure, fair rents, and free sale (the Three Fs). In Italy there had been, throughout the nineteenth century, a political recognition of the need for agrarian change.⁶ There were too many people working on the land, and holdings were too small to be productive. Economic progress was seen to depend on reorganization into larger units, and many of the ills Ouida identified would have been an outcome of this situation. In Ireland the campaign on behalf of the tenant farmers had often been extremely violent. In the words of Nationalist MP T. P. O'Connor, nothing was so astonishing "as the change which the Land League movement has made in the temper of the Irish tenant. A race of abject, cowering, and helpless slaves has been transformed into an organized force of spirited, self-reliant, and even defiant freemen" (O'Connor 989).

This is where Ouida's position becomes an inconsistent, self-contradictory one. She did make explicit comparisons between the grievances of Irish and Italian peasants in *A Village Commune* (1881), and did so once again the following year, in her article "The

⁶ See Davis's *Italy in the Nineteenth Century* (236-40).

System of Mezzadria”, published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*. However, while she could boldly expose the miseries of peasant life, she was appalled at the prospect of the peasants taking action against the conditions under which they lived. Throughout *A Village Commune*, although Ouida demonstrates her sympathetic understanding of the circumstances under which the poor turn to Communism and to thoughts of bloody revolution, she, too, might well be said to represent the Italian peasantry as “a race of abject, cowering, and helpless slaves”. Carmelo despairs of the people ever rising up: “how can we do anything; we who have no union, no chief, who cannot read, who can only struggle blindly as the birds in the nets? That is the misery of it. Our people are timorous” (326). But Ouida had little sympathy with Irish peasants already driven to desperate acts: in Italy, she argued, there was just as much privation as in Ireland, but “no agrarian crime, no revolt against masters or landlords, no effort to shirk just payments or even unjust ones” (Ouida, *Village Commune* 249). In a letter to her friend Claud Harding Ouida’s view was that rather than ameliorative legislation in response to the murderous violence against landlords, Ireland “want[ed] military law” (E. Lee 109); and to the 1881 Land Act’s extension of the rights of Irish tenants to the land on which they lived and worked she was wholly opposed. One rather wonders how many of her expatriate associates were living on dwindling rents for Irish estates.

In her letter to Harding she mentions her forthcoming book on the Italian peasants and observed that they “suffer far more than the Irish and say nothing” (E. Lee 109). Her position was one of extreme sympathy for the peasants and indignation at their plight since, unlike their Irish equivalents, they submitted “to a domination that [would] drive any other man into rebellion in twenty-four hours” (Ouida, “System” 109), but utter condemnation of outbreaks of violence when they loudly demand their rights. Her sympathy for this oppressed class is tempered by her own clearly stated identification with the ruling class: “We in Italy are all of us afraid of socialism, we who have anything to lose”, yet a situation is allowed to exist which so radicalizes the poor, so that “soon or late will spring up armed men, hydra-headed and torch in hand!” (Ouida, *Village Commune* 22). Despite all this, utterly inconsistently, she could

maintain that the Italian – feudal – model which recognized the supreme right of the landowner was “much juster and healthier” (“System” 110). Inconsistent, but not so very different from the position of writers like Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens who could take up the causes of the urban poor in northern England, but could only see paternalistic solutions to their problems.

Ouida had the manuscript of *A Village Commune* ready by August 1880, and an agreement with Buloz, editor of the fortnightly *Revue des Deux Mondes*, who wished to begin serialization in his 15 October edition. It was, she told Chatto, “a book for the moment” (7 June 1880), and she anticipated that Chatto would have the book out in England in October also. She was to learn how difficult it would be to break from the manner of her past fiction and present to her readers what she felt to be the truth about the condition of the rural poor in Italy.

Chatto dragged out negotiations over the “novel” which meant that it was too late for the *Revue*. From Ouida's surviving correspondence with Chatto & Windus it is clear that the firm were reluctant to commission a work from Ouida that departed from the conventional three-volume romance required by subscribers to Mudie's Library. They also did not want anything that was overtly political. She had first told them her intentions in the summer, accurately describing the work as “a satirical political sketch, cast in the form of a story to interest the general reader”, but, perhaps anticipating difficulties, she refused to send the manuscript on approval (Ouida, Letter *c.* early June 1880). Chatto took several months to draw up a contract, and then proceeded to market the new work as if it was another of Ouida's popular Italian romances. With the title not yet confirmed, he went ahead and placed advertisements in the press for Ouida's new “Novel”, even though this was contrary to Ouida's instructions. She maintained that to do so would detract “from the purpose and seriousness of the work” (*c.* January 1880). Chatto even inserted a list of “New Novels” in the frontispiece of the first edition which would have suggested to any browsing reader that it, too, was a new novel. Ignoring Ouida's very specific request that *A Village Commune* look “different [...] from my other books” (3 September 1880), Chatto commissioned a very attractive cover for the 2s. “Cheap Edition” which features

Carmelo and Viola walking arm in arm, with a watermill in the background. To all appearances, Chatto was offering simply a peasant love story, rather than a serious exposure of the wretchedness of rural life in Tuscany. He now begged Ouida that her next three-volume novel would be another of her Italian romances, “dans le genre of *Ariadnē*” (c. March 1882).

In Italy, *A Village Commune* was, apparently, having some effect: “Even the ministers grant its truth and justice”, Ouida informed Chatto (1 April 1882), and her publishers were quick to publish a translation in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* of extracts from Ruggero Bonghi’s review written for his periodical, *La Cultura* (Bonghi was Chair of Classics at Florence University and a former Minister of Public Instruction). Bonghi called for copies of Ouida’s book to be given away to the very people she portrayed, for “it would (or ought to) move them to rise for themselves against the administrative and political systems which torment them”. Further, “It ought to awaken in the soul of the nation a strong desire to change a state of things in which it remains the victim of a wretched and corrupt bureaucracy” (“Table Talk” 634).

In England, John Ruskin praised *A Village Commune* for its social and political realism, and urged those interested in the oppression of the poor in Tuscany and Romagna to read Ouida’s account: “What their minds are, and what their state, and what their treatment, those who do not know Italy may best learn, if they can bear the grief of learning it, from Ouida’s photographic story” (30). The review in *The Times* also vouched for its accuracy, and “hoped that this letting in of light by a popular novelist, even should the glare be somewhat theatrical, may have its effect” (Rev. “Village Commune” 9). Yet the work had its detractors. The *Spectator*’s review accused Ouida (they wouldn’t have known how unfairly) of “hoaxing the public with a pretended novel”: it was less a novel than a “series of horrors”. The review went on to ask “on what grounds she addresses this appeal to Englishmen”, and, interestingly, “have we not our own discontented agricultural population in Ireland to occupy us [...]?” (Rev. “Village Commune” 931). There was also criticism that the book was one-sided. As one of Ouida’s critics pointed out, “The Italian peasantry do not monopolise all the virtue of the country, and those in power are not invariably beasts” (Calverley 566).

Ouida had insisted that her account was “not in the slightest degree overdrawn” (Ouida, *Village Commune* 352). In an appendix to the book, she refers to an “Almanac” for her evidence that “the small proprietor and the respectable poor are being utterly destroyed off the land” (360). This may be emotively expressed, but it is historical fact that something like this, perhaps inevitably, was happening. Ouida goes on, “Let no one think my Pippo is an exaggeration. Pippo has a thousand, and ten thousand likenesses of himself all over the land”, and then quotes from the almanac, which claims that, “In the last few years nearly *two million* small proprietors have been ruined and sent to beggary” (361).

An article by Mary Calverley in the *Contemporary Review* (October 1881), questioned “Ouida’s Knowledge of Italian Life”, objecting politically to *A Village Commune*, “careless audacity marks the partisan, not the trustworthy witness”, and finding fault with Ouida’s Italian, “There are many blunders in the book, indeed almost as many as there are Italian words” (Calverley 569, 565). This was the kind of attack Ouida was used to. Critics of her earlier novels had criticized her French, a language she was brought up to speak. Here she was able to deal with Calverley’s linguistic objections, quoting Italian authorities and referring to the regional dialect.

Clearly, Ouida had an excellent command of Italian: she claimed to be able to read and write in Italian when a child (Ouida, “To the Editor”, *Contemporary* 842), and at the end of the century she wrote two articles in Italian for the *Nuova Antologia* – articles that were then translated into English for publication in *Critical Studies* (1900), Ouida’s second collection of essays.⁷ As Ouida herself said in her Appendix to *A Village Commune*, “You must know the language intimately, and you must have got the people’s trust in you, before you can understand all that they endure” (352). Indeed, such was her intimate understanding of the common people that, according to a friend of Ouida’s, her spoken Italian was closer to

⁷ Throughout the late 1880s and 1890s Ouida was regularly commissioned by the *Fortnightly Review* and the *Nineteenth Century* to write articles on Italian politics and literature. In 1899 she wrote two articles for the *Nuova Antologia*: “Sulla Decadenza delle Nazioni Latine” (“The Decadence of Latin Races”), published on 16 September, and “Joseph Chamberlain” on 1 December.

“the hedger and ditcher [with whom] she had a true bond”: ordinary Italian she spoke “only fairly”, whilst “she spoke Italian *patois* admirably” (Cooper 451).

More interesting is the disagreement between Calverley and Ouida over the conscription into the army of the new Italy, which Calverley sees as an educative force, productive of a civic consciousness in the new Italy, but which Ouida rejects as destructive of the communities she knows, although she does so in a rather high-flown way: “Myself I would prefer the unlettered mountaineer of the Lucchese hills who can recite the ‘Gerusalemme Liberata’, learnt by ear [...] to the ‘educated cad’ of the Turin or Florence streets, who has just heard enough of Fourier and Bradlaugh [...] but who could not for the life of him tell you the name of a country flower, or say by heart a line of Tasso” (Ouida, “To the Editor”, *Contemporary* 841-2).

It could be said of *A Village Commune* that it does not attempt to see the sufferings of the peasants in the context of social, economic and political developments, but she was not writing an apologia for the newly emerged Italian state. In this way, Ouida’s lament for the lost certainties of Tuscan peasant life is essentially conservative. Here, too, she would have preferred the past to stand still, but she did feel, and she did show, the pain of these people’s lives.

It was Ouida’s concern, in both her novels and her later essays, to preserve not solely the antique statuary of Rome, Florence and Venice, but the European vision of Italy, the picturesque: the unique flora of the Colosseum recently scraped away with knives and with acid (“survivors of sylvan worlds destroyed [...] the seeds of which perchance had lodged in the sandals of the legions as they came from Palmyra or Babylon”); the palace walls reflected in the canals of Venice “green with the hartstongue, pennywort, and ivy-leaved toadsflax” (Ouida, “Misgovernment” 964, 958).

Undoubtedly, in Ouida’s reverencing and recording an Italy of the past, and in her fears of its passing, she was in accord with the majority of British travel writing about Italy in the late nineteenth century. John Pemble’s description of Ruskin’s “conviction that he was writing its epitaph”, that “every visit intensified a sense of loss and impending bereavement” (168), could also be said of Ouida, and indeed her Italian novels are one of the many sources cited in Pemble’s *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorians and Edwardians*

in the South which convey fairly stock British responses to the newly unified Italy as “A Wreck of Paradise” (the title of one of Pemble’s chapters). Ouida was writing at a very specific period, the early years after unification. She was not, though, seeking to preserve an ideal *Italy* (if so, she celebrates its disparate qualities), but the Tuscan way of life, and, further than that, the customs of the particular area of Tuscany in which she lived, Signa, which were threatened by the new nation in terms of conscription and education, and of course industrialism. The author of “Holiday Customs in Italy” posed the question: “how long will these old observances survive amid the utilitarian tendencies of the nineteenth century, and must they not soon be obliterated by the spirit of the age [...] which aims more and more at reducing the globe and its inhabitants to one dead level of uniform monotony?” (210). What is remarkable about Ouida is that, unlike Henry James, for example, who, as Buzard (203-309) demonstrates, registers an uneasy awareness that the realities of poverty interrupted the pleasure he took from the picturesque, she was able to look frankly at the realities of peasant life. It is Buzard’s conclusion that far from striking out in original ways, impressionistic travel writers only add to the textual web “in which tourists seemed trapped [...] further isolating themselves from the realities they purported to grasp” (215). This cannot be said of Ouida. Yes, she could take pleasure from a vision of Virgilian agriculture in late nineteenth-century Italy, “The “silvery circle” of the reaping-hook still flashes amongst the bending wheat [...] the corn is threshed by flails in the old way on the broad stone courts [...]” (Ouida, “Passing” 136-7), but this vision did not in any way blind her to the social and political vulnerability of the Italian peasant. She saw how change might come (or, as industrial novels in Britain had, warned how it might come), yet she was not able to sympathize with change. What she *was* able to see, breaking out of the customary mould of her fictions, was one of her strengths.

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2. Victorian Responses to the Italian Risorgimento

Beautiful Freedom: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Casa Guidi Windows*

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O bella libertà, O bella!
(Casa Guidi Windows)

I

Perhaps the best known of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's works today is *Aurora Leigh*, the Künstlerroman-in-verse in which the first-person narrator constructs her selfhood through the creative roles of poet and woman, achieving fulfilment in both. Feminist criticism engaged with this genre- and gender-challenging, disturbing, work from around the 1970s, although Virginia Woolf had already done so much earlier on, and, in the nineteenth century, Emily Dickinson and George Eliot had responded to it with sensitivity and an awareness of its ground-breaking implications for women like themselves. Nevertheless, it was critics such as Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Cora Kaplan, Dorothy Mermin, Susan Stanford Friedman, Deirdre David, and Elaine Showalter, who positioned Elizabeth Barrett Browning as the originator of a new, female, tradition in poetry, rescuing her from the role of minor Victorian poetess – the “Mrs Browning” generally known for (only a handful of) her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. More recently, Barrett Browning's political poems have come under consideration: “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point”, *Casa Guidi Windows*, *Poems Before Congress*, all of which show that political engagement was a truly driving force in her life.¹ These poems date from her arrival in Italy with

¹ See Schor and especially Harris who engages with Gilbert's earlier, more bibliographical interpretation of the poem. Reynolds also reads both *Casa Guidi Windows*

Robert Browning, when Italian Risorgimento politics and their connection with government and social politics in Britain became key considerations in her life and art. However, although *Casa Guidi Windows* has been only relatively recently recognized as a major political work, in Italy Barrett Browning has long since been hailed as the “poet of the Italian Risorgimento” (Artom Treves 207).

“I love thee freely, as men strive for right”, she says in Sonnet xliii, and freedom, liberty and the right of human beings to live and make choices freely resound throughout the poems written in Italy after she herself determined to fly to her own freedom. Freedom was what the Risorgimento Italians demanded; the freedom she saw was non-existent for thousands of people, especially women and children and slaves, in the two greatest self-proclaimed lands of the free, Britain and the United States: “No help for women, sobbing out of sight/Because men made such laws?/[...] No remedy my England, for such woes?” (*CGW* II: 638-641) and, a few lines further on: “No mercy for the slave, America?” (II: 646).

Thus the complex political circumstances presented in *Casa Guidi Windows* which the poet reflects upon, judges, compares and invokes, place the notion of freedom, and its absence, squarely on the political and social scenarios of Italy and Britain. In the opening verse of *Casa Guidi Windows* (I: 1-13), a child is heard singing the simple words “O bella libertà, O bella”, but, as the poet will show us, freedom is far more than a beautiful word uttered by an innocent child; and in the first half of the nineteenth century, “freedom” was the cornerstone and rallying cry of nations constructing themselves through social and political revolutions in Europe and in South America.

Casa Guidi Windows was written in two parts, the first in 1847, the actual time of the events described by Barrett Browning, when the Austrian Grand Duke Leopold II of Tuscany and Pope Pius IX had promised to concede a freedom of sorts to the delighted Florentines; the second, after the Italian defeat at Novara by the Austrian army in 1849. Both parts were published together under the title *Casa Guidi Windows* in 1851, and both are eye-witness accounts

and *Aurora Leigh* as political poems, together with poems by Tennyson, Browning and Clough, whose first chapter opens with a description of Garibaldi’s visit to Tennyson in 1864.

of crucial events taking place – history in the making – observed through the critical, sensitive, politically aware eye of the poet.

However, the politically sensitive matters Barrett Browning chose to express in verse transgressed the boundaries of what Victorians considered appropriate both in terms of genre and gender. In mid-nineteenth-century England the specific subject matter that poetry could or should concern itself with was controversial: questions were raised in connection with whether poetry might, or should be, written on contemporary, political matters, or even on everyday matters, those deemed so “unpoetical” by Matthew Arnold; and, also, more to the point, with what were appropriate subjects for a “poetess”, or “lady poet” to address. *Casa Guidi Windows*, both in its subject matter and in its poetic form, constituted a clear challenge to the restrictive gendering of poetry: politics were to be dealt with in essays, histories, reports, that is, prose, and, naturally, written by men, not “women-poets”. For a start, Barrett Browning used the same subjective voice and position for *Casa Guidi Windows* as she had for the very intimate *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, but what was in the sonnets (in spite of a sometimes rather daring, because so confidently female, voice), a subject acceptable to Victorians for a lady to write about, love, the voice and topic were quite inappropriate for *Casa Guidi Windows*, a poem about domestic and foreign contemporary politics. *Aurora Leigh* (1857) was also a different matter: explicitly engaged with its time, it was, in McSweeney’s words in her introduction to *Aurora Leigh*, “a penetrating study of a nineteenth-century woman and a vivid representation of the age” (xiii), expressing concern, anger and indignation about the social conditions of English women, including prostitutes, dealt with compassionately and frankly, and with Aurora’s realization of selfhood as poet and woman, as her crowning achievement. But *Casa Guidi Windows* was quite different: after all, Barrett Browning was expressing, more clearly than she would in *Aurora Leigh*, her position on power politics, documentary history and literary history, showing she was well-informed on matters of contemporary politics both in *Risorgimento* Italy and Britain and displaying her knowledge of both Italian and English culture. In *Casa Guidi Windows* the Carlylean poet and prophet – “poets are soothsayers still” (II: 738) – is the subjective voice, Barrett Browning

herself speaking from her entirely personal position as woman and poet. Feminine and poetic intuition, experience, intellect and imagination blend in this “I” who is “eye” witness, located on the threshold between public life going by outside her windows, in the streets of Florence, and private life, inside her very English, bourgeois household in the Casa Guidi, the Florentine home she shared with her husband Robert Browning. Although *Casa Guidi Windows* is clearly a poem concerned with politics, because of the poet’s threshold positioning at the windows of her house (“From Casa Guidi windows”), she is able to slide with ease in and out of public and private spheres in an entirely “feminine” way, closing the windows on the outside world at will: “But wherefore should we look out any more/From Casa Guidi windows? Shut them straight” (I: 425-6). Not only does the poet mention her own child (“my two-months baby” and “my own young Florentine”), connecting him with the child who sings of “bella libertà” at the poem’s opening as well as with Anita Garibaldi’s baby (II: 680), thus inscribing motherhood as a legitimate critical locus in this and other political poems (such as, for example, “Mother and Poet”, “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point”), but she also brings into the poem her “beloved companion” (I: 1129-1183), addressing him “thou and I, Love” (I: 1178), recalling the intimate, woman’s voice of the *Sonnets*. Unlike the *Sonnets*, however, in *Casa Guidi Windows*, as in *Aurora Leigh*, Barrett Browning creates a new, hybrid poetic form to inscribe, appropriately, new subject matter. Poetic forms (*terza rima*, in epic metre)² are blended and re-cast from the dominant cultures: Italian and English poetry re-signified in terms of personal readings and experience, selectively invoked. In both its content and form, *Casa Guidi Windows* and the other “political” poems justify Dorothy Mermin’s claim that Barrett Browning’s “place at the well-head of a new female tradition remains the single most important fact about her in terms of literary history” (Mermin 3). In *Casa Guidi Windows* the role of the poet is aligned with Shelley rather than with Arnold, but so personal is her engagement with poetry and politics that her “female speaker’s voice does not blend in with those of the past [...] we do not hear the voice of tradition

² See Reynolds, “The Pulse of the Verse” (93-99).

speaking through her” (6). Barrett Browning was aware she was on new ground in exercising her beloved “bella libertà” in both private and public spheres, in her life as in her work. However, as a middle-class, deeply religious Victorian woman there were boundaries she could not consciously cross; in *Casa Guidi Windows* she has, nevertheless, left margins, boundaries, thresholds, liminality, discrepancies, interstices and blanks, allowing rich, varied, subtle possibilities for twenty-first-century readers to explore. If we imagine the poet’s viewpoint as that of a camera, both for the general prospect offered by her windows of scenes below in Part I, and, in the second part, for the “inward eye” of her imagination, then we might think of *Casa Guidi Windows* as a photograph, or series of photographs, in which some areas may be blurred. Once these are magnified, “blown-up”, or when other, modern techniques, are applied, certain details may come to signify in ways that will be meaningful to the scrutinizing reader.³ Thus, this trope will frame my reading of *Casa Guidi Windows* from my South American, early twenty-first-century, post-colonial, woman’s perspective.

II

The “Advertisement to the First Edition” (xli) appended by Barrett Browning to *Casa Guidi Windows* parts 1 and 2 (“Florence 1851”) shows that she anticipated adverse reactions to the poem from her readers in England:

This poem contains the impressions of the writer upon events in Tuscany of which she was a witness. ‘From a window’, the critic may demur. She bows to the objection from the very title of her work. No continuous narrative nor exposition of political philosophy is attempted by her. It is a simple story of personal impressions, whose only value is in the intensity with which they were received. (xli).

³ Barrett Browning herself was very enthusiastic about photography as a new art form/technology. Groth explores this in depth. See also Armstrong.

The poem is clearly, however much she may protest in the Advertisement (deceptively playing the demure “Mrs Browning”), certainly a poem of “political philosophy”, although it is approached and developed in a unique, ground-breaking way. This eye-witness account of “I a woman” and “I a poet” sustains its claim for truthfulness on the *discrepancy* between part one, written in 1849, and part two, written three years later: “The discrepancy between the two parts is a sufficient guarantee to the public of the truthfulness of the writer” (xli); a discrepancy painful, no doubt, she feels, (in terms of historical reliability) to the reader, but even more so to the writer (in terms of personal feeling), because the freedom Florentines expected in 1849 was finally not conceded. The poet has to acknowledge this and the fact that she had been wrong trusting two powerful men, the Duke and the Pope, the temporal and spiritual leaders. However, her statement that she took “shame upon herself, that she believed, like a *woman*” in some “royal oaths”, must surely have been spoken demurely tongue-in-cheek by “Mrs Browning”, as the belief in those “royal oaths” was shared by most English *men* of the time. Later, the Poet echoes this ironic rendering of woman-as-politically-naïve: “Absolve me patriots, of my woman’s fault/That ever I believed the man was true” (II: 64-65). Firmly entrenched in the present time to engage with contemporary events, she is never the poet who “trundles back his soul five hundred years” (*Aurora Leigh* 5: 190). Confident that hers is a valid perspective, her radical woman’s voice is of the future; therefore she prefers not to “join those old thin voices with my new,/And sigh for Italy with some safe sigh/Cooped up in music ‘twixt an oh and ah, – /Nay, hand in hand with that young child, will I/Go singing rather, “*Bella libertà*,”/Than, with those poets, croon the dead or cry/“*Se tu men bella fossi, Italia!*” (I: 163-168).

In *Aurora Leigh*, Aurora must confront the myths used by patriarchy to control and possess women – ghost, fiend, angel, fairy, witch, sprite, Muse, Psyche, Medusa, Lamia (I: 154-163) – in order to free herself of them. Similarly, the Poet of *Casa Guidi Windows* must foreground myths in order to be able to reject them, in this case those commonly used to describe Italy, and denounce them as deadly to the cause of freedom. Interestingly too, these are myths in which Italy is seen as a woman, which in a patriarchal

society implies its being inferior to the British lion. Italy as an abandoned, beautiful woman was the trope most commonly used in Britain but also in Italy: Niobe, Cybele, Juliet (*CGW* I: 30-50). In a similar manner, the feminization of foreign lands was a common trope of Empire: the geographies of America, Africa and Asia, and indeed their depictions on early modern maps, as well as their uses as literary tropes, were clearly female, rendered in terms of possession and ravishment; or to be resisted and feared. Deeply lodged in Victorian culture, so insidiously part of a dominant force that was only beginning to feel the challenge coming from women's questioning of patriarchy, the concept of a "feminized" Italy, Barrett Browning is indicating, must be revoked, in the same way as she would later, in *Aurora Leigh*, categorically reject male stereotypes of women. Barrett Browning's vantage point from the windows of the Casa Guidi allows her to observe Italy and its (her!) people critically: to view the Florentine crowds in the streets beneath; then, beyond the city, to view the surrounding countryside; but also to look much further afield: her windows allow her an excellent prospect of England as well.

III

The "Italian question", like the "Woman question", was much debated in Britain at this time of revolutions: just as Barrett Browning questions and subverts patriarchal assumptions about women and about Italy, so does she question and subvert issues rather less foregrounded in those days, connected with assumptions about Empire. The poem is critical of England's betrayal of the Italian cause, being driven towards pursuing the interests of Empire instead. Helen Groth points out that "Italian politics became a 'clarifying mechanism' through which English cultural commentators, journalists in an ever expanding print media, writers and artists reflected on the nature of Englishness and the myth of Protestant civility that was its foundation" (37). An integral part of "Englishness" and "Protestant civility" was Britain's role as political and economic leader in the world, power politics that included the keeping of the mythical Pax

Britannica of the Victorians. With pristine simplicity Barrett Browning uncovers Britain's aims in keeping world peace, a Peace the Poet cannot tolerate: "A cry is up in England, which doth ring/The hollow world through, that for ends of trade/And virtue, and God's better worshipping/We henceforth should exalt the name of Peace" (*CGW* II: 373-376). But "[...] your peace admits/Of outside anguish while it keeps at home?/I loathe to take its name upon my tongue" (II: 411-413). In the mid-nineteenth century, British imperial control extended over all the "pink places" on maps as well as over vast areas where it was exerted "informally", that is, where economies and trade were controlled by the British, such as in South America. This control over most of the world in both political and economic terms was powerfully symbolized by the Crystal Palace built for the Great Exhibition of 1851.

In Part 2 of *Casa Guidi Windows*, Barrett Browning cannot bear the spectacle of Florence and the Florentines (she feels one herself) suffering because of the betrayal of their hopes upon the return of the treacherous Grand Duke Leopold with Austrian troops. Closing her windows in despair – "[...] Shut them straight/And let us sit down by the folded door" (II: 426-7) – the poet can nevertheless turn her mind's eye to other, related, matters: "I have grown too weary of these windows. Sights/Come thick enough and clear enough in thought" (II: 430-1), turning her ironic eye, to "Imperial England", Tennyson's "ever-broadening England" of *Idylls of the King*, and focusing on the gorgeous Great Exhibition which "draws/The flowing ends of the earth, from Fez, Canton [...] and the vast Americas" (II: 378-381). The nations of the earth rush eagerly to London and this magnificent fairground, a monument to commercial hubris and colonial violence; its walls of glass allowing looking in or looking out with wonderful clarity, but also functioning as a barrier, or a frontier, dividing the two nations in England of rich and poor, but also home and abroad, them and us. Those rushing to the metropolis-emporium, to the heart of the Empire, forget the woes and tribulations of their own poor, forgetting also, Barrett Browning points out with grief, in their thirst for the exotic and for the new, "poor Italia" and her patriot dead; in anger the poet exclaims: "Alas, great nations have great shames, I say" (II: 648).

In *Casa Guidi Windows*, then, Barrett Browning directly addresses issues connected with Italian politics to begin with, showing how the hopes for freedom inscribed in the first part of the poem were thwarted; and, in the second part, specifically reflecting critically on European, Italian, and British politics, from her advantageous location on the threshold of her Florentine palazzo. However firm her female Poet's voice may have been in taking up these issues in the 1850s, they would nevertheless have automatically been questioned, and invalidated. "Mrs Browning" the "poetess" would have been disqualified, as a woman, from voicing opinions on politics, and her conduct in doing so, judged improper. The poem was thus labelled difficult and generally not worthy of critical attention, which would appear to have been its fate until the late 1970s.

IV

Integrating gender and imperial politics, one of the most interesting and tantalizing aspects of *Casa Guidi Windows* to my mind, is that, at the very end, the poet, drawing her reflections to a close, finding optimism for the future in the person of a child, her own, and recalling the child in Part 1 singing "O bella libertà", in fact opens out, rather than closes, the poem, when she mentions the suggestive possibilities of "[T]he blank interstices/Men take for ruins" (II: 776). In the poem Barrett Browning assures us that these "blank interstices" will be filled by God's works, thus closing on a pious note of hope. This may be so; however, blanks have been protagonists in the history of women, whether in art, writing or politics, as both Barrett Browning looking for literary grandmothers and Virginia Woolf after her have shown. For Homi Bhabha, those "interstices" or "in-between spaces, provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation" (1-2). In the "Advertisement" that preceded the first edition of the poem, Barrett Browning refers to the "painful discrepancy" she has had to live with; indeed, as a woman, she says that "such discrepancies we are called upon to accept at every hour by the conditions of our nature,

implying the *interval between* aspiration and performance, between faith and dis-illusion, between hope and fact” (xli, my italics). The “interval between” is furthermore locationally enacted as she positions herself firmly at her window. Interstices, intervals, discrepancies, blanks, thresholds: the location of women in patriarchal societies, the location of some nations on the global scenario.

Throughout *Casa Guidi Windows*, supporting Barrett Browning’s enthusiasm for the republican cause, public figures of significance are invoked; from the past, the English republican Milton is very specifically important; while from the present time, the Italian republican revolutionary Mazzini is called upon several times. Mazzini was the founder of the *Giovine Italia* [Young Italy] brigade and ideological formulator of the Risorgimento; together with Garibaldi and Cavour he led the struggle for unification and independence. Committed and powerful as these men were, the most compelling presence in *Casa Guidi Windows*, however, to my mind, is that of the only woman of significance in the poem, other than the Poet. The woman who appears towards the end of Part II of *Casa Guidi Windows* is “Garibaldi’s wife”.

In keeping with a poetics that draws attention to, as it were, the middle space, that “interval between” declared in the Advertisement, both “Garibaldi’s wife” and Garibaldi himself, here in the role of “beloved companion” (like Robert Browning) rather than the glorious leader of Italian unification, signify on scenarios which traditionally have been kept apart, but in *Casa Guidi Windows* consistently are joined together: the political (public) and the domestic (private) spheres. At the same time, in a poem critically aware of the politics of Empire, this section signifies as one of the “blank interstices”, lacks or absences, which Barrett Browning at the windows of the Casa Guidi, possibly may not have had any awareness of. Garibaldi was of course one of the “southern men who strive/In God’s name for man’s rights, and shall not fail!” (I: 1201-2) whom she invokes; however, he had ventured much further south than she might have heard of. Exiled from Italy after the Young Italy revolutionary attempt of 1836 failed, he arrived in South America, in Brazil, where he joined the fighting for a separatist cause in Rio Grande do Sul, seeking to establish a republic independent of the Empire of Brazil. This war was known

as the Farouphilhas or War of the Tatters. It was in 1839 in Rio Grande that he met and fell in love with Ana Maria Ribeiro da Silva. Poor and illiterate, eighteen-year old Anita Ribeiro was involved in the revolutionary cause. She fled her domineering husband and joined Garibaldi on his warship, fighting by his side at the battles of Imbituba and Laguna. Hers is an extraordinary story, full of dramatic moments, such as the time when she managed to elude her pursuers by galloping into a torrential river and survived only by clinging onto her horse's tail. At that time, Garibaldi had been taken prisoner, and she wandered around the forests of Laguna until she found out where he was. He escaped his guards and joined Anita who gave birth to their first child, Menotti, in the Brazilian forest. In 1841 they left Brazil, travelling on horseback for two months until they arrived in Montevideo, Uruguay, where they were eventually married. There Garibaldi joined the Masons and founded the Italian Legion, taking the side of the liberals in a civil war known as *La Guerra Grande* and leading the fighting against forces laying siege to Montevideo supported by the Argentine dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas. Meanwhile, Anita, who was as strongly anti-clerical as her husband and as actively engaged in the cause of freedom, contributed by sewing the famous loose red shirts worn by Garibaldi's legion out of the cloth meant for butchers' garments in Buenos Aires, Garibaldi's well-known outfit – red shirt, black trousers and the gaucho poncho becoming a symbol for freedom. Anita went on to serve as a nurse at the battle of Salto where Garibaldi won a resounding victory against a much larger army. In 1848 when Garibaldi was recalled to Italy, she left Montevideo with her three children arriving in Genoa where she was later joined by her husband. Garibaldi, for whom she was ever his "heroic companion", was soon fighting in Rome with (pregnant) Anita once more by his side. In their flight from Rome, following defeat in July 1849, Anita Ribeiro died, aged twenty-eight, near Ravenna, and was hastily buried in the sand on a beach.⁴

⁴ Biographies of Anita Garibaldi are few and recent in general. For example, see *I Am My Beloved. The Life of Anita Garibaldi* by Lisa Sergio (1969) and Anthony Valerio's biography (2000); novels such as *Anita, Anita: Garibaldi of the New World* by Dorothy Bryant (1993) and *Anita cubierta de arena* by Argentine novelist Alicia Dujovne Ortiz (2003); a Brazilian soap opera, where she figures prominently, *Sete*

This is only a brief summary which does not do justice to Anita Ribeiro, an extraordinary woman who, until very recently, was hardly more than a footnote in the life of her charismatic husband. Margaret Fuller, who witnessed the fall of the Roman republic in 1849 and actually described the retreat she was witnessing in a letter (quoted by Garland), does not escape the impact of the spectacle of the defeated Garibaldi, a blend of pathos and glory. Fuller only just mentions Anita Garibaldi in spite of the fact that it was known that she had been fighting with the legion: “They had all put on the beautiful dress of the Garibaldi legion [...] their long hair blown back [...] The wife of Garibaldi followed him on horseback. He himself was distinguished by his white tunic; his look was entirely that of a hero of the Middle Ages” (Riall 92).

Garibaldi’s memoirs were published between 1859 and 1861 (after *Casa Guidi Windows*), thus increasing his already immense popularity. In them, Anita Ribeiro’s death is movingly but soberly described: his “beloved companion” dies in his arms: “My dearest one’s last words were for her children. She knew that she would not see them again.” (Garibaldi 49, see also Riall 160-161). When Anita Garibaldi, the famous couple’s grand-daughter and her grandmother’s namesake, went to Brazil and Uruguay in 1929, retracing their footsteps, relying heavily on the Memoir for guidance, she describes Anita Ribeiro, characteristically, as “la mujer del silencioso sacrificio [...] la mujer que conoce el magnífico amor, así como el martirio de Italia, donde la consagran heroína” (Garibaldi, Anita 38).⁵

Giuseppe Garibaldi was known as the “hero of two worlds” – the world of the south and the world of the north; however, both Anita Ribeiro and Garibaldi were problematically heroic for the world of the north. The hero of Italian unification, who had contributed to the Italian monarchical cause was welcomed in Britain by members of the conservative establishment (he visited Tennyson); but he was also hailed as the liberator of the oppressed by anti-establishment social movements and therefore requested to shorten his stay in England. His views against the Church and organized

Mulheres (2000); and an Italian musical (2008). An early, highly romanticized (but then this may be inevitable) biography was written in 1889 by Giuseppe Bandi.

⁵ “[T]he woman of silent sacrifice [...]; the woman who knows magnificent love, as well as martyrdom in Italy, where she has been made into a heroine” (my translation).

religion in general were known and may have contributed to his dwindling fame in the twentieth century in Europe. Anita Ribeiro, too, with her clearly active stance (as opposed to Barrett Browning's "passive observer"), being unencumbered by a middle-class upbringing, fought for the cause of freedom herself, teaching her husband the "gaucho" ways of fighting. The middle-class woman with her pen and the working-class woman with her sword, in virtually all-male scenarios: Barrett Browning's inclusion and depiction of Anita Ribeiro in *Casa Guidi Windows* is, however, in many ways problematic. Barrett Browning gives Anita Ribeiro a protagonist's role in the history that *Casa Guidi Windows* unfolds, but only in terms of a glorious death, a death all the more glorious it would seem because "[Anita] felt the little babe unborn" (II: 679). She focuses, in other words, on the dead Anita Ribeiro, not on the living heroine, who was so deeply committed to the "bella libertà" sung in *Casa Guidi Windows*. She is merely Garibaldi's wife, in other words, "Mrs Garibaldi" – this from the Poet who disliked being known as "Mrs Browning". But at the same time, the figure of Garibaldi is conspicuously absent except as referent: "[his wife] who at her husband's side [...]" (II: 677). There are some similarities, too, it seems to me, though of course not wishing to force the comparison, between Barrett Browning's relationship with her husband as shown in *Casa Guidi Windows* – loving companionship, sexual fulfilment, common goals – and Anita Ribeiro's with her husband. It would seem that Barrett Browning, like so many others, knew nothing of Anita Ribeiro's life, and, very likely, little of Garibaldi's as a fighter for the freedom of "Il Popolo" (*CGW*; "the people" in *AL*) whether in the north or the south. The fact that Anita Ribeiro had transgressed social and moral norms for love, moreover, would seem to bring her even closer to Barrett Browning. And finally, Barrett Browning went on to write *Aurora Leigh*, the fictional biography of a woman who fought for herself and, ultimately, for women. The time for women writers to write biographies of women had not yet arrived, but the poetic tribute to Anita Ribeiro, the mother and fighter, paid by Barrett Browning, the woman and poet, brief as it is, is, nevertheless, suggestive:

[A]t her husband's side in scorn,
 Outfaced the whistling shot and hissing waves,
 Until she felt her little babe unborn
 Recoil, within her, from the violent staves
 And bloodhounds of the world, – at which, her life
 Dropt inwards from her eyes and followed it
 Beyond the hunters. Garibaldi's wife
 And child died so. And now, the sea-weeds fit
 Her body, like a proper shroud and coif,
 And murmurously the ebbing waters grit
 The little pebbles where she lies interred
 In the sand. Perhaps, ere dying thus,
 She looked up in his face (which never stirred
 From its clenched anguish) as to make excuse
 For leaving him for his, if so she erred.
 He well remembers that she could not choose. (II: 678-693)

V

The last verses of *Casa Guidi Windows*, like the ending of *Aurora Leigh*, present a resolution in terms of self-realization and completeness, in the achievement of harmony within the domestic or private, and public or political, spheres. Barrett Browning considered herself a legitimate speaker in both spheres; but because she appropriated (and thus empowered) the marginal position in which she was constantly being pushed into by the Victorian world of letters, she was able to see from a unique perspective, both spheres. The “blank interstices”, the “discrepancies”, she refers to, whether consciously sought by the Poet or not, and a variety of other “blank interstices” or “discrepancies” that the focuses of differently located readers will discover as the interest in the poem continues to grow, establish *Casa Guidi Windows* as an emergent text in Raymond Williams's terms (quoted in Bhabha 148), one that creates “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships” – aware and at the same time unaware of its own power. The richness of *Casa Guidi Windows* in the mid-nineteenth century, as well as in the early twenty-first century, is surely due to the fact that it raises questions in connection with the “dominant culture”, as “[...] in certain areas, there will be

certain periods, practices and meanings which are not reached for. There will be areas of practice and meaning which, almost by definition from its own limited character, or in its profound deformation, the dominant culture is unable in any real terms to recognize”.

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“Now in Happier Air”: Arthur Hugh Clough’s “Amours de Voyage” and Italian Republicanism

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In the concluding lines of his sonnet “To a Republican Friend”, Matthew Arnold draws a sympathetic comparison between his own socialist sympathies and those of his intellectual comrade Arthur Hugh Clough:

If sadness at the long heart-wasting show
Wherein earth’s great ones are disquieted:
If thoughts, not idle, while before me flow

The armies of the homeless and unfed:
If these are yours, if this is what you are,
Then I am yours, and what you feel, I share

In spite of their shared sense of political and social injustices, however, Arnold deliberately chose to exclude such time-bound factors from his verse (the sonnet above excepting), in contrast with Clough whose poetry in no way disdains references to immediate social and political issues. As a result, Arnold derided what he viewed as Clough’s anti-classical approach, an orientation he believed to be at odds with the whole purpose of poetry which, for him, should be concerned with eternal rather than worldly themes. Bearing in mind the contemporary issues that dominate “Amours de Voyage”, it is small wonder that, on being sent a copy, Arnold did not even deign to read it. Yet the poem represents a central moment in Clough’s artistic maturity, not only signalling a definite break from the confines of his cultural horizons and personal dilemmas,

but also establishing rhetorical and discourse strategies that anticipate modernist verse.

The immediate subject of Clough's epistolary poem in hexameters regards the vicissitudes of an English intellectual tourist, Claude, during the downfall of Giuseppe Mazzini's 1849 Roman Republic. Clough drew so extensively on his own visit to Rome whilst writing his poem that several of his contemporaries considered its anti-hero as no more than a thin disguise for the author himself. Yet, as Anthony Kenny has recently remarked:

To treat Claude's letters as autobiographical statements is to insult the poet's remarkable creative power. It was no small achievement to make the reader identify with [...] the vexations and sorrows of a character who is presented, initially at least, as a clearly odious person. (173)

On the other hand, David Williams, whilst conceding that "Clough would never allow himself to become as cynical and as nihilistic as Claude", insists on a close correspondence between the poet and his fictional character: "Here is the man he sometimes – not always – felt himself to be: a crippled, paralysed person, someone who had the natural, instinctive man in him throttled into lifelessness by too much indoctrination, too much moralising" (87). In the poem, contemporary European political events (and Clough's visit may be seen as a sort of political pilgrimage in support of the republican cause) are subsequently played off against the existential and philosophical predicaments of its anti-hero. Besides, through Claude's perception of the juxtaposition of the remnants of a long-gone glorious ancient Roman Empire with the new, and decidedly more prosaic, Mazzinian Republic, Clough offers an explicit critique of the essentially vain endeavours of human history, whilst, simultaneously confronting historical and cultural tradition with the modern consciousness which fails to perceive a logical continuity between past and present. My focus here will be almost exclusively on the second canto of the poem, which highlights and develops the theme of republicanism and the poetic subject's reactions to the political turmoil of the times. In so doing, I shall explore the ways in which Clough constructs his poem by setting up an ironic interrelationship between his own self and his fictional anti-hero.

Upon Clough’s arrival in Rome, Giuseppe Mazzini’s republic was barely two months old. Mazzini had been governing as effective dictator in a triumvirate together with Carlo Armellini and Aurelio Saffi, since March 1849, following the escape of Pope Pius IX to Naples subsequent to the failure of his experimental government. During his three-month “vacation” Clough was to witness the initial victory of Garibaldi’s army against the French incursion, followed by the triumph of the French siege led by General Oudinot. When he eventually left, the Republic was dissolved with both Mazzini and Garibaldi forced to flee abroad. Clough’s correspondence to friends and relations during this period not only documents the social and political upheavals he witnessed, but also offers an intriguing insight into his own paradoxical and enigmatic responses to these events. The compositional process of “Amours de Voyage” is heavily conditioned by the fact that whole sequences are basically literal transcriptions from Clough’s letters. In his first communication to his mother, two days after his arrival, for example, he records his initial decidedly anti-conventional impressions of the eternal city:

St Peter’s disappoints me: the stone of which it is made is a poor plastery material. And indeed Rome in general might be called a rubbishy place; the Roman antiquities in general seem to me only interesting as antiques – not for any beauty.

[...] I have seen two beautiful views since I came, one from San Pietro in Montorio, the other from the Lateran Church over the Campagna. (217)

Both the language and tone of Claude’s first letter to Eustace in the poem are an almost directly replica of Clough’s own words:

Rome disappoints me much, – St Peter’s, perhaps, in especial
 Only the Arch of Titus and view from the Lateran please me: [...]
 Rome disappoints me much; I hardly as yet understand, but
 Rubbishy seems the word that most exactly would suit it (13-14,
 19-20).

Not only the same observation, but also the same deliberately supercilious adjective is used, erupting after a hesitant qualification (“I hardly as yet understand”) to create an almost comic effect (phonically reinforced by the semi-alliteration of *Rome/rubbishy*).

Thus, far from expressing the typical tourist's delight at the capital city, Claude, in no way dissimilar to Clough, displays a distaste verging on boredom with his new surroundings. To underpin his derisive assessment of the city, he is also eager to expose the ludicrously false rumours spread by the press concerning recent events. Clough's allusion to one such instance in the same letter to his mother – "The story of the proposed sale of the Belvedere Apollo to the Americans is as simply a joke [...]" (217) – is also referred to in one of Claude's letters to Eustace:

[...] and although [*The Times*] was slightly in error
 When it proclaimed as a fact the Apollo was sold to a Yankee,
 You may believe when it tells you the French are at Civita Vecchia. (187)

Merely to recognize the extent to which Clough drew from his correspondence while composing "Amours de Voyage", however, provides little insight into the dynamics of the intratextual dialogue he deliberately sets up between his letters and his poem. What is discovered if one pursues this dialogic relationship is the way in which they illuminate and parallel each other in a series of attitudes, from the earnest to the ironic, to make up a composite picture of the imaginative possibilities afforded by his Roman experience. It is precisely this which makes "Amours de Voyage" such a disturbingly open-ended poem, one whose anti-hero, is intellectually over-cautious and sceptical to the point of self-deconstruction. While he no doubt reflects certain facets of his creator, he is bestowed with a sufficiently autonomous identity as to render any direct link with Clough both plausible and questionable – almost as if Clough were simultaneously tempted as well as reluctant to establish a correspondence between himself and his own character. This ambivalent attitude is somewhat symptomatic of the degree of self-dissociation which marks his temperament during this period of his life. Indeed, the extent to which the performative function of Clough's language in his letters and his poem seems deliberately aimed to forge an attitude of cynicism and disillusionment that has quasi-theatrical suggestions is most striking. Time and again he furnishes his correspondents with deliberately humdrum accounts of the turbulent events he witnessed, with everything seeming to

occur at twice remove, as in the following observations from a letter to F. T. Palgrave on 21 June:

It is curious how much like any other city, a city under bombardment looks [...] I wrote you a few lines about ‘the Terror’ but somehow did not send them. Assure yourself that there is nothing to deserve that name [...].

[P.S.] Alas, it is hopeless. – I am doomed to see the burning of Rome, I suppose – The world perhaps in the same day will lose the Vatican and me! (260-1)

This combination of understatement and candour runs throughout Clough’s letters. The following lines to his sister exhibit an almost perverse insensitivity towards the actual events narrated which fade almost to insignificance behind the deflated rhetoric: “Perhaps it will amuse you hereafter to have a letter commenced while guns are firing and, I suppose, men falling, dead and wounded. Such is the case on the other side the Tiber while I peacefully write in my distant chamber with only the sound in my ears” (253). Understatement – i.e. the casual acknowledgement of men falling dead and wounded – and the embedding of the main action within a subordinate clause are devices Clough uses to deliberately create an attitude of indifference and detachment. On the one hand, the effect of this attitude is self-reflexive in that it reveals more about Clough than the nature of the events he witnessed. On the other, it may be pertinent to see in the deliberately affected tone of his letters a sort of prelude for the composition of the poem.

The main motives for the feelings of dejection and apathy that penetrate the heart of nearly everything he wrote in this period are easily explicable. The Clough who arrived in Rome was a man distraught by moral dilemmas and professional predicaments, one who may very well have felt, to quote Claude’s words in the poem, that:

It is a blessing, no doubt, to be rid, at least for a time, of
 All one’s friends and relations [...]
 All the assujettissement of having been what one has been,
 What one thinks one is, or thinks what others suppose one. [...] (170)

Besides his spiritual crises which had caused such friction with the university authorities at Oxford, following his resignation from an Oriel fellowship after his refusal to subscribe to the 39 articles, Clough had witnessed first hand the momentary triumph of the provisional republican government in France a year earlier, only to leave the country a few days before its defeat by a more moderate, conservative force. By 1848, the Chartist movement in England, whose development Clough had also followed with sympathetic interest, had also been finally suppressed. Furthermore, before the recent success of the Whig parliament, the Tories had practically dominated English politics uninterruptedly for half a century. Now already the mood seemed to be swinging back. In January 1849 *Blackwood's* published a damning article entitled "The Year of Revolutions", which severely castigated the liberal policies of the government for having almost completely ruined the country with the total acceptance of free trade and its overturning of every stable principle of British society. Worst of all, it was held guilty for supporting practically every revolutionary cause abroad with the consequence that:

So rapid was the succession of revolutions when the tempest assailed the world last spring (1848), that no human power seemed capable of arresting it; and the thoughtful looked on in mournful and impotent silence, as they would have done on the decay of nature or the ruin of the world. (2)

There were certainly sufficient reasons for Clough's dejected state when he left England's shores that summer of 1849. But although the defeat of the revolution in France may have somewhat deadened his initial enthusiasms, it did not shake the foundations of his ideological principles which remained solidly aligned to the republican cause – there would be no Wordsworthian weeping over ruined churches for him, rather a gnashing of teeth at "how riling it is to be conquered" (267). It seems nevertheless very likely that, by 1849, Clough had lost the little faith in the efficacy of political action he continued to nurture, so that it may be no accident that he chose to cast the main protagonist of his poem in the role of a bored, snobbish and cynical intellectual English tourist, initially indifferent both to the republican cause and the political upheavals

he witnesses. On another level, it may be pertinent to wonder whether Claude is intended as a sort of an alter-ego, or, perhaps more to the point, a full look at the worst aspects of his own scepticism and tendency to abstract himself from life around him. Another possible interpretation may see Claude as a means through which Clough explores thoughts he himself had difficulty in externalizing – questions few critics have posed, let alone answered satisfactorily.

There is surely a nice irony in the fact that the unprecedented freedom Clough discovered whilst composing his poem was during a siege. As Biswas puts it: “he exploded into a new clarity” after realizing “the imprisoning self-definitions into which he had allowed himself to be guided by his responsiveness to the pressures of conformity” (291). Furthermore his change of perspective also allows him to consider his fellow countrymen in a different light. In the poem, Claude frequently castigates English responses to the destiny of Mazzini’s Republic, including such distorted interpretations of Italian events as the biased accounts in *The Times*. As a result, in contrast to Dickens, who could not help but see London when he beheld Rome just five years prior to Clough’s arrival, Claude is made to state that “Rome is better than London because it is other than London” (170). Further on he also self-disparagingly confesses how he and his friend George can only “turn like fools to the English” (170) in their despair for company. Although no such anti-English sentiments are to be detected in Clough’s own letters, it may be pertinent to see him using the poem to voice opinions he would not have readily voiced to his correspondents (including his spatial separation from them).

Canto II pinpoints the key events of the fall of Mazzini’s Republic from the approach of the French troops at Civitavecchia to their final occupation of Rome. The lyrical poem with which it opens evokes a possible spirit of place amid the loss, change and corruption represented by Rome: “Is it an illusion? Or does there a spirit from perfecter ages,/Here, even yet, amid loss, change, and corruption, abide?” (185). This yearning for a pure spirit residing within the urban degradation of Rome contrasts with Claude’s initial sense of its uselessness and decay, with the shift in attitude anticipating his sudden transition from indifference to a fervent sympathy for the

Mazzinian cause, as the melodramatic repetitions of the first-person pronoun and gradual crescendo of the tone of the following lines make only too clear:

I, who avoided it all, am fated, it seems to describe it.
 I, who nor meddle nor make in politics, – I, who sincerely
 Put not my trust in leagues nor any suffrage by ballot
 Never predicted Parisian millenniums, never beheld a
 New Jerusalem coming down dressed like a bride out of heaven
 Right on the Place de la Concorde, – I, nevertheless, let me say it,
 Could in my soul of souls, this day with the Gaul at the gates, shed
 One true tear for thee, thou poor little Roman Republic [...]. (186)

This, however, was not quite Clough's position. In a sense, it may even have been something of the reverse: an initial sympathy for the dictator shading into a somewhat tentative questioning of the man's real nature. On meeting Mazzini, who, in the words of one historian, was supposedly "a man of the heart rather than head" (Mack Smith 151) and had won the sympathy of the English establishment for his plight as a victimized political exile, Clough noted: "He is a less fanatical and fixed-idea sort of man than I had expected. He appeared shiftily and practical enough" (Greenberger 127). It must also be borne in mind, however, that Mazzini had already been severely tried by years of frustrating rebellion. It was an older, shrewder, case-hardened man whom Clough met, one only too aware of the limitations of his triumph. Clough even seemed undaunted by his hero, displaying an inexplicable impatience when, seeking Mazzini's help for a special permit to visit the Vatican, he was kept waiting in an anti-chamber while the man dealt with a French envoy. Yet, on his being received, Mazzini devoted no less than half an hour of his politically precious time to the pestering tourist poet. Admittedly, in a later letter, with French cannons banging at Rome's gates, Clough did have the presence of mind to realize the embarrassment of bothering "the Dictator any further with my trivial English-tourist importunities" (257). There is, significantly, no meeting in the poem between Claude and Mazzini. Although invoked, the real hero of the poem never appears so that Claude is denied any interrelation with him.

Canto II follows the chronological sequence of the actual historical events as reported in Clough’s letters along impressionistic and selective lines, but the perspective also shifts from the general to the specific. In his second letter to Eustace, whilst speculating on the possibility of a French invasion, Claude ponders on the clash between the egotistical interests of the individual self and those of the community at large. His own justification for not participating in the cause (in which he also includes the Roman people themselves) is made on the mere basis of the primal instincts: “On the whole we are meant to look after ourselves; it is certain/Each has to eat for himself, digest for himself, and in general/Care for his own dear life, and see to his own preservation [...]” (187-8). Claude’s cynical conclusion, that however “sweet it may be and decorous, perhaps, for the country to die; but [...] the Romans won’t do it, and I shan’t” (188), not only fails to conceal the cowardice behind his realism, but is also contradicted in the very next letter when, having built barricades to keep out the French army, he wonders: “Will they fight?” this time only to immediately answer “I believe it” (189). However, ironically, in denouncing the war as “vain and ephemeral folly” (189) in order to justify his own position, he does so by contrasting it with what he feels to be of real worth (i.e. “pictures/Statues and antique gems”), that is, the very things he had denounced as “rubbishy” in his first letter!

Claude’s fourth letter in Canto II, in which he abstractedly ponders whether he would have the inclination to save a British female from distress if circumstances demanded it of him, reveals Clough’s irony towards his character at its sharpest. For the very fact of Claude asking such a question at all deliberately subverts the conventional values of the typical Victorian gentleman he supposedly represents. Clough’s hexameters brilliantly emulate the faltering oscillations of his anti-hero’s hypocritical discourse with their skilful incorporation of parenthetical observations and blasé remarks:

Am I prepared to lay down my life for the British female?
Really, who knows? One has bowed and talked, till, little by little,
All the natural heat has escaped of the chivalrous spirit.
Oh, one conformed, of course; but one doesn’t die for good manners
Stab or shoot, or be shot, by way of graceful attention. (189-90)

Besides his obviously flippant tone (particularly evident in the word-choice “female”), Claude’s resistance of any involvement in war is finally ridiculed in the absurdly formal register and comical metonym of the line: “Should I incarnadine ever this inky pacifical finger” (190). His letter continues with a series of questions, rather than answers or justifications and his conclusion whether “all this [...] be but a weak and ignoble refining” (191) further exposes the self-delusive and inconclusive nature of his reflections.

It may be pertinent to wonder to what extent Clough may have had Mazzini at the back of his mind while writing these sequences. For Mazzini himself would not hear of anybody holding a neutral position, and Clough’s ultimately passive sympathy of the man’s cause, also echoed in Claude’s response, was undoubtedly symptomatic of such an attitude. In his essay “On the Condition of Europe” Mazzini is quite adamant in his condemnation of people who are non-committal, stating that to adopt such an attitude is impossible “without falling into moral degradation” (263). The following observations in his essay “Faith and the Future” emerge all the more challengingly as a comment not only of the character of Claude, but surely also of Clough himself:

Analysis can never regenerate the peoples. Analysis is potent to dissolve; impotent to create. Analysis will never lead us further than the theory of individuality, and the triumph of the individual principle could only lead us to a revolution of Protestantism and mere liberty. The Republic is quite another. (9)

It was Mazzini’s complaint that England adopted precisely this passive, neutral position, when it should have been helping those nations to retrieve their national identities. Thus, in a sense, both Clough and Claude, as representatives of England, become the antagonistic protagonists of a silent ideological confrontation played out on a subconscious level. This neutrality leads Clough, both in his letters and his poem, to convey the surprising ordinariness of war, the complete lack of heroic and triumphant tones: “It would seem very small to you if you saw it as I am doing” (253), as he says in one letter. Claude’s fifth letter in Canto II, in which he describes himself walking through the streets of Rome, Murray guidebook in hand, contains a similar sense of the mundane. The

shift to the present tense underlines the limited perspective of the man’s vision, with everything seeming to elude meaning just as it is being narrated:

So we stand in the sun, but afraid of a probable shower;
So we stand and stare, and see, to the left of St Peter’s
Smoke, from the cannon, white – but that is at intervals only –
Black, from a burning house, we suppose [...]
So we watch and wonder; but guessing is tiresome very (192-3)

Clough’s reports of the battles were essentially based on hearsay. One of these episodes refers to the apparent killing of a priest, which he refers to in a letter to F. T. Palgrave dated 4 July:

But a priest who walked and talked publicly in the Piazza Colonna with a Frenchman was undoubtedly killed. I know his friends and saw one of them last night. Poor man, he was quite a liberal ecclesiastic, they tell me: but certainly not a prudent one. (265)

This particular episode is given dramatic prominence in one of the central moments of the poem which questions the whole idea of reportage and its role in creating historical events, however restricted it may be, as in this case, to an ordinary individual:

So I have seen a man killed! An experience that, among others!
Yes, I suppose I have; although I can hardly be certain,
And in a court of justice could never declare I had seen it.
But a man was killed, I am told, in a place where I saw something.
(196)

The whole passage is symptomatic of the paradoxes and ontological uncertainties that characterize Clough’s poetic macrotext. Here the inability to state a fact is comically rendered in the retraction from “I have seen [...] I suppose I have” to “I can hardly be certain”. The accelerated narrative rhythm of the sequence describing the killing is all the more indistinct, uncertain and confusing:

[...] In the middle they drag at something. What is it?
Ha! Bare swords in the air, held up! There seem to be voices
Pleading and hands putting back; official perhaps; but the swords are
Many, and bare in the air. In the air? They descend; they are smiting,

Hewing, chopping – At what? In the air once more upstretched? And
 Is it blood that's on them? Yes, certainly blood! Of whom, then
 Over whom is the cry of this furor of exultation? [...]
 History, Romour of Rumours I leave it to thee to determine! (196-8)

Although Claude definitely witnesses something, he only hears from someone else what has presumably happened. He cannot be certain of the facts – that Clough himself corrects his version of the priest's fate in the very same letter above only to add another story based on hearsay about a man “hewed to pieces for shouting Viva Pio IX, A basso la repubblica” (266) adds further poignancy to the irony of his descriptions of the events in the poem. The fragmented syntax and alternating exclamations and interrogations leave only an indistinct impression of chaotic images. There remains the idea of history as nothing but glorified rumour. Thus, the deliberate pun on “Rome” and “Rumour”, which plays on the semantic interconnection between “Rome”, “rumour” and “History”, suggests that history is nothing more than the ultimate rumour. Since man is incapable of making sense of his own history, it is left to the impersonal forces of History (with a capital H) to ultimately interpret men's destinies.

The background to Clough's poem may seem deeply rooted in contemporary questions, as Arnold would have no doubt complained, but such preoccupations are where it begins, not where it ends. For Clough there is always a direct equation between poetry and life because only by engaging with real life can poetry serve any spiritually beneficent purpose. Neither do the political references themselves constitute the whole story of the poem (most of which is later concerned with Claude's embarrassingly disastrous courting of Mary Trevellyn, as well as containing reflections on other subjects, including art and religion). In a sense, it is true that by filtering events through the perspective of Claude, Clough creates the objective correlative of the turmoil and dilemmas that raged in his own subconscious. But in doing so, he also sheds any blind acceptance of idealisms, political or otherwise, in the attempt to grasp objective, universal truths as well as the truth about his own self.

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“The Last Austrian Who Left Venice”: Anthony Trollope’s Pictures from Italy

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The aim of this paper is to illustrate Anthony Trollope’s contribution to the Victorian representations of Italy. Whereas much is known about his mother’s and brother’s Italian writings, Anthony’s have gone virtually unnoticed. And yet he wrote some fascinating pages on the life in a country he came to know and love during his frequent visits to relations who chose to settle in Florence in 1843 (Heineman 251), and to which he felt deeply attracted.

In his letters to family and friends one finds traces of his longing for Italy once he got back home. In 1851, still in Ireland – long before he gained fame and wealth as a novelist – Trollope lamented the lack of “such a thing as a cheap trip from Florence by which a man could come to London and go back within a fortnight or so” (*Letters* 25). The success of *The Warden* in 1855 gave him the opportunity to enjoy such frequent and leisurely travelling, with Italy as a favourite destination. In his attraction to the country he never abandoned the substantial, solid mode of his diction, built, as Hawthorne reminds us, “on the strength of beef and through the inspiration of ale” (*Letters* 96).

Undying art, Italian skies, the warmth of southern, sunny love, the poetry of the Arno and the cloud clapt Apennines, are beginning again to have all the charms that distance gives. I enjoy these delicacies in England – when I am in Italy in the flesh, my mind runs chiefly on grapes, roast chestnuts, cigars, and lemonade. (*Letters* 127)

These words from a letter to Kate Field, who at the time was living in Florence, wittingly recalls how his pleasures resided in a mingling of art, nature and good food. In his Italian notes the occasional trans-

ports are usually juxtaposed to the enjoyment of the material sides of things. He was not alone in this: Dickens and Robert Browning among others, besides expatiating on the natural beauty of Italy's landscapes and treasures, celebrated the good Italian wines and even turned *lasagne* into a poetical specimen as Browning does in "The Englishman in Italy".

With lasagne so tempting to swallow
 In slippery ropes,
 And gourd fried in great purple slices,
 That colour of popes. (97-100)

Trollope's pictures from Italy must be taken in a metaphorical sense for the picturesque and the visual are not part of his canon. In his fiction he had always been more interested on how individuals cope with what happens to them rather than where they happen to be. Whenever he indulged in descriptions of things and places, they functioned as the mirror of the protagonists' gaze and not that of the author. As Kendrick argues, "the stillness of aesthetic contemplation, which for the Jamesian-Paterian critics of the late nineteenth century and after is the aim and value of all art, did not exist for Trollopien realism rooted in the dynamics of the self and society relationship" (4). Like Dickens's, his fictional world remained preeminently insular even when the action was staged abroad.

Trollope's pictures operate as a metaphor of how people could be affected once they found themselves in a reality, which was simultaneously part of a common heritage, the European tradition, yet sufficiently external to British habits of life to appear almost exotic. The aesthetic raptures of Ruskinian effusions and the dream-like quality of Dickensian descriptions are miles away from his factual portrayal of the present. Neither was Trollope a tourist-novelist like Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley or his own brother Tom (Churchill 129-146). With Italy as probably the country about which more books have been printed than any other, Trollope could count on a mass of existing literature as a subtext on which to build his stories, whose knowledge to a large extent he shared with his own audience. Moreover he possessed firsthand information about contemporary life and politics that went well beyond that of the average traveller of the generation of Britons who invaded the

peninsula after the Napoleonic wars. Most artists and intellectuals still moving in the wake of the secular tradition of the Grand Tour were seeking aesthetic experiences and the heritage of the past, often prompted by their newly acquired enthusiasm for the Italian cause of which Byron and Shelley had been the heralds. Trollope was scrutinizing the present.

The first question to posit is whether Trollope’s outlook adds anything to the Victorian conception of Italy, which for his compatriots was, above all, the favourite destination of honeymooners and middle-class travellers, the land of love and beauty. I will argue it does when we consider his peculiar stance as a tourist. He kept his eyes wide open. His admiration for the country did not lead him either to blind adoration or to a bigoted refusal of modes of life alien to British sensibility. In his rejection of an a-critical reading of reality, Trollope made fun of the stereotyped image of Italy that nourished Victorian expectations.

There is a romance to us still in the name of Italy, which a near view of many details in the country fails to realise. Shall we say that a journey through Lombardy is about as interesting as one through the flats of Cambridgeshire and the fens of Norfolk? And the station of Bologna is not an interesting spot in which to spend an hour or two, although it may be conceded that provisions may be had there much better than any that can be procured at our own railway stations. (*He Knew He Was Right* 705)

According to the categories of British travellers analysed by James Buzard, Trollope would fall into that of the anti-tourist tourist (80-154). The difference between the anti-tourist and a tourist marks the class distinction rooted between the British gentleman and the common man (the ladies being a mere appendage to them), that is to say, between quality, rank and culture, furbished with a good classical background and familiar with the language, able to appreciate the art and the place and to recognize the ordinariness of the bourgeois social climbers, newcomers to the enjoyments of the Grand Tour. Though not himself a snob, Trollope looked down upon, through ironic comments and cutting remarks, British tourists who supinely following their Baedekers regardless of personal taste

and choice, “doing” all the arts and beauty sites not for their own personal enjoyment but as a must in their social milieu.

He was in good company in decrying the banality of many English travellers. In *He Knew He Was Right*, for example, Trollope depicts how Sir Marmaduke Rowley and his family share the same “tourist’s disregard for the sights they were supposed to see” (Pfister 4) attributed by Dickens to Mr and Mrs Davis in *Pictures from Italy*, who “were in every tomb, and every church, and every ruin, and every Picture gallery; and I hardly ever observed Mrs Davis to be silent for a moment. Deep underground, high up in St Peter’s, out on the Campagna, and stifling in the Jews’ quarter, Mrs Davies turned up, all the same [...] I don’t think she ever saw anything, or even looked at anything” (373). Trollope figures the Rowleys in a similar manner:

From thence they went, still by rail, over the Apennines, and unfortunately slept during the whole time. The courier had assured them that if they would only look out they would see the castles of which they had read in novels; but the day had been very hot, and Sir Marmaduke had been cross, and Lady Rowley had been weary, and so not a castle was seen. “Pistoia, me lady, this,” said the courier opening the door; “to stop half an hour.” “Oh, why was it not Florence?” Another hour and a half! So they all went to sleep again, and were very tired when they reached the beautiful city. (705)

Once he reaches his destination, Sir Marmaduke finds occasion to complain that “a breakfast without eatable butter was not to be considered a breakfast in a good hotel”. An exhausted Lady Rowley spends her time “breaking her neck looking up at the inimitable glories of local monuments” and staring at paintings she could not care less about, actually hunting for the noble, wealthy Charles Glascock, her youngest daughter’s old flame, a true connoisseur of art and Italian life, she hopes to force her daughter to marry.

By this time the picture galleries, the churches, and the palaces in Florence had nearly all been visited. Poor Lady Rowley had dragged herself wearily from sight to sight, hoping always to meet with Mr. Glascock, ignorant of the fact that residents in a town do not pass their mornings habitually in looking after pictures. (709)

Charles Glascock, the future Lord Peterborough, represents the genuine article of the best aristocracy, the kind of visitor who deserves to understand Italy. Marmaduke Rowley, having only acquired a title among the lower gentry, is an easy butt for Trollope’s gibes.

Trollope aimed some of his darts at the widespread mercenary habit of cramming fiction with irrelevant guidebook intrusions that had little bearing on the actual development of the stories, as in *Can You Forgive Her?*:

I am not going to describe the Vavasors’ Swiss tour. It would not be fair on my readers. ‘Six weeks in the Bernese Oberland, by a party of three’, would have but very small chance of success in the literary world at present, and I should consider myself to be dishonest if I attempted to palm off such matter on the public in the pages of a novel. It is true that I have just returned from Switzerland, and should find such a course of writing very convenient. But I dismiss the temptation as strong as it is. *Retro age Satanas*. No living man or woman any longer wants to be told anything of the Grimsell or of the Gemmi. Ludgate Hill is now-a-days more interesting than the Jungfrau. (43)

The passage introduces the Swiss tour of the Alps by the heroine Alice Vavasor at a crucial time in her life. Trollope’s commentary originates from the notion of coherence governing his conception of the art of fiction, which demanded that even in a commercial enterprise – such as the triple-decker – descriptions and insertions should fit in with the main plot. The audience he had in mind was the well-educated middle class, knowledgeable enough to be familiar with the names of Europe’s best known sites, whether they had been there or not, a presupposition that proved useful in dispensing with supplying general information. He applied to his Italian tales the same technique employed in his English novels.

With the exception of “The Last Austrian Who Left Venice”, Trollope’s Italian stories focus on the relationship between the individual and society in British communities residing in Italy, analysed by a shrewd authorial voice. The aesthetic experience of the arts is rarely brought in to shape the characters, while landscape descriptions occasionally perform the romantic task of stressing the empathy between nature and man’s sensibility.

What can also be seen in Trollope's canon is the difference between his conventional handling of Italy and its customs and its innovative elaboration in literary terms, which played a significant part in the cosmopolitan trends that marked the development of late Victorian narrative. Italy crops up now and again as the destination of newly married couples and artists and as a safe haven for gentlemen and ladies in straitened circumstances who could manage a better life there on little money. Most of the allusions are not particularly original and could be dismissed as irrelevant did they not form part of that subtle web that helps to outline the process of the self-deception or self-definition set in motion by the encounter of the Otherness concealed in a new and unknown culture (Pfister 4).

Like most Victorians, for Trollope "the constructions of Italy that inform the Italian experience and its representations are based on an interconnected set of oppositions setting up Italy against Britain" (Pfister 5). He availed himself of a variegated array of themes and treatments. We shall start from the least original of them, the elaborations of platitudes. The uses and abuses of Italy and Italians had been a common topic in popular fiction that goes back to the early gothic novels, reaching down to *The Duchess of Malfi*. The stereotype of the Italian adventurer and cheat, an old inheritance from the previous centuries, recurs on several occasions in Trollope's fiction: the lovers of the old debauched husband of the unlucky Jennifer Lovel in *Lady Anna*; the young Duke Di Crinola in *Marion Fay*; and the comical secondary character in the less known *Kept in the Dark*, Francesca Antifiorla, "whose Noble ancestors, well-known in Italian history, include a Fiasco and a Disgrazia" (Super 412). Trollope, however, did not exploit cheap prejudices and strategic devices for their own sake. He was not interested in Italians' supposed lack of moral sense (they never take on a major role – they remain undefined presences, unsubstantial and not at all credible), but he employed their Italian-ness to disclose the hidden side of the English mind and heart once the home ties were loosened. When the action is set in a British context, Italy operates as "a perceptual foil of comparisons and contrasts" (Pfister 4), exposing the weaknesses of so-called Italianate British and Anglicized Italians.

The best examples of this can be found in the adventures and misadventures of the Stanhope family in *Barchester Towers* (1857) and in the sad story of Mary Roden’s marriage in *Marion Fay*. Madeline Stanhope’s unfortunate marriage can be read as a new version of the old intrigue of the girl seduced by a villain, the mysterious Paolo Neroni she married while living in Italy, to be left an abandoned wife, a cripple and a mother six months after the wedding. But it is not so: however charming and enticing, Madeline, the *signora*, was not an innocent English rose: she knew what she was about when among her many suitors she chose to marry

a man of no birth and no property, a mere captain in the Pope’s guard, one who had come up to Milan either simply as an adventurer or else as a spy, a man of harsh temper and oily manners, mean in figure, swarthy in face, and so false in words as to be hourly detected, need not now be told. When the moment for doing so came, she had probably no alternative. He, at any rate, had become her husband, and after a prolonged honeymoon among the lakes, they had gone together to Rome, the papal captain having vainly endeavoured to induce his wife to remain behind him. (66)

Trollope leaves us in no doubt as to the limited sense of decency that shapes life in the Stanhope family. Here, as elsewhere, the Italian experience is the turning point that brings to the surface what lies inside rather devious English figures. When the family returns to Barchester, where the Reverend Dr Stanhope has been summoned by the new Bishop to resume his neglected duties after twelve years spent in idleness on Lake Como, while still drawing his income from the Church, his musing on his daughter’s behaviour betrays his own questionable morality and his full awareness of her failings.

It was not because Madeline was a cripple that he shrank from seeing her make one of the bishop’s guests; but because he knew that she would practise her accustomed lures, and behave herself in a way that could not fail of being distasteful to the propriety of Englishwomen. These things had annoyed but not shocked him in Italy. There they had shocked no one; but here in Barchester, here among his fellow parsons, he was ashamed that they should be seen. Such had been his feelings, but he repressed them. What if his brother clergymen were shocked! They could not take from him his

preferment because the manners of his married daughter were too free. (76)

The theme of a young woman victim to a dishonourable seducer is also present in the family history of George Roden, in *Marion Fay*, who discovers that he is the son of a Venetian Duke, the reprobate of an ancient, noble race, the Di Crinolas. During a trip to Italy, his mother Mary, the orphan daughter of a respectable, wealthy family, fell in love with a handsome, gallant young aristocrat, the heir to a Dukedom, who turned out to be mercenary and deceitful. After squandering his wife's dowry, he abandoned her and their little son, insinuating that their marriage was not valid as he was already married. Naïve and sentimental, Mary continued to love the lost husband from whom she heard nothing until the day he died. In the novel, Trollope rather subtly elaborates on an extremely popular theme, that of the inexperienced passionate English girl unconsciously reacting to the awakening of the senses – something Forster masterly explores in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*.

In this story the young Duke is not painted as an evil character, but rather as an attractive, irresponsible rascal. His immorality is counterbalanced by the dignity of his noble but somewhat impoverished father, who refunds the money and helps the wife and her son to return to Britain. The story is told with gentle irony. The Di Crinola affair acts as a pretext for satirizing the fascination that ancient Italian aristocracy exerted on the British. Lord Trafford and his family, who had ostracized George Roden for as long as they thought him a mere clerk, upon the discovery of his noble descent, are ready to accept him as a son-in-law, regardless of what sort of a man his father had been.

The inveterate snobbery of the English upper classes remains a leitmotiv Trollope makes fun of on several occasions. In *Phineas Redux* Mrs Attenbury, an amateur in art and a *dilettante* in international concerns, posing as a woman of great culture, tries to marry her younger sister, Adelaide Palliser, who is in love with an English gentleman of slender means, to an Italian nobleman.

Now Mrs. Attenbury painted pictures, copied Madonnas, composed sonatas, corresponded with learned men in Rome, Berlin, and Boston, had been the intimate friend of Cavour, had paid a visit to

Garibaldi on his island with the view of explaining to him the real condition of Italy, – and was supposed to understand Bismarck. Was it possible that a woman who so filled her own life should accept hunting as a creditable employment for a young man, when it was admitted to be his sole employment? And, moreover, she desired that her sister Adelaide should marry a certain Count Brudi, who, according to her belief, had more advanced ideas about things in general than any other living human being. (*Phineas Redux* 186-87)

Even when introducing disreputable sorts of people, Trollope carefully balances his praise and disapproval between the English and the Italians, avoiding clichés. With some rare exceptions, Italians correspond to narrative functions rather than fully-fledged actors. As for the environment, though Trollope does not devote much space to luscious descriptions, there is something sensuous about the atmosphere surrounding the location of the story, whether Rome, Florence or the Northern lakes. These serve as appropriate places for “socially unbecoming” love affairs between young English couples to flourish: Adelaide Palliser and Gerald Maule in *Phineas Redux*, for example, or Lady Mary Palliser and Frank Tregear in *The Duke’s Children*.

In recreating an Italian milieu Trollope relies on naming celebrated localities and monuments to rouse vivid images in the minds of his readers. Scattered hints, strategically placed, recall the backdrops against which his characters encounter their adventures: the Campanile in Florence; the moonlit gloomy arches of the Coliseum; the sweet sunsets on Lake Como; Turin, as “new and parallelogrammatic as an American town”; the excellent Tuscan wine produced by Baron Ricasoli. As for the locals, little is said about them. With the exception of “The Last Austrian Who Left Venice”, which narrates the story of a Venetian family and their Austrian friend at the time of the third war of independence, native Italians act as figures in an exotic *altrove* surrounding British and American visitors. Once their destination has been reached, they take refuge in the safe haven of the local Anglo-American colony, a small inward-looking world where everyone knows each other. They all stick together, parading Victorian middle-class morality and gossiping about the way their compatriots, especially the ladies, behave (or rather misbehave) once away from home. In a nutshell,

one can sense an anticipation of the Pensione Bertolini in Forster's *A Room with a View* (26); Trollope explores the condition of the British abroad through a gaze that acquires a peculiar depth absent elsewhere.

"Mrs General Talboys" takes place in such an atmosphere, in 1859, with a narrator who acts as the spokesperson of the group.

We had at the time a small set at Rome consisting chiefly of English and Americans, who habitually met at one another's rooms, and spent many of our evening hours in discussing Italian politics. We were, most of us, painters, poets, novelists, or sculptors – perhaps I should say would be painters, poets, novelists and sculptors, aspirant hoping to become one day recognised; and among us Mrs Talboys took her place naturally enough on account of a pretty taste she had for painting. (56)

The would-be artist was a common figure among the foreigners who settled in Italy. Trollope had a chance to come across a few of them while staying with his mother in Florence, in the multifarious crowd she used to entertain at Villino Trollope, for Frances had a reputation for not being too choosy in selecting her visitors.

The charm Italy exercises over the female heart is at the core of the plot. The story tells of sexually improper behaviour discreetly hinted at, making fun of a silly middle-aged woman. Travelling with a young daughter while her husband remained in England, Mrs Talboys is carried away with enthusiasm for the work of an attractive Irish sculptor, Charles O'Brien, unaware of the sexual provocation her conduct implies. During a picnic just outside Rome near the tomb of Cecilia Metella on "a delicious Italian day", the ideal time for romantic escape, she and her admirer wander away from the group. Suddenly she returns deeply disturbed by the young man's daring advances. The story closes with an amusing discussion among the men of the group, including the Irish sculptor, at the expense of the silly lady.

The Cecilia Metella episode is one of the rare occasions when Trollope indulges in a visual rendering of the external space:

Of all the environs of Rome this is, on a fair day, the most enchanting; and here perhaps, among a world of tombs, thoughts and almost memories of the old, old days come upon one with the greatest

force. The grandeur of Rome is best seen and understood from beneath the walls of the Coliseum, and its beauty among the pillars of the Forum and the arches of the Sacred Way; but its history and fall become more palpable to the mind and more clearly realised out here among the tombs, where the eyes rest upon the mountains, whose shades were cool to the old Romans as to us, than anywhere within the walls of the city. Here we look out at the same Tivoli and the same Praeneste glittering in the sunshine, embowered among the far-off valleys, which were dear to them; and the blue mountains have not crumbled away into ruins. Within Rome itself we can see nothing as they saw it. (68)

Natural and artistic objects, here, as elsewhere, become prominent when what Forster calls in *A Room with a View* “the pernicious charm of Italy” starts to work: the fascination of the place is suggestive of a sensual experience of which the heroine is frightened. The very bland and discrete sexual allusions made Thackeray, who at the time was in charge of *The Cornhill Magazine*, refuse to publish the story on moral grounds, fearful of the response of his priggish readers. Trollope would not have objected to being turned down for editorial reasons, but strongly resented the accusation of indecency levelled at him: “I will not allow that I am indecent”, he wrote in November of 1860, “and profess that squeamishness – in so far that it is squeamishness and not delicacy – should be disregarded by a writer” (*Letters* 127-128). When shortly afterwards the story appeared in *The London Review*, the audience’s reactions were far from encouraging. An enraged letter of condemnation written to Laurence Oliphant, the editor of the magazine, reads: “You must make your election whether you will adapt your paper to the taste of men of intelligence and high moral feeling *or* to that of a person of morbid imagination and a *low tone of morals*” (140-41). Looking at “Mrs General Talboys” today, a story written with incredible levity and humour, which was not much appreciated at the time, it seems almost incredible that even such a prudish milieu as the Victorian was, or pretended to be, could be shocked by the lady’s misadventure in Rome. But probably it was the very levity and humour about an imaginary female transgression that shocked members of the old guard afraid of the notion that respectable women could pursue sex for its own sake. The proposal of a romantic

trip to Naples, as the possible outcome of what Mrs Talboys had unconsciously been seeking, was probably felt to be a threat to existing sexual codes thus disturbing the audience's peace of mind as much as it had frightened Mrs Talboys's sense of decency. Moreover the men's hilarious comments addressed to her would-be-lover might have sounded sacrilegious towards matrimony and family life in a strait-laced context.

A different atmosphere surrounds the Italian sections of *He Knew He Was Right*, which take place in Tuscany in the 1860s. This melodramatic novel deals with a variety of complex feelings and emotions, from the tragic dimension of the Trevelyans' miserable married life to the serene quality of the relationship between Charles Glascock and Caroline Spalding. The Italian scenery serves a double purpose: it witnesses the folly of Louis Trevelyan's unmotivated jealousy of his wife in a bleak corner of the Sieneese countryside, and it relates the blossoming of the love story between an English aristocrat and a wealthy American heiress. Florence and its beauties form the ideal background for the idyll between the two lovers, while nothing could better suit Trevelyan's maniacal obsession than the desolation surrounding villa Casalunga, where, as James suggested, this nineteenth-century Lear was raging mad (*Anthony Trollope* 1351).

For Trollope, Florence stands as an absolute value: "Late on that same evening, they met Mr Glascock close to the Duomo, under the shade of the Campanile. He had come out as they had done, to see by moonlight that loveliest of all works made by man's hands" (377). The loveliness of the Florentine setting enchants the visitors. Beauty may not need be detailed, but the unexpected and the unknown demand a grim, detailed, analytical description. He presents Casalunga's surroundings as deprived of all attraction:

Olives and vines have pretty names, and call up associations of landscape and beauty. But here they were in no way beautiful. The ground beneath them was turned up, and brown, and arid, so that there was not a blade of grass to be seen. On some furrows the maize or Indian corn was sprouting, and there were patches of growth of other kinds, each patch closely marked by its own straight lines; and there were narrow paths, so constructed as to take as little room as possible. But all that had been done had been done for economy, and nothing for beauty. (733)

And, later:

No one could live alone in such a place, in such weather, without being driven to madness. The soil was parched and dusty, as though no drop of rain had fallen there for months. The lizards, glancing in and out of the broken walls, added to the appearance of heat. The vegetation itself was of a faded yellowish green, as though the glare of the sun had taken the fresh colour out of it. There was a noise of grasshoppers and a hum of flies in the air, hardly audible, but all giving evidence of the heat. Not a human voice was to be heard, nor the sound of a human foot, and there was no shelter; but the sun blazed down full upon everything. (867)

The wilderness of Louis Trevelyan’s refuge in what was thought of as a fertile part of central Italy connects the dryness of the landscape to his own arid heart in a sudden romantic flight that enriches Trollope’s mode of representation. The bleakness extends to envelop the nearby Siena, or so the town appears to the eyes of the young, generous, inbred Hugh Stanbury. Stanbury has travelled all the way from Britain to help the Rowley family to arrange the return home of their mad son-in-law. As a newcomer to the pleasures of tourism, he does not care much for having to spend an idle day there.

On the intervening day, the Monday, Stanbury had no occupation whatever, and he thought that since he was born no day had ever been so long. Siena contains many monuments of interest, and much that is valuable in art, – having had a school of painting of its own, and still retaining in its public gallery specimens of its school, of which as a city it is justly proud. There are palaces there to be beaten for gloomy majesty by none in Italy. There is a cathedral which was to have been the largest in the world, and than which few are more worthy of prolonged inspection. The town is old, and quaint, and picturesque, and dirty, and attractive, – as it becomes a town in Italy to be. But in July all such charms are thrown away. In July Italy is not a land of charms to an Englishman. Poor Stanbury did wander into the cathedral, and finding it the coolest place in the town, went to sleep on a stone step. He was awoken by the voice of the priests as they began to chant the vespers. The good-natured Italians had let him sleep, and would have let him sleep till the doors were closed for the night. (878)

The stress Trollope places on the gloomy majesty of its palaces casts a dark shadow on the whole scene. Back in Florence the drama gives way to comedy. The resident Anglo-Americans are subjected to the witty impertinence of the narrator, who relates their comfortable life at the expense of Mrs Spalding, the American legatee's wife, and her social ambitions.

Everybody meets everybody in Florence every day. Carry and Livy Spalding had met Mr Glascock twice before the dinner at their uncle's house, so that they met at dinner quite as intimate friends. Mrs Spalding had very large rooms, up three flights of stairs, on the Lungarno. The height of her abode was attributed by Mrs Spalding to her dread of mosquitoes. She had not yet learned that people in Florence require no excuse for being asked to walk up three flights of stairs. The rooms, when they were reached, were very lofty, floored with what seemed to be marble, and were of a nature almost to warrant Mrs Spalding in feeling that nature had made her more akin to an Italian countess than to a matron of Nubbly Creek, State of Illinois, where Mr Spalding had found her and made her his own. (431)

Elsewhere the space devoted to the descriptions of the elegant lodgings in Italian palaces rented by upper-class British and Americans creates an estranged, rarefied atmosphere, where people coming from two worlds apart, still sharing an ancient stock and language, act and move in a universe not their own at the intersection of three cultures. It sounds like a very Jamesian situation were it not for the relegation of the few Italian nobles who attend social functions almost to a decorative role, like the statues in the hall and the paintings hanging on the wall.

The Anglo-American Tuscan passages in *He Knew He Was Right*, a novel Henry James reviewed very favourably, no doubt had some bearing on his late appreciation of an author he had initially labelled as a dull bore, but eventually came to consider "one of the writers who have helped the heart of man to know itself". Together with "Mrs General Talboys", *He Knew He Was Right* adumbrates in setting and dialogical strategies the Jamesian and Forsterian environment of their Italian novels. The common matrix was detected quite soon: as Stephen Wall and George Thomson observed, the Italian scenes of cosmopolitan life portrayed "with a witty and urbane exuberance"

anticipate “Henry James’s much more sophisticated exercises, and even such later developments as Forster’s early novels” (Thomson 27-46; Wall 354-56).¹

“The Last Austrian Who Left Venice”, published in *Good Words* in January 1867, moves on a different level. It came out at the time when the Risorgimento had become a fashionable topic in British fiction. After the unsuccessful insurrection in 1848, several novels had appeared in Britain where the Italian fight for independence was the stage on which romantic heroes and heroines loved and died, among them *Lorenzo Benoni* (1853) and *Dr. Antonio* (1855), both by Giovanni Ruffini, and *Sandra Belloni* (1864) and its sequel *Vittoria* (1867), by George Meredith (Churchill 132-36). Their popularity opened the British market even to such a mediocre novel as Garibaldi’s *Clelia*, which came out in English under the title of *The Rule of the Monk* in 1870. Published at the same time as its first Italian edition, the work received quite undeserved praise in an article in *The Times* by a most sympathetic reviewer (Griffiths 86). Of all of Trollope’s stories, only “The Last Austrian Who Left Venice” belongs to this school of fiction; elsewhere references to the political situation serve only to complete the picture, adding a finishing touch to the local colour. Italian affairs being a controversial item in the political news of the day, Trollope had no need to expand on the subject, as both contemporary fiction and journalism kept their readers well informed. The occasional, accurate and quite correct Italian words and phrases sprinkled in the text betray a good mastery of the language and a sound insight into national customs. When defining “caution a marked trait of the Italian character”, the narrator turns an ancient proverb “Chi va piano, va sano e va lontano” into English “Who goes softly goes soundly” (“Last Austrian” 58). His writings show a concern and a respect for the new nation, uncommon among most of his fellow authors, who were usually far more attracted by the culture and the arts of the past or fascinated by the romantic side of the nineteenth-century revolutions. Trollope’s different response to Italy may be in part due to the time of its composition. A gap of over ten meaningful years separate his Italian stories from Dickens’s

¹ For additional discussion on James’s response to Trollope see Michie.

Pictures from Italy, the first volumes of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, and Barrett Browning's *Casa Guidi Windows*, that is to say, from the literature written during the abortive revolts of the 1840s, which made the final outcome of the struggle against Austria very uncertain. The Italy of which Trollope writes belongs to the latter part of the Risorgimento. Doubts about its capacity to gain freedom had been dispelled, with Piedmont gaining European standing after the Crimean war and Florence acting as the capital of a new nation before the fall of Rome.

In the tale, the reader is thrown into the midst of the turmoil that pervades Venice on the eve of the third war of independence. An abrupt shift in perspective turns the Italian situation into the pivot of the story. The English visitor to the country, that ever present intermediary in Victorian fiction, had vanished. The narrator keeps himself in the background and only occasionally reminds his audience that what is happening pertains to a world that is not their own. The two young protagonists, Carlo, a young Venetian lawyer and a follower of Garibaldi, and Hubert, an Austrian officer garrisoned in Venice, on opposing sides and yet linked by a deep friendship, act from within an Italian context, and their vicissitudes show the seamy side of the Risorgimento affecting their public and private lives. Trollope succeeds in presenting the disillusionment and tension of a world torn by internal fighting, confronted with a war lost on the battlefield and won at the table of diplomatic dealings. Enthusiasm and dejection connote the actions of the last *Garibaldini* whose epitome is to be found in Carlo.

The story is set between Venice and Verona. Venice, far from the battlefield, preserves an apparent calmness, while Verona, the headquarters of the Austrian troops, is turned into a huge military camp where soldiers march and men suffer and die in the camp hospital. It is where Hubert lies wounded. Venice is the place of private emotions, of Carlo's family, of Hubert's love for his sister Nina, and of the two young men's quarrel over the forthcoming war. The city and its canals are painted with a few bold strokes that depict a *sestiere* off the beaten track, offering a safe haven to two antagonistic friends.

There is a certain hotel or coffee-house, or place of general public entertainment in Venice, kept by a German, and called the Hotel Bauer, probably from the name of the German who keeps it. It stands near the Church of St Moses, behind the grand piazza, between that and the great canal, in a narrow intricate throng of little streets, and is approached by a close dark water-way which robs it of any attempt at a hotel grandeur. Nevertheless it is a large and commodious house, at which good dinners may be eaten at prices somewhat lower than are compatible with the grandeur of the Grand Canal. It used to be much affected by Germans, and, had perhaps, acquired among Venetians a character of being attached to Austrian interests.

There was not much in this, or Carlo Pepé would not have frequented the house, even in company of his friend Von Vincke. (60)

However, the environment around them was anything but amicable. In discussing Italian political affairs Trollope showed the same expertise and shrewdness he had shown in his novels about British politics. He was fully aware that the national sentiment, then at its height, demanded emancipation from foreign rule even in those areas where the government could not be thought of as particularly reactionary and where the administrative and economic system worked.

In the spring and early summer of the year last past – the year 1866, – the hatred felt by the Venetians towards the Austrian soldiers who held their city in thralldom, had reached its culminating point. For years this hatred had been very strong; how strong can hardly be understood by those who never recognised that fact that there had been, so to say, no mingling of the conquered and the conquerors, no process of assimilation.

Venice as a city was as purely Italian as though its barracks were filled with no Hungarian long-legged soldiers, and its cafes crowded with no white-coated Austrian officers. And the regiments which held the town, lived as completely after their own fashion as though they were quartered in Pest, or Prague, or Vienna, – with the exception, that in Venice they were enabled, and indeed, from circumstances were compelled – to exercise a palpable ascendancy which belonged to them nowhere else. They were masters and, as masters, they were as separate as the gaoler is separated from the prisoner. (56)

When rumours of the forthcoming war break out, many young volunteers slip stealthily out of Venice to join the Italian front, Carlo among them. He was to return disheartened and disillusioned: “It at last became a fact, that any man from the province could go and become a volunteer under Garibaldi if he pleased, and very many did go. History will say that they were successful, – but their success certainly was not glorious” (68).

Like many British intellectuals, Trollope sided with the Italians against the Austrians; his admiration for Garibaldi and his followers, however, did not prevent him from realizing how the emotional appeal for national unification had made the Italians blind to the actual difficulties they were to encounter and hence unprepared for disillusion and defeat. Garibaldi was a thorn in the Italian government’s side.

That he should be successful was neither intended nor desired. He was, in fact, – then, as he had been always, since the days in which he gave Naples to Italy, – simply a stumbling-block in the way of the king, the king’s ministers, and the king’s generals [...]. What should be done with Garibaldi and his army? So they sent him away up into the mountains, where his game of play might at any rate detain him for some weeks; and in the meantime everything might get themselves arranged by the benevolent and omnipotent interference of the emperor. (68)

The awakening from the heroic myth of the Venetian youth ready to die for their country to the bitter reality of political intrigues is effectively portrayed in the final part of the story, not only through Carlo’s emotional outburst against the Italians, once he discovered the political game behind the scenes, but also through the narrator’s chilling comment on Victor Emmanuel’s speedy entry into and exit out of Venice, “with as little of real triumph as ever attended a king’s progress through a new province” (73). Siding with Garibaldi, Trollope was in keeping with the spirit of his time. Then at the height of his popularity in Britain, Garibaldi’s fame in Italy, however, had started to waver after the defeat of Mentana (Griffiths 86). The story gains strength from the sense of journalistic immediacy and verve with which it was written and from the clear perspective of the future awaiting the new nation.

Trollope’s keen interest in Italian politics continued. In a correspondence from Rome in September 1875 to the *Liverpool Mercury*, he provided a vivid portrayal of the situation the Italian Government had to face at home: financial difficulties in getting through Parliament the *pareggio*, that is, the balance of receipt and expenditures; widespread brigandage in the south; and the revolutionary “tendency towards that form of republicanism we call ‘red’ prevalent among some glorious veterans of the Risorgimento” (*The Tireless Traveller* 21). His report rings true. In debating the conflicting sides that contributed to Italian unification, he returns once again to Garibaldi, at the time a member of parliament. Although “No braver man, no more patriotic, more chivalrously devoted to freedom, ever lived”, Trollope had to admit Garibaldi could be a threat to Italian politics.

The national feeling respecting him is so strong, the idolatry with which he is regarded by the populace is so perfect a worship, that it is also impossible that they should not flatter him, and at any rate appear to agree with him. A ministry could not exist against which Garibaldi should lift his hand with a determination to oppose it to the death. A ministry could do almost anything to which Garibaldi would give an undeviating and determined support. Then, some may ask, why should not Garibaldi be minister for his country? No man could be found less able to fill such a situation, or less willing. He is absolutely without personal ambition, and I think I may say with almost the same certainty, without any comprehension of political affairs. (19-20)

The liberal-conservative Trollope, while admitting that Garibaldi did more for the unification of the country than Cavour ever did, could not but fear what he called the old hero’s subversive views. He had no illusions about the evils that needed to be eradicated before Italy could take her place among the modern European states.

Trollope’s matter-of-fact version of the Italian struggle for independence diverges from the laudatory approach prevailing in British literary texts of the period, which lasted a long time – as the publication of *English Songs of Italian Freedom* collected by G. M. Trevelyan in 1911 testifies. The general tendency of historians and the late romantics, such as Swinburne and Meredith, was to praise what Riall identifies as the “often-imagined glories of the Risorgimento” (2).

Trollope wrote of the nation as an active force, no matter how new to democracy or how torn by internal problems, less fascinating perhaps than the Italy of romance but closer to modernity. His realistic imagination created a truly Victorian representation of how he constructed Italy, turning an unromantic approach into an artistic object.

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Genova La Superba in Novels by Giovanni Ruffini and Henrietta Jenkin

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After the success of Ruffini's first novel, the autobiographical *Lorenzo Benoni* in 1853, the publisher Thomas Constable asked for a sequel about the patriotic hero in exile. But in his chastened disillusionment with Italian politics, Ruffini believed that the fervent patriot called Lorenzo Benoni no longer existed and so his story could not be continued. An implicit sequel was nevertheless published in 1861 in the novel *Who Breaks – Pays* by Henrietta Jenkin. This novel concerns the exiled Italian patriot called Giuliani, evidently based on Ruffini, who then lives in Paris. Whereas Ruffini's novel ends with the hero's hairbreadth escape from Genoa in 1833, Jenkin's novel concludes with his return from Paris to Genoa in 1848 and with the Genoese tumults of 1849.

Both novels convey the sights, sounds and manners of Genova La Superba. In Ruffini's case, the beautiful and the squalid aspects of the heartbreaking city, in which the protagonist grows to maturity, also remind us of Dickensian cities. Besides the Genoa of *Pictures from Italy*, Ruffini seems to allude to the London that so fascinated him in *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*. The city, with its labyrinthine streets and its sinister adult predators upon innocent children, is as menacing to the newly arrived Lorenzo as London has been to young Oliver and David.

More pertinent to my topic than local colour and urban topography, however, are political factors that define the Genoese identity. The proud independence of the ancient Republic of Genoa ended with Napoleon's conquest in 1797. The city was merged with the Republic of Liguria and formally subjected to the French Empire in 1805. Ten years later, the Congress of Vienna decreed the annexa-

tion of Liguria, including Genoa, to the Kingdom of Sardinia and Piedmont. Thereafter, many Genoese resented not only the French but even more bitterly the Piedmontese House of Savoy, which brutally ruled Genoa as conquered territory.

In addition to its fictional elements, to which I shall return, *Lorenzo Benoni* offers useful indications about the Genoese political climate during the early Risorgimento. Ruffini's narrator believes that "elements of dissatisfaction were [...] more abundant in the ancient Genoese territory than in any other Italian province". For besides the "purely Italian, or anti-Austrian feeling" that prevailed elsewhere in Italy and aimed at "the expulsion of the foreigner", the Genoese nourished a "purely municipal feeling, which looked simply to the overthrow of the intruding Piedmontese Government". While "the enlightened and cultivated classes" of Genoa may have shared the pan-Italian enthusiasm of the times, "the anti-Piedmontese spirit was predominant" "in the popular classes, and among the old patricians" (Ruffini, *Benoni* 243-44).

Of course many Genoese citizens collaborated for motives of self-interest with the Piedmontese rulers. Ruffini's analysis thus traces the intense hostility between the upholders of Piedmontese and, even more significantly, clerical tyranny, on the one hand, and the idealistic liberals and republicans, on the other. The novel traces the antagonisms in miniature during the juvenile protagonist's scholastic career in religious institutions. The hero emerges from the start as a rebel against tyranny, and his experiences at school and university constitute an education in how to conceive, organize and prosecute campaigns of liberation from both blatant and subtle forms of oppression. The meeting with his fellow university student Fantasio, based upon Giuseppe Mazzini, is decisive in the formation of the political revolutionary. Fantasio relates their own political conspiracy to the larger European cultural conflict being manifested in events such as the publication of Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* and the stormy Parisian reception of Hugo's *Hernani*:

At that time the war between the classic and romantic schools was at its height; ink flowed in torrents. Unable to find vent on the forbidden ground of politics, passions ran counter in the lists of literature. The classics were the Conservatives in letters, the champions of authority, swearing by Aristotle and Horace, out of

whose Church there was no salvation to be found. The imitation of the ancients was their creed. The romantic school was that of the Liberals in literature, the enemies of authority. They would not hear of Aristotle and his unities. According to them genius knew no lawgiver but itself, imitation was mere impotence, nature was the sole and eternal spring of the living and the beautiful (Ruffini, *Benoni* 123).

In this context Fantasio exercises his genius to fuse anti-Piedmontese chauvinism, anti-clericalism, pan-Italian enthusiasm, and romanticism within the republican framework of their secret society, *La Giovine Italia*. Amongst Italian cities, Genoa is best suited, he believes, to provide the organizing centre of the revolt that is to break out simultaneously in many parts of Italy. Their revolutionary ambitions partake indeed of madness, as the Benoni brother called Cæsar (Jacopo Ruffini in reality) may understand: ““Here are we, five young, very young men, with but limited means, and we are called upon to do nothing less than to overthrow an established government. We have no resources to rely upon but those which we shall be able to create for ourselves”” (Ruffini, *Benoni* 240). Unsurprisingly, coordination of the immense scheme proves too difficult, and the authorities discover the conspiracy before it can be put into action. While the others escape into exile in France, Cæsar is captured and commits suicide to avoid betraying, under torture, his companions. *Lorenzo Benoni* concludes in 1833 in Marseilles where Fantasio informs the protagonist of the appalling death of his brother – and in reality of the dearest friend that Mazzini himself would ever have.

Like Henrietta Jenkin’s novel, *Lorenzo Benoni* places the political elements in the context of other factors, and to appreciate the intertextuality of the two works, we must observe various biographical events reflected in the fiction. After their escape to Marseilles, Giovanni Ruffini and his younger brother Agostino accompanied Mazzini in wanderings through Switzerland, France and England. While Giovanni remained with Mazzini in London between 1837 and 1841 and then moved to Paris, Agostino Ruffini resided in Edinburgh. There he became the lover of Henrietta Jenkin, whose husband Charles Jenkin was a naval officer posted to the West Indies. In 1848 when the constitutional reforms in Piedmont permitted the

Ruffini brothers to return from exile, Henrietta and her husband, who had since come home from the West Indies, accompanied Agostino to Genoa. Now seriously ill, Agostino was nursed by both his mother and Henrietta. The Jenkins remained in Genoa until 1851 where their son Fleeming studied, as the Ruffini brothers and Mazzini had done, at the local University.¹ During the first part of their stay in Genoa, the extended family circle also included both Giovanni and Cornelia Turner, with whom he had been living in Paris since 1846.

Always oscillating in her loyalties between her husband and her lover, Henrietta would now exchange one lover, Agostino, for his brother Giovanni himself. In the 1850s and 1860s she spent long periods in Paris with Giovanni, in his now self-chosen exile there, and Cornelia. The members of a kind of *ménage à trois*, the three novelists wrote in these decades their often tensely interrelated works. The seven novels of Giovanni, in particular, were the result of a collaboration in which the two Englishwomen helped by correcting the linguistic aspect of his text.²

The fictional plotting of *Lorenzo Benoni* and *Who Breaks – Pays* develops, in particular, the relationships among four typical characters. Besides the hero and the heroine, referable to Giovanni and Henrietta, there are the hero's rival, in a role suggestive of Henrietta's husband, and the more mature, maternal figure similar to Cornelia. The pattern of the four typical characters – the mother, the heroine and the two rival lovers – occurs, in fact, in many novels of the period, as I have observed in a chapter entitled “Mothers, daughters and lovers” (Christensen 2005: 156-200). In the cases discussed in the chapter of my book, however, the maternal figure is the heroine's mother whereas in the novels by Ruffini and Jenkin she is the mother of one of the lovers. Giovanni indeed thought of

¹ The recent biographers of Fleeming Jenkin give a garbled account of his Genoese experiences, conflating Agostino and Giovanni Ruffini into a single individual called Augustine John Ruffini who supposedly went on to become rector of the university (Cookson and Hempstead 19).

² The seven novels of Giovanni Ruffini were published between 1853 and 1870, the eight novels of Henrietta Jenkin between 1858 and 1874, and the two novels of Cornelia Turner in 1860 and 1862. Regarding the collaboration amongst the three writers and the complexities of their emotional relationships, see Christensen, *European Version of Victorian Fiction*, 32-37.

Cornelia, the person to whom he was most devoted in life, as a vicarious representation of his own dear mother. In response to his brother Agostino's surprise about his decision to live with a woman thirteen years his senior, he wrote: "I wish to convince you about the nature of the feeling that unites me to Mrs Turner. The bond between mother and son may provide the right image. Our friendship has all the entirety and intensity of what is called love but without the possession and the storms" (qtd. Cozzolino 376, my trans). In the past Cornelia had certainly lived amidst emotional storms herself, especially when her liaison with Percy Shelley in 1816 had initiated an estrangement from her husband, Tom Turner, the protégé of William Godwin. But she had gained thereafter a wise and tolerant serenity that conveyed its stabilizing influence into the more stormy existences of Giovanni and Henrietta.³

Functioning in part as political allegories, the two novels portray the heroine's encouragement of both rivals for her affection, one of them a political conservative and the other a revolutionary patriot. A beautiful, but unreliable *femme fatale*, the heroine may typify Genova La Superba, who will not commit herself to the more deserving and liberal elements of her citizenry. The frustration of the fictional hero thus resembles that of the partisans of Mazzini's *Giovine Italia* who find that Genoa, the city for which they have sacrificed themselves, has betrayed them. But the maternal figure seeks to compensate for the capriciousness of the heroine and to inculcate, not always effectually, a view of the contemporary political storms in a larger perspective.

The pattern of the four characters, which derives from the Parisian circumstances of the 1850s and 1860s when the novels were being composed, has therefore been applied to the earlier narrated periods. In the case of *Who Breaks – Pays*, the fictional events are supposed to be occurring in the late 1840s, several years before Giovanni and Henrietta had actually met and become lovers. In *Lorenzo Benoni*, the pattern is discernible in events that have occurred before 1833 and therefore even longer before Ruffini's

³ Regarding Cornelia Turner as inspirational muse to both Shelley and Ruffini, see Christensen, "Cornelia Turner", 145-54.

initial acquaintance with Henrietta and Charles Jenkin and Cornelia Turner.

The instance of the heroine of *Lorenzo Benoni* possesses a particularly interesting complexity. In the reality of the early 1830s she is based on a very young widow, the Marchioness Laura di Negro Spinola. But it was Agostino Ruffini, not Giovanni, that carried on the affair in Genoa with the young Marchioness. In assigning the affair to the protagonist Lorenzo, the author has therefore introduced into his own supposed autobiography a disastrous amorous adventure that he had not himself experienced. The fictional pattern required, it appears, such a love affair even though the reality of the experience, in the form of Henrietta Jenkin, would not enter the author's life until much later. As a further detail of interest, the novel names the heroine "Lilla" rather than "Laura", evidently because Giovanni and Cornelia used "Lilla" in coded references to Henrietta, whose middle name was Camilla. Agostino's Genoese sweetheart Laura is thus conflated with Henrietta, his mistress in Edinburgh and, later on, Giovanni's mistress in Paris.

In the novel, Lilla makes the initial advances and works at overcoming Lorenzo's resistance. His suspicion of her flirtatiousness becomes certainty when during an operatic performance at the newly constructed Teatro Carlo Felice he spots her in a box with a military officer. The recognition of this man, Anastasius, as his rival for Lilla's love unexpectedly renews a bitter hostility between the two dating back to their schooldays. Anastasius had been the bully implicitly allied with the tyrannical priests at the religious college of their adolescence, where he had perversely admired the Turks despite the generally Greek sympathies of the schoolboys. As a rebel motivated by romantic and republican enthusiasm, the younger Lorenzo had defeated and humiliated Anastasius. But the latter, who has since joined the *garde du corps* of the despotic Piedmontese rulers, seeks a belated revenge. He goads the older Lorenzo into a duel and seriously wounds him.

The opera being performed that fatal evening is, not so incidentally, Bellini's recently composed *La sonnambula*. Lorenzo calls it "a great favourite of mine" (Ruffini, *Benoni* 247) – as it will be for the hero of Ruffini's *Lavinia*. "Who can ever have enough of the *Sonnambula*?", the narrator of *Lavinia* asks: "Everything about

it – the story, music, and feelings – so simple, so true, so fresh” (Ruffini, *Lavinia* II: 157-59). In *Lavinia* a performance of this dangerously beautiful and deceptively innocent opera similarly provides the setting for a lover’s betrayal although in this case it is the hero Paolo that betrays the novel’s heroine. He is attracted to another young lady seated near him because she seems to share so entirely his own profound, emotional responses during the performance. The opera concerns, in fact, the heroine’s apparent, but not real, betrayal of the hero for a socially superior man, while the heroine’s mother seeks to console the hero and to restore his faith in her daughter.

The mother in the novel is based on Ruffini’s actual mother, the intelligent and impulsively passionate Donna Eleonora Curlo, widely known in patriotic circles by Mazzini’s name for her, *La Madre Santa*. Although she does not do very much beyond supporting the hero with her love and comfort, her presence in the story is made to seem essential. After two unhappy years of being educated by a clerical uncle in western Liguria, the eight-year-old Lorenzo returns at last to Genoa, where “no words can express the relief it was to feel myself once more pressed in my mother’s arms, and to burst into a passionate fit of tears on her bosom”. Unfortunately, the period of relief lasts only a few days. He is sent to the college run by the priests, and for “five long years” the only solace is “a lovely, sweet face smiling on me every Thursday (the day for visitors), and, to my infinite comfort, whispering words of tenderness and encouragement”. The most blissful return to the maternal presence occurs after he is wounded in the duel resulting from Lilla’s betrayal: “The time of my convalescence [...] was perhaps the happiest in my life. I never enjoyed existence itself so much [...]. What a particular charm there was in feeling once more like a child, and being kept in order as such! How pleasant to have my mother come and offer me her arm for a walk – a very short one to be sure” (Ruffini, *Benoni* 9, 11, 255-56).

Soon after his recovery he must escape from Genoa. In a final demonstration of “that divine tenderness with which God has gifted a mother’s heart, to strengthen and console me”, his mother offers him, eucharistically, “a crust of bread and a glass of wine” (Ruffini, *Benoni* 272). The Marchioness Lilla, who has naturally repented,

waits in a dark street to beg his forgiveness and to kiss him farewell as he flees towards the harbour. While the ship sails out, the parting from the mother, the fatal woman and the fatal city occurs in the fading light of the Lanterna that symbolizes La Superba:

The moon had shone brightly throughout the night, and the tall column of the Lanterna, hitherto distinctly visible to me, now gradually faded from before my eyes, which strained to see it long after it had quite vanished from sight. It was then that I felt in its full entirety that I was a fugitive. So long as I saw that well-known object, I certainly had not realized the idea that I was absolutely and utterly without either home or country; that perhaps I should never again behold my mother's face [...]. When I lost sight of the Lanterna, it was as if I had again been torn from the arms of those so dear to me, and a host of recollections crowded round me of past happy days, days of youth, of joy, of hope, such as could nevermore return for the exiled man. The die was cast; I was proscribed, a wanderer on the wide world. (Ruffini, *Benoni* 284-85)

In the sphere of reality, the lover “could nevermore return” to the arms of Laura di Negro Spinola because she would die of consumption five years later.⁴ Ruffini's own wanderings would lead him, as I have mentioned, through France, Switzerland and England and then back to Paris. There, about thirteen years after the escape from Genoa, Henrietta Jenkin's novel would pick up again on “the exiled man”, calling him Giulio Giuliani and bringing herself into his story some years before the actual fact. The perspective on the story changes as it passes from the first-person narrative of Ruffini to the third-person narrative of Jenkin, which is semi-omniscient although focused mainly in the heroine's consciousness. Despite the changed perspective, however, Jenkin's narrator represents a continuity between the two narratives. The heroine is portrayed in one episode as fitting herself into a story already being written by the hero and continuing it. Giuliani has been recounting his life in a diary, and in

⁴ Until her death in 1838 Laura corresponded with Agostino and helped him with occasional gifts of money. The museum of the Istituto Mazziniano of Genoa displays a small English edition of the *Divina Commedia*, bequeathed by her to Agostino and containing a written dedication to him.

his eagerness in this episode to make the heroine understand him, he sends her pages from that book. She finds herself referred to with the invented given name “Perla”, because he knows only her surname, and she responds with letters signed “Perla” that carry on their story: “It was almost as if she had assumed his own name” (Jenkin 133-34). In fact, Jenkin has given her the name Lill, which provides the best evidence of her continuity with the Lilla of *Lorenzo Benoni* and, behind her, with the no longer surviving Laura.

An operatic performance again figures significantly in the love story. Although not marking an unhappy crisis, as in the earlier novel, the performance for which Lill has asked Giuliani to procure tickets at the Théâtre des Italiens will lead to eventually fatal consequences. The opera is Verdi’s recent *Ernani* in what is apparently its Parisian premiere. Based of course on the play implicitly referred to in *Lorenzo Benoni*, the opera arouses high expectations from a public that may recall the premiere in 1830 of Hugo’s *Hernani*. Jenkin’s narrator points out that the play was “the first piece played at the Théâtre Français, in which the classic unities were set aside – the first play in which the scenery was changed, an innovation that had convulsed all literary Paris” (Jenkin 32-33). In preparation for the opera, Lill procures the score and “undertook to sing all the female parts” (Jenkin 30), and at the theatre the music releases emotions as convulsive as those elicited by Hugo’s play:

Lill did more than listen, she drank in each enchanting sound. Giuliani, to whom *Ernani* was a four-fold told tale, now listened with a passionate rapture and vehemence of emotion nearer to pain than pleasure. Those who have not heard such music in the company of one loved, or about to be loved, know not as yet all the irresistible power of music.

Two or three times when the melody was most tender, or the harmony most entrancing – and what other than Italian music ever so entirely sounds the depth of human feeling? – Lill turned to Giuliani in search of sympathy; and to him it seemed as if he read through those clear eyes into her soul [...]. It was a happiness hitherto unknown, that with which Giuliani felt Lill’s arm resting on his, as they left the box. [...]

She did not speak again for some time after the carriage drove off; she was singing in a whisper, *Ernani involami* [...]

Those marvellously tender accents of love [...] sent her to bed enthusiastically devoted to Ernani, to a fantastic unknown Ernani, not at all invested with the features of any one she had ever seen. (Jenkin 33-34)⁵

A local manifestation of the “irresistible power” of European romanticism in its clash with classicism, to apply the terms of Ruffini’s *Fantasio*, the music initiates a tender relationship that culminates in an engagement. Like Lilla of the earlier novel, Lill takes the lead in the courtship while the hero holds out against what he regards as a perilous temptation. But in her devotion “to a fantastic unknown Ernani”, she comes to realize after their engagement that she does not love Giuliani himself. The chauvinistic, English prejudices of her family contribute to her dismay, and tormented by guilt and incomprehensible to herself, she neglects Giuliani. He assures her that “I will remember you in my prayers always, as Perla” (Jenkin 189) as she takes farewell and departs for England, where she will eventually marry his rival, Sir Frederick Ponsonby.

While by no means a nasty ally of tyrannical forces like Ruffini’s Anastasius, Sir Frederick has participated in the British colonial endeavour, and his traditional political views preclude sympathy with the Italian patriotic cause. He arrives at Marseilles after a long period of service in India, reminding us of Henrietta’s husband who has served as a naval officer in the West Indies. The novelist probably alludes to her brother as well, for he too served for many years in India and took her by surprise with his arrival in Genoa in 1849. The unexpected arrival may have troubled her, to judge from Ruffini’s treatment of a similar event in another novel. In *Doctor Antonio*, namely, the heroine Lucy that Ruffini based again on Henrietta is distressed when her coarse brother, returning

⁵ The indication that the opera was for Giuliani “a four-fold told tale” is problematic. The opera received its premiere in Venice, at the Teatro La Fenice, in March 1844. But exiled from Italy, Giuliani could not have heard any of the early Italian performances. It seems unlikely that he would have been able to hear the opera four times before the Parisian performance that occurs in the novel in about 1846. Henrietta Jenkin was presumably thinking of operatic performances that actually occurred after the period in which the novel has been set.

from many years in India, suddenly shatters her peaceful Ligurian idyll. The brother's arrival puts an abrupt end to the romance between the English heroine and her Italian lover.

Very clearly based on Cornelia Turner, the all-consoling maternal figure of *Who Breaks – Pays* is Lady Ponsonby, the widowed mother of Sir Frederick and later the mother-in-law of Lilla. She has, like Cornelia in the mid 1840s, lived for more than twenty years in Paris, the city also of her childhood, as “a citizen of the world”. With an uncompromising authenticity unknown in England where “all is convention, constraint, or fiction”, she brings out the best in others (Jenkin 195). Giuliani believes that “with her, he was his true self”: “Despondency and fear fled before Lady Ponsonby, as darkness flies at the approach of genial light. Her sunny smile penetrated into the dimmest corners of a benighted heart; the imps of bitterness there ensconced [sic] had to pack up their baggage and depart” (Jenkin 24). At their first meeting a similar enthusiasm unites Lady Ponsonby and Lill: “The old lady and the young one were immediately drawn towards each other”, and Lill, who has only “read of such people in novels”, is charmed to meet one in “real life” (Jenkin 41, 44). (We notice again, as in the case of Ernani, Lill's difficulty in finding real-life equivalents for the figures of her fantasy.) The romance of Giuliani and Lill will then flourish under the benignant gaze of Lady Ponsonby as they meet at her weekly, well-attended Saturday evening receptions. At one critical point the mother realizes that the romance is a source of suffering for her daughter Alice, who has also come to love Giuliani, and she must provide effective solace: “How well a mother knows how best to comfort her child!” (Jenkin 109). When Sir Frederick arrives, she does not avert another possible danger and eagerly welcomes him back into the family circle. In the railway carriage during the journey to Paris from Marseilles, where she has gone to meet him, “she watched him with exactly the same adoration in her eyes, as had been there when she kept vigil by his cradle some six-and-twenty years ago”. She “arrives in Paris a happy woman and a proud mother” (Jenkin 191, 192). The emergence thereafter of the love triangle involving Lill, Giuliani and her son will cause her to share the anguish experienced by the others.

The catastrophe is precipitated when Lill impulsively deserts her husband in 1848 during a holiday in Savoy and travels to Genoa, perhaps because she knows that Giuliani is there. Reversing the sad movement out of the Genoese harbour at the end of *Lorenzo Benoni*, Lill arrives there to hail in long contemplation the scene to which Lorenzo has bid a lingering, aching farewell:

Floods of bright warm light bathed the expanse of sky, sea, and earth, that lay stretched out before the open windows of the old palace of Doria. The sunbeams danced upon the blue waters of the wide harbour, embraced, as it were, between the loving arms of the old and new mole. The sea arched itself beyond to meet the firmament in a far horizon, and showed on its broad breast of varied blue and green many a white sail.

A vessel coming majestically into port under a cloud of canvas, and a steamer shooting outwards, crossed on the threshold of the marine gateway. On the left, far within the immense basin, tapered the masts of a throng of merchant ships, lying at anchor, under the shelter of the town and quays. Behind and around the shipping up an amphitheatre of hills, extend the many-coloured palaces of Genoa, well named the “Superba”. On the most eastern eminence is the dome of the noble Carignano church, flanked on either side by a tower.

Beyond the city rise the peaks of the lofty Apennines, each crested by its fort; from the highest point, the summits fall in a graceful gradation, like waves suddenly crystallized by some wizard power. At the extreme verge of the view to the left juts forth the bold, picturesque headland of Porto Fino, blue in the softening distance as lapis-lazuli. Opposite to the town rises against the western sky the tall, slender column of the Lanterna, or lighthouse. (Jenkin 276)⁶

Lill may almost be supposed to recall, as we do, Lorenzo’s words: “When I lost sight of the Lanterna, it was as if I had again been torn from the arms of those so dear to me [...]. I was proscribed, a wanderer on the wide world”. But the return to the Lanterna does

⁶ As participants in the conference of June 2007 in Genoa, where this paper was originally presented, had occasion to observe, the Palazzo Peschiere, in which Dickens resided in 1844-45, enjoys essentially the same view as that described here, sweeping from the Carignano church to the Lanterna.

not, in fact, reverse the exile, as subsequent events make clear. Genoa is no longer the beloved homeland, and the narrator goes on in the chapter entitled “La Superba” to characterize the Genoese as perfidious: “The Genoese are a proud, stiff-necked, distrustful, rebellious people: there is, indeed, a great similarity in their history to that of the chosen people of God, as described in the Old Testament” (Jenkin 277-78).

After the defeat of Novara, the proud Genoese rebel anew upon learning that the Piedmontese capitulation contains the provision that “Genoa will remain *unalterably* united to Piedmont” (Jenkin 293). During the factional disorders Lill fails to take proper precautions, her recklessness indicating a possibly suicidal instinct, and a stray bullet strikes her on the terrace of the Palazzo Doria. Of that terrace overlooking the harbour, we have been told that “it is the spot where the Doge Andrea Doria spread the princely repast he offered to the Emperor Charles the Fifth” (Jenkin 276). While Henrietta’s husband also bore the name Charles, Lill must remember that Charles the Fifth figures in *Ermani* as a rival for the love of the heroine with whom she closely identifies. She dies there, on a kind of stage, not only a victim of Genoese factionalism but in payment, according to the novel’s title, of what she has broken – paying perhaps for Lilla too. The heartbroken Giuliani is the first to discover her body. Joining him in grief that evening is Sir Frederick, who has just arrived by ship from Marseilles in hope of reconciliation with his wayward wife. The return to Genoa, again the site of violent death, has renewed the despair of Ruffini’s novel.

The end of the fictional Lill may, as an atoning gesture, have permitted Henrietta herself to survive. But the end also implicates the fatally compromised city that does not survive as La Superba: “the atmosphere of this intemperate town” in Ruffini’s own statement upon his departure the following year, “– without morality and without intelligence – suffocates me [...]. I shall rejoin Mrs Turner [...] the day after tomorrow in Turin and proceed to Paris in her company” (qtd Tucci 121, my trans). In Paris during the ensuing decades the loves and tensions amongst Ruffini, Turner and the Jenkins would then be enacted in reality and in the fictions that begin and end in Genoa.

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3. Tracing Victorian Sources: Italian Culture and History

Dickens and Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*

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Dickens's experience in Italy has often been considered as the source for *Pictures from Italy* or for the Italian chapters of *Little Dorrit*, yet Forster stresses the fact that those were times when the writer was still maturing and he was still forming his own world picture. In his meeting with Italian culture at large, Dickens had the opportunity to experience political, religious and, I will argue, literary challenges, which he would draw upon in later times. We know that he visited theatres and appreciated Italian melodrama. In Genoa he also found the time to read one of the most outstanding Italian novels of the nineteenth century, *I promessi sposi* [The Betrothed] by Alessandro Manzoni. The impact of this novel on Dickens has been overlooked by scholars, though it is likely to have played a role in Dickens's personal and professional development. Manzoni – whose novel Dickens had heard of before he left for Italy – must have proved interesting to Dickens both as a man and as a writer. Indeed Manzoni's novel deals with religious issues which apparently concerned Dickens in those very years. However, a most striking literary resemblance is to be felt much later, in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1857-1859), which recalls *I promessi sposi* both in design and in a few minor incidents of the plot.

In nineteenth-century Italy one can hardly speak of a novel tradition. Indeed the few novels that were actually published cannot be said to share a common poetics, nor a common theme, nor even a common readership. For this reason *I promessi sposi* is somewhat of a cathedral in the desert, built upon the ruins of neoclassic poetry. Although it is an historical novel and though its author was a reader of Walter Scott, *I promessi sposi* is more akin to Milton's

Paradise Lost than to any English novel. Manzoni's masterpiece is the result of a triple conversion and traces of the former beliefs can still be discerned in the work's texture. Manzoni was an agnostic rationalist and became a Roman Catholic, was a classicist and turned romantic, was a poet and developed into a novelist.¹ The result is a novel deeply religious, going so far as to maintain that history is ruled by Providence; politically committed, pointing out the malpractice of the Spanish rule over seventeenth-century Lombardy (and implicitly condemning the coeval Austrian rule); written in a very modern and even colloquial prose. Manzoni worked at this text with great alacrity and devotion so that the novel was written three times over between 1820 and 1840.²

And yet some of Manzoni's former affiliations persist in his work which are apt to make the Italian author particularly appealing to Dickens. From the religious point of view, Manzoni's former rationalism had led him to adhere to a form of Roman Catholicism actually tinged with Jansenism, brought to Manzoni especially through Pascal; Jansenism was exactly the sort of middle way between proper Catholicism and Calvinism, especially with regard to the means of salvation. For Jansenists faith alone could *not* save a man's soul, but at the same time they strongly rejected the belief in the "magical" power of liturgical rites. The most exemplary characters of Manzoni's novel show both a deep faith and a strong inclination to help the poor and wretched neighbours. This protestant quality was pointed out in England as early as 1873, when an article on the *London Quarterly Review* suggested that Manzoni's novel was "not written in the interest of Romanism"; in fact "notwithstanding his vigorous championship of the catholic morality, there was far more

¹ He professed himself a romantic and authored more than one pamphlet on romantic poetry; yet it must be noticed that north Italian romanticism was of a particular brand, quite different from either German or English. In fact it was not in the least titanic or in any way morbid, but rather politically committed.

² The first draft of the novel started in 1821 and was completed in 1823, under the title *Fermo and Lucia*. Manzoni was dissatisfied with this version – which he never published – and set to work on another draft eventually called *I promessi sposi*, published in 1827. During the following fifteen years Manzoni made a thorough linguistic revision of his novel, making his prose more Tuscan, which culminated in the final version published in monthly installments between 1840 and 1842.

of the Protestant Christian than of the Romanist in Manzoni" (*London Quarterly Review*, XLI 1874, cit. in Pallotta 484).

The conversion from classicism to romanticism brought Manzoni to deal with social issues, but without a romantic temperament, i.e. keeping a sense of detachment, Horatian common sense and a subtle irony. Sometimes Manzoni shows also a substantial distrust of words and their circumlocutional power to which Dickens would certainly subscribe.³

As for the conversion from verse to the novel form, the heritage of the former is particularly evident in the thorough process of revision that the novel had undergone throughout the years, as well as in its characteristic lyrical passages. Initially Manzoni crafted his novel in imitation of Tuscan prose (the most suited, in his opinion, to express Italian fictional art) which produced the first and the second editions of the novel, but, being still dissatisfied with the bookish quality of the result, he decided to spend a long period in Florence in order to write the way people actually speak; the outcome is the ultimate edition of 1840.

In the end Manzoni's work became a classic masterpiece where historical research, political commitments, religious faith, moral tension, linguistic innovation come together to form a unique national novel. In this respect I think that this is more similar to Milton's poem than to Scott's novels. In the 1830s and 1840s no one who was interested in Italian culture could have overlooked the extraordinary significance of this novel, let alone a novelist like Dickens. Besides *I promessi sposi* soon became very popular all over Europe: the first edition – to be revised in 1840 – was published in 1827, and the next year two French translations appeared, to be followed by others in 1830s and 1840s. Charles Swan's *The Betrothed*, the first English translation, was published in 1828 and was followed in 1834 by Featherstonhaugh's version and by another

³ On this particular point Eco argues that, in this novel, the higher the style and the social position of speakers, the more mendacious are the words. This implies that only acts are true because they cannot lie. This attitude of Manzoni's is particularly evident in the episode of Azzecagarbugli, the lawyer, an episode referred to by Dickens as particularly brilliant in the only letter where he mentions the novel.

anonymous one in 1844.⁴ Soon the novel became a favourite with intellectuals and writers such as Auguste Comte, Chateaubriand, and Victor Hugo. E. A. Poe enthusiastically reviewed it for the *Southern Literary Messenger* (1835), while the *North American Review* devoted a long essay to the novel in 1840. Walter Scott himself, who also expressed the wish to meet Manzoni, is credited to have said that *I promessi sposi* was *his own* best novel.⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton dedicated his historical novel, *Rienzi*, “To Alessandro Manzoni, as to the Genius of the Place”.

Although *I promessi sposi* was highly appreciated, it never became so popular in Britain as elsewhere in Europe. The scarce success it enjoyed can be explained by the highly competitive English book market and a sort of instinctive distrust of English readers when a Roman Catholic was concerned. In fact, a few reviewers accused Manzoni of imitating Scott and of deliberately disseminating Roman Catholic propaganda. Augustus Pallotta in his study of Manzoni’s translations points to two further reasons why Manzoni did not achieve greater popularity in Britain in those early days: one was the faulty quality of the English translations, which failed to convey the enormous effort on Manzoni’s part to give life to his characters, developing the widest variety of prose registers ever accomplished in Italy. The second reason depends mostly on the setting, Lombardy. This region fell short of gratifying the readers’ stereotypical idea of a picturesque, sundrenched Italy. Both these reasons however could not hold true with Dickens, who read the novel in the original language (probably the revised version of 1840) under the guidance of an Italian teacher, and who, in *Pictures from Italy*, overtly denounced the inconsistencies of the picturesque stereotype of Italy.⁶

In a letter to Samuel Rogers written in Genoa and dated 1 September 1844, Dickens describes his encounter with the novel in a rather enthusiastic fashion:

⁴ Published in London by James Burns in two volumes, with the same woodcut of the Italian edition. This last version was much advertised on the *Fraser’s Magazine*, the *Edinburgh Review* and in other volumes that appeared at the time.

⁵ According to Burke the anecdote was oral and was first written down in 1875.

⁶ On this point see my own essay on *Pictures from Italy*.

A little, patient, revolutionary officer, exiled in England during many years; comes to and fro three times a week, to read and speak Italian with me. A poor little lame butterfly of a man, fluttering a little bit at one time, and hopping a little bit at another, and getting through life at some disadvantage, or other, always. If I question him closely on some idiom which he is not in a condition to explain, he usually shakes his head dolefully, and begins to cry. But this is not what I meant to say just now, when I began to allude to him. He has initiated me in the *Promessi Sposi* – the book which Violetta⁷ read, that night. And what a clever book it is! I have not proceeded far into the story, but I am quite charmed with it. The interviews between the Bridegroom and the Priest, on the Morning of the disappointment – and between the Bridegroom and the Bride, and her Mother – and the description of poor Renzo's walk to the house of the learned doctor; with the fowls – and the scene between them – and the whole idea of the character and story of Padre Christoforo [sic] are touched, I think by a most delicate and charming hand. I have just left the good father in Don Rodrigo's boisterous Eating Hall; and am in no little anxiety, I assure you. (*Letters* 4: 189)

It is likely that Dickens finished the story, as the editor of the Pilgrim Edition suggests, but unfortunately there is no mention of this in any surviving document. The fact that Dickens does not mention the novel again has probably discouraged scholars from seeking any influence. Yet it should be considered that he does mention it, albeit once, which is more than many books he had in his Gad's Hill library; besides, a casual hint to *I promessi sposi* was hardly eligible to make a common ground of discussion with many Englishmen of his time.

There is also another reason why Dickens may have chosen to be reticent on this reading of his, and it is strictly connected with the deeply moral and religious character of its conception. At the time when Dickens went to Italy, he had joined the Unitarian Church and must have had an inclination towards a sort of ecumenical approach to religion. Dickens despised the Roman Catholic machinery as much as he disliked Puseyism. He found Roman Catholics rather superstitious

⁷ Violetta is a character from a tale titled "Montorio" added to the 1839 edition of Samuel Rogers's *Italy*. Had Violetta been reading something else we would hardly know that Dickens ever read *I promessi sposi* at all.

than pious and associated their religion with disorder and Papist schemes. Dickens was disgusted by Roman Catholic machinery and the processions he witnessed in Rome, but this is only one side of Dickens's relationship with Roman Catholics.

In Dickens's times the words Roman Catholic and Protestant were heavily connoted with a set of social characteristics that had more to do with Guy Fawkes than with Luther's 1517 theses or with the Concilium Tridentinum. In Chapter XXX of *Oliver Twist*, for an instance, Dr Losberne asks Mr Giles, the servant who had shot young Oliver, if he could take an oath that the weapon was actually loaded when it went off. In order to elicit a most conscientious answer he prepares his main question by a preliminary one: "Are you a protestant?" The question aims at (and actually succeeds in) educing a certain pride on the part of Mr Giles so that he will speak the truth, as could be expected from a Protestant. On the other hand, when Dickens criticizes Roman Catholic customs in *Pictures from Italy*, he does not consider any theological tenet either, but censures the superficiality of the procession and the alleged superstition of the worshippers. The words Anglican and Protestant were synonymous with order, cleanliness, political liberty, progress, work ethic; whereas Roman Catholic imported dirtiness, political injustice, disorder, slovenliness, laziness (Sanders *Charles Dickens*).

In fact, theologically speaking, Dickens cannot be said to have been a "good protestant" himself: he attended the Unitarian Church and had a general repugnance for every kind of theological dispute, especially within the Church of England. Moreover he often attributed to action a higher moral significance than he attached to prayer. In a satirical article against the Puseyites titled "Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Condition of the Persons Variously Engaged in the University of Oxford" Dickens makes clear what he did and did not mean by Christian:

That it is unquestionably true that a boy was examined under the Children's Employment Commission, at Brinsley, in Derbyshire, who had been three years at school, and could not spell 'Church'; whereas there is no doubt that the persons employed in the University of Oxford can all spell Church with great readiness, and, indeed, very seldom spell anything else. But, on the other hand, it must not be forgotten that, in the minds of the persons employed in

the University of Oxford, such comprehensive words as justice, mercy, charity, kindness, brotherly love, forbearance, gentleness, and Good Works, awaken no ideas whatever: while the evidence shows that the most preposterous notions are attached to the mere terms Priest and Faith. (Slater 62)

Dickens's religious affiliation could not therefore prevent him from sympathizing with the author of *I promessi sposi*. Not only does Manzoni's Jansenistic attitude undermine the importance of liturgical acts, but he keeps referring to the Gospel and to those values that Dickens held dearest – love for one's enemy, compassion, love for one's neighbour, generosity. *I promessi sposi*, with its strong reliance on the New Testament, must have shown to Dickens a more profound and non-stereotypical way to look at Roman Catholics. Both as a Christian and as novelist, Dickens could have sympathized with Lodovico-Cristoforo's conversion (a similar one occurs in *Barnaby Rudge*) or with Renzo's scruples, when the young peasant picks up a loaf from the street on the day of the bread riot in Milan; and with his heartfelt joy when he eventually could "give it back" to a beggar woman during the plague, some 200 pages later, in the form of a similar piece of bread he had just bought for himself. Dickens must also have approved of Fra Cristoforo's enthusiasm, when he begged his seniors to allow him to go and serve in the Lazzaretto hospital during the plague, because "that would be a fine death for a Christian".

Dickens was probably still reading the novel – or had just finished it – when he had a remarkable dream concerning religion, scrupulously related by Forster:

"Let me tell you," he wrote (30th September [1844]), "of a curious dream I had, last Monday night; and of the fragments of reality I can collect, which helped to make it up. [...] I was visited by a Spirit. [...] I knew it was poor Mary's spirit. I was not at all afraid, but in a great delight, so that I wept very much, and stretching out my arms to it called it 'Dear.'

[...] 'But answer me one other question!' I said, in an agony of entreaty lest it should leave me. 'What is the True religion?' As it paused a moment without replying, I said – Good God, in such an agony of haste, lest it should go away! – 'You think, as I do, that the Form of religion does not so greatly matter, if we try to do good?

– or,’ I said, observing that it still hesitated, and was moved with the greatest compassion for me, ‘perhaps the Roman Catholic is the best? perhaps it makes one think of God oftener, and believe in him more steadily?’ ‘For *you*,’ said the Spirit, full of such heavenly tenderness for me, that I felt as if my heart would break; ‘for *you*, it is the best!’ Then I awoke.” (Forster 148)

The letter goes on explaining what suggestions may have induced the dream: the fact that he heard the chimes in Genoa, the fact that there was an altar in his bedroom and a discoloured fresco of a religious subject whose face he could not quite make out.⁸

To us the dream itself is not so interesting as the fact that Dickens decided to relate it to Forster since, by doing so, he showed how seriously he took Mary’s advice. Commenting on this letter, Forster adds that the dream may have been triggered by Dickens’s restlessness about religious issues. The biographer diplomatically comments:

It was perhaps natural that he should omit, from his own considerations awakened by the dream, the very first that would have risen in any mind to which his was intimately known – that it strengthens other evidences, of which there are many in his life, of his not having escaped those trying regions of reflection which most men of thought, and all men of genius have at some time to pass through. (150)

Forster adds that Dickens found a help to “such disturbances” in a book called *Life and Correspondences of Thomas Arnold* (1844), that the novelist knew especially through Forster’s own review.⁹ This was published in October, the same year – in fact after the

⁸ It seems reasonable that this was a Madonna, as he states that Mary actually looked like the Madonna. This identification of Mary (!) with a Madonna who comes to rescue him is indeed very Roman Catholic. However we know that Dickens abhorred Mariolatry, even though, as we shall see, a feminine figure is often a necessary catalyst for a true conversion.

⁹ According to Dennis Walder, in his review published by *The Examiner* in 1844, Forster picks up all those passages that accuse the Church of England of being slave to the Old Testament, whereas it is in the New Testament the true words of salvation have to be sought.

dream. Arnold, in Forster's summary,¹⁰ contends that the principal function of Christian doctrine is the moral and social life of the community, a tenet very much in accordance with the idea of "broad church" proposed by the Unitarians. Dickens was particularly responsive to the social and practical implications of Christian religion. For this reason I think that *I promessi sposi*, which is exactly a social history of the seventeenth century where the action of Providence is particularly prominent, must have contributed to Dickens's reflections on Christianity and to his understanding of Roman Catholicism. Manzoni had been able to put into novelistic form the precepts and tenets of the Gospel. And for the same reason Dickens was reticent on the novel, as its subject were exactly those trying regions of reflections he did not escape.¹¹

We shall now concentrate on what effect Manzoni's novel has had on Dickens as novelist. The strongest resemblances with Manzoni are to be felt in Dickens's great historical novel, *Tale of Two Cities*. It is quite possible that the English novelist re-read Manzoni's novel when he was working at the *Tale*. In fact in Dickens's historical novel we can find a couple of minor episodes which recall the plot of the *Promessi sposi* and – what is even more relevant – the same overall design.

We know that *A Tale of Two Cities* is a thoroughly researched novel. Its main, and acknowledged, sources are certainly *The French Revolution* by Carlyle for the historical background and *The Frozen Deep* by Wilkie Collins for the main incidents. Dickens was in fact both producer and actor of Collins's play at the time when he conceived the *Tale*. Nonetheless we know that Dickens felt unsure about his knowledge of the French milieu and turned to Carlyle who sent him "two cartloads of books" to help his research. Unfortunately we do not know exactly what the carts contained, though it is highly

¹⁰ Walder is unsure whether Dickens had read the original book or only Forster's résumé, but he seems to opt for the latter.

¹¹ As for the dream being the reflection of Dickens's actually cogitating upon these themes, we can take his own word for it. In a letter to Thomas Stone (2 February 1851) Dickens says that dreams are an allegorical way to decipher the waking state of the mind. "[I]f have been perplexed during the day, in bringing out the incidents of a story as I wish, I find that I dream at night" (*Letters* VI: 276). More likely than not, when Dickens wrote these words he had in mind, among others, his dream vision of Mary Hogarth.

probable that most volumes were the sources of Carlyle's own book (Sanders 40). In those years the English version of the *Promessi sposi* was often advertised in numerous periodicals and in at least two books about the French Revolution: France's *A History of the French Revolution* (1847), which devoted a whole page to advertizing the novel, and in *The History of French Revolution* by Adolphe Thiers. And what is more, we know that Dickens had a correspondence about the progress of his own novel with Bulwer-Lytton, his close friend, whose historical novel, *Cola di Rienzi*, was dedicated to Manzoni.

The first point of resemblance between *I promessi sposi* and *A Tale of Two Cities* is their historical scope. Both Manzoni and Dickens share the same judgmental attitude towards the times they write about and consider the present far better times. Not only the past was troubled by riots and misgovernment, past corruption extends to everyday life; in former times people were coarser, drank more heavily, streets were dirtier and more unsafe. This contempt for the past, that has no precedent in *Waverley* or *Ivanhoe*, is probably functional to the teleology of the novels, which entails the progress of mankind. Take as an instance this one: "Those were drinking days, and most men drank hard", which parallels another taken almost randomly from Manzoni:

Quel lato del monastero era contiguo a una casa abitata da un giovine, scellerato di professione, uno de' tanti, che, in que' tempi, e co' loro sgherri, e con l'alleanze d'altri scellerati, potevano, fino a un certo segno, ridersi della forza pubblica e delle leggi. (195)

[That side of the convent adjoined a house in which lived a young man who was a professional rogue, one of the many who were able, at that period, with the help of their minions and the alliance of other rogues, to defy justice and the forces of the law up to a point.]¹²

Both Manzoni and Dickens seem to have faced the same problem: how to write a novel that shows the working of God in history.¹³

¹² Translations of *I promessi sposi* into English have been adapted from the e-text <http://www.questia.com/library/book/the-betrothed-i-promessi-sposi-by-alessandro-manzoni.jsp>

¹³ Among the sources of the *Tale*, St. John's Gospel stands out, as has recently been argued by K. M. Sroka.

Manzoni contends that history can be equated with progress because the hidden hand of Providence guides it and therefore writes a social novel where the works of Providence can be best appreciated. Dickens, on the other hand, prefers to concentrate on the plight of the individual; hence he chooses to write the stories of Manette and Carton. Yet the result is not dissimilar from Manzoni's; when Sidney Carton dies on the cross-guillotine, his prophetic vision allows him to see a far better world and far better people arise from the present bloodshed. The world, Dickens implies, improves thanks to good – mostly Christian – people who devote their lives to do good.

The double plot of *A Tale of Two Cities* entails a number of binary oppositions. One of these is the parallel between the Old and New Testaments. The revolutionaries, the Defarges, react to the iniquities of the *ancien régime* with the Mosaic law of an eye for an eye and with the curse that sins of the fathers will be visited upon their children. This attitude is shared not only by the new villains who want to slay the descendants of noblemen, but also by Charles Darnay's mother (who is afraid that the sins of her husband may fall on her child's head) and by Dr Manette, who actually denounces the Evremonds and their descendants. Only a gratuitous act of love can break this chain of "legal" injustice: a Christ-like Sidney Carton decides to die guiltless to atone for the sins of others. The core of the Christian doctrine is translated into the code of a secular realistic novel, where Sidney's sacrifice not only saves the Darnay family, but will be remembered as an example for the generations to come. Such sacrifices foster the progress of history.¹⁴ Although Carton can certainly be said to be inspired by divine Grace when he deliberately decides to die on the guillotine, his conversion begins unnoticed thanks to the quiet and motionless influence of Lucie. Lucie, almost Madonna like, irradiates love to the benefit of those who happen to be around her, men and women alike; so far that the sole sight of her standing in front of the prison is said to be a great relief for her incarcerated husband. Carton's conversion is not the

¹⁴ *A Child's History of England* (1851-1853) is written with same underlying assumption. We must know history because it teaches us not only to avoid past mistakes, but, even more importantly, to remember, honour and imitate great men of the past to whom we owe what progress there has been.

only miracle wrought by Lucie; she is also the agent of her father's conversion from the Mosaic to the Christian Law. Dr Manette repents of the curse he had called on the Evremonds and atones for it in a long painful solitude.

From a functional point of view, Lucie Manette works exactly like Lucia Mondella in the *Promessi sposi*. She never really acts, her character could hardly sustain the novel, and yet she is the centre of attraction for all acting characters and an inspiration to conversion. In the *Promessi sposi* Lucia is the instrument that brings about the conversion of the *innominato*, and often we are told that Renzo abstains from doing evil only on her account. This is an instance taken from chapter 2:

Renzo era un giovine pacifico e alieno dal sangue, un giovine schietto e nemico d'ogni insidia; ma, in que' momenti, il suo cuore non batteva che per l'omicidio, la sua mente non era occupata che a fantasticare un tradimento. Avrebbe voluto correre alla casa di don Rodrigo, afferrarlo per il collo, e... [...] Si figurava [...] di prendere il suo schioppo, d'appiattarsi dietro una siepe, aspettando se mai, se mai colui venisse a passar solo; e, internandosi, con feroce compiacenza, in quell'immaginazione, si figurava di sentire una pedata, quella pedata, d'alzar chetamente la testa; riconosceva lo scellerato, spianava lo schioppo, prendeva la mira, sparava, lo vedeva cadere e dare i tratti, gli lanciava una maledizione, e correva sulla strada del confine a mettersi in salvo. "E Lucia?" Appena questa parola si fu gettata a traverso di quelle bieche fantasie, i migliori pensieri a cui era avvezza la mente di Renzo, v'entrarono in folla. (35)

[Renzo was a peaceable young man and averse to bloodshed – an open youth who hated deceit of any kind; but at that moment his heart only beat to kill, and his mind turned only on thoughts of treachery. He would have liked to rush to Don Rodrigo's house, seize him by the throat, and... [...] Then he imagined himself [...] taking his musket, crouching behind a bush, and waiting to see if ever, ever, that man passed by alone. And, dwelling on this idea with ferocious pleasure, he imagined himself hearing a footstep – that footstep – and stealthily raising his head; he recognized the villain, levelled his musket, took aim, fired, saw him fall in his death-agony, flung him a curse, and rushed off towards the frontier and safety. And Lucia? – As soon as this word was thrown across these grim fantasies, the better thoughts with which Renzo's mind was familiar came crowding after it.]

Likewise Carton assigns to Lucie the same redeeming power (chapter XII):

Since I knew you, I have been troubled by a remorse that I thought would never reproach me again, and have heard whispers from old voices impelling me upward, that I thought were silent for ever. I have had unformed ideas of striving afresh, beginning anew, shaking off sloth and sensuality, and fighting out the abandoned fight. A dream, all a dream, that ends in nothing, and leaves the sleeper where he lay down, but I wish you to know that you inspired it. (157)

Finally I would like to mention three details in the plot of *Tale of Two Cities* that recall Manzoni's novel: the first is the story written down by Dr Manette in the Bastille and read aloud at the trial; the second is a fine example of romantic irony which takes place in analogous circumstances at the expenses of Manzoni's Vicario di Provvisione and Dickens's Monsieur Gabelle; and last a passing reference to one of Manzoni's most striking characters, the nun of Monza.

The main plot of *I promessi sposi* is the story of a vicious Landlord (Don Rodrigo) who covets Lucia, a young peasant, and tries in vain to abduct her one night. His scheme fails, but he prevents Renzo from marrying her, thus setting the story in motion. The girl flees to Monza, and from there Don Rodrigo has her abducted through the help of a senior friend of his, called *l'innominato* [the unnamed one], who sees to her kidnapping and has her imprisoned in his castle. Don Rodrigo's plan is frustrated by the fact that, while *l'innominato* holds the girl in his castle, he is almost suddenly converted to the gospel and becomes a champion of faith. Obviously his first deed is to restore the poor girl to her mother. Dr Manette's letter from the prison, brought to light in the third book of the novel, in the chapter entitled "The Substance of the Shadow", tells the same basic story of a country landlord who seizes a peasant girl, with the important difference that the abduction of the virtuous girl has a much worse epilogue.

In the *Promessi sposi* Renzo, in flight from Rodrigo, arrives in Milan on the very day of the bread riot of San Martino. Manzoni describes at length how the mob ransacks the bakeries and prepares to lynch a state functionary, the Vicario di Provvisione. The

frightened functionary bars all doors and windows and runs up to the loft, where with a bathetic turn, Manzoni abandons the pathos and jokes about the reliability of historical narrations:

Il meschino girava di stanza in stanza, pallido, senza fiato, battendo palma a palma, raccomandandosi a Dio, e a' suoi servitori, che tenessero fermo, che trovassero la maniera di farlo scappare. Ma come, e di dove? Sali in soffitta; da un pertugio, guardò ansiosamente nella strada, e la vide piena zeppa di furibondi; senti le voci che chiedevan la sua morte; e più smarrito che mai, si ritirò, e andò a cercare il più sicuro e riposto nascondiglio. Lì rannicchiato, stava attento, attento, se mai il funesto rumore s'affievolisse, se il tumulto s'acquietasse un poco; ma sentendo in vece il muggito alzarsi più feroce e più rumoroso, e raddoppiare i picchi, preso da un nuovo soprassalto al cuore, si turava gli orecchi in fretta. Poi, come fuori di sé, stringendo i denti, e raggrinzando il viso, stendeva le braccia, e puntava i pugni, come se volesse tener ferma la porta... Del resto, quel che facesse precisamente non si può sapere, giacché era solo; e la storia è costretta a indovinare. Fortuna che c'è avvezza. (236-37)

[The wretched man was running about from room to room, pale and breathless, wringing his hands, appealing to God and to his servants to stand by him and find him some way of escape. But how, and where? He climbed up into the lofts, peered anxiously down into the street through a slit, and saw it crammed full of furious people; he heard the voices clamouring for his death, and, more beside himself than ever, drew back and went to search for the safest and remotest hiding-place he could find. Crouching down in it, he listened and listened to hear if the ghastly sounds were getting weaker or the tumult was abating a little; but instead he heard the bellowing getting louder and fiercer and the bangs on the door redoubling, so that his heart turned another somersault, and he hurriedly plugged up his ears. Then, completely losing control of himself he clenched his teeth and twisted up his face, braced his arms and fists, as if he hoped they would hold the doors firm, then... But what else he did we cannot tell, as he was alone; and history can only guess. Luckily, it is quite used to doing so.]

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Monsieur Gabelle, postmaster and tax collector of a remote country village is similarly besieged during a riot:

Not only that; but the village, light-headed with famine, fire, and bell-ringing, and bethinking itself that Monsieur Gabelle had to do with the collection of rent and taxes – though it was but a small instalment of taxes, and no rent at all, that Gabelle had got in those latter days – became impatient for an interview with him, and, surrounding his house, summoned him to come forth for personal conference. Whereupon, Monsieur Gabelle did heavily bar his door, and retire to hold counsel with himself. The result of that conference was, that Gabelle again withdrew himself to his housetop behind his stack of chimneys; this time resolved, if his door were broken in (he was a small Southern man of retaliative temperament), to pitch himself head foremost over the parapet, and crush a man or two below.

Probably, Monsieur Gabelle passed a long night up there, with the distant chateau for fire and candle, and the beating at his door [...]. (242)

Manzoni makes the most of romantic irony by casting a doubt on his own reliability; Dickens does not adopt the same solution, but still uses ironic detachment in order to avoid taking side in these early phases of the Revolution.

The last resemblance consists of a passing detail in the description of Monseigneur “in Town” (108), which recalls Manzoni’s story of Gertrude known as the nun of Monza, related in chapter 9. Manzoni lingers for a long while to tell the romantic story of Gertrude, a girl who was sent to a nunnery much against her will because marrying her would have been too expensive for her family. When we meet her in the novel she has already been in the convent for some time, where she agrees to take Lucia under her protection. In chapter XIII of *A Tale of Two Cities* we have a similar situation:

Monseigneur, after generations of great luxury and expense, was growing poor. Hence Monseigneur had taken his sister from a convent, while there was yet time to ward off the impending veil, the cheapest garment she could wear, and had bestowed her as a prize upon a very rich Farmer-General, poor in family. (109)

Indeed the whole description of Monseigneur reminds, though without striking similarities, of similar noblemen in *I promessi sposi*, such as il Principe (Gertrude’s father), and il Conte Zio (Don Rodrigo’s

uncle), whereas Don Rodrigo himself and his cousin Attilio, have a counterpart in the Evremond brothers.

We do not know if Manzoni borrowed these fragments consciously or unconsciously, whether they are meant to acknowledge a debt or, more probably, they are a part of his rich conceptual universe. My claim is simply that to this universe the Italian experience has given some noteworthy contributions.

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The Italian Influence in the Plays of Charles Dickens

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In 1849, Flora Tristan visited England for the fourth time and kept a journal in which she noted that there were many immigrants in London – French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Polish, more or less in that order – all busy in various trades: craftsmen, workers, wholesale and retail merchants, teachers, “theatrical performers, doctors, members of the diplomatic corps, and lastly a floating population of travellers who stay in the country no more than a month or two” (29). While some Italians who immigrated to England gained recognition because they belonged to these professions or to the artistic world, others were political exiles following Giuseppe Mazzini, who had found a safe refuge among his many sympathizers after crossing the Channel in 1836. It is clear that this influx of Italians to England played a part in Dickens’s development as a writer, as did their literary traditions, especially *Commedia dell’Arte*. His early plays, written well before he established himself as one of England’s foremost novelists and before he spent a year in Genoa, reflect in compelling ways how Dickens’s acquaintance with Italians and Italian literary traditions contributed to his development as an artist of fiction.

As he wrote in his letters, Dickens experienced the Italian revival of the early nineteenth century even as a child. He remembered that he was brought up “to behold the splendour of Christmas Pantomimes” with Harlequin characters and the humour of Joseph Grimaldi, the famous clown at whom he had “clapped his hands with great precocity” and whose memoirs he edited in 1838 (*Letters* I: 382). Later, as a young adult, Dickens corrected the proofs of *Two Journeys through Italy and Switzerland* written by

William Thomson, Catherine Hogarth's maternal uncle. This book, along with the many travel accounts Dickens read – Samuel Rogers' poem *Italy*, Tobias Smollett's epistolary *Travels through France and Italy*, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's writings – was, unconsciously perhaps, to lead him to retell the Italian tour in a less conventional way.¹ As literary fashion required, Italian and Italianate models, settings, and flavours were constantly proposed, according to Gothic, Romantic and Victorian tastes. Dickens and his intellectual friends, from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to William Henry Ainsworth, were well aware that Italy was very much part of the English literary scene.

The young Dickens, not surprisingly, became acquainted with London's Italian population. When living at 18 Bentick Street, he had an Italian neighbour, the music teacher Philip Verini (*Letters* I: 437), and he was later to become acquainted with the singer and actress Madame Sala, who would appear in his comedies, in the parts of Julia Dobbs in *The Strange Gentleman* and Mrs Peter Limbury in *Is She His Wife or, Something Singular!* (*Letters* I: 302). Dickens was to be introduced to Mazzini, Panizzi, Gallenga and Poerio in the crucial years when Italian nationalism was supported by English men of letters (Rudman 25-175). He read William Roscoe as well as the great authors of the Romantic period who had lived in Italy, Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt. And, from what can be gathered from his library, he was an avid reader of travel books – as George Henry Lewes commented, rather disparagingly, after a visit to the writer's house in June 1838, “nothing but three-volume novels and books of travel” (*Letters* I: 302, note 1).²

¹ One example of how Dickens later broke from convention, unlike the travellers to Italy whose works he treasured in his library (Montaigne, Lawrence Sterne, Madame de Staël, Lord Byron, L. Simond, etc.), is that he was more concerned with what was going on around him than with the antiquities or the cultural sights. He did, though, voice widespread religious prejudices against both Catholics and Jews, as many commentators have pointed out. See Severi 21, for his mistaking Mantuan peasants, in their black *tabarri*, for Jews in *Pictures from Italy*. See also Hollington 144-45.

² It should be noted that Stonehouse's edition of the library catalogue reproduces a picture far different from that of Lewes. As Tillotson comments on the *Inventory of Contents of 1 Devonshire Terrace, May 1854*, “the list is of considerable interest as showing the minimum size and range of CD's collection, well over 2000 volumes at the age of 32 – minimum because we have no evidence of how many books he

It was in 1833 at Bentick Street where Dickens became familiar with the plot conventions of Italian operettas.³ That spring, he staged *Clari, or the Maid of Milan* (*Letters* I: 18), an operetta with a libretto by the American John Howard Payne and music by Sir Henry Rowley Bishop, who had studied music in London with Francesco Bianchi, an Italian musician of some repute who immigrated to England in 1793 (Duncan). *Clari* was first performed in 1823 at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. Its plot deals with the naïve, country girl, Clari, who is induced by Duke Vivaldi to elope with him to his castle, promising marriage. Although fond of her, he delays the wedding. Clari, terribly homesick, sings the operetta's claim to musical fame, "Home Sweet Home", and, instead of being comforted, learns that Duke Vivaldi will not marry her after all. She returns to the home of her father, Rolamo, a farmer (played by Dickens), where the repentant duke finds her. He finally decides to offer her his hand and half of his possessions.

Dickens's first play put all of his theatrical experiences to the test: his early readings of the *Tales of the Genii*, his knowledge of Mrs Inchbald's farces, the fabled composition of a Venetian comedietta, *The Stratagems of Rozanza* (which is considered lost), his star-struck, adolescent "splurging" on the theatre in the galleries of Covent Garden, Drury Lane and the Haymarket, and his attraction to the popular entertainments and to James Robinson Planché's staged extravaganzas.⁴ *The Strange Gentleman: A Comic Burletta*, in two acts, opened at the St. James's Theatre on 29 September 1836. There is not one Italian character in the play and apparently no trace of Italian influence, yet the plot resembles that of a *canovaccio* made up of the *lazzi* or "comic routines", as Mel Gordon approximately translates the term from *Commedia dell'Arte*

took with him to Italy" (*Letters* IV: 704-26). See also the list of volumes purchased by Dickens at the sale of Thomas Hill's books in March 1841 (*Letters* II: 229 and note). For his American books, see *Letters* III: 250 and note.

³ It was also in the same year that Dickens had pleased himself by writing a burlesque extravaganza, the Shakespearean parody, *O' Thello*.

⁴ Mrs Inchbald's works are mentioned in the *Catalogue of the Library of Charles Dickens from Gadshill* (92). For Dickens's early theatre-going experiences, see "Two Views of a Cheap Theatre" in *The Uncommercial Traveller* and E. and E. Johnson's *Dickens Theatrical Reader* (9).

(from Latin *actio*, “action”, which adequately translates the Greek word for “drama”).⁵

Dickens staged a *burletta*, a comic play with music that revolves around a funny situation, a joke, an Italian *burla*.⁶ *The Strange Gentleman* is set at The St. James’s Arms, an inn which, meta-theatrically, pokes fun at the very theatre in which the action takes place. The cast is comprised of characters who convene at the inn. The Strange Gentleman is running away from a rival, Horatio Tinkles, who wants to challenge him to a duel for the love of a certain Emily Brown whom the Gentleman has never seen. Another character, John Johnson, on the way to Gretna Green⁷ to meet his fiancée, is detained at the inn because of a lack of funds. In incognito because he has quarrelled with John Johnson is Charles Tomkins, who stops at the inn to meet his fiancée, Fanny Wilson, who is accompanied by her sister Mary, who happens to be John Johnson’s girl. Julia Dobbs, a mature, wealthy woman, is also at the inn waiting for Lord Peter, the young man who is supposed to marry her. Mayor Owen Overton, from a small town on the road to Gretna Green, also calls at the inn, where there are three waiters, a chambermaid, and Mrs Noakes, the landlady. Tom Sparks, the one-eyed “boots”, makes his rounds and serves everybody.

All of the lodgers are on some secret errand and sworn to secrecy. The three women are afraid of ruining their reputations. The three men try to avoid meeting each other. The Strange Gentleman wants to avoid the duel and therefore writes an anonymous letter to the

⁵ For further studies of Commedia dell’Arte, see Nicoll’s *Masks, Mimes and Miracles Studies in the Popular Theatre*, Nicoll’s *World of Arlequin: A Critical Study of the Commedia dell’Arte* and Taviani and Schino’s *Il segreto della Commedia dell’Arte. La memoria delle compagnie italiane del XVI, XVII, XVIII secolo*. It is interesting to note that, in the European context of the period, some of the literary and political choices of the French novelist George Sand compare to those of Dickens; she also favoured the theatre and dramatized her novels. Her son, Maurice, accompanied by Frédéric Chopin on the piano, recited the first Commedia dell’Arte *pastiches* at the theatre of Nohant (see Linowitz Wentz 8; Taviani-Schino 68-69). In England, La Commedia dell’Arte enjoyed one of its most celebrated seasons in the eighteenth century, cf. V. Papetti’s study, *Arlecchino a Londra. La Pantomima inglese 1706-1728*.

⁶ On the *burletta* see Rowell 66-74.

⁷ Like Reno or Las Vegas today, the town was well-known for its uncomplicated marriage procedures, see Stendhal’s comments in *Rome, Naples, Florence* (206).

mayor asking him to arrest one of the contenders who is staying at the inn in room number 17, the very room he himself is occupying. He also writes a letter to Horatio Tinkles to tell him that he is ready to fight the duel. He gives the letters to Tom Sparks and instructs him carefully, but the boots hands the letters to the wrong person and a series of errors, intrigues, mistaken identities, mistaken rooms and much confused commotion follows.

Through its use of various character stereotypes, *The Strange Gentleman* not so strangely aligns itself to the repertoire of the Commedia dell'Arte. There are two couples of young lovers: Fanny and Charles Tomkins, Mary and John Johnson; the stock character of the old rich woman, Julia Dobbs, lured into marriage by a young penniless nobleman, Lord Peter; the fearful lover, the Strange Gentleman; a mayor who, like the old, vainglorious Captain in the Commedia, imparts orders; servants like the *zanni*, some sharp and wise, some foolish and dull, among whom stands out a quick-witted and yet obtuse character, Pulcinella, or Punch, who creates havoc, like Tom Sparks, the one-eyed boots at the St. James's Arms.

The action of Dickens's *burletta* is made up from comic routines taken directly from Commedia dell'Arte: stock situations and *lazzi*, which include verbal expressions as well as actions and mimicry. The taxonomy of the *lazzi* would include among its list the various components of *The Strange Gentleman*'s plot, the substitution of letters, the confusion over rooms (especially at night), various forms of deceit and equivocal behaviour, intrigue, madness (especially feigned), and jokes at the expense of people's age, social standing, or financial stability (or lack thereof).⁸ At the end, the Strange Gentleman's identity is revealed when Mrs Noakes receives a letter for a certain Walker Trott from Horatio Tinkles, who explains that the duel was a ruse to send him away so that he could marry Emily Brown. In the comic anagnorisis which ensues, Walker realizes that he has lost nothing and is about to gain something, because Julia Dobbs, abandoned by Lord Peter, is ready to be consoled by him.

It should be remembered that Dickens appreciated and was well-acquainted with opera, which he could discuss with his future father-

⁸ See Capozza, *Tutti i lazzi della Commedia dell'Arte*.

in-law and co-worker at the *Chronicle*, George Hogarth, who himself wrote *Memoirs* of operas on the continent, a work listed in the catalog of the Gadshill library (*Catalog* 58). Dickens was keenly aware of opera's wide appeal in London: he tried in vain, for example, to obtain tickets at Drury Lane for *The Siege of Rochelle*, where the Irish singer and composer Michael W. Balfe debuted in England (*Letters* I: 98 and note 4).⁹ As a stage manager Dickens also recognized how the lavishness of operatic production led to expense. By 1836, he had been at work on a comic opera with the composer John Pyke Hullah for over a year, and his concern over expense was part of his rationale for discarding the originally proposed Venetian setting. At the end of December 1835, Dickens declared that he was not pleased

with any of the sketches I have made for an opera to which the title of 'The Gondolier' would be applicable; and remembering the popularity and beauty of many of the old English Operas I am strongly in favour of a simple rural story. I am the more induced to favour this notion when I consider with how little expense such a piece might be produced, and how very effective its situations might be made; while the Gondolier on the other hand would require a great many supernumeraries, and some rather costly scenery. Add to these considerations, the increased ease and effect with which we could both work on an English Drama where the characters would act and talk like people we see and hear of every day [...]. (*Letters* I: 113)

Such comments reinforce the idea that Dickens, busy as he was with *The Pickwick Papers* and many other engagements, always aimed at success (Cerutti 45-62). Opera was a popular genre among the upper middle classes; operetta, among perhaps the lower, who were highly entertained by a spectacular show that was a *Gesamtkunstwerk* on a reduced scale.

⁹ A child prodigy, Balfe was introduced to *bel canto* and operatic composition by Luigi Cherubini and Gioacchino Rossini in Paris; he then studied in Rome and Milan. In Italy, Balfe sang at La Scala in 1834 in Rossini's *Otello* with the famous mezzo-soprano, Maria Malibran, who would also sing in his other opera, *The Maid of Artois*, performed at Drury Lane on 27 May 1836. Dickens wrote of both operas in his letters and seems to have followed the career of Balfe closely.

Dickens's apprenticeship, be it as theatrical producer or playwright, corresponded to his early desire to become an actor, though he later realized that his talents were put to better use in writing. Writing serialized novels meant aiming at one target – the readers of the penny papers; writing for the theatre meant speaking directly to a live audience, to entertain and educate it. A live show as an immediate form of communication could make an author successful overnight, make his name a byword in society or destroy his stamina forever. Dickens was a shrewd, enterprising writer who managed to communicate through different channels to different audiences, until – and it happened quite early – his own novels were adapted by other authors for the theatre.

The Village Coquettes premiered at the St. James's Theatre on 6 December 1836. It starred John Braham, the best-known English tenor of the time and owner of the St. James's Theatre, who was engaged for the role of Squire Norton. The play takes place in an English village in the autumn of 1729. Two pretty village girls, Lucy and Rose, like to flirt with the young farmers. They are, respectively, the daughter and niece of old farmer Benson, who lives on the property of Squire Norton. The two coquettes have their beaux in the village, George Edmonds, betrothed to Lucy, and John Maddox, who is attached to Rose. When the Squire visits the village with a foppish friend, the Honorable Sparkins Flam, both noblemen are struck by the skittishness of the two coquettes: Squire Norton falls in love with Lucy, Flam flirts with Rose, and the two noblemen snub the two beaux. Old farmer Benson, however, does not approve of the Squire's attention to his daughter, who is not really in love, but merely flattered. Rose, however, truly believes that Flam is head over heels in love with her. The Squire, perceiving Old Benson's opposition, threatens to send him away from his land, but shortly afterwards repents, especially when he recognizes his tenant's dignity. In the meantime, Flam, to obtain the Squire's approval, decides to kidnap Lucy. The play ends happily without bringing any change to the little community.

The Village Coquettes participates in the Commedia dell'Arte tradition. It contrasts the two worlds of nobles and rustics. The plot, similar to those of the Commedia, revolves around the seduction of a farmer's daughter by an aristocratic landowner. The noblemen

bring disruption into the idyllic landscape and into the existing relationships. The village couples, belonging to the rural setting, also share the poetical clichés and the emotions of betrayal, jealousy and unrequited love, triggered when the noblemen steal the scene, of the more refined sub-genre of pastoral comedy, well-represented by such plays as Tasso's *Aminta* and Guarini's *Pastor Fido* or Shakespeare's sheep shearing episode in *The Winter's Tale* (Glavin 193-95), which predate the Commedia.

The *lazzi amorosi*, tabulated in all their variety, are frequent in the Commedia tradition and usually correspond to the different, contradictory representations of love between partners of different social status (Capozza 91-123).¹⁰ Opera, including Dickens's operetta, borrowed from all the previous dramatic traditions. *The Village Coquettes* was written as an *opera buffa* with seventeen arias, of which some like "The Child and the Old Man", which Braham sang in his concerts in England and the States, were certainly successful and received excellent reviews in the press (Dexter 165-68; Hill 191-92). Dickens, however, in time, was "repentant" and wished that it would "sink into its native obscurity" (Adair Fitzgerald 58).

Is She His Wife? Or, Something Singular!, a one-act comic burletta, opened at the St. James's on 3 March 1837, but Dickens's name did not appear on the playbill. It originally bore the title *Cross Purposes* and was composed before *The Strange Gentleman* (*Letters* I: 226). The play had a very short run – perhaps because the plot lacked originality. The action is set in the country where the young married couple, Mr and Mrs Lovetown, are rather bored; Mrs Lovetown also feels neglected. Their neighbour, Felix Tapkins, is a happy-go-lucky fellow, but rather dull. Another couple lives nearby, the Limburys. While Mrs Lovetown creates ambiguous situations to make her husband believe she is in love with Tapkins, Mr

¹⁰ The *topos* of the persecuted virgin or of the *sedotta abbandonata*, for example, is often introduced as a tragic pivotal episode, as happens, for instance, in Verdi's *Rigoletto* (1851, from Hugo's drama, *Le roi s'amuse*, 1832), where Gilda, the gorgeous daughter of the Gonzaga court jester, Rigoletto, is seduced and kidnapped by the Duke. Dickens himself proposed a similar situation, in a humorous vein, in *Nicholas Nickleby* when Kate Nickleby becomes the unwilling and recalcitrant object of Sir Mulberry Hawk's leering attentions (235-36). Actually, the sweet, docile Lucy of *The Village Coquettes* anticipates other young women in Dickens, like Agnes in *David Copperfield* and Rachel in *Hard Times*.

Lovetown retaliates by feigning an emotional involvement with the vain Mrs Limbury. In a situation full of misunderstandings, Tapkins is led by Mrs Lovetown to believe that she is not really married to the man who lives with her. The whole play could be staged today as a farce on wife swapping.

The country setting, the jealous husband and wife, the dull bachelor stand-in, and the erotic double-entendres all are part of the bag of tricks of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, used by playwrights from classical times to the present, including the anonymous late-sixteenth-century author of the *Intrichi amorosi*, a comedy once attributed to Torquato Tasso, as well as to Goldoni and his followers. In this Dickensian middle-class comedy of errors, the roles, the dialogues and the emotions portrayed are all exaggerated. The play is rife with verbal and mimed asides, puns, gags, and allusions. The actor, John Pritt Hartley, to whom Dickens had dedicated *The Village Coquettes* (*Complete Plays* 42), was Tapkins and gave an admirable performance, as the "Figaro in London" reported on 18 March 1837: "Hartley delighted his numerous friends by his very humorous performance of the principal character: and in a song, also by Boz, he displayed to great advantage his well-known talent for the English buffo parlante" (Adair Fitzgerald 75). *The Times* said that "it was one of the cleverest farces produced for some time". The *Sunday Times* defined the burletta "a trifle, but a pleasant one"; while the *Morning Chronicle* criticized the "the meagre incidents" and "pointless dialogue with the exception of a few puns of venerable antiquity" and considered, on the whole, the audience to have been too indulgent (Dexter 254).

The Lamplighter, Dickens's last play, is a one-act farce that was withdrawn from the stage in 1838 and re-written as a short story in 1841. In the first scene the astronomer, Mr Stargazer, invites the lamplighter, Tom Grig, into his house and reveals to him that he is the man sent by the stars to marry his niece Fanny. This initial situation of a wizard-like astronomer who can read the future recalls similar situations from various *canovacci* of the *Commedia dell'Arte*. For instance, in Flaminio Scala's *Flavio il finto negromante*, the protagonist Flavio is a wizard who, because of his supernatural power, helps Pantalone in his tryst with Franceschina and in many other situations. In the anonymous *canovaccio*, *Il finto astrologo*,

Zanni, disguised as an astrologer, foresees the future. In many *lazzi* Pulcinella appears as an astrologer (Capozza 156-61).

In the farce, Stargazer seems to have misinterpreted the message. The stars had predicted that a wealthy suitor would appear, but Tom Grig is just a simple lamplighter. Besides, Galileo, Stargazer's son, is in love with Fanny, and in the house there are two other girls, Emma, Galileo's sister, betrothed to the old, ugly, Moony, and Betsy, a governess, who falls in love with Tom at first sight. Stargazer and his friend, the astrologer Mooney, are both in search of the philosopher's stone that will make them very wealthy. They retire to their laboratory with Tom to whom they reveal that, since he is destined to die soon, he must marry Fanny. The girls, led by Betsy, declare their love in jest: Fanny to Moony and Emma to Tom. They are instantly refused, but then Betsy announces that only Galileo can marry Fanny because the stars have given her proof. Betsy is then free to marry Tom, but Stargazer surprises everybody by saying that he was mistaken and that Tom would live a very long life. Tom escapes from the window and goes back to his life as a lamplighter. In this madhouse situation, the simple Tom, a common worker, is far wiser than the middle-class characters that crowd around him with impossible prospects.

The contrived plots and artificial and exaggerated situations of Dickens's plays usually leave the reader unsatisfied. It must be remembered, though, that the art of popular drama, its actual representation on the stage, is always an emphatic reproduction of real life situations.¹¹ When Hullah said that "the Englishman is a reticent, undemonstrative creature, not predisposed even to vocal expressions and decidedly indisposed to pantomimic" (Andrews 187), he was not thinking of Charles Dickens. The young Dickens, already an experienced actor and a very "demonstrative" author, was learning to mirror life through minor theatrical genres, mostly of Italian origin: burletta, farce, operetta and comedietta. He would continue with these exercises all his life, especially in his novels, where dramatic situations abound, and in his early scriptwriting, where he shows a

¹¹ For a semiotic reading of drama that implies a difference between the text and the performance, see Ubersfeld.

keen awareness of the actor's craft and a working knowledge of the techniques of the *Commedia dell'Arte*.

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Dante's *Vita Nova* and the Victorians: The Hidden Image behind Rossetti's *Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante*

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In the wide corpus of Rossetti's work inspired somehow by Dante, the watercolour entitled *Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante* (1852), of which a preparatory drawing also exists, is certainly not one of the most important. Still, it serves as a good point of departure for analysing Dante's reception in nineteenth-century England and the implications of the singular fortune of the *Vita Nova* in the Victorian age.

The theme of the painting was the result of a notorious, so to speak, episode that occurred in 1840, when an Anglo-Florentine *equipe* discovered, on the wall of the chapel of Saint Mary Magdalene at the Bargello in Florence, a portrait of Dante allegedly painted by Giotto.¹ The *trouvaille* was a classic of nineteenth-century archaeology, promoted by two dilettantes, the American Henry Wilde and the Englishman Seymour Kirkup (who in his later life claimed to be in spiritual contact with Dante, as he confessed to an astonished Nathaniel Hawthorne).² The search started with the

¹ Barocchi and Bertelà provide a detailed account of the discovery (3-8).

² See the singular letter sent by Kirkup to William M. Rossetti:

Dante, with two other of our spirits, continues to live at Caprera, where he is Garibaldi's guardian, and he seldom comes to see us, though he is very kind to my little girl and to us all. I told you of the death of a little rabbit which he brought her as a present from the island. He promised her something else and we had forgotten it. The other day as we were at dinner she said: 'There is somebody crying in this room.' I am deaf and heard nothing. The nun said: 'C'È [sic] una voce qui.' (There is a voice here) I

rediscovery of a text – Vasari's *Lives* of Italian painters, re-edited by Giovanni Masselli in 1832 – which stated that Giotto had painted a portrait of the poet in the Bargello:

Giotto [...] fra gl'altri ritrasse, come ancor oggi si vede nella capella del Palagio del Podestà di Firenze, Dante Alighieri, coetaneo et amico suo grandissimo e non meno famoso poeta che si fusse ne' medesimi tempi Giotto pittore [...]. Nella medesima capella è il ritratto, similmente di mano del medesimo, di ser Brunetto Latini maestro di Dante, e di messer Corso Donati gran cittadino di que' tempi.

[Among others Giotto portrayed, as it can still be seen nowadays in the Chapel of the Palace of the Podestà at Florence, Dante Alighieri, a contemporary and a very great friend to him, and no less famous as poet than was in the same times Giotto as painter [...]. In the same chapel are the portraits, always by the hand of the same Giotto, of Ser Brunetto Latini, master of Dante, and of Messer Corso Donati, a great citizen of those times.]

Other sources confirmed Vasari, including Filippo Villani's *De origine civitatis Florentiae et de eiusdem famosis civibus*, Lorenzo Ghiberti's *Commentarii*, and Giannozzo Manetti's *Vita Dantis poetae florentini*. However, ambiguity surrounds the the portrait – some speak of a canvas and some of a fresco – making it probable that the original by Giotto was a canvas (now lost) and that the fresco was a copy completed later. To complicate matters further, there is evidence that the Bargello burned completely in 1332, that is, eleven years after Dante's death, which served as Luigi Passerini and Gaetano Milanesi's main argument to reject, in 1865, the authenticity of the portrait. Nonetheless, the portrait must have existed, in spite of chronology and the history of the building.

supposed it was some noise in the street. 'No, it is here.' I gave Bibi a pen and she was made to write: 'Open the door of the camerino,' which she did, and came running and screaming to us: 'Oh, c'è una bestia!' (Oh, there is an animal!) followed by a big lamb, almost a sheep, jumping and bleating. Dante, assisted by another, had brought it from Santa Rosora [San Rossore?], near Pisa, where it had been lost in a wood: the peasants would have eaten it. And here it has been even since, and follows Bibi like a dog. I had been in the camerino five minutes before and was never out of sight of the door. The window was fastened, but they had opened it. (Kuhns 205-206)



Figure. Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante*. Watercolour. 1852. 37 x 47. Private Collection.

As Steve Ellis points out, since the beginning the portrait has been inextricably linked, in general, with the *Vita Nova*. The Romantic generation had shown little interest in Dante's book of youth; only Shelley had some knowledge of it, testified by the *Epipsychidion* (1820-21), where he used the *Vita Nova* in a neo-platonic key to tell of his love to the Italian Teresa Viviani (Ellis 7-15). Still, in the 1830s, the *libello* had caught the attention of some literary figures: Arthur Hallam had attempted a translation, now lost except for some poems (Ellis 103), Charles Lyell, a friend to the Italian exile Gabriel Rossetti, had done a partial translation of it, and Ralph Waldo Emerson completed one, although it was never published.³

³ Lyell started working on his translation in 1826 and first published it in 1835 (*The Canzoniere of Dante Alighieri, including the Poems of the Vita Nova and Convito*) and then in 1842 (*The Poems of the Vita Nova and Convito of Dante Alighieri*). It is possible that he also translated the prose sections of the *Vita Nova*,

The rediscovery of the young Dante's image is therefore a phenomenon well inserted in a sort of zeitgeist: the 1840s witnessed the Anglophone culture's renewed interest not only in the *Vita Nova*, but also in Dante as a young lover. This can be seen in Joseph Garrow's translation for the public of the so-called Anglo-Florentines,⁴ in three different French translations, and in Rossetti's translation, composed precisely during these years, although not published until 1861.⁵

The young Dante is deeply different from the one who caught the Romantics' attention, the stern exile, a Byronic hero, whose work is primarily the "primitive" and "sublime" *Inferno* (Ellis 36-65). The Bargello portrait shows a young man, and it is precisely this freshness of youth that is found in the *Vita Nova*. The connection is well established from the start: in the portrait, declares Mary Shelley, "We see [...] the lover of Beatrice: the countenance breathes the spirit of the *Vita Nuova*" (Fraser 140). We find analogous considerations in several works celebrating the discovery – the sonnet by Theodosia Garrow as well as Giuseppe Giusti's 1841 sonnet, "Nell'occasione che fu scoperto a Firenze il vero ritratto di Dante fatto da Giotto" ["In the occasion when it was discovered in Florence the veritable portrait of Dante made by Giotto"]. The date of the portrait has been subject to debate, with each proposed year connecting symbolically to Dante's life. According to Kirkup, the portrait was painted when Dante was twenty-five, in 1290, the year of Beatrice's death:

Nel bel ritratto a fresco di Dante dipinto da Giotto nel muro della cappella del potestà di Firenze, tesoro recentemente recuperato, vediamo le medesime fattezze precisamente come quelle del busto del Torrigiani, ma con più delicata e più ilare espressione dell'età d'anni circa venticinque. (Lyell xxv)

but the manuscript is now lost. Emerson began working on the *Vita Nova* in the late 1830s, and the translation may have been completed around 1842. See J. Chesley Mathews's essay in Emerson 1960, v-xiii.

⁴ *The Early Life of Dante Alighieri*, published in 1842 by Le Monnier, with parallel Italian text. Garrow's daughter, Theodosia (later wife to Anthony Trollope's brother), composed a sonnet on the Bargello portrait: "On the Discovery of Dante's Portrait on the Wall of the Ancient Chapel of the Bargello at Florence, July 23, 1840".

⁵ Rossetti began to translate the medieval Italian poets around 1845, using his father's library as well as the resources of the British Museum. The translation of the *Vita Nova* was first published in 1861 in *The Early Italian Poets*.

[In the beautiful fresco representing Dante, painted by Giotto on the wall of the *podestà* chapel in Florence, a treasure recently recovered, we see precisely the same features as in the Torrigiani bust, but with a more delicate and hilarious expression and of an age of approximately twenty-five.]

In spite of all chronological evidence, John Ruskin proposed the year 1300, making the realization of the portrait match the date of the “vision” Dante related in the *Divine Comedy* (Ellis 118). Conjectures also surround the book Dante holds in his hand. Among the proposed attributions are the *Vita Nova* itself, a suggestion proposed by Kirkup (Ellis 104), and works by Virgil or Stace, suggestions proposed by the Anglo-French poet Renée Vivien.

This image of the young Dante, more or less implicitly opposed to that of the old and disenchanted exile, is widely spread through the whole nineteenth century, from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Dante at Verona* (1852) to Leighton's painting *Dante in Exile* (1864), showing the old Dante mocked by courtesans and jesters at Cangrande's court. *Dante in Exile* is widely derived from *Dante at Verona*, based on its role in the anecdotes included in Dante's biography published by Cesare Balbo in 1839. Rossetti writes in the introduction to the Part II of *The Early Italian Poets*:

The reader will not need to be reminded of Giotto's portrait of the youthful Dante, painted in the Bargello at Florence, then the chapel of the Podestà. This is the author of the *Vita Nuova*. That other portrait shown us in the posthumous mask, – a face dead in exile after the death of hope – should front the first page of the Sacred Poem to which heaven and earth had set their hands, but which might never bring him back to Florence, though it had made him haggard for many years. (148-49)

The reference is to the cast of what was supposed to be Dante's death-mask, discovered in Florence at the end of the 1830s – Charles Lyell had given Gabriel Rossetti a copy as a present. In effect, the comparison between the Bargello portrait and the death-mask is commonplace throughout the nineteenth century, implying

an opposition between the young and hopeful poet and the old exile “after the death of hope”.⁶

Even when its attribution was put into question in 1865, the Bargello portrait continued to haunt the imaginations of poets such as Eugene Lee-Hamilton and Renée Vivien. Lee-Hamilton’s sonnet, “On the Fly-Leaf of Dante’s *Vita Nuova*”, included in *Sonnets of the Wingless Hours*, affirms the opposition: “This little book is not by that stern man,/But by his younger self, such as he seems/In Giotto’s fresco, holding up the flower” (Quoted from Arru 177). In the same year, 1894, Renée Vivien, residing in London, spoke of the portrait in a letter to a friend dated October 25:

Que j’aime ce Dante-là ! le poétique adolescent de la *Vita Nuova*, le jeune homme qui rêvait de Béatrice et faisait de si doux vers en son honneur! Ce n’est pas le Dante hagard et tourmenté de la *Divine Comédie*, le partisan farouche, l’ennemi implacable, ce n’est pas Dante le haineux, le rancunier, l’agité, mais aussi cruellement tourmenté – en un mot, ce n’est pas l’homme vieilli avant l’âge par la douleur et l’infortune, l’exilé rendu amer par les désappointements et les revers [...]. Ce n’est pas non plus le poète consommé, mûri, arrivé au plus haut développement de son génie [...]. C’est le jeune homme qui aime Béatrice, et qui rêve ses premiers rêves de poésie et de gloire, qui étudie Virgile et Stace, et qui se fait peindre un livre sous le bras. (Quoted from Arru 177-79)

[How much I love that Dante! The poetic adolescent of the *New Life*, the young man who dreamt of Beatrice and made so sweet lines in her honour! He’s not the dazed and tormented Dante of the *Divine Comedy*, the ferocious partisan, the implacable enemy, it’s not the hateful Dante, the spiteful, the troubled, but also so cruelly tormented – in one word, he’s not the man grown older before the time by sorrow and misfortune, the exile made bitter by disappointments and reversals [...]. He’s not even the skilled, mature poet, who has achieved the highest development of his genius [...]. He’s the young man who loves Beatrice, and who dreams his first dreams of poetry and glory, who studies Virgil and Statius, and who sits with a book under his arm.]

⁶ On Leighton’s painting, see also Ellis 55-56.

The Bargello portrait became popular also because it testifies to a relationship between Dante and Giotto, matching the nineteenth-century taste for symmetries. According to some traditions, Dante and Giotto – the poet and the painter – were thought to be born the same year, 1265; also well known was the close friendship of the “other” Italian poet, Petrarch, to the painter Simone Martini, who painted a now lost portrait of Laura.⁷ The Bargello portrait is therefore proof that Dante and Giotto knew each other and, even more, that they were friends. It symbolized the beginning of both Italian art and poetry.

For Dante Gabriel Rossetti, divided by his *Doppelbegabung* – double vocation (Cometa 13) – of poet and painter, this association was of course of extreme interest. When he inaugurated the English vogue for the genre of the “imaginary portrait” with the short story *Hand and Soul* (1849), his main influence was Browning’s *Sordello*. The story of the “herald-star” Sordello, a forgotten forerunner of Dante, had rivalled the story of Chiaro dell’Erma, “remembered” – like all the “early Italian painters” – “as the shadow [...] of the coming of such a one [Cimabue]”.⁸ Both had made a *chef d’œuvre inconnu*, be it the whole dramatic monologue spoken by Sordello an instant before dying or the small picture where Chiaro had painted his own soul.⁹ Rossetti’s painting is therefore complicated and ambiguous: while his artistic declaration of intentions derives from a literary work, the portrait of a poet also serves as an inspiration for delineating the character of a fictional painter. Simultaneously, the figures of Dante and Giotto – the poet and the painter – are somehow mixed, ambiguous, overlapping each other. In *The Early Italian Poets*, the anthology of medieval Italian poetry Rossetti published in 1861, there is included a *canzone*, “Of the Doctrine of Voluntary Poverty”, allegedly composed by Giotto, while the first

⁷ See the sonnets DXXXVII (*Per mirar Policleto a prova fiso*) and DXXXVIII (*Quando giunse a Simon l’alto concetto*) of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, where the poet asks the painter to make a portrait of his mistress.

⁸ On *Hand and Soul* and the genre of the “imaginary portrait”, see Bizzotto 43-64. On *Hand and Soul* and its Dantean sources, as well as its relationship with Browning’s *Sordello*, see Camilletti “Golden Veil” and Camilletti *Beatrice* 35-49.

⁹ The reference to Balzac is by no means by chance. Published for the first time in 1831, *Le chef d’œuvre inconnu* is the veritable beginning of the genre of the “imaginary portrait”, later inaugurated in England precisely by Rossetti’s *Hand and Soul*.

Dantean subject Rossetti chooses for a drawing is the episode of the *Vita Nova*, where Dante shows himself as painting angels on the *First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice*.¹⁰

When Rossetti drew *Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante*, therefore, he was illustrating the deep connection between poetry and painting, exemplified by the friendship of the poet-painter with the painter-poet: a connection widely allowed by Dante, who had compared his own fame with that of Giotto in the famous passage from Canto XI of *Purgatory*, stated explicitly by Rossetti as the main source for the watercolour in the 1853 letter to Thomas Wollner (*Letters* I: 119-23). Rossetti included the passage in the introduction to the second part of *The Early Italian Poets*, quoting from Cayley's translation:

Lo, Cimabue thought alone to tread
 The lists of painting; now doth Giotto gain
 The praise, and darkness on his glory shed.
 Thus hath one Guido from another ta'en
 The praise of speech, and haply one hath pass'd
 Through birth, who from their nest will chase the twain
Purg. XI, 94-99 (131)

But what does Rossetti's work show exactly? The characters are the same as they appear in the passage: Cimabue, Giotto, Guido Cavalcanti, and Dante. Guinizelli, whom Rossetti reports as dead in 1276 cannot appear in the picture (*Early Italian Poets* xxv). His

¹⁰ The wrong attribution of the *canzone* is not surprising, given the extreme poorness of the sources Rossetti used in translating the early Italian poets (listed in Rossetti 1861, xii). See my analysis of the peculiarities of Rossetti's translations compared to his sources (Camilletti *Beatrice*). In the introduction to the second part of the anthology, where the authors of "Dante's circle" are included together with the *Vita Nova*, Rossetti states that "Giotto falls by right into Dante's circle, as one great man comes naturally to know another" (*The Early Italian Poets* 219). Rossetti did not accept the traditional birth date of Giotto in 1265, but sets it in 1276, a year that does not correspond with the watercolour, where we see Giotto painting Beatrice. At the time of her death, in 1290, Giotto would have been just fourteen, as also Ellis points out, an example of "a common nineteenth-century method of handling the events of Dante's life" (117). "There is a tradition", Rossetti adds, "that Dante also studied drawing with Giotto's master Cimabue; and that he practised it in some degree is evident from the passage in the *Vita Nuova*, where he speaks of his drawing an angel" (*The Early Italian Poets* 220).

presence, however, is suggested by the book that Cavalcanti holds, which can be identified with that of his poems by an explicit declaration from Rossetti himself (*Letters* I: 119-23). Giotto is looking at Dante, while painting the fresco. Over his shoulder, Cimabue looks quite astonished in response to the *newness* of Giotto's art, as if he suddenly understood the loss of his primacy. Cavalcanti is near Dante – there seems no rivalry between the two – and Rossetti agrees with the opinion predominant during the nineteenth century, which saw Guido's "disdain" (*Inf.* X, 63) directed toward Virgil rather than to Beatrice (*Early Italian Poets* 200n). And it is precisely Beatrice, the only character not mentioned in the passage of the *Purgatory*, whom Rossetti added: both in the drawing and in the watercolour, she is shown passing by, with Dante the only figure looking at her. In Rossetti's preparatory drawing, Cavalcanti also looks at Beatrice, but his expression is quite perplexed, while in the final watercolour he, with the book in his hand, directs his gaze to Dante.

The first keys to interpret this image are the directions of each character's gaze: Giotto looks at Dante, while Cimabue stares at the painting; Cavalcanti also looks at the poet, still keeping the book close, while Dante is the only one to perceive the presence of Beatrice. It should not be forgotten that this painting represents an *agon*. One interpretation is clearly that all the characters except Dante are too much absorbed in the tangible manifestations of art (the portrait, the book) to be aware of its veritable source (the angel-like woman) that passes by. Rossetti himself, in the sonnet "On the *Vita Nuova*", written in the same year, 1852, though not published until 1870, asserts the identity of the woman and the work, assimilating the contemplation of the miracle woman to the real understanding of Dante's poetry (*Collected Writings* 220).

The watercolour would therefore represent the supremacy of love over art, as well as of poetry over painting: better, of a sort of a *poetic aptitude* of the artist, either poet or painter or both, as shown in other works by Rossetti, from the Sordello-like *Chiaro dell'Erma* to the Dante painter of angels of the 1849 drawing. This idea of a poetic aptitude of the artist is widely indebted to the myth of the Romantic poets whom Rossetti had deeply read in his youth: William Blake, surely (from whom Rossetti takes another strong

inspiration for his own *Doppelbegabung*), but also Byron, Keats, and Shelley, who had created the image itself of the “young poet” that the whole Victorian age would have recognized in the Bargello portrait. Literary history shows a remarkable tendency to build up triads: the triad of Guinizzelli-Cavalcanti-Dante, the three poets of the Italian *stilnovo*, which shows a strong structural proximity with the triad Byron-Keats-Shelley, the three poets of Romanticism. And there is an image, proposed by Trelawny’s famous account of Byron’s life and later popularized by iconography, that may act as a hidden image in this watercolour, implicitly favouring a rapprochement: the anecdote of Byron contemplating Shelley’s corpse on a beach near Viareggio, only recognizable (after the devastation operated by the drowning) by a copy of Keats’s poems borrowed from Leigh Hunt and found by Trelawny in his pocket. In this anecdote, the three poets of Romanticism were symbolically reunited, when only one of the three was still alive and another present only in the form of a book.

Rossetti makes the same choice to represent the symbolic reunion of the three poets of the *stilnovo*, with the already dead Guinizzelli implicitly present through the book of his poems. The idea of a closeness between medieval love poetry and Romanticism was not new: the Coppet circle of Madame de Staël, as well as the German Romantics, had asserted that the veritable ancestors of Romanticism were the Provençal troubadours, and this idea would have been reverberated until the twentieth century, from C. S. Lewis’s *The Allegory of Love* to Denis de Rougemont’s *L’amour et l’Occident*. Still, in Rossetti’s work there is the idea that the common element between the Romantics and the *stilnovo* poets is their *youth*: “a book that only youth could have produced” is how Rossetti defines the *Vita Nova* in *The Early Italian Poets*: “[...] the *Vita Nuova* is a book which only youth could have produced, and which must chiefly remain sacred to the young, to each of whom the figure of Beatrice, less lifelike than lovelike, will seem the friend of his own heart” (124). In this passage Rossetti approaches two sources. The first is a passage from Dante’s *Convivio* (I.i.16-17), where Dante defined the *Vita Nova* as a work “fervid and passionate” [“fervida e passionata”], as it is appropriate for a book written “at the threshold of my youth” [“a l’entrata de la mia gioventute”]: “for it is

proper to speak and act differently at different ages, because certain manners are fitting and praiseworthy at one age which at another are unbecoming and blameworthy” (“Ché altro si conviene e dire e operare ad una etade che ad altra; perché certi costumi sono idonei e laudabili ad una etade che sono sconci e biasimevoli ad altra”). The second source is the beginning of Goethe's *Werther*, in which the anonymous editor of the letters wished that the book would become the reader's friend: “And you, good soul, who suffers the same distress as he endured once, draw comfort from his sorrows; and let this little book be your friend, if, by fortune or by your own fault, you cannot find a closer companion” (“Und du gute Seele, die du eben den Drang fühlst wie er, schöpfe Trost aus seinem Leiden, und laß das Büchlein deinen Freund sein, wenn du aus Geschick oder eigener Schuld keinen nähern finden kannst”, 6). It is precisely this youth that fascinated the Victorian public in contemplating the Bargello portrait. Anticipated by a novel telling precisely the sorrows of a *young* man, the nineteenth century fell desperately in love with Dante's youth, and (in the same way as the characters of Wilde's *Portrait of Mr. W. H.*) used a fake portrait and a misread book to build up a story.

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Victorian Uses of the Italian Past: The Case of Camilla Rucellai in George Eliot's *Romola*

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According to Maria Tosello, who fifty years ago published a painstakingly researched book on the “Italian sources” of *Romola*, in George Eliot’s historical novel there are twenty-five fictitious characters (which include of course the protagonists: Romola, Tito, Bardo, Tessa, Baldassarre...) and about one hundred and sixty truly historical ones, that is to say: fictional *personae* who have a counterpart in that vast assortment of history books, chronicles, diaries, letters, and archive material which George Eliot consulted in order to write what can be rated as her most ambitious novel (Tosello 29). Camilla Rucellai, the hysterical prophetess who, in chapter 52, intrudes briefly but strikingly into the life of the eponymous heroine, is but one among the many characters of *Romola* based on historical records.

I have chosen her a bit rashly (I certainly did not expect I would have so much trouble finding out so little about her), but not randomly: historical erudition, literary ambition, and prophetic vision are obviously highly relevant to this novel, and as a negative female counterpart of Savonarola with a marginal role in the story, George Eliot’s grey-haired Camilla, with her crab-like grasp on Romola’s arm, and her “mad” or “wicked” visions, seemed to furnish a promising, suitably circumscribed and practically unexplored subject for investigation. To my knowledge, none of the scholars who have studied the sources of *Romola* have bothered to investigate Camilla Rucellai specifically,¹ while the only critic who has granted

¹ Maria Tosello does not even mention Camilla Rucellai in her book; neither does Andrew Thompson’s *George Eliot and Italy*, while Bonaparte’s lengthy study of

her some attention seems to have been Margaret Homans (189-222), who is not interested in George Eliot's sources, but is attracted to this character for reasons similar to mine: her brief but impressive portrait is viewed as part of the book's self-reflective, and basically conflict-ridden, preoccupation with the legitimacy of (female) artistic "vision". Of course, one can read *Romola* and even write about *Romola* without bothering about its sources – I myself did, quite a few years ago (Villa 95-141). But, after devoting some time and thought to the matter, I have come to feel that by totally ignoring its sources one is bound to miss something that is crucial to the full appreciation of the novel and even to the intellectual pleasure which can be derived from reading it. Both can hardly be complete without a clear perception of the meticulous and really astute dovetailing of historical fact and fiction out of which its text is woven. The implied reader of such a piece of narrative as *Romola* is definitely supposed to derive some of her/his pleasure from recognition – and the more he or she is familiar with the discourses produced around the historical events portrayed, the greater the pleasure is going to be; as for the critics, Eliot's well-nigh obsessive search for historical accuracy (which is a crucial feature of this novel) can be fully grasped only by dipping into some of her sources.

To George Eliot the historical novel was – let us remember – the highest form of fiction, "a task", as Marian Evans wrote in 1856, "which can only be justified by the rarest concurrence of acquirement with genius" ("Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" 320). Predicated as it appeared to be on a delicate balance of "accurate and minute knowledge" and "creative vigour", it was definitely not the type of fiction for dilettante "lady novelists" to experiment upon. Only very few exceptionally gifted and deeply perceptive individuals were capable of familiarizing with the "relics" of the past, and "by force of [...] sympathetic divination" of "reconstruct[ing]" its "fragments into a whole", bringing it "nearer to us" (320-321). To wield the pen as an historical novelist was then, for George Eliot, to set for herself a rather arduous task, where risk of failure by way of over-reaching herself was great and manifold: guilt-ridden as it is, the

the novel touches on her only in passing, without giving any information about the historical character or its sources.

ambitious over-reacher's self-image is likely to be inflated and mystified by idealization (such as, indeed, the novelist freely applied to the discursive construction of her protagonist Romola) and the erudition deployed to prop it up might eventually prove pedantic and sterile. Instead of supporting the noble aspiration to fame and immortal glory, it might – rather pathetically – hamper creation. The more “accurate and minute” the knowledge, the weaker and more inhibited the “creative vigour” may become or, alternatively, the more the powers of “sympathetic divination” will have to be taxed in order to extract meaning and Lukácsian “totality” out of a senseless multiplicity of information and opaque detail.² It is blindness on one side, as in the scholar Bardo (a Florentine precursor of Casaubon, in many ways), and prophetic vision with all its ambiguities, on the other, as in Savonarola, and of course Camilla Rucellai.

Indeed, Eliot's attempt to legitimate literary “vision” by collecting historical information, and pressing it to serve her overarching purpose,³ was fraught with anxiety; and there are a variety of symptoms indicating the strain George Eliot was under while performing it. Some emerge from letters and biographies and relate to the problems of composition she encountered in writing *Romola* and the manifold connected troubles;⁴ others are inscribed in the text of the novel, where the exorbitant deployment of erudition and historical detail – which in an historical novel is supposed to

² According to György Lukács, in historical fiction written after the exhaustion of the progressive, more militant phase of the bourgeoisie, the past is reduced to “a collection of exotic anecdotes”, “history becomes a large, imposing scene for purely private, intimate, subjective happenings”, and the striving towards “archaeological precision” vainly tries to compensate for the novelist's weakened grasp on the sense of history (182-199). Lukács does not mention *Romola*, but he would surely agree that it was a heroic, though doomed, attempt to go against the grain of such developments – a novel to which only a mighty mystification may confer the appearance of “totality”.

³ She was fully aware of the effort made in that direction, as well as of her degree of success. As she wrote to Hutton, “there is scarcely a phrase, an incident, an allusion, that did not gather its value to me from its supposed subservience to my artistic objects” (*Letters IV*: 97).

⁴ She took ages – by her standards – to write her novel, haggled more than usual with publishers over the terms of its sale and publication, and at its completion felt exhausted and suddenly aged because of the effort (Haight 343-373).

increase its realistic grip on reality – coexists with a number of compositional devices which produce an altogether different effect: the astounding “coincidences” out of which the plot is woven (too many and too blatant to need recalling here); its sophisticated chronology, both rigorously historical and ingeniously “symbolical” (Carpenter 82 ff.); the deployment of prophecies and prophetic images, objects and paintings;⁵ the use, by unsuspecting characters, of ponderously meaningful metaphors;⁶ and the reiterated foreshadowing of the final confrontation between Tito and Baldassarre, by means of recurring imagery, a “poetical” device which Eliot had used more sparingly in *The Mill on the Floss* – here, as in the earlier novel, we find countless “floods” and “currents”, but they are interspersed with even more countless “clutching”, “laying hold of”, “wringing” and “strangling”, a sort of leitmotiv which includes “Camilla’s tightening grasp” on poor Romola’s arm (*Romola* 525) – an extroflexion, perhaps, of the narrator’s own neurotic grasp on the facts of the historical past. All these aspects of *Romola* – out of which the artistic unity of the text is laboriously woven – show how the meticulous search for historical accuracy must have generated a certain anxiety of superfluity, with the need to emphasize every single detail’s subservience to the whole. Hence, a strengthening of the self-referential aspect of the novel is at the expense of its “realism”, that is, a weakening of its reference to the world and history. In *Romola* it is not art that imitates life, but it is life that, through the most unlikely sequences of events, is forcibly led to imitate art – a far cry from the “creep[ing] servilely after nature and fact” which the narrator of *Adam Bede* had passionately recommended as a recipe for modern, post-romantic art (221).

⁵ Dino’s vision delivered on his death-bed to Romola – though undoubtedly a “sickly fancy” of an ascetically inclined religious enthusiast – turns out to be true, and Tito’s scared look, which Piero di Cosimo prophetically captures in painting early in the story, finds its proper object (Baldassarre) under Piero’s very eyes in chapter 22.

⁶ For instance, early in the novel, when we still do not know the details of Tito’s past, Bardo comments on the value of Tito’s gems and intaglios, that “Five hundred ducats” are “more than a man’s ransom” (117). It is, as the narrator remarks, “a mere phrase of common parlance” but – though Bardo is far from suspecting – “a man’s ransom” is exactly what they should serve for, if Tito were less of ungrateful young man.

The feeling that the writing of this novel involved treading new and potentially dangerous ground may well account for the text's recurrent harping on the authenticity of visions and the problems raised by their interpretation. Again, this aspect of the novel uncannily partakes both of its self-reflective quality (its preoccupation with itself) and of its "realistic" aspiration to capture the zeitgeist of early Renaissance Florence. The recurrence of the discourse of vision and divination in late Quattrocento texts produced around Florence's turbulent public life cannot but strike the modern reader, very much as it must have struck George Eliot, as a fascinating and rather incongruous relic of medieval superstition. Poised on what is generally considered (and Eliot did consider) the very threshold of modernity, late fifteenth-century Florence was a location where traditional religious beliefs vivified by the Savonarolan movement had to contend with the incipient disenchantment of the world, heralded by Machiavelli and Tito, and the like of them. In reconstructing an historical past where signs were taken for wonders by some, and wonders cynically deflated by others, Eliot's own anxieties as to the legitimacy of her "historical romance" bristling with erudition and meanings (cultural, political, philosophical, ethical) could easily find a way to inscribe themselves in the text. Indeed, it has always seemed to me that much of the pathos pervading the portrait of Savonarola, "who had sought his own glory indeed, but sought it by labouring for the very highest end", derives from the narrator's self-projection onto the prophetic reformer, who was not content with "vague exhortations", but strove to adapt minute and recalcitrant reality to vision, turning "beliefs into energies that would work in all the details of life" (*Romola* 664). Camilla Rucellai, who had come to George Eliot as little more than a female name popping up rather casually in the chronicles of the overwhelmingly male world of Florentine politics, functions – on the other hand – as a negative double, a nightmare figure of female authority onto which all that was morally or psychologically troublesome in prophetic vision was displaced.

As far as I have been able to ascertain, even today what is known about this late fifteenth-century Florentine lady is not

much.⁷ Camilla was born on 16 October 1465, in a rich Florentine family (the Bartolini-Davanzi), and was married at a very young age to Rodolfo, a member of the distinguished Rucellai family. They were among the earliest and most ardent followers of Savonarola, and – in the course of a public ceremony held on 8 March 1496 – they consensually separated in order to enter the Dominican tertiary order. After a few months, Rodolfo got tired of the monastic routine and asked his wife to resume life together, but she refused. She had assumed the name of Lucia, had adopted a quasi-monastic life-style, and had gathered around herself a small religious community, which was first lodged in a small private house, situated close to Savonarola’s headquarters, the male Dominican convent of San Marco. On adjacent grounds, a monastic institution dedicated to Saint Catherine of Siena was later built (1500). After 1500 Camilla-Lucia was long deputy prioress of Santa Caterina,⁸ an institution noted for its fidelity to the memory of Savonarola, and for its excellence in the production of art objects (it is not by chance that later in the sixteenth century it will be the home of Suor Plautilla Nelli [1523-1588], known as “the first woman painter in Florence”).⁹ Camilla-Lucia – who during her lifetime had been famous for her prophetic ecstasies, fierce anti-Medicean politics, fervid spiritual life and even miracles – died in 1520 and was later beatified as Lucia Bartolini. As such she is

⁷ Most of it is summed up in a one page entry of the *Italian Dictionary of National Biography*, compiled in 1964 by Carlo Vasoli, a distinguished scholar of Renaissance philosophy. I have checked most of his sources: *Acta Sanctorum Boll.*, 29 October, XIII (202-207); Villari (CCXCVII, CCLXVIII, CCCXXXVII), del Lungo (224 ff.), Schnitzer (I: 205, 418, 445; II: 391) and Ridolfi (I: 150). I have also been able to check and add some further sources: del Migliore (I: 205-207), Razzi (629), Richa (Tome 8, part IV, 278-284). Passerini (131-132), Paatz (I: 434-435), Creytens (127-130).

⁸ According to Vasoli (630), Camilla-Lucia was prioress of the convent, but Razzi (629) – together with Richa (282), who relies on Razzi, and Passerini (131), who relies on both – is at pains to stress that, due to her extreme humility, she never wanted to be officially made “prioress”.

⁹ On Plautilla Nelli see Fortune, but also Germaine Greer. According to the latter, Suor Plautilla was “instructed in the art of painting at the instance of her mother superior, Camilla de Rucellai” (186) – which seems most unlikely since Nelli was born in 1523 and Camilla died in 1520.

allotted a day in the Catholic calendar: it is 29 October – probably the day of her death.¹⁰

Recent historians of the Dominican order sensitive to its gender politics provide us with a meaningful context to such scarce information. All through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries such lay women as Camilla who chose to lead a disciplined life of devotion and penitence occupied a shifting middle ground between the religious and secular states of life. As nuns living without *clausura*, they were free to participate in the life of the community and enjoyed a degree of independence both from family constraints and from ecclesiastical authority (Lehmijoki-Gardner 1-36). Romola's own adoption of the serge mantle of a "pinzochera" in both her failed and her successful escape from Florence seems to reflect this state of affairs; likewise, her charitable activity carried out on the ground floor of her house at the time of the famine reflects the same teasing mixture of conformity and rebellion, since it is construed both as a way to obey Savonarola's injunctions and as a challenge to her husband.

Still in the line of contextual historical information, we may add that such women as Camilla were only loosely connected to the Dominican order and participated in a "vibrant mystical culture" rarely shared by their male counterparts (Lehmijoki-Gardner 2). A bout of such religious fervour, almost an epidemic of female devotion, occurred at the end of the fifteenth century, when many women "nubile, married, and widowed [...] were induced by Savonarola's sermons to abandon the world and enter the religious life" (Polizzotto 491). It was at this time that communal life became popular among them: communities were formed around charismatic leaders, who were not content with a "subordinate and anonymous life of prayer and devotion" (491). They – like Camilla – gathered followers, founded convents, and regarded themselves as religious teachers and "spiritual pioneers" (491). Their ambitions as to independent agency often brought them into collision with the desire of Dominican friars to keep them under strict male supervision, but

¹⁰ Vasoli's authoritative biographical entry dates Camilla's death as 20 October. But his most authoritative source (*Acta Sanctorum*) as well as Razzi (629), Richa (282), and Passerini (131) give 29 October as the date of her death.

well into the sixteenth century, “when political pressure had all but destroyed the last vestiges of Savonarolan reform in male convents like S. Marco [...] – these female communities [...] had become the real foci of the Savonarolan cult. They ensured that Savonarola’s teaching was preserved and his cult transmitted to future generations” (523). This historical detail, of course, chimes well with *Romola*’s “Epilogue”, with its small female community headed by Romola herself, passing on to the younger generation (Ninna and Lillo) the cult of Fra Girolamo and preserving the best of his moral bequest.

Eliot was obviously informed about the pious lifestyles of penitent lay women, but seems to have associated Camilla only vaguely to this climate, nor does she seem to be aware of her subsequent career as head of St. Catherine – though she might have found this piece of information in at least one of her recognized sources.¹¹ Eliot made extensive research in the topography of early Renaissance Florence and strove to adhere to it most accurately while writing *Romola*: for instance, she was aware that Via del Cocomero, where the historical Camilla briefly resided after her separation from her husband, was the site of a pious community of female followers of Savonarola, but seems to locate the fictional Camilla’s abode neither there, nor in a little house between Via Larga and Via di San Gallo, which Camilla and her followers later bought from Francesco Rosselli, the location – very close to San Marco – where the Monastery would be built after year 1500.¹² We may guess George Eliot had no clue even as to Camilla’s age, since

¹¹ Del Migliore’s *Firenze Città Nobilissima Illustrata* – which Tosello lists among the sources of *Romola* – mentions “Cammilla” Bartolini-Davanzi as Ridolfo Rucellai’s wife, the pious founder of the monastery of Santa Caterina da Siena, in the section devoted to this convent (205-207).

¹² Via del Cocomero (nowadays via Ricasoli) is mentioned twice in the novel, in chapter 11 and chapter 63 – the latter in conjunction with the pious female community: “Honest Fra Domenico, then, who was preaching Lenten sermons to the women in via del Cocomero [...]” (*Romola* 598). Camilla Rucellai’s abode in *Romola* is not clearly located, but it seems to be situated not far from the Church of Badia Fiorentina (opposite the Bargello), where Romola repairs immediately after the upsetting meeting with the prophetess and contemplates Filippino Lippi’s “serene Virgin appearing to St. Bernard” (525). As Guido Biagi first pointed out (in a footnote to his edition of *Romola*), George Eliot was not aware that in the 1490s Lippi’s picture was in fact held in the Monastery of Campora, out of town; only in 1529, at the time of the siege of Florence, was it moved for protection to the Badia.

she represented her as a grey-haired woman. In year 1497 – when the fictional meeting with Romola takes place – Camilla-Lucia was a thirty-two year-old widow, roughly the same age as Romola is supposed to be in 1507, when the epilogue to the novel is set and the heroine appears only very lightly marked by the passing of time: “the finely-moulded cheek had sunk a little, the golden crown was less massive” (673). Unhampered by historical knowledge and therefore left to her own inclinations, George Eliot assumed Camilla to be oldish, turning her into a sort of nasty mother figure trying to forcibly exert her (despicable) authority over a justly recalcitrant daughter. Moreover, Camilla’s “chamber arranged as much as possible like a convent cell” (524), without being one, far from conveying any positive idea of freedom from rigid cloistering, suggests an element of shamming, a lack of authenticity which pervades the whole following scene, and amply justifies Romola’s horrified rejection: ““God grant you are mad! Else you are detestably wicked!”” (525). The value and morality of male prophecy is a moot issue in the novel: Dino’s premonitions about Romola’s marriage appear to be accurate though ineffectual; Savonarola’s prophecies are part of his visionary attempt at moral and political reform, and partake both of its greatness and its limits. There is no doubt, however, as to the nature of female prophets: our young heroine Romola, rational and well-balanced as she is, shrinks “with unconquerable repulsion from the shrill volubility of those illuminated women” (524), and the reader is very much encouraged to feel likewise.

Repulsion and fascination are, as we know, closely related, and Camilla’s gift for prophecy was – we may safely assume – what attracted George Eliot in the first place. Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, a devout Piagnone historian and one of the earliest biographers of Savonarola, mentions her visions among the many “visus admirabiles” [marvellous visions] which during Savonarola’s lifetime had testified to his sanctity and his mission:

She stated that she had seen his image many times, and that there had been many signs that he would be a leader in the reformation of the church, and for two whole years every time he was preaching, she had perceived some sign coming down from heaven, which pointed out his great sanctity. And also she said that she had often heard from the angels what he was to preach on the following day,

and that he had never neglected to say the things she had heard beforehand, nor she was aware he had ever uttered different things. She also said that she had seen a chair on which lay a crown with a palm-leaf in it. And that it was revealed to her by the Heavens that both the chair and the crown, which signified martyrdom, were being made ready for Hieronimus” (*Vita Hieronimi Savonarolae* 178; *Vita di Hieronimo Savonarola* 74 [my translation from the Italian version]).

Gianfrancesco, who, belonging to the Savonarolan entourage apparently set great store by Camilla’s spiritual authority, had already referred to her – in his *Life of Pico*, 1496 – while discussing Savonarola’s sermon on Pico’s untimely death. Here her name is not mentioned, but she is referred to as the authoritative “nun”, “multis praeclara vaticinii” [well-known for her prophetic visions], who had foreseen Pico’s wearing the Dominican robe “liliorum tempore” [at the time of lilies]. This prophecy was, according to her admirers, duly followed by facts, since Pico was ordained by Savonarola on his death-bed, not in springtime, as many had surmised, but on 17 November when, King Charles VIII having just arrived in Florence, the city was full of flags bearing the golden lily of France.¹³ It is unlikely that George Eliot had read this book (though she may have been familiar with Meiners’s version of Pico’s life which heavily relies on Gianfrancesco’s account),¹⁴ since she tells a slightly different version of this episode. Probably on the basis of a different

¹³ “Besides a nun, famous for her many prophecies, who, while he was alive, had foretold him many things which would occur to him and which later did occur exactly as foreseen, among other things had revealed – two years before his death – that at the time of lilies, as a consequence of Savonarola’s exhortations, [...] he would take orders as a Preaching Friar. [...] Many of those who had heard of this prophecy were surprised by the words ‘of lilies’ and believed that they meant springtime, when lilies bloom. But it turned out that the lily in question was the King of France, whose emblem is the lily, who entered Florence with a large retinue [...] on the day before Pico took holy vows [...]” (*Ioannis Pici Mirandulae...* 84-85) [my translation].

¹⁴ Meiners’s work is included in a list of books which George Eliot read, or intended to read, for *Romola*. See *Notebook for Romola* (p. 2 backside). Meiners speaks of “a cloister nun in Florence, who was famous for her heavenly prophecies, constantly confirmed by fact” who had foreseen two year before Pico’s death that “in the time of lilies he would enter the Dominican Order at the behest of Brother Hieronymus Savonarola” (67) [my translation].

source (which as yet I have failed to identify), George Eliot mentions Camilla as the prophetic woman who had foreseen the *death* of Pico della Mirandola “in the time of lilies”. The episode is ironically inserted in chapter 29 as an example of the twisting and turning of meaning required to make so-called “revelations” match real events:

“By-the-way,” said Francesco Cei, “have you heard that Camilla Rucellai has outdone the Frate in her prophecies? She prophesied two years ago that Pico would die in the time of lilies. He has died in November. ‘Not at all the time of lilies,’ said the scorners. ‘Go to!’ says Camilla; ‘it is the lilies of France I meant, and it seems to me they are close enough under your nostrils.’ I say, ‘Euge, Camilla!’ If the Frate can prove that any one of his visions has been as well fulfilled, I’ll declare myself a *piagnone* to-morrow.” (227)

Pater had read *The Life of John Picus* in Thomas More’s abridged version, which does not include the passage about Camilla and was probably relying on Eliot’s authority when, in his essay on Pico, he relates the same version of the story endowing it with wholly different connotations.¹⁵ While musing on the precociousness and “overbrightness” of genius, “which in the popular imagination always betokens an early death”, he recalls Camilla Rucellai, as “one of those prophetic women whom the preaching of Savonarola had raised up in Florence” who had declared, “seeing [Pico] for the first time, that he would depart in the time of lilies – prematurely, that is, like the field-flowers which are withered by the scorching sun almost as soon as they are sprung up” (Pater 33-34). Thus, what in Piagnone mythology was, basically, the prophecy of Pico’s delay in following his religious vocation in Pater becomes the anticipation of an untimely death, such as may be brought about by the “chilling touch of the abstract and disembodied beauty Platonists profess to long for” (Pater 33), or perhaps – more concretely – by the rigid moral climate created by such zealous religious reformers as Savonarola.

But let us return to George Eliot. Given the number of books and even archive material that she consulted in order to write her novel,

¹⁵ According to Donald Hill’s “explanatory notes” to his authoritative edition of the *Renaissance*, Pater’s source for this detail might well have been Eliot’s novel, which he had read with interest in 1863 (Pater 330).

it is hard to be definite as regards her sources for single details and minor characters. However, her main source for Camilla, as for many other aspects of the novel, seems to have been Villari's monumental *Life of Girolamo Savonarola*, published in 1861: Villari doesn't mention Camilla at all, but her name occurs three times in the documents related to Savonarola's trial, included in the second tome – documents which, as we gather from chapter 71, George Eliot studied very carefully. There Camilla appears, with Vaggia Bisdomini and Bartollomea Gianfigliuzzi, as one of the women from whom Savonarola supposedly declared he “ebbe delle cose” [got things] which he later “predicava sotto nome di rivelazione” [preached as revelation] (Villari CCXCVII-VIII). Savonarola also declared – or allegedly declared – that after a while he had stopped relying on their visions since he did not want these women “si potessero vantare di avergliene detto”, that is, he did not want them to be able to vaunt they were the sources of his prophecies.¹⁶ Savonarola's words seem to suggest, on his part, a sort of “anxiety of influence” generated by such formidable female practitioners in the art of “vision”. But it was a fairly established practice at the time, for Dominican preachers, to rely on the “revelations” of women such as Camilla; and what was probably thorny about the issue was not so much the fact of referring to female spiritual authority, but the strong political connotations of resorting to such specific female helpers, well-known for their fiercely anti-Medicean sympathies. This emerges very clearly in the particular episode recalled in *Romola*, which is also mentioned in the same documents: when Bernardo del Nero – the authoritative member of the Medicean party who in the novel is godfather to Romola – was

¹⁶ “When he was asked what relationships he had had with women, and what he had had from them as revelation; he said: at the beginning, when he had started stating these things, he had spoken with women and from them he had some things which he later preached as if they had been revealed to his mind; but lately he had not spoken to them, because he did not want them to be able to vaunt they had told him. The women from whom he had received such things are Madonna Vaggia Bisdomini, Madonna Camilla Rucellai, and Madonna Bartollomea Gianfigliuzzi, who said she had her own devotion and her own spiritual aids; but I did not trust the latter much, because she seemed mad to me” (Villari II.ii: CCXCVII-VIII). I am giving here my own translation since neither of the English versions of Villari's book (Leonard Horner's and Linda Villari's) includes the documents I am quoting here.

elected Gonfaloniere of Florence, and the Popular party were much depressed by this calamitous event, Camilla Rucellai had apparently suggested, following a “revelation”, that he should be thrown from a window of Palazzo Vecchio, a piece of divine advice which had perplexed Savonarola and his entourage, but which apparently they had not unequivocally and openly discredited (Villari CCLXVIII; but also CCCXXXVII).¹⁷ Given the bias which made Eliot look for an evil prophetic vision onto which to displace a negative version of herself (and of her faultless heroine), it is not surprising that these very few lines were enough to trigger her imagination, leading to the insertion of Camilla into the novel.

Romola is a complex work of fiction, where Eliot’s “art of balancing claims” (some would call it her art of having her cake and eating it) produces extreme results, as social conservatism and feminist utopia vie for supremacy and are oddly grafted one onto the other. No doubt, Camilla Rucellai is made to serve the patriarchal bias of the novel (which tends to dislocate the burden of guilt pertaining to prophetic vision onto an “illuminated woman”). However, the function of the meeting between the two Florentine ladies is to weaken Romola’s trust in Savonarola, providing a sort of metaphorical anticipation of the stake on which he will be burnt:

her indignation, once roused by Camilla’s visions, could not pause there, but ran like an illuminating fire over all the kindred facts in Savonarola’s teachings, and for the moment she felt what was true in the scornful sarcasms she heard continually flung against him, more keenly than she felt what was false. (527)

¹⁷ “[Of what occurred on Holy Friday] I did not know and do not know anything, apart from what I have heard from Filippo Arigucci: that there were some Signori who wanted to throw Bernardo del Nero, who was then Gonfaloniere di Giustizia, out of the window of the Palazzo; and at that time the same Filippo had sent to inquire of Madonna Camilla de Rucellai what they had to do; and she had answered that she had had it as a revelation that they should throw him from the windows and that she had told Fra Malatesta of San Marco, asking if this throwing out of the window was divine inspiration, and Fra Malatesta asked me, if it could be divine inspiration, and if doing it was allowed; and I answered as it is right to answer in such cases of illegitimate things [irregularita] and I did not tell him it was to be done. [...] I would have liked it if he had been sent away, but I did not support the idea of his death”. (Villari Tome II.ii, CCLXVIII) [my translation]. But see also Villari Tome II.ii, CCCXXXVII.

Camilla's hysterical visionarism exposes the dubious foundations of Savonarola's authority, and he dies by fire in Romola's mind well before his actual execution in Florence's public square – the last of the figures of patriarchal authority in the novel who, though ostensibly revered, come to a bad end.

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4. The English in Italy: Studies in Victorian Biography

Ruskin and Architecture: The Impact of His Early Travels in Italy (1830s-1840s)

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John Ruskin's long life (1819-1900) was devoted to travelling, observing, drawing and writing. His own objective in travelling, which combined a traditional approach in the Grand Tour tradition with a highly innovative one, gave rise to a new conception of the art of travelling – one infinitely more demanding and rewarding than that which had been and continued to be the reality for a majority of Victorian travellers.¹ Ruskin's early journeys on the Continent were undertaken first as a child with his parents, later as a young man with his faithful friend and Alpine guide Joseph Couttet, and later still as a newlywed in the company of his young wife Effie.² All these experiences in his formative years led to the writing of his major work on architecture, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849). This paper sets out to explore how Ruskin's travels in Italy in the 1830s and 1840s influenced the conception and writing of his architectural treatise.

1. Ruskin's travelling experiences in Italy

Ruskin's childhood was enriched by his many travelling experiences. Initially he would travel around Great Britain, accompanying his father, a wine merchant, on business or trips to Scotland to visit relatives on his mother's side, then he began to roam the Continent,

¹ See for example Christine Johnstone's review of Frances Trollope's *Visit to Italy*. *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*.

² In his diary on 24 September 1856 Ruskin entered the list of his journeys on the Continent for the period 1840-1856. See *Diaries*, II: 522-523. Only during the years 1843, 1847, 1853 and 1855, which were devoted entirely to writing, did his travels not take him outside Great Britain.

encouraged by his parents, who considered travelling to be a necessary complement to an education which had hitherto been conducted at home with private tutors. During these tours, Ruskin's delight in experiencing the grandeur of nature firsthand, the Alpine landscapes in particular, was a natural consequence of the kind of childhood he had experienced as an only child, spent for the most part in the confinement of his London home where, as he recalls in his autobiography, reading had been his only occupation (*Praeterita*, § 45-46, 30-31). It was through books then that the young John Ruskin had been introduced to France and Italy. In his autobiography, *Praeterita* (1885-1889) he recalls how the gift of Rogers's *Italy* and Prout's sketches had motivated his parents' decision to tour Italy and, as a result of this experience, of his own lifelong passion for Italian art:

But on my thirteenth (?) birthday, 8th February, 1832, my father's partner, Mr. Henry Telford, gave me Rogers' *Italy*, and determined the main tenor of my life. At that time, I had never heard of Turner [...]. But I had no sooner cast eyes on the Rogers vignettes than I took them for my only masters, and set myself to imitate them as far as I possibly could by fine pen shading.
 [...] There is no doubt however that early in the spring of 1833 Prout published his *Sketches in Flanders and Germany*. [...] We got the book home to Herne Hill before the time of our usual annual tour; and as my mother watched my father's pleasure and mine in looking at the wonderful places, she said, why shouldn't we go and see some of them in reality? My father hesitated a little, then with glittering eyes said – why not? (vol. I, ch. 4, § 88, 69-70).

If Rogers, Prout and Turner paved the way for Ruskin's writings on art and, most notably, for his *Modern Painters* (1843-1860), the question remains open as to what extent his Italian tours in the 1840s influenced the writing of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849). Ruskin entered many remarks and observations in his diary during his various Italian tours, providing us with precious information on what he saw and how he reacted to new works of art that he discovered and to those he saw again on subsequent tours. The first visit to Italy during which notes were made was the one undertaken in 1840 for medical reasons – health problems having caused him to interrupt his studies at Christ Church College, Oxford

and return home. According to Jeanne Clegg, “In April 1840 Ruskin manifested faint symptoms of consumption, was taken home and received doctors’ orders to winter in the south. The main objective was not Venice but several months in the warmth of Rome and Naples” (40-41). That Ruskin felt uncomfortable during his trip can be deduced from the many negative comments that he entered in his diary. The comment he wrote concerning the architecture in Genoa is typical of this ill-humour which led him to overcritical remarks:

Nov. 2 Genoa. Sketched in the morning in the cathedral [...] Sketching again on the quay; a characteristic bit of arcade running along the whole city, dark as pitch and filthy. [...]

The churches all in the same style; a great deal of barbarous alabaster, but still imposing; infinite wealth and great power of mind, though a little diseased in its operation. The Cathedral however is thoroughly ugly outside; the porch enduring – mosaic, in pretty patterns of black and white marble – but the upper part quite plain, merely ribbed like a zebra – detestable. Still not so bad as Orleans; merely ugly, but not vulgar.

Nov. 3 Chiavari. Left Genoa early.

[...] the villages cold in effect, the roofs plain grey pink. [...] Here arcades all along the street, with odd short Norman-looking columns, but no decoration nor balconies above, only a little glaring and decayed fresco. (*Diaries* I: 101-2)

As the family proceeded on their journey, it seems that the discovery of so many architectural treasures helped Ruskin gradually overcome his low spirits and sense of physical weakness. We find him busily drawing sketches of the church of Santa Maria della Spina in Pisa, in a much more positive mood than he was in Genoa, and yet he seems to be subject to rapid variations of mood as his positive remarks are immediately counterbalanced by much less laudatory ones, undoubtedly the sign of a certain form of frustration, but also of much more than mere frustration. It is clear that Ruskin was in the process of discovering his interest in architecture and broadening his passion for Italian art:

Nov. 10 Pisa. Sketching in the morning. [...] Few lookers on, and those much more considerate than either in England or France. [...] Then to the Cathedral for a quiet look inside. [...] The Cathedral

quite overwhelming in its display of marble, and all effect lost by bad employment of materials. [...] Monuments and altars innumerable in the transepts, of exquisite design in white marble, as far as the flower-work went. [...]

Nov. 12 Yesterday sketching hard in Pisa, and examining town; found nothing whatever in the least interesting, except the cathedral. (*Diaries* I: 108)

An unparalleled curiosity combined with an acute sense of architectural aesthetics were Ruskin's qualities allowing his eye to perceive the slightest detail and his mind to reflect on the effect produced:

Nov. 25 Sienna. This town is worth fifty Florences: larger and more massy buildings in *general* with numbers of the triple Venetian window. [...] Outside of the Cathedral confused – all sorts of levels; baptistery or something at east end, all Gothic; then flight of stairs, under delicate arches, opening on a piece of rich ruin, with a lovely central window, rosettes all over in marble. The west front supported on columns of twisted flower work, and pierced with doors of most exquisite tracery – all marble, quite inimitable, the interior corrupt; like Genoa and Pisa ribbed with horizontal lines of black, and roof a great deal gilded, but far superior in proportion of architecture and richness of effect to either Genoa or Pisa. (*Diaries* I: 113-4)

His eye was particularly attracted by the decorative diversity of northern Italian Gothic architecture. By contrast, the Renaissance architecture he encountered in Rome appeared quite monotonous to him for its lack of decorative elements:

4 December Rome. Went to St Peter's to get a sketch and couldn't, and was disgusted with the architecture. It is very coarse in conception, I think. The churches here, which I rushed through a few of on Tuesday and Wednesday, are all the same thing over and over again; always handsome, always encrusted with invaluable marbles, always possessing treasures of art and intellect, but all the same monotonous columns and arches from beginning to end, chapels and altars of the same pattern and proportions, differing only in the design of the altar mosaic, the width of the ceiling.

6 December. St Peter's always looks like a mere toy. The more I see the less I think of it. (*Diaries* I: 119-121)

From Rome on to Venice, which the family had first visited as part of their 1835 tour when the young John Ruskin, then aged sixteen, caught his first glimpse of the city that would attract him back again and again and whose history he was to write in *The Stones of Venice* (1852-3). Recalling the happiness he had felt during his previous trip to Venice, he was anxious to leave Rome in December 1840 so as to be able to relive the same sensations he had experienced in that city five years earlier. On 6 May 1841 he wrote:

Thank God I am here! It is the Paradise of cities. This and Chamouni are my two bournes of earth; there might have been another, but that has become pain. [...] the outlines of St Mark's thrill me as if they had been traced by A's hand. (*Diaries* I: 183)³

This youthful enthusiasm for Venice was to leave a lasting mark on Ruskin's mind. After the publication of the first volume of *Modern Painters* in 1843, Ruskin felt he needed to study Italian art in depth before undertaking the later volumes. He therefore planned another Italian journey, referring to his decision to go this time without his parents as "heartless" but prompted by the urgent necessities of work, i.e. the study of Italian painting. The diary was, on this occasion, replaced by daily letters to his parents (see *Ruskin in Italy*) and by a notebook containing "descriptions and criticisms of the artworks which the young author of the first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843) had expressly come to study" (Tucker xi). What Tucker refers to as "the unexpected multiplication of Ruskin's objects of study" (Tucker xii) during his 1845 Italian tour is precisely his growing fascination for architecture, a point also noted by Shapiro in the introduction to his edition of Ruskin's letters:

[...] though his chief object in Pisa was the Campo Santo frescoes, his interest in architecture an architectural ornament was even greater than it had been in Lucca. He measured the churches, made notes on them, drew them, and gathered fragments of the Baptistry to send home. And he extended his studies to domestic architecture, making several drawings of the Palazzo Agostini. (xiv)

³ The reference to "A's hand" is to Adèle Domecq, Ruskin's youthful love. In *Praeterita*, Ruskin corrected this statement and relativized the importance of Venice: "I find a sentence in diary on 6th May, which seems inconsistent with what I have said of the centres of my life work. [...] But then, I knew neither Rouen nor Pisa, though I had seen both" (vol. II, ch. 3, § 57, 268-9).

2. Reading architecture as a text

The fact that Ruskin's Italian tour of 1845 had marked a turning point in his life and career was made explicit in the chapter which he devoted to it in *Praeterita* entitled "The Campo Santo" (vol. II, ch. 6), which deals with his experiences in Pisa. This is also in evidence in his Preface to *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, where he stresses the large number of examples drawn from the Romanesque and Gothic. While rejecting the idea that what he had written constituted a treatise on European architecture, he stated that what he had in fact produced was a series of reflections drawn from his personal experience of French and Italian architecture. These reflections were gathered under seven headings which he called "lamps". By using a Biblical reference, Ruskin emphasizes the quasi-sacred mission which he now feels he has been entrusted with as an art-*cum*-social critic, thus resolving an issue which had been the subject of debate in his family circle for many years. As noted by Tucker,

Ruskin's impassioned defence of a life dedicated to spreading 'the love and knowledge of art among all classes' was a fresh answer to a question he had debated for two years or more, his choice of profession. [...] They [his parents] had instilled in him from an early age that he owed it as a duty to God to cultivate his powers and peculiar talents "in Service and for the benefit of your fellow Creatures", a lesson he had thoroughly assimilated. (xxx)

As Proust said of Ruskin, "he cultivated the religion of Beauty": "Le don spécial pour Ruskin, c'était le sentiment de la beauté, dans la nature comme dans l'art" (110; but see also Gamble). This he felt to be his mission in life. The tools he used to celebrate beauty both in nature and in art were his pencil and his pen, sketching and writing – first sketching in order to capture fleeting beauty, then reflecting and writing about his aesthetic experiences. In Ruskin's own words, Poetry and Architecture are two expressions of the same reality with the same finality – creating beauty and recording natural beauty and thus constituting the memory of nations, their cultural heritage which could be handed on from generation to generation:

[...] there are but two strong conquerors of the forgetfulness of men, Poetry and Architecture; and the latter in some sort includes the former, and is mightier in its reality; it is well to have, not only what men have thought and felt, but what their hands have handled, and their strength wrought, and their eyes beheld, all the days of their life. (ch. 6, "The Lamp of Memory", § 2, 169-170)

The idea that poetry and architecture share the same function of encapsulating the memory of men and of nations is in fact reminiscent of Ruskin's own definition of architecture as a text to be written by the architect and artist (sculptor) and read by any individual for whom the piece of architecture and work of art has been created. Pursuing the metaphor of architecture as text in "The Lamp of Memory", he goes so far as to place architecture above poetry in being more truthful and expressive than words:

How cold is all history, how lifeless all imagery, compared to that which the living nation writes, and the uncorrupted marble bears!
How many pages of doubtful record might we not often spare, for a few stones left one upon another! (ch. 6, § 2, 169)

Ruskin is sceptical about the possibility of establishing universal rules governing the language of architecture: unlike natural (verbal) languages with their own unchangeable grammars, the modes of expression in architecture are so numerous that they cannot be reduced to a universal and permanent system. In order to read an architectural text, Ruskin suggests, one should be able to place it within the context of the spirit of the period in which it was produced, a principle which he applied in writing *The Stones of Venice*, where reading the Venetian architecture with the knowledge of the city's history is a necessary condition to understanding it. Defining the second of what he calls the "Virtues of Architecture", he uses precisely the metaphor of architecture as text: "[...] we require of any building [...] that it speak well, and say the things it was intended to say in the best words":

Now as regards the second of these virtues, it is evident that we can establish no general laws. First, because it is not a virtue required in all buildings; there are some which are only for cover or defence, and from which we ask no conversation. Secondly, because there

are countless methods of expression, some conventional, some natural: each conventional mode has its own alphabet, which evidently can be no subject of general laws. Every natural mode is instinctively employed and instinctively understood, wherever there is true feeling; and this instinct is above the law. [...]

I shall use no influence with him whatever, except to counteract previous prejudices, and leave him, as far as may be, free. (*The Stones of Venice*, vol. I, ch. 2, 30)

As an art critic, Ruskin sees his role then as guiding readers along the path to acquiring the knowledge necessary to the understanding of the historical and cultural context of the work of art.⁴ His aim is to guide readers and leave them free to form their own judgements. He sees his role as a guide, not as a teacher, since familiarity with historical data forming the background against which architecture was to be apprehended and interpreted is not envisaged by Ruskin merely as an intellectual and rational exercise. According to him, reading an architectural text requires above all a form of emotional empathy between the reader and the artist who created it, despite the distance in time separating the two acts, that is, an understanding of the artist's intentions via the work of art passed on to succeeding generations. This kind of sympathy, this desire to enter into communication with men of past ages, cannot be taught: hence the freedom which Ruskin promises to grant his readers, allowing them to pursue a personal reading of the architectural text in the form of an individual response. This admission of the necessity for an emotional and personal act of communication, besides his evocation of the more technical aspects of architecture, echoes his own definition of architecture in the opening lines of *The Seven Lamps*: architecture/art being distinct from building/technique, reflecting the division of the human being, body and spirit/soul.

Since, according to Ruskin, architecture could be defined as a poetic text made of stones just as epic is poetry made of words, it stood for him as the uppermost form of artistic activity since it mobilizes the participation of every human faculty: man's senses as

⁴ There is no doubt that Ruskin was an avid reader of local history books when he was travelling. By way of illustration of this point, a letter he wrote to his father from Lucca on 6 May 1845 mentions a volume of Sismondi's *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du Moyen Age* (Ruskin in Italy 53).

well as his intellect, his sympathy as well as his reason. His oft-quoted definitions and assertions indicate clearly the importance he attached to visual elements (colour, decoration, sculpture): “Ornamentation is the principal part of architecture”, or “The fact is, there are only two fine arts possible to the human race, sculpture and painting. What we call architecture is only the association of these in noble masses, or the placing them in fit places”. His attachment to the essentially visual, rather than the structural, the sensual rather than the intellectual quality of architecture permeates the text of *The Seven Lamps* and may be traced back to his experiencing so strongly the presence of colour in the stones used in Italian buildings (alabaster and marble mostly) and the many decorative elements on the walls of the palazzi. His overwhelming concern with the aesthetic quality of architecture and with the effect it produced on any individual who was sufficiently prepared to apprehend it points out the close link existing for him between aesthetics and ethics, the visual qualities of architecture and the emotions they arouse. These emotions being of a double nature – aesthetic and ethical, beauty engendering the love of order (one essential manifestation of which being social order and social justice) – Ruskin was naturally led to mix aesthetic and moral as well as social considerations in his reflections on architecture.

3. Social considerations and architectural reforms

Being convinced as he was that a change in work practices would improve the quality of nineteenth-century English architecture, Ruskin believed that the adoption of a specific architectural style in Victorian England was the necessary condition. It was the shocking contrast between the Gothic architecture that he had been able to admire on his various continental travels and the depressing reality of contemporary English architecture that gave rise to the impassioned plea for urgent change in *The Seven Lamps*:

I say architecture and all art; for I believe architecture must be the beginning of arts, and that the others must follow in their time and order; [...] our architecture *will* languish and that in the very dust, until the first principle of common sense be manfully obeyed, and

an universal system of form and workmanship be everywhere adopted and enforced. It may be said that this is impossible. It may be so – I fear it is so: I have nothing to do with the possibility or impossibility of it; I simply know and assert the necessity of it. If it be impossible, English art is impossible [...]; but there is a chance for us in these, and there is none else; and that chance rests on the bare possibility of obtaining the consent, both of architects and of the public, to choose a style, and to use it universally. (ch. 7, “The Lamp of Obedience”, § 6, 194)

Ruskin’s suggestion of choosing a style to be universally adopted in Victorian England should not, I believe, be interpreted as a sign of his taking side in the on-going “battle of the styles”. It is easy enough to see in his choice of the Gothic, of which he was so passionately fond, a means of going back to the roots of the Christian tradition in which Europe was embedded.⁵ Many scholars have therefore justified Ruskin’s choice of Gothic by placing it against the background of the anti-Catholic feelings in England following the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act. Ruskin’s religious education received from an Evangelical mother made him a strong opponent of the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement, which he qualified as “the darkest plague that ever held commission to hurt the earth” (ch.1, “The Lamp of Sacrifice”, note 1, 203). Since Gothic was associated with Christian supremacy, and not merely with the supremacy of the Catholic Church in medieval Europe, he saw it as his mission to make his choice of Gothic acceptable to the anti-Catholic majority in England (Fontaney 437-484).⁶ But in fact, Ruskin’s deeper reasons for his choice of Gothic do not lie in any sort of religious allegiance but rather in his thinking again in terms of the most effective communication between the artist and the individual who will try to apprehend his architectural creation. The question that seemed to haunt Ruskin’s mind was how to find an architectural style that would create aesthetic pleasure and make at the same time communication truly effective. To my mind, Ruskin’s

⁵ It was A. W. Pugin, a staunch member of the Roman Catholic Church who, in *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841), had first expressed his strong admiration of the Gothic style as the expression of the Christian faith

⁶ In *Ruskin and Venice* Jeanne Clegg speaks of “the difficulty of reconciling an ideal of Venetian Christianity with the hostility to Catholicism” (88).

preoccupations go beyond mere national and historical references; they are of a superior, universal order. This is how his choice of Gothic as a style to be universally adopted should, I believe, be understood. In “The Lamp of Obedience” in which he raises the question of architectural reform and on which style it ought to be based, he states the two criteria which should preside over his choice: first, architecture’s capacity to evolve and adapt itself to new conditions as society itself changes; second, the sympathy (i.e., the personal understanding of and response to the work of art) that it permits:

That alone which it is in our power to obtain, and which it is our duty to desire, is an unanimous style of some kind, and such comprehension and practice of it as would enable us to adapt its features to the peculiar character of every several building, large or small, domestic, civil or ecclesiastical. I have said that it was immaterial what style was to be adopted, so far as regards the room for originality which its development would admit: it is not so, however, when we take into consideration the far more important questions of the facility of adaptation to general purposes, of the sympathy with which this or that style would be popularly regarded. [...] The choice would lie I think between four styles: – 1. The Pisan Romanesque; 2. The early Gothic of the Western Italian Republics, advanced so far and as fast as our art would enable us to the Gothic of Giotto; 3. The Venetian Gothic in its purest development; 4. The English earliest decorated. The most natural, perhaps the safest choice, would be of the last, well fenced from chance of again stiffening into the perpendicular; and perhaps enriched by some mingling of decorative elements from the exquisite Gothic of France, of which, in such cases, it would be needful to accept some well known examples, as the North door of Rouen and the church of St Urbain at Troyes, for final and limiting authorities on the side of decoration. (ch. 7, “The Lamp of Obedience”, § 7, 196-7)

His reasons for recommending Gothic are radically different from those advocated by other architectural critics of the same period such as Pugin and Viollet-le-Duc (Pevsner). For Ruskin, Gothic art expressed the qualities that had been allowed to flourish in medieval times, among which, the love of nature and imagination which had

produced such unrivalled architectural beauty (*Stones of Venice*, vol. II, ch. 4).

Thus, for Ruskin, architecture was a field in which profound changes should be introduced, both in the conception and the practice of the art, which in turn would form the basis and driving force behind radical social changes through the recognition of the value of manual work. This would provide much-needed employment opportunities as well as the right kind of employment and should not be wasted on the construction of far-fetched new glass and iron buildings (Ruskin referred to the Crystal Palace erected in Hyde Park for the 1851 Great Exhibition as a mere “cucumber frame”). Thus the minds of manual workers would be elevated, and all men would be allowed to experience the nobility of useful manual work:

There is a vast quantity of idle energy among European nations at this time, which ought to go into handicrafts. [...] I have myself seen enough of the daily life of the young educated men of France and Italy, to account for, as it deserves, the deepest national suffering and degradation. [...]

We have just spent, for instance, a hundred and fifty millions, with which we have paid men for digging ground from one place and depositing it in another. We have formed a large class of men, the railway navies, especially reckless, unmanageable, and dangerous. [...] Suppose that we had employed the same sums in building beautiful houses and churches. We should have maintained the same number of men, not in driving wheelbarrows, but in a distinctly technical, if not intellectual employment, and whose were more intelligent among them would have been especially happy that employment, as having room for the development of their fancy, and being directed by it to that observation of beauty which, associated with the pursuit of natural science, at present forms the enjoyment of many of the more intelligent manufacturing operatives. (*The Seven Lamps*, “The Lamp of Obedience, ch. 7, § 8, 199-200)

Another contemporary ill which Ruskin rails against was the solution sometimes advocated to remedy the idleness of unemployed men whereby they were employed to do restoration work. He had grieved over the decayed state of the Venetian palazzi for want of proper care, but he deplored even more the restoration work that was carried out, in which he saw an act of reprehensible betrayal of the

original, a violation of the original creation. The past which had witnessed the creation of these architectural masterpieces was dead: there was no point in reviving it as any attempt at reviving it would mean alteration and distortion, in short, a denial of the uniqueness of the original work of art. The severity of Ruskin's condemnation of restoration work in "The Lamp of Memory" can be felt in the prophetic voice foreseeing the worst of tragedies on the horizon in the closing sentence of *The Seven Lamps*: "There is thunder on the horizon as well as dawn. The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar".

Neither by the public, nor by those who have the care of public monuments, is the true meaning of the word *restoration* understood. It means the most total destruction which a building can suffer: a destruction out of which no remnants can be gathered; a destruction accompanied with false description of the thing destroyed. Do not let us deceive ourselves in this important matter; it is *impossible*, as impossible to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture. That which I have above insisted upon as the life of the whole, that spirit which is given only by the hand and eye of the workman, never can be recalled [...].

Do not let us talk then of restoration. The thing is a Lie from beginning to end. [...] more has been gleaned out of desolated Nineveh than ever will be out of re-built Milan. (*The Seven Lamps*, ch. 6, § 18-19, 184-5)

Ruskin's campaign against restoration can be traced back to his youthful travels in Italy. It was in that country and at that time that his aesthetic acuity was at its height and there too that he experienced the unbridgeable gap between himself and his fellow-men. A genuine symbiosis had begun to exist between Ruskin and art, and a widening gap had come to separate him from his contemporaries. The thirty-year-old man had lived his happiest hours in ecstatic admiration of Italian Gothic architecture. With his *Lamps*, he enlightened the minds of the Victorians and guided them in their discovery of the architectural treasures of Florence, Sienna and Pisa. The stones of Venice were to be his next step. If *The Stones of Venice* was not meant to rival Murray's *Guide*, at least it would serve to guide travellers who sought to understand the history of Venice and its

monuments – as Ruskin’s full title indicated.⁷ It continued and improved upon what had already been so effective in *The Seven Lamps*, namely opening the eyes of the Victorians to ever wider artistic horizons.

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⁷ John Pemble states that Ruskin’s opinions were “treasured as guides and oracles by a huge travelling public. He provided a litany of responses for two generations of British visitors to Italy” (207).

Elizabeth Barrett Browning in Italy

Marianne Camus – Université de Bourgogne, France

“I love Italy – I love my Florence. I love that ‘hole of a place,’ [...] – with all its dust, its cobwebs, its spiders even, I love it, and with somewhat of the kind of blind, stupid, respectable, obstinate love which people feel when they talk of ‘beloved native lands.’ I feel this for Italy, by mistake for England”, wrote Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Miss Haworth in 1858 (*Letters* II: 285). This love affair between the poet and Italy, unlike many, lasted to the end of Barrett Browning’s life and, like most, was not quite all roses. It is the rather exceptional story of a famous English poet spending the last fifteen years of her life in Italy, even more exceptional insofar as she wrote some of her most successful poetry – *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) and above all *Aurora Leigh* (1857) – there. Her feelings for the country followed a double curve, one going from affection and enthusiasm to lassitude or exasperation and back again; the other, deeper down, going from admiration to love to what one could almost call identification. The influence of Italy on Barrett Browning’s poetry is obvious, but her letters also serve as a major source of information about her personal response, a double and fluctuating relationship to the country.

Italy as a good place to winter, given Barrett Browning’s frail health, had been on the cards for a long time, the last missed opportunity occurring in 1845 when her father refused to let her go, despite her doctors’ advice and her brothers’ readiness to accompany her. She alluded to this situation in one of her first letters from Pisa: “For years I had looked forward with a sort of indifferent expectation towards Italy, knowing and feeling that I should escape there the annual relapse, yet, with that *laissez aller* manner which had become a habit to me, unable to form a definite wish about it”

(*Letters* I: 290). It is common knowledge that she needed the love of Robert Browning and the certainty of her father's opposition to their marriage to agree finally to elope to Italy. But the decision, once taken, was never regretted. First, because her health improved dramatically and almost immediately: "The change of air has done me wonderful good [...] and I am renewed to the point of being able to throw off most of my invalid habits, and of walking quite like a woman. Mrs Jameson said the other day, 'you are not *improved*, you are *transformed*'" (*Letters* I: 290). Later, she wrote, "I am wonderfully well [...] Robert declares that nobody would know me, I *look* so much better" (*Letters* I: 341). One may suspect that this sudden improvement in health was not entirely due to the balmy Italian climate. Freedom from her father's overpowering presence and sexual fulfilment might have played their parts. She confirmed the improvement in July 1849, writing,

[...] it seems like a dream when I find myself able to climb the hills with Robert and help him lose himself in the forests. I have been growing stronger and stronger, and where it is to stop I can't tell really; I can do as much, or more, now than at any point since I arrived at woman's estate. (*Letters* I: 412-3)

Her health, though, was genuinely poor, and she would not go on improving, but to the end she did go on – with the standard summer complaint about the heat – about her pleasure in the mild climate: "mountain air without its keenness, sheathed in Italian sunshine" (*Letters* I: 413). And on, "The sun is powerful – we are rejoicing in our Italian climate" (*Letters* II: 105). One cannot fail to notice, however, that there is occasionally a hint of regret in the letters for some aspects not of the English climate, but of the English landscape. One example is a comparison which she made, one feels, to herself as much as to her correspondent, "The air is as fresh as English air, without English dampness and transition; yes, and we have English lanes with bowery tops of trees, and brambles and blackberries" (*Letters* I: 456). In the same way, the easy-going way of life remained a pleasure; she talked of their "primitive" life with "no trouble, no cook, no kitchen" (*Letters* I: 303). The cheapness of everything appeared – as to all proper tourists – wonderful. Nevertheless, there is a suggestion that a tinge of nostalgia had

crept into her soul between the letter to her sister-in-law, written shortly after their arrival in Pisa in 1847 about how they dined “in [their] favourite way on thrushes and chianti with a miraculous cheapness” (*Letters* I: 303), and, a year later, another letter, to Mrs Jameson, in which she praised the cheapness of “English mutton chops” (*Letters* I: 354). It looks very much as if Barrett Browning’s English appetite had become a little tired of Italian thrushes.

One point worth noting in the passage cited about her health is the mention of “woman’s estate”, the first hint to confirm the interpretation as to the feeling of liberation brought on by life in Italy, a liberation that is specific to Victorian womanhood and that must have appeared the greater to Barrett Browning as she had suffered oppression to a greater degree than most. She had lived under the roof of a father whose tyrannical desire to control his children’s lives was extreme, not to say pathological. Her “climb[ing] the hills” parallels her going to Vallombrosa and braving the monks’ disdain of her as a woman or her taking sides in the political turmoil through which Italy was going and stating her opinion about this new freedom, freedom to move outside the private sphere as well as outside the invalid’s room. One striking instance of this liberation is the letter in which, under the pretext of describing the August heat of Florence, she actually described herself, “dishevelled hair at full length, and ‘sans gown, sans stays, sans shoes, sans everything’, except a petticoat and a white dressing wrapper” (*Letters* I: 381). It is true that the hardly hidden satisfaction at being free of the English dress code for women hints at another satisfaction more difficult to express directly for a Victorian woman, but perfectly comprehensible in this letter – that soon after mentions Robert’s full approval of such a state of undress. This feeling of freedom and happiness was regularly expressed, as well as was a gratitude to Italy for permitting such feelings to blossom. From Pisa, she wrote, “So now ask me again if I enjoy my liberty as you expect. My head goes round sometimes, that is all. I never was happy before in my life” (*Letters* I: 302). And later from the Palazzo Guidi, “happier and happier have I been, month after month” (*Letters* I: 380). The gratitude to Italy for permitting such feelings to blossom is clear too: “Oh, we Italians grow out of the English bark [...]. Such a happy year I have had this last!” (*Letters* II: 197). As she wrote to

Ruskin from Rome in 1859, “I never feel at home anywhere else [than in Italy], or to *live* rightly anywhere else at all” (*Letters* II: 300). This remark actually indicates that a transfer had been made; Italy had been adopted as the country of the heart. The feeling for Italy as the place which allows a woman to be herself runs through *Aurora Leigh*, whose eponymous heroine only finds fulfilment as an artist and as a woman in Italy. It is in Italy that she finally writes her mature and universal poetry. It is in Italy that she realizes the importance of the life of the body, through Marian’s sensuous delight in her baby, a typical Victorian shift of object. It is in Italy that she is able to reconcile everyday-life concerns and the aspirations of the soul and thus be united to her cousin Romney. The fact that Aurora was born half Italian is probably an indirect expression of the author’s regret not to have been so herself. An 1855 letter to Ruskin certainly reveals how Italian bliss was superimposed on English anguish grounded in family matters:

If you knew what it is to give up this still dream – life of our Florence [...] if you knew what it is to give it all up and be put into the mill of a dingy London lodging and ground very small indeed, you wouldn’t be angry with us for being sorry to go north – you would not think it unnatural. As for me, I have all sorts of pain in England – everything is against me, except a few things. (*Letters* II: 199)

Forbidden her father’s house and unable to forget him, deeply attached to her sisters and deprived of their company too, it is no wonder that when she created Aurora, she firmly defined her as dual in nationality and culture and thus empowered her to turn her back on the harshness of England.

It is easy, if not very original, to affirm from these first points that Barrett Browning’s attitude to Italy was influenced by her own experience, as a grown-up Victorian woman who could not face her father’s disapproval, as an invalid who found enough strength and energy at the age of forty to release herself from the corset of English conventions. Her progress was in a way archetypal. But if she can be said to epitomize Victorian contradictions, it is not simply in her being a woman, but also in her being a woman highly, if largely, self-educated in the classics and an acknowledged poetic voice of her time. These intellectual strengths counteracted her physical and emo-

tional vulnerability; they also gave her the confidence and the power to express, both in her letters and in her poetry, the complexity of her feelings for her country of adoption, for the Italians and for contemporary Italian politics.

Certainly, if the invalid rejoiced in the improvement of her health, if the wife enjoyed the freedom to love openly at last, the poet immediately fell in love with the country's grace and beauty and was full of admiration for every town she visited. The following are only a few of her enthusiastic remarks: "[Pisa] is a beautiful, solemn city" (*Letters* I: 297), "Florence, the most beautiful of the cities devised by man" (*Letters* I: 331), and "Venice is quite exquisite. It wrapt me round with a spell at first sight and I longed to live and die there – never to go away" (*Letters* II: 8). Her first contact with Renaissance art and architecture sent her into raptures. Her letters are full of exclamation points. "Wonderful", "striking" and "divine" are recurrent epithets. She mentioned being able "sometimes to go over the gallery and *adore* the Raphaels" (*Letters* I: 355; emphasis added). Beneath these rather predictable reactions what one cannot help but notice is the Englishness of the cultural background. First, the most heavily recurrent qualification, "beautiful", is often associated with its Burkean counterpart, "sublime", in an attempt to establish aesthetic gradations as, for example, when she compares the "elaborate grace" of the cathedral in Pisa and the "massive grandeur" of Florence's Duomo. "At Pisa we say, 'How beautiful!' here we say nothing; it is enough if we can breathe" (*Letters* I: 331). Very English too is the romantic appreciation of a majestic landscape. About her trip to Vallombrosa she exclaimed, "and the scenery – oh, how magnificent! How we enjoyed that great silent, ink-black pine wood! And do you remember the sea of mountains on the left?" (*Letters* I: 337).

An interesting point here is that in Barrett Browning's eyes even Italian cities partook of that romantic quality. Her descriptions repeatedly romanticize Italian towns. For example, amongst others, Ancona is "a striking sea city, holding up against the brown rocks and elbowing out the purple tides, beautiful to look on" (*Letters* I: 381). In response to Florence in the evening, she writes, "Such a view! Florence dissolving in the purple of the hills; and the stars looking on" (*Letters* II: 125). It is also an interesting instance of the

exchange taking place between visitor and visited place. This romanticizing shows the way in which, arriving in a strange place, visitors first measure it by their native aesthetic rules and then by the way in which that place works on them, changing some elements and adding others to their initial philosophy of beauty. The end of this process is depicted in *Aurora Leigh*, at the same time an urban, contemporary and very English narrative poem and a poem steeped in the atmosphere of golden age Italy.

The reference to a golden age is necessary, if one is to believe Barrett Browning's response to the state of the arts and in particular of literature in nineteenth-century Italy. Enthusiasm gave place, then, to frustration, as she wrote of her disappointment with the university library in Pisa:

The catalogue of the library [...] offers a most melancholy insight into the actual literature of Italy. Translations, translations, translations from third and fourth rate French and English writers, chiefly French. The roots of thought, here in Italy, seem dead in the ground. It is well that they have great memories – nothing else lives. (*Letters* I: 309)

This aspect remained for her “the worst of Italy” (*Letters* I: 469), even if later she became able to speak about it with humorous resignation: “We are going through some of Sachetti's novelets now: characteristic work for Florence, if somewhat dull elsewhere. Boccaccios can't be expected to spring up with the vines in rows, even in this climate” (*Letters* I: 355).

This feeling of deprivation as far as the written word is concerned explains the importance of the Anglo-Americans in her Italian life – indeed, the vast majority of the acquaintances and friends referred to were English or American. She certainly never made friends with Italians: she only mentions Professor Ferrucci in Pisa, “M. Villari, an accomplished Sicilian” (*Letters* II: 125) and, occasionally, the Italian spouse of some American or Briton – Mrs Wiseman's son-in-law or the husband of Margaret Fuller. But her letters report the fact that Florence was “full of great people” (*Letters* II: 145), i.e., Tennyson, Dickens and Thackeray, and later also mention the presence of the Trollopes, Mr Lewes and Miss Evans, although she does not say anything about meeting any of them. These references perhaps betray a hidden hankering for the company of her literary

peers. But this is not the only reason why her social life was so typical of the British expatriate wherever s/he lived. Another is to be found in a rare but telling remark: “As to Italian society, one may as well take to longing for the evening star for it seems quite as inaccessible” (*Letters* I: 377). Her letters sometimes read as if she were doing her best in a doubly unsatisfactory situation. The awareness of the difficulty of being accepted into the real life of a country when one is a foreigner was slightly tinged with the bitterness of not being welcomed as the Italian one wishes to be. But the declaration of independence from English speaking society which came just before also reveals the frustration at being cut off from the intellectual and literary circles to which she belonged by right and talent.

But if Italian society did not easily forego its rules to accommodate foreign lovers of the country, it could be said that, in a parallel way, Barrett Browning did not shed her middle-class Englishwoman-abroad attitude very readily. She looked at the Italians as she looked at landscapes, from a distance, as in *Casa Guidi Windows*, as the letters verify:

what helps to charm here is the innocent gaiety of the people, who for ever, at feast day and holiday celebrations, come and go along the streets, the women in elegant dresses and with glittering fans, shining away every thought of northern cares and taxes, such as make people grave in England [...] and the rich fraternise with the poor as we are unaccustomed to see them, listening to the same music and walking in the same gardens and looking at the same Raphaels even! (*Letters* I: 343)

This is one of many such passages where Barrett Browning comes close to the other Victorians in Italy, to Dickens in particular, who found in Italian life the grace and joy that seemed to have fled from industrialized and urbanized England. The way in which the classes mix, the ability to enjoy the moment and the capacity to move in a crowd without feeling threatened are activities which both writers describe and admire. One should note, however, that Barrett Browning remained at her window, while Dickens walked the streets. There is no mention, least of all description, of the everyday life of ordinary Italians in her letters (or her poems). She did not

seem to see the poverty and the dirt which impressed Dickens just as much as the grace of the people. She could not, it is true, because of her sex and because of the state of her health, roam the streets. But she did move about and must have seen some of the less glamorous side of Italian life. It is probable that she simply did not want to mention it. It might be because she was a self-exiled woman who had chosen to leave England for a new and free life. Her professed perfection of everything Italian can be seen either as a vindication of the rightness of her choice or as a sort of self-defence.

Despite the carefully maintained distance, the idealized vision of a sort of Paradise on earth is soon checked. It is easy, for example, to see the feeling of superiority over other people, so typical of the British stance at that time. The Italians, like the working class or women in England, were seen as overgrown children, happy in their position of providers of services and pleasure to their superiors. "Give me the smiling face of the attendant, man or woman; the courteous manner; the amiable desire to please and to be pleased; the light hearted, pleasant, simple air [...] and I am theirs again tomorrow!" wrote Dickens, in an enthusiastic moment (310). "I love the Italians [...] and none the less that something of the triviality and innocent vanity of children abound in them" (*Letters I*: 351) wrote Barrett Browning tenderly, both authors betraying themselves as members of the ruling nation of the time.

But this impression of a miraculously surviving Arcadia did not really stand the tests of time and of politics. Italy was going through the long and difficult struggle for independence and unification. After the disappointment of 1848, she could not help exclaiming, "Ah, poor Italy! I am mortified as an Italian ought to be. They have only the rhetoric of patriots and soldiers, I fear!" (*Letters I*: 383). She repeated this sentiment several times in the second half of 1848, most strongly in a letter to Mrs Martin: "It has rained once or twice, which is always enough here to moderate the most revolutionary when they wear their best surtout [...]. What they comprehend best in the 'Italian League' is probably a league to wear silk velvet and each a feather in his hat, to carry flags and cry *vivas*, and keep a grand fiesta day in the piazzas" (*Letters I*: 388-9).

This is of course the other side of the childishness that was at first found so charming.

These comments are interesting in at least two ways. First, in so far as they reveal Barrett Browning's perception of nineteenth-century Italians as still a Renaissance people, a little as if they had come down from their paintings in their silk velvet surtouts and paraded, more, one almost feels, for the foreign spectator's pleasure than for their own. Despite the fact that she lived there for so long, the country and its inhabitants seemed to have somehow remained creatures of the imagination. Then the remark that she felt as an Italian ought to was one of the first in which she refers to herself as a real Italian. But, somehow, it does more than this; it places her on the level of Italian patriots, which can be interpreted in two ways as well. It might imply that she, the weak English poetess, is more a man than most Italians. It may also be defining Italy as a feminine entity, bullied by aggressive and invasive masculine powers and in need of defenders. The two interpretations are not exclusive. They also indicate identification with the country, identification which would account for the fire with which Barrett Browning felt and spoke for Italian independence and unity. Unconsciously the fate of Italy is felt to be similar to her own: the impossible unity is a mirror of the impossible wholeness of her situation before her marriage. It may also reflect her torn feelings between English and Italian cultures which she found so hard to reconcile. Following this line of thought, the Italians may be seen as representative of the plight of women in general, vanquished by their own qualities. Certainly, if their lack of commitment to action occasionally irritated Barrett Browning, she went on thinking "the people [...] gentle, courteous, refined and tender-hearted" (*Letters* I: 424). The feminine connotations of the epithets should not be misinterpreted. Barrett Browning was a firm believer in the power of feminine virtues, as again *Aurora Leigh* proves, with its final conversion of the virile English social reformer to the feminine poetic principle upheld by Aurora.

Certainly, this is where the curve of identification with Italy appears most clearly. Of course it can be seen as a transfer, a visible way of affirming that inner conflicts were resolved, that wounds of a deep and very private nature were healed, by siding completely with Italy. If she needed the English language and the English

publishing system to go on as a writer, she seemed rather quickly to have come to a point when she not only did not need the English, but did not even want them. She rejoiced in 1848 to see Florence “tolerably *clean* of the English” (*Letters* I: 377). And in 1853, she stated that she was “much tired of the self-deification of the English nation at the expense of all others” (*Letters* II: 113).

But this attitude came to a climax over Napoleon III’s action in Italy. She firmly sided with him and against the English position: “I class England among the most immoral nations in respect to her foreign policies. And her ‘National Defence’ cry fills me with disgust” (*Letters* II: 359). But this unflinching support of the French emperor, which puzzled and embarrassed all her friends, can be seen as partaking of that complex rewriting of her own life in terms of that of her adopted country. She was publicly renouncing England by siding with her enemy or at least political rival, France. But it was also possible that the pain at the loss of the beloved though unforgiving father led her to give too much credit to Napoleon III’s paternalistic pose. To her he was, or she wished him to be, a father figure who, instead of judging and constraining, generously came to the rescue of a daughter trapped by her own weakness as much as by her enemies. In neither case did she want to see nor could she see the predatory side of the father. Our neat conclusion, however, is again upset by what comes immediately after the sentence just quoted: “But this by no means proves that I have adopted another country – no, indeed!” (*Letters* II: 359).

And so the reader of Barrett Browning’s letters is left, like the reader of *Aurora Leigh*, with the feeling of a real love for Italy, but also of an impossible quest, which, more than a wish to be united with the beloved, probably reveals the wish to be reunited with the mother. For to the absolute loss of the English mother of the poetess, *Aurora Leigh* the poem responds with an Italian mother who survives after her death in mother Italy, creating a generational line between women and country.

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Catherine Dickens in Italy: Marriage, Mesmerism and Madame de la Rue

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Travelling from Siena to La Scala in late January 1845, Catherine Dickens sat beside her husband on the box of their carriage. They had been living in Genoa since July and were studying their Italian vocabulary during the ride. After a few minutes of silence, Catherine dropped her muff and her husband looked her way. What he saw surprised him. Catherine had lost consciousness but had neither fainted nor fallen asleep. “Her eyelids quivering in a convulsive manner” and “her senses numbed”, she had unexpectedly entered “the Mesmeric trance”, he reported. Roused “with some difficulty” by Dickens, who asked her what was wrong, a trembling and discomposed Catherine explained that she “had been magnetized” (*Letters* 4: 253-54). She was unaware that her husband, sitting silent beside her, had been attempting to mesmerize, long distance, someone else – Madame de la Rue, whom he had been treating “magnetically” for a host of debilitating symptoms at her home in Genoa during the past month. Unwittingly, Catherine had fallen into a trance her husband intended for another woman, in another place.¹

Recounting the incident later that day to Emile de la Rue, Dickens suggested that the power it revealed was extraordinary. Were he to publish an account of what had occurred during the ride,

¹ Fred Kaplan briefly discusses this episode in *Dickens and Mesmerism* (83-84), a detailed study of Dickens’s fascination with the phenomenon, the uses to which he puts it in his fiction and its place in Victorian culture. Michael Slater notes Dickens’s interest in mesmerism and Catherine’s unhappiness with his magnetic treatment of Madame de la Rue in *Dickens and Women* (122-24). Both critics point to Dickens’s preoccupation with the sexual basis of the mesmerist’s power.

his readers would find it “stupendous[ly] difficult” to believe, he told Emile (*Letters* 4: 253-54). But to those familiar with the marital dynamics of the Dickenses, the image of Catherine in a trance induced by her husband is strangely familiar. Whether he exerted his power directly or at a remove, Catherine’s entrancement at his hands gives literal form to his influence over her during their courtship and marriage. In fact, the mesmerized state might be seen as a fitting emblem for Catherine’s experience of coverture during that period, as Robert Browning suggested, it could be for Victorian wives generally – when the mesmerist Browning imagines in his poem “Mesmerism” (1855) seeks to “have and hold” his beloved subject with his “steady stare”, combining the language of animal magnetism with that of the Anglican marriage service.

In Catherine’s day, the legal doctrine of coverture signified a woman’s dependence on and subordination to her husband as well as his obligation to protect or “cover” her. More specifically, it stipulated that a woman’s legal selfhood was subsumed by that of her husband upon marriage, when they became “one person” – that person being the husband. Mesmerism, too, was understood by Victorians to involve a union or merger of two people, most often a male operator and his female subject, whose “extreme intimacy and ‘oneness’” required a suspension of will and agency on the subject’s part (Winter 239).² Under coverture, the legal identity of a married woman was suspended indefinitely, and she lost the autonomy she had exercised when single, no longer able to own property or sign binding contracts. In mesmerism, the entranced subject became “depersonalized”, “with no intentions of [her] own” (Winter 83). Entering what was considered a “community of sensation” (Winter

² While some women acted as mesmeric operators in Victorian London, with addresses in Harley Street and Bloomsbury Square, they were a small minority, and Dickens’s conception of mesmerism as well as Catherine’s experience of it involved a gender dynamic in which magnetic powers were exercised solely by men whose subjects were most often women. As Alison Winter notes in discussing Victorian mesmerism, “the few women mesmerists did not give public demonstrations, perhaps because the role of mesmerist (as opposed to that of subject) was too overt a display of power” (138). Dickens always refused to be mesmerized, telling Chauncy Hare Townshend in 1841, for example, that he “dare not”; since he was hard at work on *Barnaby Rudge*, “even a day’s head ache would be a serious thing” (*Letters* 2: 342).

77), she ceased to experience her own sensory perceptions, instead sensing those of the mesmerist: a “living marionette”, “she would speak his thoughts, taste the food in his mouth, move her limbs in a physical echo of his” (Winter 3). For Catherine Dickens, whose husband was also her mesmerist, the inequitable intimacies of the magnetized state mirrored and reinforced those of the matrimonial.

If we consider Catherine’s mesmerized subjectivity in relation to the other, more conventional forms of self-abnegation she embraced in her marriage, we can recognize her loss or suspension of self as an ordinary rather than an extraordinary condition. Among the demands it placed on her, wifely selflessness required Catherine to negotiate among her various selves in a way that best suited her husband, subordinating her identity and duties as a mother, for example, to those belonging more strictly to Dickens’s wife when asked to do so.

Catherine is best known to posterity as “Mrs. Charles Dickens”, an identity she continued to embrace even after her marital separation in 1858. Yet Catherine Dickens was also Catherine Hogarth, a granddaughter and daughter, a sister, cousin, niece and aunt, defined in multiple ways by her family of origin. In the 1840s and 50s, she was the mistress of a substantial middle-class household and, in the 1860s and 70s, of a less substantial one. By the time she and Dickens left England for North America in January 1842, she was the mother of four; by 1853, she had given birth ten times. From her children, Catherine gained perhaps her strongest sense of self, one that was independent from Dickens even as her intimacy with him made it possible. Acquired “naturally” rather than by proxy or contract, motherhood could never be revoked, whatever her husband and the laws of custody might suggest to the contrary. Nonetheless, its demands and satisfactions could be superseded by a call to duty on Catherine as Dickens’s wife and by her need to give precedence to the selfless self that defined her position under coverture.

In 1841, Catherine was pressured and cajoled into accompanying her husband to North America and leaving their four young children behind, although doing so made her “cr[y] dismally” (*Letters* 2: 380-81). With the help of William Macready, who brought his own “magnetic” powers to bear on her, she was persuaded to give pri-

macy to her identity as “Mrs. Charles Dickens” and perform her selfless duty by her husband. Thus it seems only appropriate that Catherine was first mesmerized by Dickens during their American tour, willingly surrendering her will to his in what amounted to a celebration of their marriage. Dickens described the experience to John Forster on 2 April 1842 – their sixth wedding anniversary as well as Forster’s birthday. “The other night at Pittsburgh”, Dickens told his friend, “there being present only Mr. [Putnam] and the portrait-painter [George D’Almaine], Kate sat down, laughing, for me to try my hand upon her”:

I had been holding forth upon the subject rather luminously, and asserting that I thought I could exercise the influence, but had never tried. In six minutes, I magnetized her into hysterics, and then into the magnetic sleep. I tried again next night, and she fell into the slumber in little more than two minutes [...] I can wake her with perfect ease; but I confess (not being prepared for anything so sudden and complete), I was on the first occasion rather alarmed. (*Letters* 3: 180)

Dickens begins by poking fun at his own bravado as he “hold[s] forth” and “assert[s]” himself. But Catherine’s behaviour quickly justifies his claim to magnetic power, a claim he reinforces by implicitly measuring himself against his friend John Elliotson, perhaps the foremost proponent of mesmerism in their day. Like Elliotson, whom he watched mesmerize patients at University College Hospital, Dickens stages his magnetic “trial”, exercising the influence in front of male spectators. But unlike the doctor, who sometimes failed in attempts to wake the female subjects he displayed, Dickens wakes Catherine with the same “perfect ease” with which he magnetizes her.

Elliotson mesmerized his best-known subjects, the O’Key sisters, to cure their epilepsy, and his demonstrations ostensibly served the ends of medical science. By contrast, Dickens’s demonstrations in Pittsburgh showcased his power alone, as an end in itself rather than a form of therapy. As a result of their treatment, Elliotson’s patients seemed to gain unusual abilities. Mesmerism appeared to make them clairvoyant, enabling them to foretell the deaths of

fellow patients.³ But Catherine was neither cured nor empowered when she was magnetized. Losing self-control, she became hysterical and then unconscious, Dickens claimed. Her “hysterics” corresponded to the phase of excited “delirium” that typically preceded the trance of the magnetized state, although Dickens’s term also conveys a sense of his subject’s emotional weakness and volatility as a woman.

As the timing of Dickens’s communication reveals, what Catherine and her husband were demonstrating in Pittsburgh was, in effect, her selfless submission to him under coverture. Dickens provided his account to Forster in his anniversary letter – the anniversary of Forster’s birth as well as the marriage of the Dickenses – wishing Forster “many, many happy returns of the day”. His portrait of Catherine’s magnetized submission follows a comic description of marital sparring and insubordination on her part – when he and Catherine argued over whether or not Forster and Maclise would celebrate the day without them: “I say yes, but Kate says no”, Dickens recounted (*Letters* 3: 178). As he knew, Catherine’s very presence on the tour was a mark of her compliance with his wishes. But any nay-saying from her at all was impossible when he “tr[ie]d [his] hand upon her”, placing her under “the influence”, an apt symbol of their marital dynamic for their anniversary, Dickens suggests, and one he hopes will be enduring.⁴

Yet Dickens soon learned what Dr Elliotson already understood: that even a powerful magnetic operator depended on the cooperation of his subjects, who might appear submissive and senseless but who exercised their own agency in becoming so and who could resist control in numerous ways. As Winter notes, the magnetized subject, presumed to be “rendered powerless” by the operator, did not always prove as passive and mechanical as expected and “sometimes seemed to seize control” (23). Not only might she acquire unusual powers during an experiment; she might exercise a transgressive social license while magnetized and challenge the

³ Elliotson argued that, in fact, mesmerism simply heightened their sensory perceptions, allowing them to detect unhealthy bodily emissions that others could not (Winter 78).

⁴ Telling Macready of his “extraordinary success in magnetizing Kate”, Dickens “hope[s] [he] will be a witness of that, many, many, many happy times” (*Letters* 3: 175).

authority of her mesmerist. So Elliotson discovered in 1838, when Elizabeth O'Key mocked him in front of a crowded audience in the hospital theatre, proved embarrassingly wilful and was soon exposed as a fraud, discrediting him in the eyes of many of his colleagues.⁵

While Catherine did not turn on her mesmerist as Elizabeth O'Key turned on Elliotson, she could resist as well as submit to his powers, rousing herself when she thought they were misused. Between their residence in Italy and their residence in Switzerland and France a year later, Catherine did just that, thwarting Dickens's desires and putting an end to their intimacy with the de la Rues. Revealing the complexities of her position, Catherine broke her marital trance in order to insist that *she* rather than Madame de la Rue be the primary subject of her husband's magnetic powers. Faced with the prospect of a return to Italy and a renewed attempt on Dickens's part to cure his female "patient", Catherine insisted that he tell the de la Rues of her objections and distance himself from them. He was to consider and explain her "state of mind" rather than alter or control it (*Letters* 7: 224). Dissolving the "community of sensation" that characterized the magnetized state and its "oneness", Catherine refused to replace her perceptions and desires with his.

Dickens considered Madame de la Rue a victim of "shattered nerves" (*Letters* 4: 254) and of what he termed "tic in the brain" (*Letters* 12: 443), and she first submitted to his magnetic influence on 23 December 1844, in what became an extended series of magnetic sessions that weakened his influence over his own wife as it strengthened his hold on another's.⁶ By 27 December, he had treated her a second time, and for the next three weeks, their sessions took place daily. Leaving Catherine for the de la Rues' in the late morning, he would put Augusta into a trance and then encourage her to confront her fears. He believed she might go mad if she failed to defeat the "bad phantom" that haunted her dreams, an intimidating and demonic male figure whom he hoped to expose as a

⁵ For a detailed discussion of Elliotson's experiments with Elizabeth and Jane O'Key, see Winter 79-104.

⁶ Fred Kaplan devotes a chapter to Dickens's treatment of Madame de la Rue in *Dickens and Mesmerism* (74-105).

“powerless shadow” through mesmerism (*Letters* 4: 264). Before he and Catherine left Genoa on 19 January for an extended tour of Italy, Dickens arranged for a March reunion with the de la Rues in Rome and, in the meantime, for daily magnetic sessions to be held long distance, at eleven every morning.

It is unclear at what point Catherine began to object to her husband’s arrangements with the de la Rues and to what she perceived as his inappropriate intimacy with another woman. She may have questioned her husband’s behaviour or that of his “patient” before she and he left Genoa on their travels, since Madame de la Rue surprised Dickens by proposing to halt her treatment in early January, at a social gathering where the two women met (*Letters* 4: 259). If Catherine hoped that her husband would lose interest in the case once they headed south, she was disappointed. Dickens remained preoccupied with Madame de la Rue and her condition, exchanging detailed letters with her and Emile. Although Catherine may not have seen much, if any, of their correspondence, she saw or heard enough to make her uncomfortable; in his letters, Dickens described his relationship to Madame de la Rue in terms that suited a romantic or marital bond. Augusta was “yielding” to him, trusting to him, confiding in him; he was agonized by their separation and troubled by his loss of influence over her (*Letters* 4: 249, 259). He “thought continually about her, both awake and asleep”; “her being [was] somehow a part of [him]” (*Letters* 4: 264).

The union of mesmerist and subject did not suspend the intimacies of husband and wife; Catherine conceived her sixth child, Alfred, in late January or early February, while the Dickenses were on their travels and her husband was attempting to magnetize Madame de la Rue from the road. But Catherine’s continued intimacy with her husband did not reconcile her to his magnetic “oneness” with Augusta.⁷ She was distressed – so much so that, nine years later, when he revisited Italy with Wilkie Collins and

⁷ Emile de la Rue clearly shared some of Catherine’s unease. Once the de la Rues arrived in Rome, Emile called Dickens to his wife’s side in the middle of the night, hoping to curtail her sufferings. Yet he feared that Dickens doubted his attachment to Augusta; feeling powerless, he deeply regretted that it was left to another man to mesmerize his wife and “grieved at not being able to exert the influence” over her (*Letters* 4: 263, 323).

Augustus Egg, Dickens could still refer to the behaviour that “made [her] unhappy in the Genoa time”, although he considered it an example of his “intense pursuit of any idea that takes complete possession of [him]” – part of his gift as a writer, he argued (*Letters* 7: 224). Whether or not Catherine was correct to criticize her husband’s behaviour in this instance, the influence he exercised over her was checked. She saw him misjudging and misusing his powers and would not watch silently while he did so. The precise timing of her request is uncertain, but she ultimately “constrained [Dickens] to make that painful declaration [...] to the De la Rue’s [sic]” of her “state of mind” (*Letters* 7: 224), although her views were probably clear enough without it.

Soon after their departure from Italy in June 1845, Dickens looked forward to another residence in Genoa and another chance to cure Augusta, as he told Emile (*Letters* 4: 324). Repeating his hope to Forster in the spring of 1846, Dickens planned to economize by writing his next novel “in Lausanne and in Genoa”, “living in Switzerland for the summer, and in Italy or France for the winter” (*Letters* 4: 537-38). Dickens’s use of “or” – “Italy or France” – after “and” – “Lausanne and [...] Genoa” – is telling: the sticking point in his discussions with Catherine, in fact, and by 17 April he was forced to explain to Augusta that Catherine, “never very well” in Genoa, “[could] not be got to contemplate” a return there and to concede that his influence had failed him in that quarter (*Letters* 4: 534). While *he* wished to live in Genoa, Mrs Dickens did not, “though [he had] beset her in all kinds of ways”. “Therefore”, Dickens told Augusta, “I think I should take a middle course, for the present, and, coming as near you as I could, pitch my tent somewhere on the Lake of Geneva – say at Lausanne, when I should run over to Genoa immediately” (*Letters* 4: 534).

In Volume 4 of Dickens’s *Letters*, the Pilgrim editors note that the phrase “for the present” was added as an after thought by Dickens – inserted to his sentence “over [a] caret” (*Letters* 4: 534 n. 4). The added phrase suggests Dickens’s lingering hope that, with time, Catherine would relent and submit, allowing him to “pitch [his] tent” in Genoa after all. But by May Catherine’s own conception of their trip was paramount, at least in regard to its southern boundary, a line that she herself drew. “We are on the move again”, she wrote

Margaret Holskamp, a mutual acquaintance of the de la Rues. “Mr. Dickens” hoped to write his “new monthly book [...] in perfect quiet”, Catherine explained, and was “very anxious to know more of Switzerland, so we are going to spend the summer there at Lausanne [...]. The winter we shall very likely spend in Paris, but we shall not go any further south”. Catherine used the plural pronoun “we” in her letter to Miss Holskamp rather than the singular “I” that her husband used in *his* to Madame de la Rue, and the imperative mood (“shall”) instead of his use of the conditional “could” or “should”. She thus spoke for Dickens as well as herself on this matter, even while expressing deference to him and his wishes: “Mr. Dickens is very anxious to know more of Switzerland”, as she put it. He might “beset” her, but her mind was set, impervious to his influence in this regard. They would not go south of Paris, to Genoa and the de la Rues.

In an unusual show of power ten years into her marriage, Catherine Dickens forced her husband to recognize and act on her “state of mind”, resisting his influence and setting the terms of their second residence on the continent. Signs that Catherine was emerging from her marital trance in the mid- to late 1840s were generally more subtle – manifested in her pursuit of friendships with women who valued self-fulfilment and self-expression over self-sacrifice and in anxieties over childbearing. By the end of 1847, with the advent of her second miscarriage after the birth of her seventh child, it was the state of her *body*, not her mind, that preoccupied her and her husband. Increasingly identified with and as her body, Catherine entered a phase of her life best characterized by the term “overbearings”, used by a sympathetic Francis Jeffrey to describe her plight. That is, however, another story.

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Edward Lear in Italy: Mediterranean Landscapes as Inspiration for a Rhizomic System of Nonsense

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In his *Philosophy of Nonsense*, Lecerclé tries to account for nonsense in Bakhtinian terms by talking of the exotopy of nonsense. He focuses on the dialectics of inclusion/exclusion, which founds values and at the same time guarantees the unity of a style and the coherence of meaning. It is the interwoven cloth of the canon, which not only implies subversion and inversion, but also engages in conversion and transversion, re-emerging out of an appearance of incoherence and chaos. “This dialectical is essential”, Lecerclé notes by quoting Bakhtin, “to the genre of autobiography – this is my life, and yet I must be outside it, at a distance from it, in order to narrate it as a story. The contradictory position of exotopy [...] has one considerable advantage – it gives the subject a surplus of vision” (220-221). This appreciation, “a surplus of vision”, is the distinctive mark of Lear’s correspondences from Italy, where flights of fancy stand out perfused in a detached, humorous idiolect.

“The creative impulse springs from the collective”, writes Neumann in *Art and the Creative Unconscious* (98). He continues, “although creative men usually live unknown to one another, without influence on one another, a common force seems to drive all those men who ever compensate for a cultural canon at a given time or shape a new one” (99). The canon of nonsense literature that encompasses Edward Lear’s and Lewis Carroll’s *exotopies* – impossible objects that, to some extent, match Dickens’s puns or irrational characters – may be intuited as a compensation for the loss of a collective myth in the one-sided, super-rational world of Victorian zeitgeist. Limericks

and nursery rhymes represent an attempt to reshape and resume, through instinctual drives embodied by phonic fantasies, coinages and metonymic associations, a collective myth of a reliable state of nature. Coinage is a typical nonsense proceeding formula of Lear's contaminations. His pidgin speech matches grotesque caricatures of freaks and topographical drawings of impossible objects or incoherent taxonomies. Consider, for example, his "frogloodytes", freaks that resemble cats and men much more than frogs, a portrait that dates back to his Sicilian tour with Lord Proby in May-July 1847. Such botanical nonsense-coinages and zoological monsters like frogloodytes reveal the author's aesthetic pursuit of the *hapax* effect, engendered by the hyperbolic "unique encounter". The nonsense strategy either results from a meticulous, incisive topographic trait, joining together incoherent semantic fields, or from a coinage-manipulation formula which may be easily acknowledged as belonging to Lear's idiolect.

Nonsense applies its subverted rules to an intelligible world of queer, animated objects or anthropomorphic creatures. Through logical paradoxes and semantic incoherence of the context, they are in contrast to rational common sense (Alice's "matter of factness") as a healthy antidote to the restrictive education to which Victorian subjects were subjected: the unconscious returns in the guise of linguistic symptoms. Lear's puns and portmanteau creations spawn similarly, through the conjunction of two heterogeneous fields, impossible objects (what Deleuze would call rhizomatic branching out), like Lear's Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò. *Parole* coinages, the same that appear to prevail in the delirium of mental patients or in glossolalia, characterize to some extent the aesthetic choice of the lunatic Lear. Even Lear's travelling correspondence from Italy – the 1846 *Illustrated Excursions in Italy* – betrays his idiosyncratic language proceeding, and his exotic escapism reads as an excursion within an imaginary metalanguage. He introduces a facetious correspondent, who stands out through the proliferation of obsessional phonemes (*lanternois*), the playful imitation of a foreign language (*baragouin*), and the coinage of "regularly" invented words (*charabia*) (Lecerle 31). Unlike the delirious mental patient, the writer of nonsense keeps under control – even though almost obsessively – the manipulation of a code, wavering between hyper-coding (an extravagant respect of the code) and hypo-

coding (its subversion). The aesthetic pleasure is most often reached by means of witticism within the range of *hapax legomenon*, a word or phrase which occurs only once in the written record of an author's work.

It could be argued that Lear's whole nonsense-creation is shaped like a rhizome, an expression first used by Deleuze and Parnet in *Dialogues* to designate the anarchic logic of representation arbitrarily arranged through some unpredictable branching out from the plant, which results in heterogeneous disposition (33). Through the aesthetics of the "arbitrary arrangement", the image of the rhizome also occurs in Deleuze and Guattari's essay, *A Thousand Plateaus*. In the research undertaken with Guattari, Deleuze invokes a botanical, rhizomic model of thought, which appears in opposition to arborescent thought. The image, borrowed from the botanical order, possibly after Jung's evocative metaphor, may be suggested by any "literary machine" organized in lines of articulation or segmentarity and assemblage.¹ The non-signifying system of Lear's nonsense, alluding to ludicrous incongruity, untrammelled as it is by hierarchical ties, seems to be deeply connected with the first three principles of the rhizome-system, outlined in the prologue to *A Thousand Plateaus*. The diagram relates to *connectivity*, the capacity to aggregate by making connections; *heterogeneity*, the linking of unlike elements; and thirdly, *multiplicity*, the multiple singularities synthesized into a "whole" by relations of exteriority.

Due to its multiple, non-hierarchical nature, the rhizome-system works by means of trans-species connections, while an arborescent conception of knowledge works with vertical and hierarchical connections, according to dualist categories and binary choices. The recombinant and aggregative poetics of nonsense reads as a techno-

¹ In the prologue to his *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung conceives life like a plant that lives on its rhizome. He points to the rhizome as what remains as a fixed and self-sustaining structure after the ethereal has gone: "Its true life is invisible, hidden in the rhizome. The part that appears above the ground lasts only a single summer. Then it withers away – an ephemeral apparition. When we think of the unending growth and decay of life and civilizations, we cannot escape the impression of absolute nullity. Yet I have never lost the sense of something that lives and endures beneath the eternal flux. What we see is blossom, which passes. The rhizome remains" (3-4).

poetic construction which, assumed as a rhizomatic system, involves, as Lecercle suggests, “the co-presence of elements belonging to incompatible realms of being” (218). Throughout Lear’s non-hierarchical relationships between successive circles, or plateaus, nonsense coinages and graphic puns combine as heterogeneous stems flourishing within the rhizomorphic system. Even though the tip of the principal root has failed to spawn, an immediate and indefinite multiplicity of secondary filaments – parallel signs and characters which mark the end of the binary logic of dichotomy – seem to graft themselves around the stems. One of the most peculiar aspects of this semiotic chain of connections emerges through Edward Lear’s personal rhizomic canon, both in topographic drawings and in poem-writing formula, through his process of parallel transversions from botanical to zoological subjects, whereby high and low appear fused into a single linear genre. An example of this process, bringing about absurd or ridiculous themes treated with elaborate seriousness, can be provided by Lear’s sonnet, “Cold are the crabs”, originally published in the posthumous collection, *Teapots and Quails*:

Cold are the crabs that crawl on yonder hills,
Cold are the cucumbers that grow beneath,
And colder still the brazen chops that wreathe
The tedious gloom of philosophic pills! (63)

The link between nonsense and sense is fostered through parodied intertext by means of the explicit allusion to Tennyson’s *In Memoriam A. H. H.*:

Calm is the morn without a sound
Calm as to suit a calmer grief,
And only through the faded leaf
The chestnut pattering to the ground: (XI.1-4)

The relationship interwoven in the process of transversion is, as Lecercle suggested, conceived like “a denial which turns to be a Freudian negation, as the sense denied on the surface of the text comes back in the multiplication of intertextual traces” (188). The denial of sense, which reads as a parody of pathos, in other words, betrays the opposite feeling. Any denial of loving affection is

therefore meant as a key to gain access to the semic system of Lear's "Ivory Tower", as Douglas Puccini's outspoken criticism seems to suggest, in his attempt to explain Lear's insight and search for isolation and self-denial:

Edward was a man who lived in his own world but did not feel at home in it [...]. He mingled with the upper class of his country at an early age and was taken into Lord Derby's family circle without really being accepted as a member. Derby supported him like a father, but without loving him like a son. Love withheld was a constant reason for grieving and a source of fear, but at the same time it was a power that moved him towards a rich artistic production. During phases of intense activity he seemed to overcome his solitude. For example, his lonesome grief. Not being accepted in ways of loving affection, he sought to find approval in art. (97)

The indefinite setting within Lear's rhizome-system – stemming out of connectivity, heterogeneity, and multiplicity – could not but imply the liberation of thought from those images which imprison it, having been judged so far as incompatible with freedom from need and as intrusive, almost obsessive or even schizoid. Once the new wave of trans-species connection was recombined, through continuous negotiation with its context, it was nurtured in the southern light of Mediterranean sites, from Sicilian coasts to the Ligurian Riviera. The nonsense-system was bound to function, and even flourish, despite local "breakdowns", thanks to deterritorializing and reterritorializing processes. Meant as ruptures within the rhizome, these processes seemed to fuel Lear's inner life and work, as though the multiple entryways were inextricably joined in a thoroughly anarchic and horizontal procedure.

Both the drawings for the limericks and the nonsense verse, decryptable as models of "rhizomatic multiplicities", seem to work as bulbs or tubers susceptible to constant modification, apt to compensate the barren ground of the increasingly rational Victorian zeitgeist. Lear's assemblages expand the connections, making the whole nonsense performance proliferate, as though through a map, until, after the maximum dimension, the multiplicity undergoes a change in nature, a metamorphosis. At the end of the transformation

process, Lear's fantastic creations appear to bear either human-animal-vegetal traits or the opposite characteristics belonging to the artificial world of automatons. In contrast, his models of nomadic and rhizomatic writing perfectly apply to his choice of a nomadic style of living. He would undoubtedly benefit from such positive influence established by semiotic chains of aggregation, which, like "tuber agglomerating very diverse acts", plunged him in an essentially heterogeneous reality of "throng of dialects, patois, slangs" (Deleuze and Guattari 7).

From time to time, he managed to overcome his emotional problems, to increase his territory by movement-deterritorialization. The "ruptures" in the context worked as breakdowns to strengthen his resilience, and through lines of flight Lear outlined a map with multiple entryways along deterritorialized flows of thought. The shifting of frontiers, both literal and metaphorical, took him along unpredictable and random paths, according to a map that was always "detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable" (21). Open to all directions, the multiple entryways of nonsense allowed him to explore all the modes of communication of the a-centred rhizome, within its relation to the animal, vegetal, and topical issues. They helped him perform an asymmetrical, active resistance to the most rigid organization within the ruling Victorian code. Lear, however, led what von Franz, after Baynes, called the "provisional life" of a compulsive and restless drifter. As von Franz puts it, the very same hope concerning the coming about of real things in the future betrayed a terror of entering space and time completely, of being the specific human being that one is bound to become, a feature of the *puer aeternus* archetype.²

² Together with Lewis Carroll, Lear remains one of the best examples of the archetype analysed by the Jungian psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz in *Puer Aeternus*. From Ovid, the Latin phrase refers to the child-god of the Eleusinian mysteries, later identified with Dionysus and Eros. He is the divine youth, born in secrecy during the night of mother-cult mysteries, whose function is to redeem; a god of life, death and resurrection, he embodies divine youth. Translated as "eternal youth", *puer aeternus* is also used to designate a male whose behaviour betrays too great a dependence on a maternal figure. See Noakes's biographical study, *Edward Lear: Life of a Wanderer*, for further discussion of the extent to which this archetype informs our understanding of Lear's life and works.

This particular feature helps explain to what extent the map of rhizomorphic thought, whose issue is to construct the unconscious, made Lear especially connected to the world of the collective unconscious, primeval source of enduring archetypal images, expressed in verses: for example, the connectable fields of his nonsense travel-poems, which partly reflect the Victorian and imperial urge to discover new worlds, in order to expand one's own map of the world. In one of Lear's most popular nonsense songs, "The Jumbles", a group of fantastic creatures, the Jumbles, go "to sea in a Sieve" (264) and move about in a world that is not a real one, being a nonsensical domain which makes psychic sense, a world of archetypal images. In fact, the Sieve is typically round, a sort of mandala, which recalls the archetype of wholeness. The collective heroes' quest for paradise, or the longing for oneness with the mother, is suggested as a journey to wholeness, a *nekyia* or night sea journey such as Odysseus may have taken. Even though the Jumbles start their perilous voyage, threatened by the sea water, "On a winter's morn, on a stormy day" (264), the verses stress the darkness of the sky, the length of the voyage, and the night: "And all night long they sailed away" (266). The Jumbles themselves stress the emphasis: "And all night long in the moonlight pale,/We sail away with a pea-green sail" (267). Escaping along the tracing of a rhizomic map through aimless wanderings is still linked to the adolescent psychology of a callow *puer aeternus*, keen to try new and exciting things, which displays Lear's travelling as an ineluctable choice, as if he had been compelled either to move or to wander from Abruzzi to Calabria and Sicily on adventure holidays. Even after settling in Sanremo, Italy, at the age of fifty-eight, he made an arduous trip to India and continued his travels around Europe. In the urge to expand consciousness through many experimented entryways, to struggle for wholeness (the goal of what Jung calls the individuation process) or, rather, in the hope to evade psychic pain and growth, Lear travelled to many of the same places Byron – another *puer aeternus* – had been, such as Albania and Greece. Indeed, Byron, who died when Lear was eleven, had been a childhood hero of Lear's. Years later Lear wrote in his diary about how he would "sit

[...] in the cold looking at the stars [...] stupefied & crying when he heard that Lord Byron was dead” (Noakes, *Wanderer* 22).

There are many explanations for Lear’s travelling. As a landscape painter, he needed new subjects, spectacular scenes, and sunlit landscapes. Furthermore, as Noakes shows, “he saw that, for all his suffering, the world was full of beauty and wonder. Above all, he found in these journeys a physical and spiritual freedom he had never imagined possible and which he sought to share in his Nonsense songs” (*Edward Lear 1812-1888* 14). Journeys, after all, are a frequent leitmotiv even in his nonsense verse. Another reason for Lear’s wanderings was the fact that “being on the move helped to reduce the frequency of his epileptic attacks, and although the rigorous journeys sometimes exhausted him, he never felt fitter than when he was traveling” (Noakes, *Letters* xvi). The tourist’s notes accompanying Lear’s work as a draughtsman and painter, which was inspired by *en plein air* environments, including the Italian or French Riviera and Corsican coasts, communicate his enthusiasm for southern landscapes scorched by the bleaching sunlight and bright vistas of the Mediterranean. In the choice of those picturesque and impressive landscapes, Lear found not only inspiration for his delicate watercolours but also refuge and both physical and emotional relief, afflicted as he was with various illnesses, including epilepsy and bipolar depression, which he poetically reformulated through nonsensical displacement as “frenzied fit”. In a December 1858 letter, addressed to his friend Chichester Fortescue, he confessed he was at times very low spirited and depressed: “There are times when I turn into bile and blackness, body and soul & in those phases of my life I hate myself & through myself I hate everybody, even those I like best” (*Letters of Edward Lear to Chichester Fortescue* 122). What he was searching for – though he was not aware – and could find in Italy was, after all, a sort of light therapy: the vivid sunshine of the Mediterranean landscape was the location that would finally brighten his sad sights on life and lessen his depressive symptoms. When the euphoria of his elated mood lighted up, then flashes of witticism let out a sharp knowledge of the *Lebenswelt*, as may be inferred from his witty jokes and riddles, based on the conjunction-homophonic relationship of two heterogeneous fields, bordering the ethics of

institutional power. It was definitely the landscape bleached by the sun and the view of the sea mirroring the clear blue sky that stimulated him to work as the topographical painter he aspired to be and that affected his chromaticism. Exactly like rhizomes, or bulbs propagating and flourishing in the light of sunshine, his paintings gained another hue by his contact with the Posillipo School, under Giacinto Gigante; due to the outstanding technique of colouring learnt from the acknowledged master, Lear was able to sell most of his works to his English subscribers.

His nearly unending wandering is symbolic of his quest for spiritual fulfilment, which he would never reach.³ Unable to find a place in the world, the world of professional landscape painters, it could be argued, the freak – with whom he identified himself – joined other drop-outs, living on the fringe of society. Lear's nonsense only partly masked his distress, or rather it was, like a scar, its distinguishing mark. The people he met after his final move to Liguria, by the end of the 1860s, seemed to help him tolerate the feeling of being an alien in a foreign land and helped him to some extent out of the isolation. His last lively geographical limericks, interpolated and completed by humorous landscape sketches, were written in Sanremo, where he had settled after a life of long journeys and stays in rented rooms. In Liguria, the mildness of the climate, the familiar atmosphere of the environment, the closeness to Mediterranean scenes were all welcome to him as a late blessing. The sight of endless sandy beaches, of hillsides scattered with olive trees, of a mountain chain fading into the distance, in the vaporous blue-violet light of the sea, enabled him to understand that Sanremo was finally his home. The bright light of his studio in Villa Emily, which became his permanent residence, fostered his interpretation of the natural environment in a transfiguring style which was very much indebted to the rarefied atmospheres of watercolours by his elected master, W. J. M. Turner. An outline of his schizoid-rhizomatic

³ As Noakes has put it, his search was not for passionate, physical love, but for someone who would accept and appreciate him as a person in the way that his parents had not wanted him as a child. Through his sensibility and charm he was sought after as a friend, and he loved to be with children because they liked him and showed it. But what he was looking for, and never found, was real spiritual involvement with another person (*Wanderer* 134).

genius is his own humorous plan for Villa Emily. He sketched the villa as a human face, using features of caricatures in which the eyes, nose, and mouth represented the various rooms of the home. He had always loved being with children, epitomizing the behaviour of the *puer aeternus*, and his “Volumes of Stuff”, as he himself defined his *Nonsense Books*, were originally written to delight children. Like a child, all of a sudden, he would turn from the most joyful exuberance to the deepest gloom, but he was perfectly aware of the impending hour of melancholy or morbidity. The pendulum of his “ludicrously whirligig life which one suffers from first and laughs afterwards” (Noakes, *Selected Letters* xiii), as he wrote to his mentor, the Pre-Raphaelite William Holman Hunt in July of 1870, was to some extent triggered by the Italian *genius loci*. The outcome was a displaced emotional stream, an introverted way of reinterpreting natural environments through dramatic and sublime or grotesque descriptions of vaporous views vanishing into the distance, in a motionless, crystalline atmosphere, exactly like his nonsense lyrics, always on the boundary of symbolic desolation or triumphant incongruity. Lear wrote his journals soon after sightseeing or at the end of an excursion, sketching detailed and witty impressions that were to take the form of familiar, entertaining letters addressed to relatives and friends, or even biographers.⁴

It is with Dickens’s *Pictures from Italy* that Lear’s travelling correspondence shares the most interesting features, mainly taste for humorous incidents recorded within the experience of pioneering journeys. Their cosmopolitan interests and attitudes can be easily recognized through reading their literary travelling itineraries, mainly characterized by the aesthetics of the picturesque, though pervaded by personal idiosyncrasies. Recorded through familiar letters, similar to Lear’s correspondences from Italy, the expressive means of Dickens’s sketches within the travelogue, witness a revolving tension between picaresque fiction and reality. His *Pictures from Italy* seems to be the accomplishment of a travelling Pickwick.⁵

⁴ Like John Forster to Dickens, Thomas George Baring was both Lear’s biographer and friend.

⁵ See Schoenbauer Thurin 66-78. For a more general appreciation of Dickensian characterization, see Davies 65-74.

On the other hand, the evocative scenery of Lear's *Illustrated Excursions in Italy* is partly devoted to the recording and visual rendering with the tools at his disposal – either words or watercolours – of the idyllic vision of what was, in those times in Italy, the wild countryside. His selection of the word *excursion*, stemming out of the Latin *excursio* (from *excursus*, past participle of *excurrere*, to run out) seems to suggest that he chose peculiar excursions which were considerably separate from ordinary itineraries of the Baedeker tour and were rather to be meant as a “nonsensical” and fanciful, intertextual edition of the medieval *Viaggio Periglioso*. Apart from the traditional stops at sites naturally rich in classical and Renaissance culture, like Rome, Florence and Naples, Lear's predilection for wild nature and exotic destinations confirmed him as the heir to a pre-romantic sensibility that focused on the search for the sublime and the picturesque. At the same time, however, it was the width of his cosmopolitan horizon which drove him not only to travel to far away countries, such as Egypt, Greece, Palestine, and India, but also to explore, with makeshift transport, regions of Italy, such as Basilicata or the Kingdom of Naples, which were surely considered backward or even overrun with bandits. Such experiences among wild regions, which no doubt appealed to his romantic sensibility, allowed him to cross the boundaries of his times as a forerunner of modern journalists, a pioneer of cosmopolitan travellers.

In the quest for the picturesque – an aesthetic category suggesting variety, smallness, irregularity, roughness of texture, and fostering the power of imagination – both Dickens and Lear sought to revolt against the tyranny of symmetry. They considered Italian scenes, rather than legs of the canonical Grand Tour, as formidable chances to foster their own creativity, since they were keen on picturesque, never-before-explored Italian sceneries, as a possible source of inspiration. Lear's *Journals of a Landscape Painter*, compiled from notes taken during his wanderings in southern Calabria and in Campania, scrupulously report not only the more curious aspects or encounters with unpredictable people of a completely different civilization, but also the most fascinating views of natural backgrounds which he would later

elaborate through oil-painting in his own atelier, when he was able to own one, in Sanremo.⁶

Both Dickens and Lear visited Italy in search of human rather than cultural experiences, since both men were curious and careful observers of manners remote from the Victorian civilization stemming out of the core of the British Empire. Rivalling the anthropologist's power of observation, they found getting acquainted with the common people of Italy extremely stimulating and delighted themselves in observing the rules (or the absence of them) that regulated, or to some extent complicated, social life in Italy. Through their legacy of humorous writing and visual arts, they betray a hue of colonial taste for the "alterity" – that is to say, the experience of being otherwise. For outness is (even meant as a proceeding from nonsense experience of inversion), as Coleridge suggested, nothing but the feeling of otherness (alterity) rendered intuitive, or alterity visually represented.

Many of the stories which Lear would record in his journal through Italy offer topical anecdotes that bear witness to the contradictory political scenario in Europe during the Italian Risorgimento. In his biographical study, *Lear's Italy*, Montgomery relates an episode about mistaken identity, between Lear and Lord Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary at the time. Palmerston, while not at all popular in the Kingdom of Naples and certainly no friend to the ruling Bourbons, had gained great influence over young patriots through his projections that Italy could be liberated only by a revolutionary movement to establish a republican government. On one occasion, Lear was sketching one of his opalescent watercolours near a picturesque, savage spot in Calabria, a place which would have appealed to Radcliffe's gothic imagination. A police officer approached and ordered the artist to show his passport. On seeing the signature of Palmerston on the document, the officer thought that he

⁶ It is possible that Lear's settling on the Italian Riviera was partly determined by the need to take root and to live and work in an atelier where he would be able to paint his oil pictures. See Anninger, *passim*. Lear himself had special cabinets made by a local artisan to store his watercolours in the newly-built Villa Emily in Sanremo in the early 1870s. "First and foremost, the strong physical presence of the two cabinets speak of a new-found sedentary-life [...]. The cabinets contain Lear's freshest work, the sketches and watercolours that he made en plein air as the basis for his finished watercolours or oils upon his return" (49-50).

had seized the enemy of Ferdinand II (Bomba). He arrested Lear and forced him into the village, waving the passport and proclaiming that he had captured Palmerston. The episode, although centred on the ambiguous attitude of Italians towards Lord Palmerston, testifies to the otherness experienced by Lear, the feeling of not belonging.

Besides the shared exotic passion for picturesque travelogue, other common interests link Dickens and Lear within the category of the grotesque. Dickens's aesthetic of onomatopoeic propriety and Lear's onomatopoeic imagination seem to draw inspiration from a common source. Dickens's almost obsessive search and choice of family names (he was used to carefully scrutinizing obituary pages and records of births and marriages in order to find names suitable to the characters in his novels) suggests the impression that the attitude of the fictional characters should derive from the name of things. In addition to that, the same intuitive philosophy of subverted language-logic applies to Lear's nonsense text, in which it is the phonetic association that evokes and determines the plausibility within semantic range. A commonly shared attitude to humorous manipulation of words and puns may be inferred from Dickens's "Man from Tobago" in *Our Mutual Friend* ("The Man from Somewhere"), in which we retrace the code of the limerick-structure – the answer to the metaphysical source of wh- questions concerning the Origin: which, in this case, is the fabulous Tobago, a small and remote island in the Caribbean Sea. Quite similarly, Lear provided the early version of the same original limerick concerning the "sick man", the archetypal and solitary freak portrayed as "the old man". Lear's limericks join together several themes evoking the destabilizing code of the freak, such as self-consciousness, embarrassment, uncontrolled bodily parts, and combine them together according to the aesthetic choice of hyperbolically ridiculous patterns, so as to reveal nonsense in its inner structure-code. The canon results in a rhizome which ceaselessly establishes new semantic connections, and which, throughout its secondary stems, brings about the compensatory function of humour and irony. Both of them perform an active role as a blending of soothing resources, meant as diverse powerful means to exorcise despondency and isolation.

By depicting the vivid light and hues of Italian environments through intimate and emotionally interpreted scenes, Lear aspired to compensate for his intimate failures, which were expected to reveal his versatile genius as a painter of surprising achievements in watercolours, but he was recognized only to a modest degree. Lear saw in this respect a confirmation of his self-image as an impossible creature or monster, being tragic and comical at the same time – hence, the possible source of inspiration for the freak, presented as a displaced protagonist in many of the nonsense rhymes and stories written during his Italian sojourn.

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5. Italy and Italians in English Literature: From Stereotype to Identity

Italian Transformations: Gender and National Identity in Madame de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* and Selected Works of Charles Dickens

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Set in Britain and Italy between 1794 and 1803 and written after Trafalgar and Austerlitz in 1805, Madame de Staël's novel *Corinne: or Italy* is justly acknowledged as a seminal text in Romanticism. It debates the value of emotion over intellect, nature over the manmade (Luzzi 67), while critiquing contemporary political issues relevant to Staël's own exile from Napoleonic France which are both explicit and necessarily coded in the text. Dickens was only five years old when Staël died, but her novel was a hit throughout the nineteenth century, in part, because of its engagement with the construction of links between gender and nation which preoccupied *many* Victorian writers.

The tragic love affair of the novel is played out as a drama between nations as much as individuals. "The difference of national character is the force that sets all in motion", writes Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1807: "And it is Great Britain and Italy, the extremes of civilised Europe, that are personified and contrasted in the hero and heroine of this tale" (183). The words "extremes" and "civilised" are interesting here with their implications of worrying alliances, "suspect" cultural links and divisions. We have a sense of the tension between opposites – both a magnetic attraction and repulsion between these nations and these individuals. In other words, in the love affair between Corinne and Nelvil, Staël explores what the British and the Italians have to fear and to desire from each other. Staël apparently argues for the homogenizing effects of civilization, that force she says "tends to make men look alike and

almost really be alike” (13), while hoping for an appreciation of the delight in cultural variation. However, she also dramatizes the failure of these individuals to overcome “natural” incompatibilities understood as differences in “national character”. Those “natural” differences are articulated in terms of gender expectations.

One of the most influential early constructors of Italy and Italians, Staël writes into her heroine – made explicit in the novel’s title – an aspirational model for Italy. As Corinne is triumphantly crowned poet laureate at the Capitol, Prince Castel-Forte claims she is “the image of our beautiful Italy; she is what we would be but for the ignorance, the envy, the discord, and the indolence to which our fate has condemned us” (27). Figured as a Sybil and natural descendent from Petrarch, Corinne continues a glorious and ancient tradition while foretelling the possibility of a fresh and beautiful future. However, this positive narrative of personal and national amelioration takes a turn when she meets the Englishman (or Anglo-Scot) Lord Nelvil. He embodies a cluster of often contradictory ideas: romantic, tortured, indecisive “man of feeling”, rational man of enlightenment, chivalric knight, active military hero. As an Englishman he is both satirized and valorized by Staël, for she critiques his gender politics and patriarchal attitudes while placing hope in his British military prowess as capable of resisting Napoleon. However, Corinne is representative of Italy, that “Juliet of nations”, and the Romeo and Juliet analogies embedded in her romance with Nelvil predict its doom.¹ Corinne’s love affair and demise seem an enactment of stereotypical nineteenth-century assumptions about Italy’s particularly “feminine” fate and the “masculine” chivalric heroes who have failed to rescue her – either from occupying tyrants or the nation’s own perceived weaknesses and shortcomings. Whether politically or emotionally motivated, narratives of tragic love or betrayal are commonly used to articulate the foreigner’s experiences in Italy. Such plots recur in the Italian novels of writers as diverse as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James and E. M. Forster. *The Marble Faun*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Daisy Miller* and *Where Angels Fear to Tread* all engage in various ways

¹ The characterization of Italy as the “Juliet of nations” is an enduring trope. See Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s extended use of it in her 1851 poem on the failure of the first stage of the Risorgimento, *Casa Guidi Windows* (400).

with this theme of the foreign male's frustrated chivalry in relation to troubled love affairs, to delineate the complicated psychological contours of the cultural encounters Americans and British have in and with Italy.

This negotiation of affinity between and distance from Italy is expressed not just in novel plots of the nineteenth century, but also in the ideological narratives implicit in Victorian racial and cultural hierarchies. In *Primitive Culture*, Victorian anthropologist, E. B. Tylor places Italy *second* below the top-ranked England in his ordering of the "civilized" nations of the world (qtd. in Stocking 162). The British want Italy close for reasons of shared cultural heritage and affinity, but complete equality with a power negotiating its right to imperial domination is, seemingly, undesirable. In this respect these cultural hierarchies replicate the anxiety inherent in Victorian gender hierarchies which place women in contradictory positions of both superiority and inferiority to men, particularly in terms of marriage. Empire invests this cultural dynamic with yet another source of angst; fascination is fused with fear in the British perceptions of Italy, for Victorians, including Dickens himself, repeatedly read in the fallen Roman civilization, worrying predictions of their own imperial downfall.²

But Victorians were intrigued by the novel *Corinne* because of a parallel obsession with the relationship between gender roles and national aspirations.³ With its problematizing of the concept of woman as genius, it is not surprising that Victorian women writers, in particular, found something to attract them in the novel. The essential conflict for the creative woman who is encouraged by love to disavow the fame she desires and to embrace a domestic or religious role instead is explored by a number of writers, and accounts for the novel's "double-edged" reception by many (Kaplan

² See, for instance, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Plea for the Ragged Schools of London Written in Rome": "Shall we boast of empire, where/Time with ruin sits commissioned?/[...] Lordly English, think it o'er, Caesar's doing is all undone!" (457).

³ Perhaps no writer articulates this linked anxiety between the potential for imperial downfall and the position of women than does Florence Nightingale in her accounts of her travels in the East and in her novel essay *Cassandra*. See her *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile 1849-1850*.

1). Elizabeth Barrett Browning reworks *Corinne* in the feminist story of her own half-English, half-Italian heroine, *Aurora Leigh*, while John Forster's one-time girlfriend L. E. L. modelled her own public persona on the fictional poetess, going so far as to dress as Corinne and to write in her "voice" (Francis, *Essays* 93-115). For many poets, like Felicia Hemans and Jane Taylor,⁴ however, the characters of both Corinne and Staël inspire a fascination *and* a repudiation (Davidoff and Hall 161) – a reflex also stereotypical of the foreigner's encounter with Italy. For Hemans and Taylor, Corinne's talent and fame are considered to be dangerous temptations for women: distractions from traditional and approved domestic ideals. In "Corinne at the Capitol", Hemans writes: "Happier, happier far than thou./With the laurel on thy brow,/She that makes the humblest hearth/Lovely but to one on earth!" (686).⁵ Here, as with Dorothea Brooke's "hidden life" in *Middlemarch* or Esther Summerson's jingling household keys in *Bleak House*, is the argument for satisfaction in a power which emanates from small acts in a small sphere, acts which are assumed to radiate improvement to others and the nation.⁶ By the end of the same century, views of the novel and its relation to women's lives changed again. Writing in the 1880's, the feminist Bella Duffy dismissed *Corinne* as a "very long-winded" and "glorified guide-book with some of the qualities of a good novel" (qtd in Ingram 180-81) because she was part of a later movement which sought to valorize, not apologize for feminine creativity (Francis 9). As Francis argues:

The political model represented by Madame de Staël and *Corinne* – of "influence" exercised through the *salon*, of feminine emotion and virtue as transformational forces, of the willingness to stake subjective dignity upon the suffering created by a rejected heterosexual commitment – lost its charms. (9)

⁴ See Taylor's "To Mad. de Staël" (289-91) and Hemans's "Corinne at the Capitol" (681-682) and "Women and Fame": (868).

⁵ Hemans incorporates these lines from her own poem in a further contemplation of women's roles in her later poem "Women and Fame".

⁶ See also James Buzard's discussion of this converted power in *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels*.

I would argue that the *charm* of feminine “influence” and its potential transformative power enthralled Dickens. These gender ideals were important for his definitions of self and nation – especially in those novels which most closely follow his *own* trip to Italy: *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*.

And if the character Corinne reflects the gender role anxieties of many Victorian women writers, I would argue that the character of Lord Nelvil can be shown to make interesting comments on Dickens’s own cultural encounter with Italy and his attitudes to gender and national character. Nelvil runs to Italy to escape grief and ill-health after the death of his father. The “phantoms of his imagination” have left him with a bad conscience that he might have precipitated his death because of his own sexual dalliance with a French widow (Staël 5). Fuelled by restlessness, Dickens, too, flees to Italy for motivations that are both practical and psychological. He is frustrated by battles over copyright issues, exhausted by demands on his time and money, disappointed in the sales of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and in a slight career slump. Always defensive about his educational deficiencies, he also seeks to fulfill the role of the gentlemanly grand tourist: “to see the world” (*Letters* 4: 68), as he writes to Lady Blessington, hoping to lay “up such a store of recollections and improvement” for next year at Broadstairs (*Letters* 4: 162). Both men go to Italy seeking a particular kind of quiet, or peace – at sensitive points in their lives – what Forster describes as the *very* “turning-point” of Dickens’s career (307).

In this respect, Dickens seeks to replicate the Italian journey of another highly influential eighteenth-century writer on Italy – Goethe. At 3 a.m. on 3 September 1786 – “the birthday of my new life” (383) – Goethe slips out of Carlsbad. He flees an unfulfilling love life and career as a civil servant which has stalled his writing life following his initial success with *Werther*, to achieve a miraculous transformation in Italy – the country where he is literally “reborn” as a creative writer (383). His *Italian Journey* experience seems to haunt later nineteenth-century writers who seek from Italy similar transformations. Indeed, Hawthorne’s *Marble Faun* – another novel set in Italy and used like *Corinne* as a guidebook for tourists – was originally called *Transformation* and debates the forces of creativity and destruction available to the artist

in Italy, while also placing that debate in terms of the differing gender expectations between Americans and Italians (Manning xvi-xviii).

Whatever Dickens's or Lord Nelvil's investment in the transformative power of Italy, the first impression of the country is disturbing to both men. While Dickens will learn to form an affectionate "attachment for the very stones" of Genoa, his initial "feverish and bewildered vision" of "disheartening dirt, discomfort and decay" was that he had come to live in a "pink jail" (*Pictures* 29). He alternates between feeling, as Nelvil does in Corinne's presence, an "enchanted confusion" or a hellish nightmare. The concentration on the grotesque dominates *Pictures from Italy*. Italy is an unprogressive, degenerate country: a land of emasculated passivity and superstition in Nelvil's view, as is evident when he heroically saves the burning town of Ancona while Italians stand by helplessly inert; a land of cultural coma and stoppage in Dickens's view. "A country gone to sleep without the prospect of waking again", he writes Count d'Orsay:

It seemed as if one had reached the end of all things – as if there were not more progress, motion, advancement, or improvement of any kind beyond, but here the whole scheme had stopped centuries ago, never to move on any more, but just lying down in the sun to bask there, 'till the Day of Judgment. (*Letters* 4: 169)⁷

A world without the "whole scheme" of progress is a terrifying one for Dickens and is a subject which haunts his fiction and fuels his aspirational models of womanhood.

Both Nelvil and Dickens blame the Catholic Church for lack of national progress in Italy. Predictably for the English, they characterize it as corrupt, tyrannical, outmoded, ridiculous, and emotionally phony. Dickens replicates these common stereotypes in his published account of his travels, despite his subconscious ambivalence about the Church as is evident in a dream he has while in Italy. In that, his dead sister-in-law Mary appears to recommend Catholicism to him

⁷ The linguistic parallels between this passage and the "moving on" of Jo the crossing sweeper in *Bleak House* demonstrate a comparable concern about national decline and stagnation in that novel.

in what he thinks may be an “actual Vision” (*Letters* 4: 197). But Dickens feels the need to suppress this ambivalence in *Pictures*. If Staël, in her Napoleonic world, places her faith in British militarism as a hope for progress, Dickens relies on the railroad – that “heretical astonisher [...] of punctuality, order, plain dealing and improvement” which he predicts will have caused an “earthquake” in the Vatican (*Pictures* 110).

But progress and national character are also matters related to gender and the position of women. In *Corinne and Italy*, Nelvil comes face to face with his own gender expectations and their relationship to his identity as an Englishman. Confused by his instant attraction to Corinne, he finds the “mystery and publicity” of her life one of the “wonders of the strange country he had come to see”, and he concludes that “in England he would have judged such a woman very severely, but he did not apply any of the social conventions to Italy” (22). Culturally disoriented, Nelvil asserts that the “natural” order of things is inverted in Italy and that women have power which should properly be assigned to men:

For nature and the social order to be revealed in all their beauty, man must be the protector and the woman the protected. But the protector must adore the weakness he defends and respect the impotent divinity who, like the Roman household gods, brings happiness to his home. One is inclined to think that in this country women are the sultan and men the harem. (97)

He finds Corinne most attractive when most submissive, as is evident when he watches her dance the Tarantalla: “when the woman kneels, while the man dances around her not as a master but as a conqueror. How charming and dignified Corinne was at that moment! How queenly she was as she knelt!” (91). But when the dance reverses and it is Corinne’s turn to adopt the dominant stance, Nelvil is instantly turned off. As Staël writes: “However distinguished a man may be he never appreciates the superiority of a woman without mixed feelings” (122). Corinne recognizes his antipathy to her power and fears that by falling for him she will become the “slave” to his “master” (148). She prays for the creative charm of Scheherazade to save herself, to transform him, and to save her nation (80, 280).

However, Corinne is not “naturally” suited to Nelvil – even given her half-English bloodline. He recognizes that while “the most entrancing of women [...] she is an Italian and she has not the innocent heart, unknown to itself, which, I am sure, belongs to the young Englishwoman whom my father intended for me” (53). English patriarchal domestic ideals dictate that Corinne’s half-sister Lucy is the natural and rational choice of wife for him as opposed to the too “completely natural”, and, therefore, conventionally “unnatural” Corinne who is often, interestingly, described in terms of a sprite or fairy, capable of bewitching and potentially corrupting him into “supernatural happiness” (52). She has the too dangerous “oriental charm” (26) of Cleopatra that “sets him on fire” (190) but that does not combine well with domestic submissiveness. Even when “out of love, Corinne made herself his slave, the master, often troubled by this queen in chains, did not enjoy his power in peace” (122).

Ironically, Corinne will give him up out of a kind of capitulation to the very “Victorian-style” domestic ideals she has escaped by moving to Italy, renaming and reinventing herself. She will find that she is forced to obey the patriarchal desires of the dead father who has forbidden her alliance with Nelvil. And when she sees that Lucy, whom she has mothered from birth, loves him and that he loves her, Corinne is maternally self-sacrificing. Of course, Nelvil will wrongly read Corinne’s “rejection” as evidence of a faithlessness and sexual profligacy he describes as Italian. Blinded, too, by his labeling of Lucy as English domestic angel, he will also fail to see *her* emotional knowingness after their marriage: *her* recognition that he is bored with her and still loves the more stimulating Corinne. However, Corinne retires to Italy where she abandons both her career as poet laureate and her people. The famed improviser fails in her role as Scheherazade and dies.⁸ The implication is that her nation, so closely tied to her identity, dies with her.

⁸ There is an interesting overlap with another fictional “Sibyl” figure, the actress Sybil Vane, in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Like Corinne, Sibyl Vane loses her genius for performance once she has experienced real love for Dorian. She becomes an artistic flop and is driven to suicide by her lover’s rejection. Wilde is, of course, playing with the concept of art as a force for transformation in this novel which is a theme explored in a different register in *Corinne*.

Dickens shares many of Nelvil's anxieties about women, and his views about them, too, are brought into focus through the disorienting experiences he has in Italy. In a double-handed insult, Dickens, in *Pictures from Italy*, mocks those Italian women who wear blue because they believe it to be the Madonna's favourite colour by his ironic observation that these devotees "are very commonly seen walking the streets" (*Pictures* 50). He makes a subtle connection between these women and streetwalkers or prostitutes, conveying his sense of the unseemliness of such public displays and freedoms in women. And in the cancelled passage which originally appeared in the *Daily News*, Dickens goes further in aligning *these* blue women with his vilification of the feminist bluestocking: "Upon the whole, I think I like them nearly as well as some 'Blue ladies' in England" (5). Liking these "Blue ladies" not at all, Dickens will rail against them in his *Household Words* articles whose unflattering titles "Sucking Pigs" and "Whole Hogs" reveal his disgust.⁹ He will also hold them accountable for national domestic decline in his characterization of Mrs Pardiggle and Mrs Jellyby in *Bleak House*. Furthermore, these ladies are the antithesis of the un-Corinne-like retiring domestic woman in whom he will place his faith for national progress and improvement. That kind of woman is expressed symbolically in the literally self-effacing (i.e. temporarily pox scarred) Esther Summerson. She is that image of the attractive submissive queenliness Nelvil admires so much. Like Scheherazade or the Biblical Queen Esther upon whom she is modeled, she is the type of woman who can demurely influence and civilize men, while offering salvation or stability to her people and nation. This gender type forms the emotional core of Dickens's hope for England. When Victorian writers invoke allegorical comparisons of domestic Englishwomen to Queen Esther or Scheherazade, they betray an anxiety about and an investment in women's influence to civilize, restore, and regenerate men and to secure national and imperial power. Too fame-loving, too commanding, too experienced, Corinne fails to combine the right balance of submissiveness and rule

⁹ He will also attempt to defuse the power of feminism in his mocking characterization of strong, but domestic women like Susan Nipper or Mrs Bagnet as bluestockings.

to be either an effective “natural” woman or national heroine. Like the charming but un-domestic Dora Spenlow in *David Copperfield*, she must die. Dora is replaced by Agnes, another Madonna-like Lucy, perpetually “pointing upward”, with the implication, too, of “onward”. Here, again, Dickens reveals his belief in prescribed domestic roles for women as a cure-all to self and nation – a means to progress.

In the book that most closely follows *Pictures from Italy*, *Dombey and Son*, Dickens offers his most thorough engagement with the master-slave, tyrant-civilizer trope in terms of gender and nation. By blending references to both oriental slavery in the figuration of Edith as Egyptian sexual slave and American slavery in his reworking of aspects of slave narratives, Dickens offers a critique of mastery both in terms of Dombey’s private and business dealings and in terms of England’s imperial ambitions. He explores the topical theme that slavery, whether domestic or imperial, will corrupt the master. Dombey fails to recognize that Florence (a heroine whose very name is imaginatively linked to Italy) is his moral master and that, in Edith, he has effectively bought a woman to breed another heir. Given both England’s and Dickens’s post-American trip commitment to anti-slavery, it is clear that Dombey’s pride, home, and “house” must fall.

Dickens’s ambivalent view of national greatness and fear of imperial decline haunts this novel, as it does his impressions of Italy. His description of a Venetian palace parallels that of the deserted Dombey home: the “ruin [...] the rats fly from” (*Dombey* 871). He writes: “through the halls and plate and triumph – bare and empty now [...] its pride and might extinct” (*Pictures* 80). On the Roman campagna, too, “a mighty race of men have left their footprints in the earth from which they have vanished” (*Pictures* 149). When describing the “ruined world” of Dombey’s House “on which the sun would never rise again” (*Pictures* 149-50), Dickens draws directly on his previous millennial views of Italy as a falsely proud and defunct imperial nation. This anxiety about empire compels him, again, to place his faith in the “softening influence” (*Dombey* 3) of women: “the graceful, beautiful and harmless” (856) Florence, the daughter out of whom “another Dombey and Son will ascend – no rise [...] triumphant” (924). When properly invested in,

this “base coin”, dismissed by Dombey as a “bad Boy”, turns to gold (3). She becomes the centre of meaning and value. She is that “something that is good and pleasant to have” (856), not the feared “nothing” or “vacuum of meaning” (43) James Buzard argues haunts the mid-Victorian novel. In the new kind of empire managed by her rescuer husband Walter Gay, she will do the ideological work of presenting the supposedly more humane face of imperial expansion and progress suggested in the closing pages of *Pictures from Italy*: a world “better, gentler, more forebearing, and more hopeful” (187). Florence’s opposite, Edith, the defiant sexual slave who will not bend to her master’s will, escapes, like Corinne does, to live an unconventional kind of life in the south of Italy. The undomesticated Edith, like Corinne, is not the kind of woman who can be accommodated comfortably in the England of Dickens’s imagination.

But Dickens will also betray his ambivalence about his nation’s advance in his terrifyingly nightmarish characterization of the railroad, his beloved form of progress which, in ham-fisted symbolism, will destroy the despotic Carker. It is perhaps this ambivalence that makes Dickens so desperate to give the illusion of meaning and value in changing times through the allegorical significance of domestic women as cultural saviours like Scheherazade and Queen Esther.

Like Lord Nelvil’s, Dickens’s trip to Italy caused him to experience a temporary dislocation of national identity which was followed by novels in which he attempted to relocate and secure that identity, particularly in terms of his exploration of the role of women in his society. For Dickens, the domestic woman was a kind of security blanket against eroding stabilities and encroaching “progress” which could leave one feeling both positive and negative about the future – both attracted and repulsed, as Nelvil and Dickens felt for Italy.

However, in *Corinne*, the indecisive Nelvil is drawn to both Corinne and Lucy, the undomesticated woman of genius and the domestic angel in the house. *That* novel never fully resolves these opposite attractions. Even when Corinne dies and Nelvil becomes “a model of the purist and most orderly domestic life” (404), the narrator leaves us with unanswered questions about Nelvil’s choices and his adherence to nationalistic gender ideals:

But did he forgive himself for his past behaviour? Was he consoled by society's approval? Was he content with the common lot after what he had lost? I do not know, and, on that matter, I want neither to blame nor to absolve him. (404)

Staël can place no clear confidence, as Dickens strives to do in his novels of the mid-century, in the benefit to be derived from those like Esther, Agnes or Florence who live the "common lot" radiating improvement to those around them. And, in this respect, too, I want neither to blame nor to absolve him.

Of course, however much Dickens's gender politics may align him with the fictional character of Nelvil, he must also find affinity, if not with Corinne, then certainly with Scheherzade – the story-teller eager to create to survive. That Dickens will link Scheherzade's creative force for national deliverance to often worryingly mundane and limited roles of domesticity for woman reveals his own attraction and repulsion to "Corinne" characters and "Lucy" characters. These types of women will evolve in his fiction into complicated figures limited only by his fantasies about them in terms of what he could see them achieving for self and nation. Dickens's trip to Italy, like Goethe's own, provided him with the necessary creative transformation – in Forster's words, the "higher power" (309) – that enabled him to personally survive in the course of contemplating and writing about his nation's survival.

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A Little (of) Italy in Early Dickens: End in the Beginning?

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In early Dickens, especially *Sketches by Boz* and *Oliver Twist*, images of Italy abound. References to the country are present in writings from the earliest stages of his career, even before he was able to tour to Southern Europe. Slight as these references may seem in comparison to, say, those in *Pictures from Italy* and *Little Dorrit*, they are nonetheless significant in their own right. Indeed, Italy is perceived both as a cultural and a sociological entity alive in Dickens's own milieu and as a country out there, on a European chessboard, demanding an English response to its striving for political and national unity. The short span of time in which the composition of *Sketches* and *Oliver Twist* fall – from 1834 to 1839 – gives such an object of analysis, Italy, a distinct sort of unity, all the more detectable since the writer, in his mid-twenties, was supposedly an uneducated, self-made man. These representations of and references to Italy testify to Dickens's cultural awareness, to his almost prodigious self-education, and to the variety of his artistic interests.

Moreover, it is in these early images that his 1844 tour of Italy and stay in Genoa are firmly rooted. The other forces that led Dickens to leave London seem almost ancillary: his wish to forget financial difficulties, the almost unbearable levels of his work pressure and the need for “a gallant holiday”, the much cheaper cost of living – he even “gravely” thought of extending his stay in Italy to up to three years (Johnson 269, 291). All this reminds us that Dickens did not cross the Channel in the spirit of a tourist, an attitude he clearly disparaged; rather, he travelled to face issues of personal and general value (Waters *passim*). This self-discovery

suggests an “end in the beginning”, to repeat Virgil Grillo’s formula in analysing *Sketches*. Indeed, early references to Italy and Italians anticipate the later relevance of Italy to Dickens’s works.

Behind Dickens’s references to Italy, one rightly sees the tradition of the Grand Tour, as well as what Pemble terms the Romantic fascination for the Mediterranean South and for Italy, in particular. This is obvious, but should not be taken for granted, especially when one considers that Dickens is neither mechanically following a literary and cultural “must”, nor conforming to a generalized mood of intensified attention and sympathy for the country in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In fact, this cultural attitude is not universal: a diagram of Britain’s fascination with Italy along a diachronic line, while featuring an increasing wave of sympathy and interest (Parker *passim*), would also display shorter waves that indicate minor declines in the Italianate fashion in the 1820s and 30s. One decrease would coincide, for example, with the trial of Queen Caroline in 1818-20 or with the short-lived insurrections in Naples and Piedmont (Brand 204ff.). These disappointments were familiar to the British, dimly heard in the mild terms with which Byron voiced them: “You see the Italians have made a sad business of it. All owing to treachery and disunion among themselves. It has given me great vexation” (Brand 209). Giuseppe Mazzini similarly registered a more general disappointment, when in 1837 he complained of a fall of interest in Italy, “in politics as in literature” (Brand 214). Mazzini, on the other hand, also caused a new, intense wave of support for Italy upon his discovery that he was the victim of British espionage, denouncing the surveillance of his correspondence. In consequence of which “[p]opular sympathy was such that pictures of this arch-conspirator were sold in London by the thousand” (Mack Smith 43). Nonetheless, if Dickens was sceptical of Italy’s politics, he opposed and reacted to them, subordinating all to a deeply engrained sympathy. Ultimately Italy was part of the European space he needed for his novels.

The references to Italy in Dickens’s *Sketches*, then, counterpoise what critics have seen, from the beginning, as the peculiarly Dickensian territory: London. In fact, although foreign toponyms are rare, many of the names, the simplest elements of characterization, are Italian, and many more could at least sound so because they are

Roman and Latin (immediately suggesting the hard task of defining such a complex geographical and historical entity as Italy). Such names express exoticism or refinement, in accordance with the ennobling, aristocratic practice of Augustan England. This fashion, however, spread to the middle class and would-be middle class, and Dickens comically contrasts Christian names with lower-register English surnames. So in “Sentiment”, one reads of Maria, Lavinia, and Amelia, the Misses Crumpton; in “Horatio Sparkins”, besides the protagonist of the title, one finds also Teresa Malderton and Augustus Fitz-Edward; in “Mrs Porter”, Miss Lucina; in “Mr. Minns and His cousin”, Augustus Minns and Octavius Budden, and so on.

In “Sentiment”, with names suggesting distinction, education and gentility, an experience of France and Italy, not surprisingly, is mentioned as something essential to a thorough education, comically open to bourgeois pretensions. In this perspective, many references to Italy are connected with the arts: music, for one. In “The Boarding House”, Mr Wisbottle, in a dressing-gown, is whistling “Di piacer”, an aria implicitly interiorized as part of English culture precisely because Boz need not bother to give any other details. In “Vauxhall Gardens by Day” Rossini’s *Tancredi* is mentioned.¹ In “The Mistaken Milliner”, Miss Amelia Martin has a voice so sweet to Mr Jennings’ ear, that he asks his wife if she, “with a little cultivation, would[n’t] be very like Signora Marra Boni” (*Sketches* 253).

As far as theatre is concerned, some of the characters of the Commedia dell’arte figure in passing. It is hardly possible to overstate their importance, since mythic stereotypes of the Commedia permeate the whole of Dickens’s canon (Eigner *passim*; for Dickens’s early theatre: Severi, *passim*). In “Mrs Porter”, Roderigo, in spite of all his commendable practicing in falling about, does fall finally just “as a Harlequin would jump through a panel in a Christmas pantomime” (*Sketches* 429). In “The Dancing Academy”, where a Sicilian shawl-dance swirls in an opening, grand-ball night, “one of the ladies” is said to be “in training for a Columbine” (*Sketches* 258). In the same line, perhaps, there are references to pantomime and Punch and

¹ The composer visited Britain in 1824, when he met many intellectuals and a “Rossini Festival” was organized.

Judy, the puppet show introduced to England in the second half of the seventeenth century by the Italian puppet master, Pietro Gimonde. Thus, in “The Boarding House”, to help readers recognize the “tremulous voice” of a character, the narrator relies on a figurative comparison to Punch (*Sketches* 285).

Italian names also relate to typical trades undertaken by Italians in England. In “The Dancing Academy”, *Signor* is the title (deferential) given to a certain Billsmethi, a hardly credible Italianization of a very English Bill Smith (and there is also a Miss Billsmethi and a Master Billsmethi), who runs the academy and who is duping Augustus Cooper. The same should be inferred from the Signor Lobskini, who appears as the singing master. On the same principle, in *Nicholas Nickleby*, the writing of which partly overlapped with the writing of *Oliver Twist* in 1838-39, the Mantalini establishment profits from the magic power of names and their cultural associations. Here, the Italian surname is a guarantee of fashionable refinements in Mrs Mantalini’s dressmaking establishment, suggesting that Dickens was familiar with the condition of the many Italians who, in their various degrees and qualities of need, came to England for work and a better living. Indeed, whether Mrs Mantalini is Italian or not, she is an example of success in business: about twenty women work for her in poor conditions underground, while her first floor drawing-rooms exhibit “an immense variety of superb dresses and material for dresses”, intended for “the nobility and gentry” (*Nickleby* 124-5). Her advertising sense shapes the man she marries: “His name was originally Muntle; but it had been converted, by an easy transition, into Mantalini, the Lady rightly considering that an English appellation would be of serious injury to the business” (126). Furthermore, the principle on which the surname is constructed shows linguistic awareness and wordplay, as both Muntle and Mantalini derive from the same phonic root which recalls the Italian *mantello*. And, of course, artists in the Crummles’ theatre company have to sound Italian, like Miss Snevellicci, Miss Gazingi, Miss Bravassa (334), according to a comic strategy which is historically accurate: an English clown, one Nelson, was keen on terming himself as Signor Nelsonio (Winder 179).

There are other oblique references to things Italian that touch upon aspects which have little to do with the arts. In “A Visit to Newgate”

and in “The Black Veil”, for instance, the narrator mentions “Bishop and Williams”, two criminals executed in 1831 for the murder of an Italian child, an early demonstration of Dickensian sympathy for child victims on the streets of London. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, Mrs Nickleby (XXVII) reminds us of such youngsters in her peculiar frame of mind: when seeing an Italian image boy (the same type as the “Italian image lad” referred to in *The Old Curiosity Shop*) selling little statues of famous people, she has a dream about Shakespeare.

Dickens, similarly endowed with the gift to join very different things through rhetoric, mock-heroically translates the typically Londonian situation of a traveller dismayed before the winding streets of Seven Dials into that of the archaeologist Giovanni Battista Belzoni, awe-struck at being the first man to enter the Pyramid of Giza (“Seven Dials”). In “The Boarding-House” there is a mysterious reference to a certain journeyman, per antonomasia a would-be Don Giovanni, and in “Mudfog Papers” there is a Signor Gagliardi, an inventor.

These are, indeed, only cursory references: “Mrs Porter over the Way”, published in *The Monthly Magazine* in January 1834, serves however as a clear example of a somewhat pivotal interest in Italy. Dickens’s second ever appearance in print, the piece is a farce, satirizing the absurdities of private theatricals, so much so that the title of the sketch derives not from the amateur performers, but from the *iron* internal to the piece, Mrs Porter, who enviously negates bourgeois pretences to harmony and artistic elevation. Generally speaking, not only does this sketch exemplify Dickens’s love for the theatre in all its forms, but it reminds us that such a love had strong links, from his very infancy, with Italy, as is fondly shown in the introductory chapter to *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi*, which Dickens edited in 1838 in homage to the first modern clown, the son of an Italian actor. The interest of “Mrs Porter over the Way”, however, derives from the plays the Gattletons are staging domestically: in a single night, they are attempting to perform two demanding pieces: the tragedy *Othello* and an operetta *Masaniello*. *Othello* functions here as an introduction to an Italian theme, the very Englishness of the Shakespearean tragedy being complicated by its associations with Venice. The play also serves as a first step in a progression of artistic ambitions and corresponding setbacks,

culminating in the staging of no less than the revolution led by Masaniello and the eruption of Vesuvius.

A Shakespearean burlesque may have been familiar to an English public, but *Masaniello* draws on less popular and more recent events in British and European culture. The play required staging the eruption of Vesuvius, though not the one that buried Pompeii, which had already been an operatic sensation in the early nineteenth century. Performances of *L'ultimo giorno di Pompei*, an opera by Giovanni Pacini (which was the inspiration for Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*), had taken place in two of Italy's most famous theatres: the Teatro San Carlo in Naples in 1825 and the Teatro La Scala in Milan in 1827 (Cavaliero 148).² However, "Mrs Porter over the Way" most likely drew from a source closer than Pacini's opera: James Kenney's *Masaniello*, which opened at the Theatre Royal, on 3 March 1829.³ *Masaniello*, also popular on the early nineteenth-century English stage, was based, in its turn, on Daniel Auber's Grand-opéra in five acts, *La Muette de Portici* (libretto by Eugène Scribe and Germain Delavigne), which opened in Paris on 29 February 1828.

Kenney's *Masaniello* shared with *La Muette* the connection between the eruption of Vesuvius and the popular revolt led by Masaniello that took place in Naples in the seventeenth century. In "Mrs Porter" the volcanic eruption seems to sanction the failure of that revolt. Nonetheless, the eruption – as related images clearly show in later Dickens (Wilson 17) – is the first symbolic appearance of a hidden, persistent fire of social rebellion, one whose target could be viewed in relation to the brutal, uncaring governments of the Italian states. Similarly, when the seat of the English Parliament took fire, Dickens interpreted the event symbolically, tracing its final cause to the government's deliberate indifference toward people.

² Dickens visited both during his stay in Italy, though confessed that his expectations of artistic excellence were rather disappointed. His *Pictures*, of course, also retraces his memorable ascent and descent of Mount Vesuvius.

³ Kenney undertook a production of the patriotic "The Sicilian Vespers" in 1840. As a successful dramatist in the twenties and thirties and close friend to Macready, he was probably well known by a theatre-addict like Dickens, who might have seen Kenney's "The Spirit of the Bell" at the English Opera House in 1835 (*Letters* I: 65n.). They were at dinner together at Rogers', a common friend, on 31 January 1841 (*Letters* II: 242n.).

The figure of Masaniello was not only a metaphor for the Italian Risorgimento, but also inspired a national revolt elsewhere in Europe. Auber's *La Muette* is remembered because its first performance on 25 August 1830 at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Bruxelles ignited flames of revolt in the Belgians, who then succeeded in seizing the independence of their country from the Dutch. Thus, there is potentially a level of political interest and commitment behind the suffocating smoke and confusion of the Gattletons' performances. The conclusion of the sketch, however, reminds us of the scepticism towards "cardboard revolutionaries": "the audience went home at four o'clock in the morning, exhausted with laughter, suffering from severe headaches, and smelling terribly of brimstone and gunpowder" (*Sketches* 430).

A final point in relation to this sketch: it may also serve as evidence of Dickens's own attitudes towards theatricals and amateur performances, specifically his comic awareness of too easy an exoticism. When the writer was asked by the composer John Hullah to supply the libretto for an operetta to be called *The Gondoliers* in 1835, he had Hullah drop the Venetian setting altogether. Dickens "transformed [the play] into a bucolic drama of would-be-seducers, rustic maidens and upstanding farmers. He could work, he argued, with effect on a play where the characters behaved like people he saw and heard every day; and it would not require the costly and elaborate decòr of an Italian scene" (Johnson 82).

In *Oliver Twist*, there are a number of references, albeit indirect, to the presence of Italian people in England in the early nineteenth century. As Robert Winder has recently argued, the first can be found in Fagin, even though he is known as "the Jew" and can be traced historically to Ikey Solomon, the chief of an organized gang of juvenile thieves. Winder points out how the physical features of Jews and Italians overlap in the common perception: "the cartoonist George Cruickshank also portrayed Italian street entertainers as Semitic, Fagin-like rogues: stooped, beak-nosed, bearded and with dark, hooded eyes" (182). Vagrancy and poverty were shared features as well. Granting that, the striking palimpsest emerging in Fagin is that of an Italian *Padrone*, as notorious as Ikey: he was the master not so much of juvenile thieves, but of players of accordions and barrel organs, whose sheer number in the streets of London,

along with their usually discordant music and insistent begging, rendered them almost as annoying as thieves. “By the middle of the century there were over eight hundred [of them], and there was a growing sense that they were not quite the hard-up vagabonds they seemed to be, but members of determined and organized gangs” (Winder 180). Furthermore, the neighbourhood of Fagin’s den seems very much to correspond to that of this obnoxious Italian community: Clerkenwell and “the area around Hatton Garden and Little Saffron Hill, that became known as ‘Little Italy’”. Hence, one could argue that there is a touch of Italian blood in Oliver.

For the first time, however, in *Oliver Twist*, Italy is evoked as a location in its own terms. Towards the end of the novel, it appears as a geographical entity. Oliver’s ancestry comes to the surface, and through a belaboured intermingling of Brownlow’s memories and deductions, along with Monks’s confessions, the narrator reveals that the story of Oliver’s parents is at least partly located there. It is a complex and knotty plot, one must acknowledge, and rather cumbersome to the narrative (Worth 45-6), but one way of stressing its importance is precisely in paying attention to geographical specifications.

First, though, Rome seems to loom large before being mentioned. The main character in this subplot, Edward Leeford, disguises himself as Monks, a name he assumes to escape from crimes other than those committed against Oliver. Hence, superimposed on his own name, this strange *nomen* is an *omen*: what else could it bring to a Protestant mind but the Catholic Church and, thus, Rome and Italy? In the literature of the day there is no lack of poems and novels stressing connections between Catholicism, Italy and sinister immorality (Brand 220). The name may even allude to Matthew Lewis’s 1796 eponymous protagonist of *The Monk*, whose debauchery is revealed in Monks’s devastated features and convulsive fits, betraying syphilis. The villain’s name and role, while expanding on the Newgate side of the novel, give it a marked gothic flavour. And, as Franco Moretti reminds us, the Gothic, from Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* through Mrs Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, is especially connected with the peninsula before migrating to the new characteristic settings of Germany and Scotland (18).

But what matters more are the explicit references to Rome which occur when Monks is reported to have travelled there (Chapters 49 and 51), in that the somewhat unpredictable expansion of geographic boundaries – Rome and Italy, matched with a parallel use of Paris and France – is organic to the entire structure of the novel. First, the European locations give shape to an international sub-theme that balances the almost claustrophobic nature of the London chapters, thus shaping *Oliver Twist* as an imbalanced “tale of three cities”. Interestingly, when countries beyond Europe are mentioned, no cities are specified: there are reports that Brownlow chases Monks in India, where the latter has property, and that Monks, being forced abroad after exposure, again commits crimes and later dies in jail in the United States. Second, the Continent participates in the clear-cut moral contrasts of the novel: Paris and Rome are places where guilt seeks shelter and hides. The two cities are also linked in a geographic progression, taking a different share in a composite site of evil, to be contrasted to England, even if the opposition might then be qualified. After all, Oliver’s stepmother is “wholly given up to *continental* frivolities” (326, emphasis added).

There is, furthermore, a well balanced symmetry among the cities. In Paris Oliver’s stepmother, with her son, leads a fashionable, sinful life after the break up of her marriage with Edwin Leeford. Conversely, one of Edwin’s relatives, having gone to Rome, falls ill and summons Oliver’s father to his death-bed. Once there, Edwin Leeford falls ill as well and, before dying, summons, in his turn, Oliver’s stepmother, accompanied by Monks. So, Italy and Rome are the southernmost stages of a morally sterile Grand Tour, overtly alien to art and positive associations. Romantically assumed to be places of physical and spiritual healing (one of Oliver’s mother’s rich relatives goes there to convalesce), Italy turns out to be the opposite. Edwin’s relative, on his deathbed, takes an unproductive shortcut in trying to make amends for his moral guilt: the large sum of money he bestows on Oliver’s father only becomes the origin of further corruption.

Dickens renders all this background in protracted “tellings”; there are no “showings” at all. No attempt is made to give concrete details to the spaces mentioned. Only pre-formed cultural associations contribute to their construction, so that their structural importance

cannot exceed this precise measure, according to the poetics of truth which Dickens claimed in his preface (4-7). Nonetheless, a weaker rhetorical means of stressing the importance of these settings consists in the double evocation of the scenes set in Rome: one based on Brownlow's factual and hypothetic reconstruction (Chapter XLIX); the other, underlined by a reticence, confirmed in Monks's confession (Chapter LI, 342-8). Such repetition also conveys different degrees of sympathy to places. Paris and France, though primarily on a par with Rome and Italy in their opposition to England, are secondarily distinguished via their relatively closer connection with crime. Such associations conform to stereotypes alive in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars. In a map tracking the distribution of villains in the English novel of the nineteenth century, Paris is seen as the centre of villainy (Moretti 32). *Oliver Twist* is no exception to this rule, nor should it be considered as such, since Paris is the chosen residence of the evil Edward Leeford and his mother, while the less guilty, repentant characters, go to Rome and there expiate through death. (The crime of betraying Edwin Leeford and burning his letter and will, though actually committed in Rome, is performed by the two unrepentant villains who have occasionally been there.)

Such an expansion of locations displays Dickens's interest in Italy, his need for a European space, and the impossibility of using it convincingly before actually experiencing it. In this respect, the fleeting image of Italy in *Oliver Twist* foreshadows *Pictures from Italy*: there too France is featured as a prologue, and the further south the narrative descends through its territory, the more Italy is anticipated. It also foreshadows, in a truer sense, *Little Dorrit*. In this novel, London may still be the core of the narrative world, but its centrality is questioned in light of the advantage of a thoroughly integrated, vertical European space. The initial chapters are set in France, specifically in Marseilles and its environs, a space that is itself of porous national boundaries. The city is at one end of the Riviera, with Genoa on the other side, according to the transnational map that Cavalletto holds in his mind and sketches with his forefinger on the floor of the prison (4). Later, in a deliberate, much clearer, structural correspondence than the one seen in *Oliver Twist*,

the second of the two parts of *Little Dorrit* – extending through many chapters – uses Italy as a definite space for the action.

Thus, if references to Italy and Italian themes in early Dickens, in a sense, announced the need for a location larger than Britain and prompted both his tour of and stay in Italy, they can also help remove the critical bias that originated precisely from *Sketches by Boz*: that of Dickens “as a specifically English writer”. Such a bias “has tended to obscure his extensive relations with European culture” and perhaps limited “appreciation of his stature” (Hollington 7).

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Middlemarch: **The Novel, the Manuscript, and Italy**

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The action in George Eliot's masterpiece *Middlemarch*, serialized in 1871-72, takes place primarily in Middlemarch – that is, in England. But Italy figures significantly in the novel, primarily but not exclusively in those four consecutive chapters in Book Two that are set in Rome. Eliot uses Italy as both setting and symbol, highlighting several of the most important themes in the novel. Eliot also alludes to various figures in Italian history and uses the Italian language to highlight theme and indicate character in significant ways.

The first significant reference to Italy in the novel is the "Italian Proverb" Eliot provides as the epigraph for chapter 7: "Piacere e popone/Vuol la sua stagione" [Pleasure and melons/Want the same weather] (1.7.62). Eliot's holograph manuscript of the novel, now in the British Library, shows the author correcting her misspelling of the first word (deleting a superfluous "e" at the end) and demonstrates the care Eliot took to ensure the accuracy of her Italian. Eliot's association of Italy with pleasure and warm weather invites the reader to consider Italy's counterpoint: chilly England and melancholy Lowick, home to the emotionally frigid scholar Edward Casaubon.

Eliot offers two brief but significant references to Italy in chapter 9. First is the allusion to her uncle Arthur Brooke's collection of "Renaissance-Correggiosities" (1.9.72). Eliot's portmanteau-word combines the sixteenth-century Italian painter Correggio's name with "curiosities" – or perhaps even "monstrosities". In any case, these are works of art that at this point in time Dorothea cannot bring "into any sort of relevance with her life". Though Dorothea has not yet

had any education that would help her appreciate Italian art, Casaubon's young cousin Will Ladislaw has, and it is significant that Mr Brooke offers to show Will his collection of "Italian engravings" several pages later (1.9.78). Will, who has the valuable gift of "poetic imagination" (1.9.80) and understands how art can illuminate and enrich life, is, in a few chapters, going to serve as Dorothea's most valuable source of information about Italian art.

Eliot powerfully associates Rome with death, primarily by linking the Italian capital (along with its art, literature, religion, and history) with the older scholar Edward Casaubon and his futile and fruitless research into "The Key to all Mythologies". In chapter 10, the narrator refers to Casaubon as often keeping company with "Tartarean shades" – that is, with ghosts from Tartarus, the Roman underworld (1.10.84). On the next page, Casaubon proposes taking his young bride, Dorothea Brooke Casaubon, to Rome for their honeymoon. Andrew Thompson points out that at the time "the Grand Tour, with Italy as its ultimate destination, was still at the height of its popularity" and suggests that it is not surprising that the Casaubons should choose Rome as their destination (124). However, Casaubon's motive in choosing this destination has nothing to do with love or romance, but is in the service of his barren scholarly activity. In the first direct reference to Rome in the novel, we learn that Casaubon wants to "inspect some manuscripts in the Vatican" (1.10.85). The final sentence of the chapter treats the Casaubon wedding, shoving it into a short but dull sentence – "Not long after that dinner-party, she had become Mrs Casaubon and was on her way to Rome" (2.10.92). The structure of the sentence presents the marriage as something that happens to Dorothea, like a smothering – something to be rushed through and not dwelt upon. In this context, the reference to Italy sounds almost foreboding.

Chapter 19, the first of the four chapters actually set in Rome, begins with an Italian epigraph Eliot borrows from the seventh canto of Dante's *Purgatorio*: "L'altra vedete ch'ha fatto alla guancia /Della sua palma, sospirando, letto" [See the other who, sighing, has made a bed for her cheek with the palm of her hand] (2.19.183). It is significant that Eliot intentionally misquotes Dante's text: she gives "L'altra" in place of Dante's "L'altro", indicating that it is a woman,

not a man, who is suffering (and sighing). Dante's reference in the *Purgatorio* is to a man, Henry I of Navarre, known as "the Fat", but Eliot clearly wants her readers to apply the passage to Dorothea. In Eliot's manuscript, she underlines the word "L'altra" indicating her awareness that she has altered the original text. Finally, she deletes the underscoring, presumably deciding the emphasis was unnecessarily fussy. In this chapter, Will Ladislaw's friend Adolph Naumann correctly identifies the recently-married Dorothea and Edward Casaubon not as a complementary pair, but as an "antithesis" (2.19.184).¹

Chapter 20 gives us our first real look at Dorothea's married life – the Casaubons in Rome. The two opening paragraphs reveal Dorothea sobbing in the Via Sistina, as the result of an earlier disagreement, and Edward carrying on with his moribund research at the Vatican library (2.20.187). The narrator tells us that "To those who have looked at Rome with the quickening power of a knowledge which breathes a growing soul into all historic shapes, and traces out the suppressed transitions which unite all contrasts, Rome may still be the spiritual centre and interpreter of the world" (2.20.188). But we learned from chapter 9 that Dorothea has had no education to prepare her to take delight or nourishment from Italian art – for Mrs Casaubon, the fragments of sculpture she sees are only the sad, lifeless relics of a bygone civilization. At her husband's direction, Dorothea views many works of classical and Renaissance art – and sobs, as she thinks about her unhappy marriage.

¹ Andrew Thompson underscores Eliot's debts to Dante; he finds significant hints of Dante in Eliot's imagery, as when Mr Casaubon is "lost among small closets and winding stairs", and he feels Dorothea transforms her impressions of Rome into "a Dantesque masquerade" (124), while Will Ladislaw functions as a kind of Virgil to Dorothea's Dante, guiding her through the infernal "dead city" of modern Rome (125). Thompson finds a complex "web of Dante connections" (133) in the novel, including Dorothea's "Dantean suffering" and Eliot's use of light and sun imagery (132-33), an exploration of the "Dantean convention of the 'screen lady'" (136), and a parallel between Will Ladislaw's exile from Middlemarch and Dante's from Florence (137). He also finds that Dorothea and Will's kiss in chapter 83 is "unmistakably evocative of Dante's famous scene between Paolo and Francesca" in the fifth canto of the *Inferno* (138), and argues that ultimately Dorothea functions as a "despiritualized, secular Beatrice" with "redemptive power" for Ladislaw (142-43).

In this chapter, Casaubon suggests his wife should see the “celebrated frescoes designed or painted by Raphael” (2.20.191), but he does not have any real feeling about the works of art he recommends; he can only say of the frescoes that “most persons think [them] worth while to visit”. Dorothea protests, “But do you care about them”, and his unfeeling response, couched, typically, in the passive voice, is that “They are, I believe, highly esteemed. [...Raphael] has been held to combine the most complete grace of form with sublimity of expression. Such at least I have gathered to be the opinion of conosciuti” (2.20.191). Rome reveals Casaubon’s true nature: in his candle-lit study, he neglects his young wife, making “bitter manuscript remarks on other men’s notions about the solar deities” and becoming indifferent to the Italian sun (2.20.192).

Later in this same chapter, Edward Casaubon tells his wife, in his pedantic way, that Rome is “one among several cities to which an extreme hyperbole has been applied – ‘See Rome and die:’ but in your case I would propose an emendation and say, See Rome as a bride, and live thenceforth as a happy wife” (2.20.193). But this altered saying has a dark, ironic underside; Dorothea’s marriage to Casaubon is far from happy, and is, indeed, a kind of death (“See Rome and die”). In the manuscript, Eliot alters this speech, first writing “in your case, my dear Dorothea, I would say”, then substituting “in your case I think it will be more appropriate”, before finally penning “I would propose an emendation & say” in the left margin of the page. The adjustment is subtle, but significant: Eliot deemphasizes any tender feeling Casaubon may have for his wife by omitting the phrase “dear Dorothea”, and has him offering an “emendation” of the text, rather than doing what is “appropriate”.

Dorothea goes on to ask her husband if he is satisfied with his honeymoon in Italy: “I hope you are thoroughly satisfied with our stay – I mean, with the result so far as your studies are concerned,” said Dorothea, trying to keep her mind fixed on what most affected her husband.” His response to Rome is predictable: he announces his satisfaction with the honeymoon by admitting that “various subjects for annotation have presented themselves which [...] I could not pretermitt” (2.20.193).

In the third “Roman” chapter, chapter 21, Will Ladislav visits Dorothea, learning something about how she views Rome and the works of art she sees there. She explains to Will that her ignorance about art is genuine and that “in Rome it seems as if there were so many things, which are more wanted in the world than pictures” (2.21.201). Dorothea has a social consciousness which inhibits her enjoyment of any art that does not respond to the real needs of others; indeed, her “response to the degradation she sees around her [in Rome] is significantly different [...] from that of so many visitors on the ‘brilliant picnic of Anglo-foreign society’ who often accepted that the situation was in some degree fitting” (Thompson 124).

Edward and Dorothea have had a disagreement earlier that has reduced her to sobs; here in chapter 21 Dorothea takes steps toward resolving their differences, saying to her husband, “Forgive me for speaking so hastily to you this morning. I was wrong. I fear I hurt you and made the day more burthensome”. Casaubon replies, “I am glad that you feel that, my dear”. Dorothea asks, “But you do forgive me?”, and the narrator tells us “In her need for some manifestation of feeling she was ready to exaggerate her own fault. Would not love see returning penitence afar off, and fall on its neck and kiss it?” (2.21.204). But no matter how kissable Dorothea is, Casaubon’s response to her is like his response to Italy: pedantic, not romantic. Instead of taking her emotional needs seriously, he throws a line from one of Shakespeare’s Italian plays, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, at her: “Who with repentance is not satisfied, is not of heaven nor earth” (5.4.79).

While Edward and Dorothea Casaubon provide our main perspectives on Victorian feelings about and attitudes toward Italy, Eliot also gives us the vital, lively views of Will Ladislav and his artist friend, Adolph Naumann. These characters enable Eliot to position both Dorothea’s and Edward’s views about crucial matters of art, religion, and history in a more meaningful context. In chapter 22, we see how Rome has affected Will Ladislav’s view of history. Speaking to the Casaubons, Will offers “a half-enthusiastic half-playful picture of the enjoyment he got out of the very miscellaneousness of Rome, which made the mind flexible with constant comparison, and saved you from seeing the world’s ages as a set of box-like partitions without vital

connection". He goes on to confess that "Rome had given him quite a new sense of history as a whole: the fragments stimulated his imagination and made him constructive" (2.22.206). An alternate version of this important passage appears in the manuscript on the verso of a subsequent page, and the details in that earlier version make clear how a creative soul like Will Ladislav's can make use of the fragments of Italian history and culture he finds in Rome. In the earlier manuscript version, Eliot writes "Rome had given him quite a new sense of continuity in history as a whole", and then alters that to "a new sense of unbroken history as a unity", going on to add "That might seem paradoxical, but fragments obliged you to think of the way in which they could be put together to make wholes". Revising that final phrase, too, Eliot says that "fragments stimulated the imagination, & set him on constructing".

After her conversation with Will Ladislav, Dorothea finds her response to Italian history and culture changing; "Every one about her seemed good, and she said to herself that Rome, if she had only been less ignorant, would have been full of beauty: its sadness would have been winged with hope" (2.22.210).

In this final chapter of Book Two, Dorothea and Casaubon visit Naumann's studio and are exposed to the paintings of a living artist working in Italy. More significantly, she has a far-ranging private conversation with Will Ladislav the next day, about art, poetry, social responsibility, religion, and enjoyment. She tells Will that "this immense expense of art, that seems somehow to lie outside life and make it no better for the world", pains her, spoiling her enjoyment when she is forced to think that "most people are shut out from it" (2.22.214). Will replies that "The best piety is to enjoy – when you can. You are doing the most then to save the earth's character as an agreeable planet. And enjoyment radiates" (2.22.214). Dorothea says, "I have often felt since I have been in Rome that most of our lives would look much uglier and more bungling than the pictures, if they could be put on the wall" (2.22.215). Dorothea's colloquy with Will is very important; at the end of the conversation, she tells Will earnestly "I am so glad we met in Rome", and she openly acknowledges that she likes Will "very much" (2.22.218).

The scenes actually set in Italy are confined to the four consecutive chapters in Book Two, "Old and Young", just considered. But

elsewhere in the novel Rosamond Vincy, Arthur Brooke, and the auctioneer Borthrop Trumbull offer more allusions to Italy, helping to reveal their character and their attitudes toward history and culture. Similarly, there are many more allusions to and quotations from Romans and Italians (including Ovid, Ariosto, Dante, and Boccaccio in the realms of literature) elsewhere in the novel. Even Peter Featherstone has among his few books at least one work by the historian Flavius Josephus (1.12.108).

Rosamond Vincy knows little about culture of any sort; all she really knows how to do is to entertain men. She is an accomplished student of Middlemarch culture, however; she is “the flower of Mrs Lemon’s school, the chief school in the county, where the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female – even to extras, such as the getting in and out of a carriage” (1.11.94). She is a well-trained singer, who can offer her listeners popular tunes in English or songs in Italian from Mozart’s operas, including “‘Voi, che sapete,’ or ‘Batti, batti’ – she only wanted to know what her audience liked” (2.16.158).

Arthur Brooke feels that culture is a simple matter of learning the appropriate Latin tags; he quotes Virgil (1.6.54) and Horace (4.34.321) correctly, but later erroneously ascribes a common Latin tag to Horace (4.38.376). He clearly associates art with Italy, speaking confidently of “*brio*” and “*morbidezza*” (1.9.77-78), though his understanding of art seems superficial; later in the novel he condescendingly says to Dorothea that “Fine art, poetry, that kind of thing, elevates a nation – *emollit mores* – you understand a little Latin now” (4.39.380). His allusion to Ovid is apt, but it also shows how lightly Brooke takes matters of culture. Indeed, the fuzzy-minded Brooke takes most things, even serious ones, lightly; his own knowledge of culture and art seems to come down to his ability to toss out “a little Latin” at appropriate times.

The auctioneer Borthrop Trumbull also trades in a superficial knowledge of Italian culture: he boasts of owning a picture by Titian (3.32.306) and offers for sale a picture he claims is by “*Guydo*, the greatest painter in the world” – that is, Guido Reni (6.60.594). But Trumbull’s understanding of even his own culture is manifestly superficial. Though he claims to be “a great bookman”, his interest in books is limited to the prestige they can buy him in Middlemarch.

He boasts to Mary Garth of owning “no less than two hundred volumes in calf” (3.32.305-06), suggesting his familiarity with the covers of his books is greater than his knowledge of their contents.

The narrator alludes to Ovid’s story of Actaeon and Diana from *Metamorphoses* (3:138-252) in describing Will Ladislaw’s relations with both Mrs Lydgate and Mrs Casaubon.² The allusion – to “the whole history of the situation in which Diana had descended too unexpectedly on her worshipper” (5.43.427) – is perhaps less interesting in itself than the statement on the same page that Will feels his position in Middlemarch threatens to divide him from Dorothea with “those barriers of habitual sentiment which are more fatal to the persistence of mutual interest than all the distance between Rome and Britain” (5.43.427). The narrator also alludes to Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*: Mrs Bulstrode suggests that Tertius Lydgate has advantages, when it comes to romance, over local Middlemarch “Orlandos” (3.31.292). Ironically, this allusion pays off later in the novel, when Mrs Cadwallader applies a similar allusion to Will. She says that “Mr. Orlando Ladislaw is making a sad dark-blue scandal by warbling continually with [...] Mr. Lydgate’s wife” (6.62.615).³

Eliot uses sonnet 17 from chapter 21 of Dante’s *La Vita Nuova* as an epigraph to chapter 54 (6.54.523). We are clearly intended to apply it to Will and Dorothea.⁴ In this sonnet, Dante’s “lady carries love within her eyes”, and men “turn to gaze at her”; “He whom she greeteth feels his heart to rise”, and “pride becomes a worshipper” (Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s 1846 translation).⁵ In the chapter itself, Will, planning to leave Middlemarch, turns from his path by going to Lowick to gaze at (and speak with) the widowed Mrs Casaubon, who looks at him with a “direct glance, full of delighted confidence”

² Bert G. Hornback offers helpful annotations here and throughout his Norton Critical Edition of *Middlemarch*.

³ Thompson sees the allusion to Orlando as an instance of Middlemarchers applying “foreign stereotypes” to Will Ladislaw (127-28). Thompson also discusses Mrs Cadwallader’s identification of Will with “an Italian with white mice”, associating her remark with Will’s “presumed diletantism” and “need of charity” (128-30).

⁴ Thompson sees Will and Dorothea as analogues to Dante and Beatrice, and suggests that Will’s experience possibly replays Dante’s in *La Vita Nuova* (135).

⁵ Rossetti’s translation was published in 1861, and Eliot owned a copy (Thompson 140).

(6.54.530); the chapter ends with a reference to “Will’s pride”, now a worshipper of Dorothea. A few chapters later the narrator tells us about Will Ladislaw’s pride by revealing that Will Ladislaw believes Middlemarchers like Toller and Hackbut are “in a state of brutal ignorance about Dante” (6.60.590). Will is not ignorant of Dante, and his sensitivity to the art and literature of Italy mark him as different from the provincials that surround him in Middlemarch.

Early in the novel, Lydgate is not interested in the world of art, thinking that “books [are] stuff” (2.15.140); he tells Rosamond, “I read no literature now [...] I read so much when I was a lad, that I suppose it will last me all my life” (3.27.265). The Italian with whom Lydgate is most closely associated is not from the world of art, but from science: the physicist Luigi Galvani, who lends his name to the “galvanic experiments” Lydgate pursued in Paris (2.15.148). But by the end of the novel, Lydgate has learned from his own painful marital experience with Rosamond and recalls, perhaps, one of the classics he “did” long ago in school (2.15.140). In the final chapter of the novel, we learn that Lydgate “once called [Rosamond] his basil plant; and when she asked for an explanation, said that basil was a plant which had flourished wonderfully on a murdered man’s brains” (8.Finale.821), alluding to a story John Keats borrowed, for his “Isabella, or the Pot of Basil” (1820), from Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (4.5).

I conclude my survey of the role of Italy in the novel by considering the two crucial references to the early Roman hero Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus in Susan Garth’s kitchen. Susan Garth, formerly a teacher, now teaches her children. In chapter 24, Ben and Letty learn about Cincinnatus. Young Ben Garth identifies Cincinnatus as a farmer and says he “was a wise man, like my father, and that made the people want his advice” (3.24.241). The lesson is almost immediately interrupted by the arrival of Fred Vincy, who is unable to pay his debts and must take the savings of Caleb Garth’s family; talk of Cincinnatus ceases immediately. Later in the novel, the family fortunes turn for the better, when Caleb Garth is offered the management of both Sir James Chettam’s property at Freshitt and Mr Brooke’s property at Tipton. Mrs Garth tells her children of the honor to their father: “He is asked to take a post again by those who dismissed him long ago. That shows that

he did his work well, so that they feel the want of him”. Ben shouts, “Like Cincinnatus – hooray!” (4.40.392). Ben, who has not, previously, distinguished himself as a scholar, reveals that he has learned something important about Roman history, and his mother Susan shines, too: the success of the student demonstrates the success of the teacher, and Eliot’s great novel demonstrates that Susan Garth can communicate what is important about the history and culture of the past and how that past can powerfully illuminate the present.

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The Visit to Genoa in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*

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Daniel Deronda (1876) is George Eliot's last novel. It is also her most ambitious and most sophisticated work. Although at the time it was well received, because it was a great novel produced by the greatest living English novelist, Victorian readers were made uncomfortable by its double structure, which they found puzzling, for there are clearly two different story lines. One deals with the personal history of the hero, Daniel Deronda, and his relationship with the Jews, and the other, with a charming young English lady he meets, Gwendolen Harleth, who is led to marry Grandcourt, an English aristocrat, whom she does not love but who gives her money and rank. It is a disastrous marriage, which ends tragically.

With the exception of Jewish readers, who praised the Jewish part because it painted a sympathetic picture of their community, of their traditions and beliefs, most readers preferred the English part, considering that the character of Gwendolen was George Eliot's best creation. The novelist was disappointed by their response because it failed to see the coherence of her novel. As she told her friend Barbara Bodichon in a letter dated 2 October 1876: "I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there" (*Letters* VI: 290). Only the most perceptive readers were ready to see that, after *Middlemarch* (1871-72), she had woven another rich and complex web of analogies and contrasts.

Indeed, there are some points in the novel where, as we shall see, the two plots clearly converge within crucial episodes, which are set in Italy, in Genoa. I propose, first, to study the importance of Deronda's visit to Genoa, where he learns about his origins. Then, we shall see how Gwendolen's life is tragically affected by her journey

there. In a third and final part, we shall examine the significance of Genoa in the novel.

1. Daniel Deronda's visit to Genoa

Daniel Deronda has been brought up as an English gentleman in Sir Hugo Mallinger's family, and he calls him "uncle". For many years he has suspected that he might be Sir Hugo's illegitimate son, but he has never known the truth about his parentage, and he cannot imagine who his mother could be. The third volume of the novel ends with a partial revelation, when Sir Hugo gives him a letter written by his mother, telling him that she wants to see him. This letter is reproduced at the beginning of the next chapter, which is also the beginning of the fourth and last volume. Placing the letter at this crucial spot gives it a real solemnity:

TO MY SON, DANIEL DERONDA

My good friend and yours, Sir Hugo Mallinger, will have told you that I wish to see you. My health is shaken, and I desire there should be no time lost before I deliver to you what I have long withheld. Let nothing hinder you from being at the *Albergo dell'Italia* in Genoa by the fourteenth of this month. Wait for me there. I am uncertain when I shall be able to make the journey from Spezia, where I shall be staying. That will depend on several things. Wait for me – the Princess Halm-Eberstein. Bring with you the diamond ring that Sir Hugo gave you. I shall like to see it again.
– Your unknown mother,

LEONORA HALM-EBERSTEIN (VII, 50: 529)

We have here a romantic device: the sudden appearance of a long-forgotten character, a very ill old woman who will reveal something of great importance, in what is almost a death-bed confession, to a close relative who will apparently be recognized by the fact that he is wearing a beloved jewel.

Daniel never imagined that his mother could be a princess, probably living in *Mittleuropa*, judging by her name. But after waiting several days in Genoa for this mysterious mother, who finally arrives, he learns more. Before being married to a prince, his

mother was a famous opera singer, known as the Alcharisi. This was only a stage-name, for in fact she was Leonora Charisi, the daughter of a religious Jew. She tells Daniel that she chose her singing career as an act of rebellion against her father, whose religion she found oppressive. She did not want to have her life decided for her in a clear-cut pattern. She married Daniel's father, who was her father's own choice, because she could control him and also because he would not object to the artistic career she had chosen for herself. After her first husband's death, she decided to part from her baby in order to devote herself fully to her career:

"I did not wish you to be born. I parted with you willingly. When your father died, I resolved that I would have no more ties, but such as I could free myself from. I was the Alcharisi you have heard of: the name had magic wherever it was carried. Men courted me. Sir Hugo Mallinger was one who wished to marry me. He was madly in love with me. One day I asked him, 'Is there a man capable of doing something for love of me, and expecting nothing in return?' He said, 'What is it you want done?' I said, 'Take my boy and bring him up as an Englishman, and let him never know anything about his parents.' You were little more than two years old, and were sitting on his foot. He declared that he would pay money to have such a boy. I had not meditated much on the plan beforehand, but as soon as I had spoken about it, it took possession of me as something I could not rest without doing. At first he thought I was not serious, but I convinced him, and he was never surprised at anything. He agreed that it would be for your good, and the finest thing for you. A great singer and actress is a queen, but she gives no royalty to her son." (VII, 51: 543-44)

Daniel thus learns about his Jewish origins. Contrary to what she expected, he tells his mother that he is glad to be a Jew, for, recently, he has been sentimentally involved with Mirah, a young Jewess, whom he has rescued from suicide, and he feels a real affinity with her brother Mordecai, a visionary Jew, who dreams of returning to the Holy Land. When discovering his true identity, Daniel also learns about the family's links with Genoa, the town where the meeting takes place: this is where his mother grew up and where she was married. It was the home of his grandfather, for the Princess says: "his family had lived here generations ago. But

my father had been in various countries” (VII, 51: 542). So Genoa is associated with the history of his family, and also with the history of the Jews, for he remembers that many of them landed there when they were expelled from Spain in 1492:

[...] among the thoughts that most filled his mind while his boat was pushing about within view of the grand harbour was that of the multitudinous Spanish Jews centuries ago driven destitute from their Spanish homes, suffered to land from the crowded ships only for brief rest on this grand quay of Genoa, overspreading it with a pall of famine and plague – dying mothers with dying children at their breasts – fathers and sons agaze at each other’s haggardness, like groups from a hundred Hunger-towers turned out beneath the mid-day sun. (VII, 50: 532)

After this unexpected and essential revelation about his origins, Daniel realizes that his Christian education cannot be done away with, but he discovers his true vocation: “to identify myself, as far as possible, with my hereditary people, and if I can see any work to be done for them that I can give my soul and hand to, I shall choose to do it” (VII, 53: 566).

That the revelation of Daniel’s Zionist vocation (restoring the identity of the Jewish nation in the Holy Land) should take place in Genoa cannot be a sheer coincidence, for, as Andrew Thompson has argued, “Eliot translates a Jewish yearning for a national identity into the language and terms of the Italian *Risorgimento*” (171), which was in the making in the present of the novel (1865-66) and was fully achieved by the time the novel was published (1876). The Victorian readers could see the achievement of Italian unity as a promising background for Deronda’s Zionist mission, after this revelation in Genoa.

Eliot’s emphasis on his links with the worshippers in the Genoa synagogue, where both his grandfather and father had worshipped serves a similar purpose. In this way the Jewish element is fused with the Italian element, for which the English public had a great sympathy in the 1860s and the 1870s, because the struggle for Italian liberation and independence was a popular cause in England:

But simply, instead of packing and ringing for his bill, he sat doing nothing at all, while his mind went to the synagogue and saw faces

there probably little different from those of his grandfather's time, and heard the Spanish-Hebrew liturgy which had lasted through the seasons of wandering generations like a plant with wandering seed, that gives the far-off lands a kinship to the exile's home – [...] the memories wakened among the sparse taliths and keen dark faces of worshippers whose way of taking awful prayers and invocations with the easy familiarity which might be called Hebrew dyed Italian, made him reflect that his grandfather, according to the Princess's hints of his character, must have been almost as exceptional a Jew as Mordecai. (VII, 55: 586)

When George Eliot suggests that in the Genoa synagogue, the Hebrew liturgy is “dyed Italian”, she clearly endeavours to *Italianize* the image of the Jews, because she hopes “to circumvent British prejudices concerning Jews and to make them respectable as the Italians had become” (Thompson 171).

2. Gwendolen's tragic experience in Genoa

By a strange coincidence (of the kind which is familiar to readers of Victorian fiction), Daniel happens to meet Gwendolen in Genoa, when she arrives at the Albergo dell'Italia with her husband Grandcourt. She has now been married to him for some time, long enough to experience his domestic tyranny. The Grandcourts have their own reasons for being in Genoa then. They were yachting in the Mediterranean, first about the Balearic Islands, then off Sardinia and Corsica, when a squall damaged their yacht and their skipper decided to spend about a week at Genoa, to set things right (VII, 54: 578). To while away the time as the repairs are progressing, Grandcourt decides to hire a small boat and to go sailing in the Bay of Genoa, taking his wife with him, because he is jealous of Daniel Deronda and does not like to see her with him.

At this stage, a terrible accident occurs: Grandcourt drowns, and Gwendolen is rescued by fishermen. The particular circumstances of the accident are not described in direct narration, and Daniel finds it hard to learn how things actually happened:

Meanwhile he employed himself in getting a formal, legally-recognized statement from the fishermen who had rescued Gwendolen. Few

details came to light. The boat in which Grandcourt had gone out had been found drifting with its sail loose, and had been towed in. The fishermen thought it likely that he had been knocked overboard by the flapping of the sail while putting about, and that he had not known how to swim; but, though they were near, their attention had been first arrested by a cry which seemed like that of a man in distress, and while they were hastening with their oars, they heard a shriek from the lady, and saw her jump in. (VII, 56: 590)

Everything is later explained to him by Gwendolen, who cannot help expressing her deep-seated sense of guilt about the whole matter, for she saw Grandcourt drowning and she could not help him. She might have saved him by throwing a rope, but she was paralysed and did nothing for him. In fact, the image of the drowning man was just the materialization of her desire to see the death of her tyrannical husband and to be freed from him:

“All sorts of contrivances in my mind – but all so difficult. And I fought against them – I was terrified at them – I saw his dead face” – here her voice sank almost to a whisper close to Deronda’s ear – “ever so long ago I saw it; and I wished him to be dead. And yet it terrified me. I was like two creatures. I could not speak – I wanted to kill – it was as strong as thirst – and then directly – I felt beforehand I had done something dreadful, unalterable – that would make me like an evil spirit. And it came – it came.” (VII: 56, 592)

“I saw my wish outside me.” (VII: 56, 596)

Thus, Gwendolen’s journey to Genoa brought about much more than a tragic accident, which put an end to her disastrous marriage to Grandcourt. It was a revelation too, but of a different kind from Deronda’s. In pre-Freudian terms, George Eliot conveys the dreadful experience of Gwendolen’s split psyche – her secret wish to kill Grandcourt and her resistance to active murder. As we have seen, this experience results in a terrible feeling of guilt, even though Deronda tries to persuade her that her “murderous thought” (VII, 56: 597) could have no outward effect and that Grandcourt’s death was inevitable. However, Gwendolen cannot help seeing the link between the dead face of Grandcourt and her own deep-seated fear, represented by the picture hidden behind a panel in her mother’s rented house at Offendene, which aroused her terror on two occa-

sions: "the picture of an upturned dead face, from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with outstretched arms" (I, 3: 20). Here in Genoa, her own phantasm comes true and she recognizes it: "ever so long ago I saw it" (VII, 56: 592). For the first time, she becomes aware of her true self and must face the cruel nature of her desire.

The whole episode takes on a particular significance, once the reader remembers that it is preceded by Gwendolen's strange dream, also associated with Genoa, which is definitely the place of revelations:

She was waked the next morning by the casting of the anchor in the port of Genoa – waked from a strangely-mixed dream in which she felt herself escaping over the Mont Cenis, and wondering to find it warmer even in the moonlight on the snow, till suddenly she met Deronda, who told her to go back. (VII, 54: 579)

This dream symbolically reflects Gwendolen's presence in hell – which perhaps accounts for the mysterious heat, although it is simply the hell of her married life – and her desire to escape from it. The dream also foreshadows the part played by Deronda in Gwendolen's future liberation, an experience which Thompson compares with the special relationship between Dante and Virgil in the *Divine Comedy*:

The strangely-mixed dream evokes the dreamlike opening of *Inferno I* where Dante, finding himself in a dark wood, rushes back the way he had come only to be stopped by Virgil in the "strangely-mixed dream" which is the *Comedy*. Dante's first words to Virgil on his headlong descent down the slope are "'Have pity on me, whoever thou art,' I cried to him 'shade or real man!'" (65-66): Gwendolen's proud nature has refused "to say to the world 'Pity me'" [V, 35: 366], but in these scenes paralleling the opening of *Inferno*, she is asking for pity and guidance from Daniel whose presence, like Virgil's, signifies that "other road" passing through Hell to emerge, as Dante had done, to ascend Mount Purgatory. Gwendolen, like Dante-character with Virgil, becomes like a child dependent upon the support of Daniel for her actions during the infernal part of her journey and, like Dante, she too fears being forsaken. (150-51)

3. The significance of Genoa in the novel

After this description of the part played by Genoa as a background for two essential experiences of the main characters of the novel, the question remains: why did George Eliot choose such a place? Here we have no direct answer, and our arguments will necessarily remain speculative. It seems evident that Genoa was selected, in part, because, in the nineteenth century, it was the gateway to Italy and a famous resort for English tourists, as is exemplified by Dickens's long stay there. Besides, it was a big harbour for cargo ships, packet boats, sailing ships and yachts, not far from La Spezia, another popular resort for tourists and sailors. Moreover, Genoa was a cosmopolitan city, with a Jewish community and clearly associated with Jewish history.

George Eliot visited Genoa herself on four occasions. The first time was in 1849, after the death of her father, when her Coventry friends, the Brays, took her on a continental tour to rest and divert her. She arrived in Genoa from Nice and stayed for about a week, before going through Milan to Lake Como and Lake Maggiore (Haight 68-70). We may imagine that the city left a permanent impression on her, for it was her first experience of foreign travel and her first contact with Italy. The second time, in March 1860, after she had finished *The Mill on the Floss*, she visited the city with her companion Lewes, coming through the Mont Cenis Pass and Turin, before going by sea to Rome, Naples, and back to Florence, on a long Italian tour (*Letters* III: 311). In her Journal, she has a section entitled "Recollections of Italy, 1860", where she mentions the sunshine of Genoa, their sightseeing, the Palladian streets, the Palazzi and the tower of Santa Maria di Carignano which they climbed to view the city, of which she gives a very positive image:

We lost no time in turning out after breakfast into the morning sunshine. George was enchanted with the aspect of the place, as we drove or walked along the streets. It was his first vision of anything corresponding to his preconception of Italy. After the Adlergasse in Nuremberg, surely no streets can be more impressive than the Strada Nuova and S. Nuovissima at Genoa. In street architecture, I can rise to the highest point of the admiration given to the Palladian

style. And here in these chief streets of Genoa, the Palaces have two advantages over those of Florence: they form a series, creating a general impression of grandeur of which each particular palace gets the benefit; and they have the open gateway, showing the cortile within – sometimes containing grand stone staircases. And all this architectural splendour is accompanied with the signs of actual prosperity: Genoa la Superba is not a name of the past, merely. (*Journals* 338)

She also describes a night at the Genoa opera, where the singers were not quite first rate:

We went to the opera in the evening. It was a benefit night for the basso, and we had a series of selections – one scene from the *Barbiere* containing the *Calumnia* – very ill sung, and two acts of *Rigoletto*, in which the King's part was presented by a fat robust tenor. An incompetent and ugly soprano, who sang "Una Voce", was hissed first and then warmly applauded, perhaps from an alternation of candour and pity. (*Journals* 338)

In spite of this minor disappointment, to which Eliot and Lewes responded appropriately with a humorous attitude, they seem to have really enjoyed this stay, for they returned there the following year, in late April 1861, after George Eliot had finished *Silas Marner*. They came from Mentone by *vetturino* and stayed in Genoa for two days before going on to Florence, where they did research for *Romola*. Lewes describes this second visit (for him, and third for her) in a very humorous letter sent to his eldest son Charles, who was then a student at a private school in German-speaking Switzerland:

Monday we got to Genoa by 2 o'clock having stopped to lunch en route. We were so enraptured with Genoa last year that I feared lest a second visit should be a disappointment. But a "thing of beauty is a joy for ever, its loveliness increaseth" [Keats, *Endymion* I, 1] (as I remark to Mutter [Charles's nickname for George Eliot, his stepmother] respecting my own beauty) and our stay at Genoa was again intoxicating (*not* alcoholic). [...] At Genoa, where we stayed Monday and Tuesday, we went to the opera and heard Verdi's *Attila* bawled with great vigour. The "scourge of god" was represented by a basso with the shortest arms and the most obtrusive stomach I ever

saw, doch war es immer nicht der Held! [Though he was not heroic at all!] The Mutter conceived a violent passion for him. The tenor laboured under a deficiency of voice and a redness of nose. The prima donna was a vigorous little fat Jewess, not bad at all.

Mutter sternly resisted Genoese velvets, and Genoese bracelets, so that we bought nothing at Genoa but a few volumes of Italian lit[erature] and history. On Wednesday, May 1 [...] we started again with our vetturino [...] reaching Sestri at 5. [...] Next day we got to Spezia, which is very beautiful – I mean the bay and Carrara marble mountains, which rise on one side of it. (*Letters* VIII: 283-84)

A last visit to the city in March 1869, on their way to Florence, was less pleasant because then, it was pouring with rain (*Letters* VIII: 448). Of necessity, both their day- and night-time outings were severely curtailed. That stay was far from memorable.

Thus, in the novelist's mind, the city was associated with many things. First it was linked with the history of the Jews. It called up images of opera singers, her recollections showing that singers performing in Genoa were not always the very best, although the audience were particularly demanding. The little Jewess, who played the part of prima donna, may have been the germ of the character of the Alcharisi. In Lewes's memory, the place was also associated with La Spezia and its bay – where the Romantic poet Shelley was drowned while yachting, a possible connection with Grandcourt. We may be sure that George Eliot, too, was thinking of Shelley when she was writing the Genoa episodes of her novel, since her epigraph for chapter 54 is taken from Shelley's *The Cenci*.

Two last possible connections may be mentioned here. First, among the great figures of the city, one is of special interest: Andrea Doria, the famous admiral of the Renaissance, who had a splendid palace near the sea, with beautiful gardens where the Leweses spent some time reading in 1861 (Thompson 46). Although he has no direct link with the novel, there is a striking detail about him, which might be relevant to the events of the book. Jane Irwin tells us that among the many books that George Eliot read when she was researching on the history of the Jews was Henry Hart Milman, *The History of the Jews from the Earliest Period Down to Modern Times*, whose fourth edition in three volumes was published by John Murray in 1866. And among

Milman's sources, there is a chronicle which he often cites, *The Chronicles of Rabbi Joseph ben Joshua ben Meir, the Sphardi*, because he regards it as "unquestionably the most valuable historic work of the Jews which has been made accessible to the European reader" (III, 454). The work, which was first published in Venice in 1554, has two volumes: history from Adam to 1520 (volume I), and from 1520 to 1553 (volume 2). Jane Irwin gives us this precious hint:

The Genoese focus of the second volume may have an occluded link to the events of the Grandcourt yachting expedition. The chronicler writes of the battles and exploits of the Admiral Andrea Doria and the "wicked count", his nephew, who was "cast a second time into the sea": "the count is drowned, and he is no more who thought to possess dwelling-places that were not his" (II, 430, 432). (296)

This description might fit Grandcourt, who is not quite a count, but, indeed, a wicked aristocrat, who covets the title and the heritage of Sir Hugo Mallinger, his uncle.

The second connection with Genoa would be the great Italian patriot, Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), clearly mentioned in the novel, because Deronda has read him and may have been inspired by his example. This is, at any rate, how the young man supports Mordecai in the debate about Jewish independence in the Philosophers' Club:

"If we look back to the history of efforts which have made great changes, it is astonishing how many of them seemed hopeless to those who looked on in the beginning. Take what we have all heard and seen something of – the effort after the unity of Italy, which we are sure soon to see accomplished to the very last boundary. Look into Mazzini's account of his first yearning, when he was a boy, after a restored greatness, and a new freedom to Italy, and of his first efforts as a young man to rouse the same feelings in other young men, and get them to work towards a united nationality. Almost everything seemed against him: his countrymen were ignorant or indifferent, governments hostile, Europe incredulous. Of course the scorners often seemed wise. Yet you see the prophecy lay with him. As long as there is a remnant of national consciousness, I suppose nobody will deny that there may be a new

stirring of memories and hopes which may inspire arduous action.”
(VI, 42: 457)

In Genoa, Daniel learns about his real identity and receives his mission because he has been prepared for it by his meeting Mirah and then her brother Mordecai, an experience which has radically changed his vision of the Jewish world and the part he might play in it:

Feelings had lately been at work within him which had very much modified the reluctance he would formerly have had to think of himself as probably a Jew. And, if you like, he was romantic. That young energy and spirit of adventure which have helped to create the world-wide legends of youthful heroes going to seek the hidden tokens of their birth and its inheritance of tasks, gave him a certain quivering interest in the bare possibility that he was entering on a like track – all the more because the track was one of thought as well as action. (VI, 41: 439)

Beyond the romantic inspiration of Daniel’s ideas, one may look here for the influence of Mazzini (born and bred in Genoa), who became aware of his patriotic mission in Genoa, as he tells us in his autobiography, a work which was familiar to George Eliot – a fact which Thompson reminds us of:

This generalized account of going forth to seek “the hidden tokens of [...] birth and its inheritance of tasks” parallels the specific Mazzinian subtext to which Daniel refers, and there is even an echo of Mazzini’s motto “thought and action” in Daniel’s speculation that his “track [might be] one of thought as well as action”. Genoa, then, becomes for Daniel, as it had been for Mazzini, a starting point, a place charged with possibilities, where old categories and identities are broken down and new ones established. There is, I believe, a tribute to Mazzini intended in Eliot’s placing of the defining event in Daniel’s life in Genoa, the birthplace of the *Risorgimento* “prophet of Italy”. (177)

Conclusion

The importance of Genoa in George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* should not surprise us. Because the novelist was a great traveller, because

she enjoyed going to Italy as often as she could, it is only natural that she should have chosen an Italian background for crucial episodes of her last novel. There were precedents for that. *Romola* (1863), her only historical novel, was set in Florence during the Renaissance. In *Middlemarch* (1871-72), there were important episodes in Rome, another place of revelation, where Dorothea realizes the barrenness of Mr Casaubon, her husband, and Will Ladislaw falls in love with her. What is perhaps new in *Daniel Deronda*, which is clearly a cosmopolitan novel, where the action often shifts from one country to another, is the convergence of the two plots in Genoa, where the main characters are brought together for what will prove to be crucial experiences.

We may suppose that the exceptional part played in the novel by this Italian city with its long cosmopolitan history, its past Jewish associations and its modern attraction for British tourists reflects George Eliot's own enthusiasm for it, because, like Lewes, she found her stays there "intoxicating" – though *not* alcoholic!

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6. Intercultural Crossings

Gift and Narrative in Charles Dickens's "The Italian Prisoner"

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Hearing the story of a good, charitable man, presumably one will be prompted to admiration and perhaps emulation. But there may be a sense as well of something dubious in such storytelling, a feeling that both teller and auditor are basking in a light to which they have no right, or, in a more appropriate analogy for this tale from Charles Dickens's *The Uncommercial Traveller*, a suspicion that arriving at a feast to which they have invited themselves, they are proceeding to get drunk on another man's wine. In talking about generosity there is, perhaps inevitably, the danger of excess and intemperance. A sense of unease, then, like that registered near the beginning of "The Italian Prisoner" where Dickens the traveller states that having played a very minor part in the drama, he "may relate its story without any fear of being suspected of self-display" (180). A questionable disclaimer, since it is he who narrates the tale, and indeed later he will put on display his cleverness, enterprise, and British doggedness. I want, however, to take this worry about self-display as a hint in exploring Dickens's treatment of issues of power in "The Italian Prisoner". My guiding idea: as "The Italian Prisoner" tells a story of the power to save, it also exposes the susceptibilities of that power, its excesses and its vulnerabilities. These susceptibilities are characteristic both of "the English gentleman" and of the narrative Dickens offers to commemorate the English gentleman's singular compassion and generosity. In the course of his memorial, Dickens engages a familiar and rather thorny paradox characterized by the New Testament phrase: "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matthew 6:3). One must give without thinking that

one is giving, without calculating the gift or the reward, and without any notion of recognition from others or even oneself. It seems the story of generosity surely should be told, but at the same time it should not be told because, by such an accounting, it is a betrayal of a secret properly known only to the giver and to God. In such a view, it may be that to tell the story of generosity is not only to teach by good example but also to risk infecting one's capacity for generosity with the destructive vanities of self-regard, calculation, and knowingness. My reading of "The Italian Prisoner" will examine Dickens's handling of this paradox to which generosity and stories about generosity are susceptible.

First appearing in *All the Year Round* in 1861, "The Italian Prisoner" revisits themes of *Pictures from Italy* and the Italy sections of *Little Dorrit*: Dickens the traveller recalls a pre-Risorgimento Italy rich in various wonders but morally impoverished by custom, cult, and tyranny; amidst Italian histories and intrigues, British virtues appear in high contrast. The story: an English gentleman comes to the rescue of an innocent man imprisoned for political reasons, saving his life. Visiting Italy some years later, at the behest of the same gentleman, Dickens locates the shop of Giovanni Carlavero and along with effusions of gratitude receives a gift bottle of wine, vouchsafed him for delivery to the English gentleman. The oversized bottle leads to a lively comic sequence encompassing Italian cupidity and English resolve and is shipped home with not a drop of it lost. Although it was not very good wine, the English gentleman finds it "sweet and sound" (189), and for many years the bottle occupies a place of honour at his table, Dickens remembering fondly, now the gentleman is gone, the memento of Carlavero's rescue.

In one respect, it is a simple tale of British generosity and Italian gratitude; nearly contemporary with John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* and Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, "The Italian Prisoner" also speaks, albeit indirectly, to late-Dickens issues of nation-making, power, and bio-economics. Italy's troubled past and its recent history suggest instructive parallels to Britain's own internal and imperial struggles; Italy's corrupt and antiquated ways of law and punishment affirm the necessity of British as well as Italian reform; the importance of not only securing Carlavero's liberty but also alleviating his physical sufferings is characteristic of mid-Victorian

constructions of the social body that imagine the individual's biological life as both fundamental human value and vital national resource. "The Italian Prisoner" is a brief for some of the major themes of Reform in the 1860s: healing the nation, humanizing power, preserving the health and lives of the people. Saving Carlavero, the English gentleman exemplifies the generous virtues Britain as well as Italy should embrace on the road to the modern liberal state. But how represent such virtues without falsifying them?

The English gentleman: one of Dickens's good gentlemen in a long line extending from Mr Brownlow to Mr Jarndyce, he exhibits a gentler power, a care for life characteristic of the nineteenth-century trend in which health replaces salvation, and the succour of bodies is viewed as at least as important as the saving of souls, or, more ambitiously, bodies become a means of redefining souls. As Philip Allingham notes, the English gentleman was based on the late Lord Dudley Coutts Stuart, a Liberal figure of generous politics and philanthropy well known to Dickens. Resident in Italy, the fictional avatar of Dickens's liberal gentleman moves beyond the comfortable realm of "English society on its travels" (183), the standard round of house parties and sightseeing, and makes it his business to visit an Italian prison. There among the common criminals he discovers Carlavero, a man whose appearance marks him as an exceptional case, "his countenance [...] having nothing in common with the faces of the malefactors with whom he was associated" (182). The English gentleman recognizes a gentle or genteel character in the Italian prisoner, who later appears "a well favoured man of good stature and military bearing, in a great cloak" (181). Carlavero is suffering in quite literally the lowest of conditions: his cell, under the ground and under the waters of the harbour, is plunged into utter darkness and is "insufferably foul", the air poisonous and nearly asphyxiating (182). The Italian prison resembles the London underworld of Dickens's reform-minded gentlemen (and Dickens himself), the hovels of a sunken lane or a cul-de-sac alley in Shoreditch or Bethnal Green, precincts of material and moral filth, of damp and disease and crime.

Having encountered Carlavero, the gentleman himself suffers in his mind and affections, as if a contagion of suffering has infected

him. While he is a man accustomed to command, the image of Carlavero in chains commands him: “the figure of this man chained to the bedstead [...] destroyed his rest and peace. He was an Englishman of an extraordinarily tender heart, and he could not bear the picture” (183). The gentleman gains the prisoner access to light and air, lances the dangerous tumour on his neck (183), and mounts an effort to obtain liberty for Carlavero though all believe the effort hopeless. He has been told three times by the Italian authorities, as though like Saint Peter they would betray goodness by multiples and mock the suffering prisoner, that Carlavero has been “particularly recommended” for the treatment he is receiving (182-3). In “The Italian Prisoner”, it is also the English gentleman who is particularly commended as a contrasting example of compassion and generosity, and along with the tenderness and susceptibility characteristic of his power to save, is possessed of a “desperate resolution” to gain Carlavero’s liberty and a rare courage in disregarding social opinion, which among the English abroad soon makes him a laughing-stock and labels him a “bore” (183).

The English gentleman: an exemplary figure of compassion and generosity. Tenderhearted, susceptible to images and feelings, yet strong in his courage and resolution. Some of today’s American conservatives might brand him with that hackneyed phrase, “bleeding-heart liberal”, and in doing so get at precisely the problem Dickens reckons with here: how does one tell the story of generosity without betraying generosity, without appearing to indulge in self-praise, displaced vanity, or sentimental idolatry? Dickens’s orchestration of the English gentleman’s story by way of the narrative framing of “The Italian Prisoner” is one strategy, and we will consider it after first making two further points about the gentleman. As the story moves to its climax, the English gentleman has for several months waited for word from an Italian Advocate whose secret efforts he has enlisted on Carlavero’s behalf, paying him one hundred pounds though with no guarantee of obtaining the prisoner’s pardon. Several months pass without any word, but one day the gentleman receives a letter from the Advocate requesting an additional fifty pounds and suggesting a last effort may be effectual. Believing he has been thoroughly swindled, the gentleman is determined to part with no more of his money. In addition, it has

only been desperation that has led him to the Italian Advocate, whose work is surely a matter of bribery. The purity of the gentleman's conduct and character have perhaps been sullied by his involvement, so that his desire to wash his hands of the affair also may be driven by a revulsion to the taint of corruption in the proceedings. But on the verge of posting his reply he has a change of heart, and he sends the money. This desperate gamble pays off: the Advocate is successful, and Carlavero is freed. As in the aftermath of his first visit to the prison, it is the command of a tender heart that decides the issue: on the brink of posting the letter refusing the money, the English gentleman gazes round at the beauties of Italy's sky and sea, and with his "gentle heart much moved" again sees a vision of "the slowly dying Carlavero chained to his bedstead, for whom the universe had no delights" (184-5). It is at this moment that he decides to take the risk, though it seems certain he will be cheated again, and he admits in his revised letter to the Advocate that he knows it is a great "weakness" in him (185). The Englishman's generosity, then, is a matter of courage and resolution, but also a matter of susceptibility and irresolution. The latter perhaps explains the strange turn that finds the gentleman, after Carlavero's pardon, writing his apologies to the Italian Advocate and inquiring how the pardon was achieved: so susceptible is he to a passionate interest in Carlavero's story that he forgets his own involvement in an almost certainly unsavoury business, the details of which would probably emerge in the accounting he solicits.

The left hand has not known what the right is doing, it seems, and while the English gentleman, Dickens tells us, has not sought or gained any earthly recognition or reward, certainly he has gained the heavenly one promised in the Gospel of Matthew: "Without a doubt, GOD has recompensed him" (185), Dickens writes. Yet the people and events of the tale also encompass the doubtful, with important details left to the reader's speculations and perhaps awakening, as they do for the curious English gentleman, a desire for a fuller accounting. Such uncertainties or suppressions regarding the events of the story suggest Dickens crosses into the realm of fiction in this narrative essay where all the characters except Carlavero lack proper names and where key events and information

are undefined or withheld. It may be, as Phillip Allingham remarks, that real people are here transformed into types to emphasize themes of sympathy and generosity, while real identities are protected or preserved. Such fictional transformations regularly occur in the realm of the narrative essay and indeed in all non-fiction, and it may be granted that in “The Italian Prisoner” we see in microcosm the literary strategies of allegory so often at work in Dickens. Along with the powerful documentary realism characteristic of his writing (and maybe an essential component of such “realism”), we know that Dickens is much given to the making of types and allegories. John Bowen has examined at length this aspect of the early Dickens in novels such as *The Old Curiosity Shop*, where Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* is an important model, and the place of “Allegory” in *Bleak House* has been often discussed in light of Dickens’s attention to issues of language, signification, and power. But why the seeming drift into fiction and allegory in “The Italian Prisoner”, a modest and brief memoir of old friends and fellow travellers?

It is an inevitable drift, maybe, because the story is so directly concerned with matters of generosity and matters of narrative rhetoric, so that Dickens intimates a defining aspect of his fiction and maybe all fiction: the familiar turn that makes of story a gift as well as an account or a communication. The masking or revising of literal historical referents stages a falling-short and an incompleteness; the story as story does not and cannot match or coordinate precisely with facts and history. One hand does not know, must not know, what the other is doing; unlike a history, story and fiction must disavow calculation and accounting, measure and weighing (we can grant of course that in other places Dickens exposes the fictive character of history as well). Dickens’s narrator is the uncommercial traveller, whose only interest is “Human Interest”, an interest that may by definition be incalculable. The gift of story is a matter of disregarding or exceeding measure, rather as in one of the New Testament parables: the Prodigal Son or, closer to home in this story of a bottle of wine, the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, where even “unto this last”, whom calculative equity would pay the least, the full day’s wages are rendered. (The Parable supported one of the most scandalous and most contested points in Ruskin’s critique

of political economy, which appeared in *Cornhill's* in 1860, the year before *All the Year Round* ran "The Italian Prisoner".)

Let us consider this English gentleman's heart, from which, perhaps, a wine of compassion and generosity flows, and which, Dickens perhaps shows, is indeed a new wine, which must burst the old bottles of a conventional or unexamined virtue, and even burst the old bottles of didactic moralizing history. It is a heart of courage and resolution, but it is a tender heart, in its most intimate or exalted moments susceptible to the image of another's suffering fate. It is a heart morally distressed by dirt, suffering, and crime, though not overcome by the natural impulse of recoil and avoidance, instead reckoning with the darkneses that meet it, that haunt it, that seem to command it. How does one represent the virtue of such a heart without playing it false, indulging a species of the "self-display" Dickens's narrator disavows?

I have proposed that one aspect of Dickens's strategy is worked out in the story of the English gentleman, where the power of saving and the power of compassion and generosity are shown to fall short of mastery: goodness often appears to outpace intentions, and rather than lay claim to possession of virtue, fall prey to its demands. The possible references to the history of ethics are many, from the golden rule to the categorical imperative to Nietzsche's "bestowing" and Emmanuel Levinas's concepts of substitution and "the hostage". Of further importance is Dickens's handling of the rhetoric and representation of the generous virtues in his orchestration of the English gentleman's story. The story is told within a narrative frame that first presents the event of Dickens's the traveller's meeting with Carlavero and, immediately following the story of the gentleman, presents Dickens's adventures travelling with the Bottle of wine. We can first note that this narrative structure effects a containment of the story of the English gentleman's generosity, muting the claims it may seem to make to special virtue, embedded as the story is between two more or less comic episodes. At the same time, the first part of the narrative frame starts a plot that is engaged prior to the English gentleman's story and so lays dramatic emphasis elsewhere. The main dramatic question in "The Italian Prisoner" is not whether the English gentleman will save Carlavero; the outcome of those events is summarized early on. This is an

unusual move because it shifts the narrative emphasis when conventional practice (and much of Dickens's typical practice in both fiction and nonfiction) would suggest a better course in mining the English gentleman's story for its full value of affect and suspense, so as to underscore its themes of compassion and generosity. Instead, dramatic emphasis is divided between the framing narratives. The first occurs with Dickens meeting Carlavero and in one respect scarcely poses a dramatic question at all. His charge from the English gentleman is to find Carlavero, to speak the gentleman's name all of a sudden, and "to observe how it affects him" (181). The event is shortly in view as Dickens discovers Carlavero at his wine shop, speaks the name, and Carlavero "bursts into tears, and falls on his knees"; his "over-fraught heart is heaving as if would burst from his breast, and [his] tears are wet upon the dress" Dickens wears (182). A simple question is posed: is the grateful Italian to be taken as ridiculous and excessive, or is he to be taken seriously? More broadly, also posed is a thematic question regarding what we might call containment and spillage, of holding in things in reserve as opposed to pouring them out. The English gentleman's story will answer that question, and Carlavero will gain greatly in dignity by its conclusion: "but I knew this", Dickens affirms, "here were his kisses on my hands, because they had touched the hands that had worked out his release. He had no need to tell me it would be happiness for him to die for his benefactor; I doubt I ever saw real, sterling, fervent gratitude of soul, before or since" (186). In the perspective that develops from the English gentleman's story, the image of Carlavero spilling forth his heart's gratitude suggests two things: one, that the English gentleman's susceptibility to feeling, to tender-heartedness, to unaccountable gambles on life and death, is as gratuitous and uncalculating as that of his Italian counterpart; two, that in compassion and generosity there is a loss of mastery which encompasses not mere weakness but a noble sort of moral susceptibility, careless of one's own interests and instead exercised by the distress of others.

The second part of the narrative framing advances similar themes, but in Dickens's adventures with the notorious Bottle of wine the question is turned around: rather than being invited to consider what spillage means, we are invited to consider containment and reserve.

These of course are familiar British virtues often staged in contrast to Italian expressivity and effusion, and one aspect of the story of the Bottle is to reassert them: Dickens will bring the Bottle back to England, "not a drop of it spilled or lost", the wine of gratitude in its proper receptacle being returned to Carlavero's English benefactor. The Bottle however undercuts such virtues, occupying on the comic scale of "The Italian Prisoner" the furthest point: the gentleman may be foolishly tender-hearted, Carlavero on his knees may be ridiculously or movingly excessive, but the Bottle, oversized, ungainly, and topped with the invisible load of Carlavero's gratitude, is positively absurd. In a parody of the English gentleman's heartfelt concern for Carlavero's life, Dickens suffers his obligation to the Bottle: "what disquiet of mind this dearly beloved and highly treasured Bottle began to cost me, no man knows" (187). And in a further comic reversal, the dramatic emphasis on the Bottle's maintaining its capacity to contain and preserve will make it a flowing fount of Dickensian trope. The narrative structure of "The Italian Prisoner" is itself a sort of bottle, containing a story that might be suspected of sentimental excess within the two narratives of other spillages, those of tears and of wine, literal and metaphorical. Dickens's text is enabled to spill the secrets of a generous heart while at the same keeping them safe, their rare vintage kept in reserve and protected from corrosive conventional ironies. Such is Dickens's narrative design: the story of generosity is defended against accusations of self-righteous display, calculated moral effect, or superior knowingness.

"Here were his kisses on my hands, because they had touched [his] hands": along with its narrative displacements, "The Italian Prisoner" thrives on other kinds of substitution and exchange, Dickens the traveller as the English gentleman's agent and proxy himself receiving Carlavero's tears and tokens of gratitude, and in his later adventures becoming something like the gentleman's comic double: "Still I stuck to my Bottle, like any fine old Englishman all of the olden time. The more the Bottle was interfered with, the stauncher I became [...]" (188). The Bottle is insistently, perhaps incontinently, given over to trope, Dickens's text with a certain rhetorical drunkenness proposing a toast to proposing toasts. If one is tempted to imagine metaphors and narratives as a reserve or

container of meanings and feelings, the Bottle proves those meanings and feelings must also be a matter of a seemingly irresistible pouring forth. The Bottle's comic pleasures are charged with the incongruities of a container about which the narrative cannot contain itself. An emblem of intemperance: Dickens picturing himself with Bottle as an apt image for a Cruikshank illustration on the miseries of drink or for a moralizing temperance-society warning. A precious vintage of liberty and gratitude, forever endangered by its enemies, who, in Dickensian phrasal spill, are shown to pout about it, mock it, tackle it, nibble it, refuse it, accuse it, suspect it, and job it (187). A prisoner itself, arrived in England where it is held "in honourable captivity in the Custom House" (189). Dickens's Bottle figures the powers and virtues of compassion and generosity, but figures, too, the depredations to which they are liable. Riding in style inside the carriage and keeping Dickens outside or cramped alongside, the Bottle becomes his captor, a comic oppressor suggestive of a human companion, some clinging double of the grateful Carlavero. It obtrudes, it confines, it claims its uncanny due like an avatar of the grateful dead, those folk-tale figures whose thanks for the generosity of the living mechanically repeats itself, insistently importuning their unlucky benefactors. Reminiscent of the bottle of the imp in familiar stories from Aladdin and the Grimms, where the bottle spirit is a danger as well as a boon to its owner, Dickens's Bottle demands to be moved along a chain of substitutions and exchanges, one's gaining of its possession at the same time the diminution of one's power to hold it as one's own.

In the course of a story of generosity, the Bottle appears to spin out of control, Dickens's language also susceptible to one hand not knowing what the other is doing. The Bottle: pondering it, one might consider the zero-value of the floating signifier, the liberties and liberality of language in which Dickens so often delights. If a major concern of Dickens's writing is to tell stories of compassion and generosity, that writing itself must be liable to losing account even as accounts are offered. We have already noted the apparent drift into fiction and allegory in "The Italian Prisoner" and how it raises questions of narrative reliability: if Dickens's traveller withholds or lacks certain information, it may be the case that his history is indeed a false account, a fantastic traveller's tale. As

fiction, it loses credit; as an instructive factual history, however, it would lose its force as a text of mourning and elegy for the noble English gentleman. Just as the English gentleman must engage with the Italian Advocate on trust, so the reader must take Dickens's narrator on trust. This trust asks the reader to forget the distinction between fact and fiction, to forego the question of credit in favour of a more valuable "Human Interest". In the parable of the Bottle, say, a spectre is shown to haunt every exchange, be it of story or gift or story as gift. The Bottle, generating trope upon trope, shows that such interest is other, elsewhere, exorbitant or excessive. Dickens's tale is not simply one of moralizing pattern and example. Like a ghost story where the reality of the apparition is less important than its demand that justice be done, the narrative, refusing to deliver all of its contents even as the Bottle liberally pours itself forth in myriad figures, exceeds any measure of credit.

Along with such figural and narrative disruptions, however, it is also necessary to consider the political economy of the Bottle, the fever and tears of a lifetime of gratitude invested in Carlavero's gift in turn becoming an object of exchange and in its travels absorbing something like the seductive glow of the commodity-fetish. The social relation of gift and giver risks being brought into the very system of ghostly abstractions and fictive equivalences Dickens's narrative otherwise resists by virtue of its disjunctive frames and figures. And given the bio-economics of populations and productivity contemplated by the modern nation-state, we may wonder whether the Bottle occupies a point of transition where matters of liberty are being transposed to matters of biology, the political vintages of classical liberalism being transubstantiated into the life's blood of the social body. As such new wine burst the old bottles, that body was ministered to by new species of English gentlemen, and among those civil servants, military men, physicians, and scientists whose public character attempted to join the power to rule with the power to save, one might imagine a toast being raised to bare and susceptible "life", over which is to be exercised a gentler power, one itself susceptible to finer pains and perhaps finer pleasures. The taste of such wine, whether ultimately that of mere vinegar, like Carlavero's vintage on its arrival in England, or really and truly as

good as Claret, as Dickens's traveller also remarks, in either case may well go to one's head.

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Speech, Ghost Language, and Heteroglossia in Two Italian Translations of *A Christmas Carol*

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The popularity of *A Christmas Carol* around the world results from its being – and has caused it to be – translated into more languages than any other of the works of Charles Dickens. Such success suggests that there is something about this particular ghost story that speaks to generation after generation of readers in many languages, almost in spite of the complexity and idiosyncrasies of Dickens's prose. Figures of speech, ironic turns, comic asides, and the varying registers of the narrator's language (not to mention that of the ghosts) are among the many challenges translators face; the ways that translators meet these challenges reveal, of course, their different attitudes towards the original text. Two Italian translations of *A Christmas Carol* – the first, published in 1888, by Federico Verdinois; the second, in 1981, by Maria Luisa Fehr – illustrate the kinds of choices translators make and the ways these very choices shed light on what precisely makes Dickens's original prose Dickensian.¹

The dates of publication account for some differences in terms of the language used by the two translators. Verdinois's translation dates back to the end of the nineteenth century, whereas that of Fehr is still in print. Indeed, Verdinois's text is one of the first Italian versions of the *Carol*, and the translator's attitude towards Dickens is sometimes more daring than in the more recent version. Verdinois is

¹ New translation aids – not available to either Verdinois or Fehr – make the present analysis possible, including on-line *corpora* and Wordsmith Tools, a software especially useful for this study.

translating a text by one of his most brilliant contemporaries, but the *Carol* had not achieved the status of being a “classic” of world literature. This version sounds at times slightly antiquated to the modern reader, who may not be familiar with some of its syntactical structures and certain aspects of its vocabulary. In contrast, Fehr shows a kind of reverence towards what is now considered to be one of the masterpieces of the short story, and she is therefore more inclined to choose solutions that do not overly modify the structure of the English text, as if she anticipated that her text would be subjected to a close comparison with the original.

It should be remembered that many of Dickens’s ghost stories were written for special Christmas issues of the magazines he edited, *All the Year Round* and *Household Words*. That time of year had always fascinated him, and the author attempted to express his own feelings about the spirit of Christianity and the meaning of Christ’s birth – charity, love, and respect – curiously, through ghost stories. Indeed, the British tradition of reading or telling ghost stories on Christmas Eve could be attributed to Dickens. Four out of five of the subtitles of his *Christmas Books* underline the importance of the supernatural to the plot: *A Christmas Carol, In Prose, Being A Ghost Story of Christmas* (1843); *The Chimes, A Goblin Story of Some Bells that Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year In* (1844); *The Cricket on the Hearth, a Fairy Tale of Home* (1845); *The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas-Time* (1848). The *Carol* is foremost a “Ghost Story of Christmas”, in which three ghosts convey to Scrooge and to the readers the message that an individual can learn from past mistakes and has the opportunity to change the future.

The subtitles go beyond the mere annunciation of the theme – they also tell the reader about the language used in the narration – and in this Christmas book the language is that of ghosts. Such language must create the gothic atmosphere for the reader and, even more, scare the miser Scrooge. Nevertheless, this story is one for the holidays; thus, the narrator must also convey the humour and happy atmosphere that belongs to the season, pointing out the differences between Scrooge’s way of passing time and everyone else’s, characteristics of the tale that somehow must be maintained in translations as well. There are other important features of the

narrator's style in the *Carol*, including imagery, figurative language – irony, in particular – and emphasis and effects brought about by repetition. Together, these devices contribute to the general tones of gaiety and ghostliness that comprise Dickens's prose style in this tale.

Nearly any simile from the text shows how its structure can be misleading to the translator, whose most difficult task is to identify what must not be disregarded in a translation in order to prevent a loss in meaning.

Dickens's Original Text	Translation by Verdinois	Translation by Fehr
<p><i>Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.</i> Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the dearest piece of ironmongery in the trade.</p>	<p><i>Il vecchio Marley era proprio morto per quanto è morto, come diciamo noi, un chiodo di porta.</i> Badiamo! non voglio mica dare ad intendere che io sappia molto bene che cosa ci sia di morto in un chiodo di porta. Per conto mio, sarei stato disposto a pensare che il pezzo più morto di tutta la ferrareccia fosse un chiodo di cataletto.</p>	<p><i>Il vecchio Marley era morto come il chiodo di un uscio.</i> Badate: non voglio dire di sapere, per mia personale esperienza, che ci sia qualcosa di particolarmente morto nel chiodo di un uscio. Sarei, anzi, tentato io stesso di considerare piuttosto un chiodo di bara come il più defunto pezzo di ferro manufatto che esista sul mercato:</p>

The narrator's words focus on a character that will very soon appear in the shape (or shade) of a ghost: Marley's ghost will be the first supernatural vision, who tells Scrooge about the imminent arrival of the three Christmas Ghosts. In the example, the narrator shares his thoughts about the origin of a strange saying. It is, in fact, a simile in its structure, but it becomes playfully alliterative in the very first sentence of the narration. Through this mixture of figures of speech and sounds, Dickens's narrator frequently aims at ironic effects that counterbalance the seriousness of the very statement he is making.²

² Both figurative language and irony, especially when intertwined with puns, pose translation problems. Paul Newmark, in his *Approaches to Translation*, analyses seven ways of translating metaphors, similes and comparisons, according to the kind of relationship they have with the part of text to which they belong, and it is not difficult to apply these rules to the translation of puns, which are strictly connected with figurative speech.

Even though the two versions belong to two different centuries, the translators have to face the same problems: for instance, in the example they attempt to maintain the wordplay (and consequent irony) contained in the English saying without creating a sense of foreignness to the Italian reader. The task is not an easy one, but both translate the English saying literally. Taken alone, this initial phrase could have been otherwise easily translated into Italian with *morto stecchito*, but since the narrator elaborates upon the phrase in the following lines, creating that very important ironical atmosphere of the text, the Italian phrase alone is not sufficient. Both translators manage to find a good compromise between Dickens's English and Italian. In fact, this result is not always possible, and sometimes translators' solutions generate what Humboldt called *Fremdheit*, a sense of not completely understanding a text due to a translation that does not consider the effect on the reader.

The two translators had also to face the problem of Dickens's playful figurative language intertwined with irony.

Dickens's Original Text	Translation by Verdinois	Translation by Fehr
"[...] You're particular, <i>for a shade</i> ". He was going to say " <i>to a shade</i> ", but substituted this, as more appropriate.	Siete un tantino pedante, mi pare, <i>per essere un'ombra</i> .	Sei pignolo <i>per essere un'ombra</i> [...] Stava per dire " <i>all'ombra</i> ", ma cambiò la frase per renderla più appropriata.

Here we notice how Verdinois is able to keep the general ironic tone of the original text without creating the *Fremdheit* seen in Fehr's translation, which is sometimes too exhaustive in its attempt to translate each part of Dickens's wordplay literally. On the other hand, though, Verdinois cuts a considerable part of text, losing some of the meaning of the original, since he does not reproduce in Italian the irony contained in the punning on "shade".

Another issue for the translator of Dickens is the treatment of *realia*, so often relied upon to create ironic effects. By *realia* is meant words that are part of the Victorian British culture and that are not likely to be recognized by a foreign reader.

Dickens's Original Text	Translation by Verdinois	Translation by Fehr
There's more of <i>gravy</i> than of <i>grave</i> about you	c'è in voi più della <i>marmitta</i> che della <i>marmotta</i> !	c'è in te più del <i>sugo di carne</i> che della <i>tomba</i>

Here Dickens plays with *realia* to reach an ironic effect that has to be transmitted to the readers of a translation. For the English punning on “gravy” and “grave”, Verdinois substitutes a new one in Italian, which if, on the one hand, loses the background of the original, on the other hand, preserves the irony that is predominant in this part of the text. He creates nonsense in Italian, playing with the words *marmitta* (saucepan) and *marmotta* (marmot), enabling the reader to get a certain sound effect even though he recognizes words that do not belong to the context of the story. Fehr makes a different choice when she translates this pun verbatim, adding a footnote that explains the meaning of the English words “gravy” and “grave”. This solution allows the reader to enter the English culture, but at the cost of the irony in the original English. Once again, the choices betray the different attitudes of the translators towards Dickens: the earlier translation is more audacious, producing a new phrase through the usage of personal skills and creativity; the second one opts for a safer solution in order to avoid modifying a somewhat sacred text.

Rivalling the translational problems of figurative speech in the Dickensian *Carol* is the language of the supernatural, a distinctive aspect of this particular narrative. Dickens's narrator uses the language of ghosts to create the gothic atmosphere of a ghost story, but he uses the familiar genre to offer his readers a moral lesson. Ghost stories belonged, at first, to the oral tradition and became widespread in print culture after the Gothic novel introduced readers to the uncanny and the supernatural.³ Curiously, in most gothic tales, ghosts do not speak very often or very much, a reason why, when the language of the ghosts is under discussion, the language to be considered must include not only words spoken by ghosts, but also, and with particular attention, *all* the words that contribute to create the supernatural atmosphere of the text.

³ For a study of the supernatural in English fiction, for one example, see Scarborough.

It can be immediately seen that a certain degree of ambiguity permeates the language of the ghosts, causing new challenges for the translator, especially when this kind of language has a key role in terms of its effect on the reader. For example, the frequency of words related to ghosts contributes to this effect. From the list of all the words of the text ranked in order of their frequency (generated through the software *Wordsmith Tools*), it can be seen that words related to ghosts – “ghost”, “spirit”, “phantom” and “spectre” – head the list. A comparison among the lists of words of the English version and the two Italian translations is useful to demonstrate to what degree the target texts correspond lexically to the source text. The following table displays part of the lists obtained from the “Stave IV: The Last of the Spirits”, in which Scrooge meets the ghost of Christmas Future:

Dickens's Original Text	#	%	Translation by Verdinnois	#	%	Translation by Fehr	#	%
Spirit/s	27	0.477	Spirito/i	41	0.831	Spirito/i	38	0.454
Ghost	8	0.147	Fantasma	10	0.202	Fantasma	22	0.263
Spectre	3	0.055	Spettro	1	0.020	Spettro/i	4	0.048
Phantom	10	0.183						

The table shows some mismatches in the total number of occurrences of the words in the two languages, due to the overlapping of Germanic and Latin roots. Both the words *ghost* and *phantom* are translated with the Italian word *fantasma*, since *ghost* (Old English *gast*) comes from Germanic *ghoizdoz* (supernatural being) and only afterwards appeared in Christian writings as a translation of the Latin word *spiritus* (originally meaning “breath”, later “vital principle”), from which the English *spirit* and the Italian *spirito* are derived. The modern meaning of “spirit of a dead person” often overlaps with the semantic field of *phantom*, which comes from the Latin *phantasma* (probably from an unrecorded Ionic form of the Greek *phántasma* meaning “illusion”, “unreality”) and which acquired the sense of *ghost* from around 1400. Furthermore, the word *spectre* is used,

from 1800 on, in the meaning of *ghost*, but it mainly occurs in the sense of appearance, vision, or apparition, being derived from the Latin *spectrum* (Italian *spettro*).

This focus on the use of nouns that identify the supernatural creatures in Stave IV shows that the most commonly used word in the English version is *spirit*. The table clearly shows a correspondence to the two Italian versions, where the word *spirito* is the most frequent. The same pattern follows with *spectre*, the least frequent in the three texts. When all of the words referring to supernatural creatures are counted, however, there are some remarkable differences in the total: 49 in the original English, 52 in the Verdinois translation, and 64 in the Fehr translation. A difference of three occurrences between the Verdinois text and the English original is not so relevant, especially considering the frequency of the words, but the higher number of occurrences in Fehr's translation is: it may be explained by the translator's intention to emphasize the gloomy supernatural atmosphere that characterizes the scariest of Dickens's five Christmas Books.

Sometimes repetitions can involve whole expressions, not just single words, which equally contribute to the coherence of a text. As has been remarked, repetitions are key characteristics in Dickens's writing: through them he focuses his reader's attention on specific parts of the text. Both Italian translators no doubt saw the need to preserve them in their own versions, which in turn show some of the differences in the way the two translators organized their work. In the following example, the two translators respond to the difficulties surrounding the repetition of entire phrases.

Dickens's Original Text	Translation by Verdinois	Translation by Fehr
At this the spirit raised a frightful cry	A questo lo Spettro diè uno strido orrendo	A queste parole lo spirito emise uno spaventoso urlo
Again the spectre raised a cry	Qui lo Spettro mise un altro strido	Di nuovo lo spettro emise un grido
The Ghost, on hearing this, set up another cry	Udendo queste parole lo Spettro mise un altro strido	A queste parole il fantasma lanciò un altro grido

In the original English, the same expression appears in the first two examples, but not in the third, where the verb *raised* is substituted by *set up*. Verdinois's translation maintains the repetition in the second and the third example; Fehr's, however, leaves the same structure of Dickens's original. Thus, it is important to highlight that both translations keep the repetition. Even if they show some minor differences, the translations permit the reader to recognize the same expression cropping up again. In this case, therefore, both versions preserve one of Dickens's rhetorical techniques, whose purpose was to create connections between two parts of the text.

These talkative ghosts are not the only device through which the narrator conveys his Christmas message of love and charity. Another, and one of the most important, is heteroglossia, a term Bakhtin defines in *The Dialogic Imagination*, when he analyses the different levels of discourse in *Little Dorrit*. A similar kind of analysis can be applied to *A Christmas Carol*, considering the fact that, through heteroglossia, the narrator can make his characters the spokespersons of his thoughts. The reverse is also possible: through the words of the narrator, the characters' thoughts can be perceived as well. On some occasions heteroglossia may be relatively easy to translate, but on many others, it is opaque or not always identifiable as distinctive to a specific part of the text.

Dickens's Original Text	Translation by Verdinois	Translation by Fehr
Up Scrooge went, <i>not caring a button for that</i> . <i>Darkness is cheap</i> , and Scrooge liked it.	Scrooge andava su, <i>senza curarsene un fico secco</i> : <i>l'oscurità costa poco</i> , e a Scrooge gli piaceva.	Ma Scrooge, <i>senza curarsi minimamente di ciò</i> , continuava a salire. <i>Il buio costa poco</i> , e per questo gli piaceva.
The <i>inexorable</i> finger underwent no change.	Il dito <i>inesorabile</i> stette saldo.	<i>L'inesorabile</i> dito non mutò direzione.

In the first example, the language of the narrator mimics the words (or verbalized thoughts) of Scrooge; similar to the story's beginning, when Scrooge appears sceptical and positively denies that anything could ever scare him, least of all the darkness in his own house. Dickens's original makes clear that those words could very likely be uttered by an old, harsh man, who prefers darkness only because

it is a way to save money. Here the two Italian texts show some differences: Verdinois translates *not caring a button* with *senza curarsene un fico secco* that belongs, as the English expression, to everyday language. Fehr, with her *senza curarsi minimamente di ciò*, is more formal. This difference in the translations is due to the double function of the author's words in the original text: they contribute to the irony of the narration, as shown by the first translation, but they also describe the scene through the words of a detached narrator, as Fehr does.

The second example shows how subtly heteroglossia functions in the text: it is only through an adjective that Scrooge's feelings can be perceived and understood. The adjective *inexorable* seems to be nothing more than part of the narrator's words, but there is more than just this, because it would have very likely been used by Scrooge if the author had wanted him to express his feelings in his own words – i.e., through direct speech. Scrooge, in fact, considers the behaviour of the ghost of Christmas Future as relentless. In this case, Fehr's version is the closest to the original English because she gives the adjective more strength by moving it before the noun. In the Verdinois translation, however, the adjective is located after the noun, and the structure of the sentence becomes more suitable to the narrator's words than to the words of a character. While this decision could be thought to sacrifice part of the original version, Bakhtin points out how difficult it can be to find the hidden speech of the characters in a text. According to the Russian critic, in fact, heteroglossia inevitably forces readers and translators to take intrinsic, often sought for, ambiguity into consideration.

The two Italian translations of the *Carol* show the importance of the message in Dickens's original and of its preservation. Preserving the message, though, sometimes clashes with the necessity of maintaining the all-inclusive, richly varied language used by the author. Each choice by a translator leads to consequences: it is very difficult to avoid losses, and the translators must choose what to sacrifice. However, this challenge is part of the translators' task, since they are mediators of the message an author transmits and, in fact, become the author's voice in another language. If a translation is often considered a manipulation of the text, it is also true that the translators' work is one of continual cooperation with an author.

New translations, as a matter of fact, help authors, like Dickens, to convey their messages in any epoch, granting them an always vaster and newer audience in many languages, not only in their own.

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Dickens and Italian Cinema

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My title and the subject of this paper are of course provocative. Highlighting only a few facts might suggest that attempting to link Dickens and Italian cinema is a desperate enterprise. It is surprising, for example, to discover that Dickens has not been widely adapted in the Italian media. As far as cinema is concerned there have been only three Italian silent film versions of Dickens's novels and stories, and no sound adaptations at all. He has not fared much better in television with only four programmes, between 1958 and 1968, two of them with eight episodes of 60 minutes duration, all produced by RAI, the Italian state television. If we turn to translations of Dickens's work, we might think the situation is much the same, that is if we consult standard reference works. The *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens* states that few "Italian translations of Dickens's works were available during the lifetime of the novelist" (Schlicke 568). However, this picture has been altered by the research of Luisa Carrer which "pushes back the first recorded translations by half a century" (3). She demonstrates, for example, that a translation of *Oliver Twist* was published in 1840 and also brings out the important role played in Dickens translations by the Triestine periodical *La favilla* which appeared for ten years from 1836. The magazine published two translations of Dickens's works in 1845, the most important of which was *The Chimes*, which was written during his stay in Genoa. These are major discoveries although they leave unchanged the judgement of Ellis Gummer on Dickens's reception in Germany, that "the immediate and lasting success of Dickens's work in Germany is without parallel" (9). In other words, although Italy may have occupied a powerful place in Dickens's imagination, it can hardly

be said that he figured deeply in the inner life of a place that he greatly loved. Dickens's role in the imaginative life of the United Kingdom and, almost equally, that of the United States is too obvious to need elaborating, and while he did not achieve this level of what might almost be called saturation in France, Germany and Russia, still he is a significant force in their national cultures as, for example, Dostoevsky demonstrates, none of whose novels is without the presence of Dickens in some shape or form. However, even if the evidence does seem to be loaded against me, I want to persist in my claim that there may be illuminating links to be traced between Dickens and Italian cinema although these connections have nothing to do with influence. Rather than influences what I am interested in here are *correspondences*, correspondences between, say, word and image, and the *interpenetration* of works from different historical periods and in different media (on this topic see also Smith).

The theory and practice of correspondences involves ideas, some of them of great antiquity, which still have currency in the field of art history, but which seem to have been largely ignored in current literary theory and criticism, or in film studies. Leonardo, for example, took an active role in Renaissance debates about the primacy of art forms in which he, not surprisingly, wished to argue for the superiority of painting over music and poetry. But at the same time his willingness to accept that painting could be seen as mute poetry and poetry as blind painting reveals an attitude of mind that is uninterested in rigid categorization of the arts. What I am trying to draw on then is the readiness of certain historical periods to think of the arts in holistic terms.

An attitude of mind similar to Leonardo's is revealed by Baudelaire, who was committed to the view that "the best account of a picture may well be a sonnet or an elegy" (ix), a mixing of forms entirely in the spirit of my own attempt to link film and literature. To come at the issue from another direction, I can only hint at the recondite nature of the system of correspondences worked out by Ernst Robert Curtius in his magisterial *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, a major aspect of which is "the establishing of parallels between biblical history and Greek mythology" which "led to the establishment of parallels between the teachings of the Bible

and pagan myths” (219). One of Curtius’s key analogies may help to clarify the nature of my approach further, his claim that

contemporary archaeology has made surprising discoveries by means of aerial photography at great altitudes. Through this technique it has succeeded, for example, in recognising for the first time the late Roman system of defence works in North Africa. A person standing on the ground before a heap of ruins cannot see the whole that the aerial photograph reveals. [...] historical disciplines will progress wherever specialisation and contemplation of the whole are combined and *interpenetrate* [my emphasis]. (ix)

Seen from the ground, as it were, Dickens and Italian cinema could not be more different, but even a slight degree of elevation may reveal connections that are worth pursuing.

Bringing Dickens and Italian cinema together is not, then, a question of influences. It is, rather, an attempt to show that within a relatively small segment of artistic culture it is possible to trace parallels and similarities that may enhance our understanding of, and pleasure in, works of art and artists who are superficially quite disconnected. I want at this point to attempt to get closer to the heart of my subject by means of a brilliant essay with another provocative title, “You Must be Joking” by Guido Bonsaver. Bonsaver analyses Rossellini’s *Francesco giullare di Dio* [Francis, God’s Jester] of 1950 in an attempt to define the director’s philosophy and also what he calls “a national trait and a cultural climate”. Bonsaver sees the film as characterized by a “blend of innocence and irrationality” and as a celebration of the “joyful madness” of the Franciscans. Fellini’s participation in the film is important for him because this “blend of innocence and irrationality [...] can be found in a string of Fellinian characters”, including the girl on the beach at the end of *La dolce vita* [The Sweet Life] with whom Marcello is unable to communicate. Bonsaver widens his argument to include aspects of the work of de Sica in, say, *Miracolo a Milano* [Miracle in Milan] of 1951, and he suggests that this tradition, if that is what it is, is continued in the work of Roberto Benigni, who acted in one of Fellini’s later films and who brings what Bonsaver calls “this type of dysfunctional character into the twenty-first century in films such as *La vita è bella* [Life is

Beautiful]”. Bonsaver offers two explanations for the phenomenon he is analysing. At the social level, he sees this manifestation as a reaction to the horrors of war, fear of nuclear terror and, even, as “an act of rebellion against the stylistic straitjacket imposed by neorealism”. At the level of what might be called myth he sees a connection with the old Italian saying, “italiani brava gente” (Italians good people), and his final word is that “Perhaps it is not so trivial to suggest that a child-like vision of reality – innocent, open-smiled and irrational – recurrently finds its way into Italian cinema” as a “projection of how” Italians “would like to be seen”.

What, the impatient reader might be inclined to ask, has all this to do with Dickens? Quite a lot, I think, as we may begin to see if we remember *his* view of the Italian people as a whole, especially the poor, which seems remarkably similar to “italiani brava gente”, as in his praise in *Pictures from Italy* of “the smiling face of the attendant, man or woman; the courteous manner; the amiable desire to please and be pleased” (Ormond 353), qualities which are rendered specific in Dickens’s major Italian character, the Giambattista (John Baptist) Cavalletto of *Little Dorrit*, with his patience of character and rapidity of motion, his vividness of gesture, his gentle kindness, all of which combine to make him an emblem of the ordinary people of his native country. If we move away from the specifically Italian John Baptist to think of Dickens’s characters in general in relation to Bonsaver’s “innocence and irrationality”, the range and variety of those who share these traits becomes almost unmanageable. As the *Oxford Companion to Dickens* points out, he weaves into the “very texture” of his novels “an array of characters who lack sanity, common sense, or rationality” (362). *David Copperfield*’s Mr Dick, for example, seems quite simply mad in his kite-flying and obsession with King Charles’s head, but he is also a moral centre with a perception of good and evil often denied to the sane. Dickens is in touch with a very old tradition here, that of the Holy Fool, a figure who has one of his most powerful expressions in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. This is, of course, a European tradition and, if we adopt Curtius’s position of looking down on the European scene from above, we may be able to accept that similarities between Dickens and, say, Fellini are not merely accidental even if they are not a matter of direct influence.

There is, however, another pervasive correspondence between aspects of Italian cinema and Dickens, a clue to which is provided by Michael Brooke in pointing out that Rossellini's *La macchina ammazzacattivi* [The Machine that Kills Bad People], made in 1948 but not released until 1952, was a deliberate attempt to align his work more with the *commedia dell'arte* than had previously been the case, an argument which immediately brings to mind the role of the circus in Fellini's life and work (30). We can think here of the end of *Otto e mezzo* [Eight and a Half], for example, what Fellini himself called "an enchanted ballet filled with fantasy, a magic kaleidoscope", the appropriate climax to a film that "needed exactness, but the exactness of dreams" (234, 241). And there is also a link here to that apparently unlikely connection that Fellini sees between himself and Bergman who, in Fellini's words, "smells the strain of blood that also has the taste of the sawdust of the circus" (244). With the circus, and the *commedia dell'arte* in its transformation into English pantomime, we are unmistakably in the Dickens world, and by this stage I would argue that my theory of correspondences between Dickens and Italian cinema is starting to work quite fruitfully. Michael Hollington has suggested, for example, that one of the key influences in creating Dickens's delight in Italy was "the great pantomime clown Grimaldi, the source of a special enthusiasm for Italian popular culture and traditions of carnivalesque art" (127). Joseph Grimaldi was one of the greatest popular entertainers of his day, the man credited with inventing the figure of the clown in the English tradition, and it is significant at this point that one of the many tasks that Dickens took on as a rising young writer was the editing of Grimaldi's memoirs in which he was able to express the joy of his childhood memories of seeing Grimaldi perform.

La Strada [The Street] is a particularly potent film to bring into play at this point. With Gelsomina and the Fool we encounter again Bonsaver's blend of innocence and irrationality, this time with the force of a moral centre, while the brutality of the wandering artiste Zampanò makes him a fitting inhabitant of some of the bleakest settings in Italian cinema, or any other if it comes to that. Another correspondence that comes immediately to mind is *The Old Curiosity Shop* with its galaxy of examples of human goodness, from the

slightly shop-soiled Dick Swiveller through the human decency of Kit Nubbles to the almost saintly purity of Little Nell. And while the demonically evil Quilp is not a professional entertainer like Zampanò, the physical contortions of which Quilp is capable are not a world away from the sometimes frightening antics of the circus and the travelling player. Once Nell and her senile Grandfather take flight, they enter the world of the Punch and Judy exhibitors, Codlin and Short, sinister enough in their way, and the equally disorientating realm of Mrs Jarley's travelling waxworks show. And their own journey is across landscapes as bleak and frightening as anything we see in *La Strada*.

There is, of course, urban imagery in *La Strada*, but the majority of its settings are of rural and small town squalor, a thematic contrast with the beauty of the sea which appears in relation to Gelsomina's purity at the beginning of the film and Zampanò's possible redemption at the end. But the world of de Sica, in works such as *Umberto D* and *Ladri di biciclette* [Bicycle Thieves] is that of the city, and this immediately sets up a major series of correspondences with the Dickens world. The protagonist's final journey, by tram, through the streets of Rome shows him looking up at buildings which tower above him and seem to reduce his dilemma to that of only a single stone in an edifice of human suffering. Dickens is, of course, the prose poet of the deprivations extorted by the metropolis, a setting and a theme to which he returns continuously throughout his career. The lonely life of Umberto D is mitigated by two emotional relationships, with his beloved dog and the pathetic little servant, what Dickens would have called a skivvy, who has two potential fathers for her unborn child. There is, again, a rich field for parallels and interpenetration here. The skivvy, or household drudge, appears in Dickens's work over and over again, from the Marchioness in the early *The Old Curiosity Shop* to the Guster of the mature *Bleak House*. And these figures share with de Sica's example a human decency that is often missing from those higher up the social scale. Umberto D himself is a representative figure from an earlier world, now superseded by the dominance of the computer, for when he cries out that he was employed by a government ministry for thirty years, we can be sure, I think, that he was a clerk, and the clerk is an important

presence in all of Dickens's writing, journalism as well as fiction, from the very beginning of his career. Most of Dickens's examples are in employment, rather than retired, although they are as much cogs in an impersonal machine as is Umberto D. But they also, like him, seek desperately to find or maintain some level of emotional contact with the external world.

One of the strangest of these figures is the Newman Noggs of *Nicholas Nickleby*, a character who seems almost catatonic in his withdrawal from the world, although he comes to acquire a semblance of normality through his fondness for Nicholas and his desire to help him and his family. Pancks of *Little Dorrit* is equally bizarre, puffing about like a little tug-boat on the Thames and disconcerting all those who are unable to contemplate him with some degree of love which Little Dorrit herself does, of course. The masterpiece in the field of the clerk as the alienated product of the city is obviously the Wemmick of *Great Expectation* for whom his father, the Aged P, plays the role of Umberto's dog and his friend the skivvy. Umberto also has "his" room, that pathetically tiny space which is his only if he can continue to pay rent to his nightmarish landlady. Wemmick's space, his Castle, is much more elaborate, but vulnerable in other ways, to the nightly setting off of the Stinger, for example, the little cannon which Wemmick has installed and which threatens to shake the crazy little box to pieces every time it is fired.

These attempts to remain human in the face of a hostile world might permit a conclusion to my exploration of the correspondences between apparently dissimilar cultural worlds. Neorealist cinema was often characterized, especially on its early appearances, as taking a rigorously dark and austere view of human possibilities, but the passage of time seems to me to have modified this picture. The brutal Zampanò's breakdown in tears on the beach at the end of *La Strada*, a collapse engendered by the memory of Gelsomina; Umberto D's pursuit of his tiny dog just before the film's final image of the screen filled with the running of playful children; the ultimate reconciliation of father and son at the climax of *Ladri di biciclette* – all of these display a quality of sentiment, sentimentality even, highly characteristic of Dickens's view of the world. Scenes of heightened feeling, within a moral context, designed to elicit an

emotional response from the reader regularly punctuate his work, and we can see exactly these qualities at work in the films I have been analysing. As I have been at pains to stress these similarities are not a matter of influence. But they do suggest that if we take an aerial view of apparently dissimilar cultural artefacts, correspondences may come into focus, an enriching process for both Dickens and Italian cinema.

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