



Scatasta Gino and Federica Zullo (editors),
*The Invention(s) of Charles Dickens:
Riletture, Revisioni e Riscritture*

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by Sara Gazo

A lot has been said and unsaid about Dickens and his work, but one argument has stood all trials, and that is that the secret of his unfading success lies largely in his capability of reinventing himself, his stories, and his world. Not only this: the continuous shaping and re-shaping of Dickens's work and life into today's world is also proof—should it be needed—that this process of constant rebirth has never ended. The purpose of *The Invention(s) of Charles Dickens. Riletture, revisioni e riscritture* ("Re-readings, revisions, re-writings"),¹ edited by Gino Scatasta and Federica Zullo, is to celebrate this protean, constantly self-renewing side of the Inimitable's life and work by paying tribute to the many facets of this continuous evolution. The collection gathers thirteen of the many essays presented in occasion of the celebrations held in Bologna in 2012-3 for Dickens's bicentenary, which culminated with the eponymous symposium in January 2013. The volume is divided into five sections which focus on different meanings of the phrase "The inventions of Charles Dickens." Each chapter works like a slide in a magic lantern and presents a snapshot on Dickens's life, work, and legacy, showing that indeed he is

¹ Author's translations.



'in and out of Dickens', 'in and out of his time', but also in and out of reality, a real life and a 'dreamt' figure, author and character, informed by his time and still informing ours. The collected essays focus on distinctively disparate aspects of Dickens, and yet they are all connected by their being part of a main story, that of Dickensian studies, which adds a new layer to the reinvention of Dickens: not only his own and the reader's any longer, but also the critic's. The volume is completed by an Afterword, a list of Dickensian events held in Bologna in 2012-2013, and a section devoted to the Authors' profiles.

Gino Scatasta's Introduction is in fact an essay in its own right, opening the collection with a series of crucial questions. Is Dickens our contemporary? What does 'Dickensian' really mean to us? Which one is, if there really is one, the real Dickens? While reasoning in search for an answer, Scatasta skilfully touches upon all the topics treated in the collected essays, thus conveying on paper the atmosphere of collective research, enthusiasm, and celebration that was at the core of the Bologna events, as well as highlighting the subtle *fil rouge* running through all the contributions.

The first section, entitled "Dickens in Dickens," explores three variations on the theme of Dickens's reinventing himself and his past in his writing.

Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's "Dickens and The Line of Beauty" opens the collection by tracing the sinuous line dividing light and shadow, beauty and ugliness, liveliness and deathlike stillness, that winds through Dickens's writing. Douglas-Fairhurst adopts in this chapter a twofold approach by presenting a linguistic analysis of the meaning and use of the word "beauty" and its cognates, and exploring the representation of the concept of beauty in Dickens's work. This chapter shows how the latter developed during the years, but also how Hogarth's aesthetic theories—at times mediated by the work of other authors—informed Dickens's work, thus turning the famous 'streaky bacon' into a more elegant serpentine thread of beauty. Douglas-Fairhurst's Dickens is suspicious "of the language of beauty" (28), and yet capable to find it in the most ordinary and unexpected places. However, his difficult relationship with beauty translated into an inability to successfully portray it in words—as Douglas-Fairhurst notes, "the fact that 'beauty' can refer both to objective attributes and subjective evaluations represents more than a philosophical or semantic problem" (31). Beauty is for Dickens an imaginative act that transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary, rather than a mere set of pleasant attributes. The word "beauty," Douglas-Fairhurst concludes, acts "as a bridge between realism and romance" (31) and is therefore closely connected with the fairy-tale ingredient of Dickens's stories. Douglas-Fairhurst also offers a fascinating insight into Dickens's apparent need to preserve beauty. By presenting a range of instances from Dickens's life and fiction, Douglas-Fairhurst charmingly conveys the idea of a Dickensian crusade in defence of beauty against the decay and corruption of time. Dickens's persistent fascination with the figure of Sleeping Beauty, for instance, is inscribed within a general Victorian hunger for the halting of time and the preservation of beauty, for example through memory and writing. Finally, Dickens's relationship with beauty does not concern only abstract ideas, but is also incarnated in specific narrative patterns. Seemingly heterogeneous inserts such as the interpolated tales from *Pickwick*, Douglas-Fairhurst concludes, are not meant as detachable pieces. They are in fact crucial in conferring shades to the sunny portrait of the main narrative, curves on the line of beauty that informs the whole novel.



In "The Reader: Dickens, il romanzo, il teatro" ("The Reader: Dickens, the theatre, and the novel"), Marisa Sestito explores Dickens's reinvention of both his authorial role and material in adapting his fiction for the Public Readings. In Dickens's rewriting of some of his most famous works, Sestito argues, two aspects are especially striking: a "parziale passaggio di genere" ("partial genre transition"; 49) from novel to theatrical performance on the one hand, and the alteration or subversion of original balances on the other. As regards the latter, Sestito finds especially meaningful the elision of children from Dickens's reading material. Sestito locates in the evolution of Dickens's fictional child the history of the author's coming to terms with his own life experiences. After *Great Expectations*, Sestito notes, children tend to lose relevance in Dickens's fiction, their roles become progressively more marginal, until they finally disappear altogether—with due exceptions—from his public readings. Sestito focusses on four examples from Dickens's twelve Readings to illustrate her argument, that is *The Story of Little Dombey*, *A Christmas Carol*, *David Copperfield*, and *Sikes and Nancy*. In these, Sestito notes a progressive shift of focus onto secondary, adult characters, but also towards more dramatic, violent scenes. Sestito concludes her chapter with a daunting question: if Dickens had been working on his own childhood sufferings in describing the travails of his fictional children, what kind of life experiences was he working on when he shed them to put violent, saturnine characters such as Sikes or Jasper at the centre of his fiction? The answer, much as the solution to the mystery of *Edwin Drood*, is left to the reader. This chapter makes for a compelling, well-presented reading which offers much food for thought. Sestito manages to include many examples in her analysis, which greatly helps follow her main argument, and provides several interesting starting points for further research.

In "La nascita di un personaggio" ("Birth of a character"), Stefano Bronzini presents Dickens's creative process as the continuous reinvention of content to match his audience's response and expectations. This, Bronzini specifies, is especially true of character creation, and nowhere is it more apparent than in *David Copperfield*. In this novel, Bronzini argues, the reader walks "sentieri simili e mai uguali" ("similar but never identical paths"; 64) along a journey of continual rebirth which both informs the story and defines the relevance of characters in the plot. According to Bronzini, rebirth is often signified in the narrative by returns. Thus, the distinction between arrivals and returns becomes key, in that the latter implies previous experience, which in turn allows a character to learn from their past. Returns are so crucial in the story's structure that Dickens adopts specific techniques in writing them, including disseminating the narration with reminders of characters that have temporarily exited the main narrative—as, for instance, is the case for Mr Micawber's letters—with the double purpose of anticipating their return and signalling their importance in the story. However, Bronzini warns us, there are rules governing the birth and rebirth of characters, and breaking them may entail condemnation to be a marginal accident in the story. This is the unfortunate fate of Steerforth and Emily, guilty of claiming for themselves the role of protagonists, but also of Mrs Steerforth and her maid Rosa, who refuse to let go of the past and end up entangled in it. The only exception to these rules seems to be Peggotty, who, in narrating the death of Clara Copperfield, steals for a while David's narratorial role, managing nonetheless to reach unpunished the end of the



novel. Bronzini gives many interesting examples in support of his claims, and manages to concentrate several fascinating insights in this chapter, especially on the significance of various characters in *Copperfield*. He also touches upon many interesting Dickensian staples, such as the resurfacing of the past and of recollections in the present, the importance of writing in preserving memory, and the power of imagination as a creative effort.

The second section, "Dickens Out of Dickens," explores Dickens's interaction with some of the main realities of his age.

In "Dickens e l'Impero. Relazioni pericolose fra l'Inghilterra e il mondo" ("Dickens and the Empire. Dangerous liaisons between England and the world"), Federica Zullo takes on the challenge of exploring Dickens's multifaceted relationship with the British Empire and its colonies. Not only is she successful in this, but she also manages to throw in, for good measure, an overview of the interrelations between Victorian England and the rest of the world. This chapter is subdivided into three sections, which makes it easier to follow the many interesting points. In the first, Zullo explores the role of the colonies in the life and imagery of Dickens and the Victorians. Throughout his entire writing career, Zullo warns us, "i territori colonizzati rimangono comunque luoghi dell'immaginazione" ("the colonies remain places of the imagination"; 90)—like many of his contemporary writers, Dickens never visited them in person. Nonetheless, the colonies informed Dickens's writing but also the Victorian fiction at large, as authors writing in the first half of the Nineteenth century usually "confermavano, contribuivano a sostenere, o comunque a rendere visibile" ("tended to confirm, contribute to support, or make visible"; 90) a specific view of the Empire. Dickens, Zullo argues, followed in the widespread habit of using colonies as off-stage territories in fiction—an aside where to put his characters when they were not actively participating in the main story. Dickens's relationship with colonial territories is then inscribed in that of the Victorians, especially as regards the ideological association of 'savages' with the English poor—both figures incarnating a pervasive and deeply rooted idea of alterity. On the one hand, the colonised territories are a source of richness and possibly of rejuvenating power for the mother land, on the other their lack of civilisation is a constant threat looming over it. The same, Zullo implies, may be said of the urban poor. In the second part of this chapter, Zullo highlights the common traits shared by "il povero urbanizzato e il soggetto coloniale" ("the urbanised poor and the colonial subject"; 94), with special regard for the association between children and savages. This section follows the evolution of Dickens's treatment of the English poor in his fiction, noting a shift from his earlier depiction of the poor as separated from the other classes to a later portrayal of poverty as a pervasive force seeping through the layers of society. In her third section, Zullo expands on the idea that "il tema della migrazione verso le colonie aveva [...] per Dickens sia una valenza politico-sociale, sia potenzialità sul piano artistico" ("the theme of the migration to the colonies had for Dickens at the same time socio-political implications and artistic potential"; 100). Dickens grew increasingly critical of the Government's policies regarding England's relations with its overseas territories, and especially with those who, forcibly or willingly, migrated. Returns from the colonies are especially represented in his fiction as a breach of social protocol, and an impossibility. This is the case of Magwitch, who will never be able to reintegrate in the society of his homeland. Overall, this chapter offers a comprehensive and broad-ranging overview of



Dickens's relationship with imperialism and colonialism, well introduced and clearly presented.

Maurizio Ascari's "A Popular History of the Metropolitan Police: la polizia londinese raccontata in *Household Words*" ("A Popular History of the Metropolitan Police: the London Police as narrated in *Household Words*") follows a series of articles on the Metropolitan Police, penned by Dickens and his sub-editor Wills and published during the 1850s and 1860s in their weeklies *Household Words* and *All The Year Round*. For Ascari, these essays are valuable evidence of the reception of the police force and of the Victorian urban imagery, of the affirmation of the detection paradigm, and also of the "funzione 'politica'—di denuncia—che la parola assume in questo periodo" ("political" function—of denunciation—that the word [Police] takes on in this period"; 133). In a short yet exhaustive introduction, Ascari traces the origins and evolution of the Metropolitan Police, managing to recreate in a few lines the time frame and social context in which Dickens's articles are set. The birth and operational life of the Metropolitan Police, Ascari claims, were enshrouded in a climate of suspicion especially due to its unclear role in society and its apparently close relationship with the criminal world. This is reflected in Victorian fiction, where the police are often depicted as a pervasive and threatening presence—so much so, Ascari argues, that the Victorian author wishing to write about them from a positive or even neutral point of view should first of all "vincere la diffidenza dei lettori" ("win the mistrust of their readers"; 123). Dickens and Wills did precisely this by adopting in the 1850s articles an anecdotal style aimed at familiarising their readership with the methods of the new police force, including the then-new science of detection. However, Ascari notes, Dickens's later articles not only gradually shift to a more literary treatment of the theme, but also tend to betray Dickens's progressive—albeit never complete—loss of faith in the infallibility of the Police force, revealing the existence of criminal pockets where justice cannot reach. This chapter is one of the clearest in the collection. Ascari's aims and claims are clearly expressed and the structure is solid and neatly laid out, which makes for an easy as well as memorable read. Ascari's examples are spot on and give a vivid idea both of the climate surrounding the work of the Metropolitan Police during the second half of the Nineteenth century and of Dickens's changing attitude towards the force and their function in guaranteeing public safety.

In "Three Types of Poverty in *The Pickwick Papers*," Luke Seaber classifies and explores the various declensions of poverty as portrayed in Dickens's first novel. Seaber's aim is to demonstrate that the general perception of the stereotypical 'Dickensian poor', which he sees as especially widespread in Italian Dickensian criticism, is in fact false, and that "in this novel *not* about poverty, *not* about misery, there lie some of Dickens's most interesting representations of the poor" (136). Seaber defines the three main categories of poverty traceable in *Pickwick* as "moralised," "characterised," and "mimetic" poverty. Poverty is *moralised* when "the economic situation is used as part of a system of rewards and punishments" (151), as in the case of the dying clown in "The Stroller's Tale," one of *The Pickwick Papers*' interpolated stories. The portrayal of moralised poverty is used, Seaber claims, to show misery as the result of immoral behaviours calling for punishment. *Characterized* poverty, on the other hand, occurs when "the focus is on a character's response to the economic situation" (151), as in the case of Mr Jingle and Sam Weller, who embody two opposite responses to poverty, one



disastrous (Jingle's) and the other ultimately profitable (Sam's). This kind of poverty "is not the result of moral failings" (144) but of external circumstances, and what determines Sam's and Jingle's respective fate is how they respond to their misery, that is the former with honest wit and the latter with dishonest shrewdness. Finally, poverty is *mimetic* when "the economic situation has no role to play within the text, but is simply described" (151), as in the case of the medical student Bob Sawyer. The description of his living conditions are, according to Seaber, a "portrayal of poverty rather than a representation" (150). In *Pickwick*, Seaber concludes, Dickens seems to 'make use' of the poor for narrative purposes, rather than use his narrative to denounce the conditions of the poor, as he would later do. Seaber's claims are clearly stated, thoroughly supported, and—although such a neat classification may be a little oversimplified—on the whole convincing. Interesting starting points for further research can be found in this chapter and include the role of language in Sam's and Jingle's response to their situation, and the relevance of clothes as indicators of social and economic status, a theme that would recur throughout Dickens's work. A mention of the *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi* might have added value to Seaber's analysis of the clown's death in "The Stroller's Tale," as Dickens wrote the two almost simultaneously.

The third section, "Dickens in His Time," explores Dickens's relationship with some aspects of Victorian literature and society.

In "Dickens e il romanzo europeo: *Great Expectations*" ("Dickens and the European novel: *Great Expectations*"), Federico Bertoni explores the relationship between Dickens and the European novel by reading *Great Expectations* as "un caso esemplare, una sorta di paradigma su cui misurare tendenze di più ampio respiro che riguardano la teoria e la storia del romanzo europeo" ("a sample case, a sort of paradigm on which to measure the broader trends related to the theory and history of the European novel"; 156). In a short introduction to the chapter, Bertoni convincingly inscribes Pip's story in the context of the European novel as typically built on contrasts, subversion, ambiguity, and self-deception. Bertoni's main argument is divided into three sub-sections, just like a Victorian three-volume novel. In the first of these, Bertoni examines the close relationship between names and identity in *Great Expectations* and in the European novel. If in the Victorian realistic novel "il nome proprio diventa [...] una sorta di calamita semantica, un connotatore di identità e il più efficace dispositivo dell'illusione realista" ("names become [...] a kind of semantic magnet, an indicator of identity and the most efficient device of realistic illusion"; 159), Pip's fragmented identity is signified by the many names he is given throughout the novel, each refracting his true self and reflecting his relationship with the other characters—nobody ever calls him 'Philip Pirrip'. Pip's various identities include the narrative 'I', which in turn is further divided into child-hero-Pip and older-narrator-Pip. Not only this: matters complicate even further when we consider that Pip himself carries out an act of self-creation in declaring "I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip" (162). In the second sub-section, Bertoni places *Great Expectations* on the verge between bildungsroman and fairy-tale, and explores the implications of such a precarious balance. Whilst the novel is undoubtedly built upon the classic bildungsroman frame, elements of archetypal fairy-tales seep through the lines of realism and heavily inform Pip's story. Bertoni locates the focal shift between realism and fairy-tale in Pip's crossing the gates of Satis House for the first time. This rite of passage is indeed the point of connection between the two genres, but Pip's



crossing also signifies his entrance into the realm of subjectivity, in which realism is doomed to succumb to wishful delusions and self-deception. Pip's, Bertoni warns us, is a Nineteenth-century fairy tale, one that he himself creates by obstinately twisting ordinary events to match his yearning for the extraordinary, and that is therefore doomed to end in disappointment. Only through real-life experience can Pip begin to come to terms with reality. Finally, Bertoni shows how the clash between young, hero-Pip and older, narrator-Pip becomes apparent both on a content and linguistic level. The objective of this chapter is indeed ambitious, however Bertoni manages to touch upon all the prefixed points and even to expand on a few focal insights, with plenty of examples to support his claims, which makes for a thoroughly enjoyable reading.

Gabriella Elina Imposti's "Charles Dickens in Russia" traces the constantly pervasive influence of Dickens's novels in Russian literature, starting from the first, heavily familiarised and extremely popular translations by Ivanovic Vvedenskij. After offering a panoramic view of the Russian authors who show the most apparent Dickensian influences, Imposti expands on a few most notables, tracing not only similarities and differences between their work and Dickens's, but also reporting their personal relationship with the author and his novels. Gogol, Dostoevskij, Turgenjev, and Tolstoj inevitably play major roles in this chapter; however, Imposti manages to open a very welcome window on contemporary 'Dickensian' authors, such as, for instance, Boris Akunin, who defined his 2001 mystery *She Lover of Death* as a "dickensijankij detektiv" ("Dickensian detective novel"; 196). Akunin's novel is clearly based on *Oliver Twist* and especially on the story of Sikes and Nancy, although the author has transposed it into a Russian context. Overall, Imposti gives a comprehensive, impressively in-depth (considering the reduced space of a chapter) overview of the impact of Dickens on Russian authors, which started at the very beginning of his career and to this day. The story of how Dickens came to be known and loved in Russia is compellingly traced and engagingly presented, and the many anecdotes make the reading lighter while conveying a relatable idea of the respect and even reverence of Russian authors for Dickens and his work.

In "The Man Who Outsold Dickens," Stephen Knight challenges the popular view of Dickens as 'the voice of the people' by giving that definition to rebellious, shocking G. W. M. Reynolds, chartist and serial novelist, who used "populism [as his] chosen weapon in his mission to educate the masses [and] resist the forces of oppressive authority" (197). Reynolds, Knight claims, was the working classes'—the street people's—favourite author, whereas Dickens's work appealed mainly to the middle-classes, who appreciated his "sentimental bourgeois morality" (197). Knight's contribution offers a commendably in-depth peek into Reynolds's work, especially into *The Mystery of London* (1844-6) and its worse-behaved younger sibling *The Mysteries of the Court of London* (1848-56), with abundance of information on plots and characters—all the more informative for those who are not familiar with this author. Overall, this chapter makes for a truly compelling reading and offers much food for thought, especially as regards Knight's comparison between Eugene Sue and Reynolds, and his defence of Reynolds's crucial importance in the Victorian literary panorama. Through Knight's words, Reynolds comes across as a fascinating, alternative version—more radical, more melodramatic, more genuine, more devil-may-care—of Dickens. However,



there is less Dickens in this chapter than we might expect in a volume celebrating the author, and it is lamentably left to the reader to pinpoint the remarkably numerous correspondences in the lives, work, ideas, and popularity of the two authors. A more decided stress on how these writers lived parallel lives on different tracks, as well as an investigation on the possible dynamics that made so that Dickens is still beloved and celebrated whereas Reynolds went forgotten and neglected for many years² would have made it a better fit for this collection. Knight's final claim seems to be that Dickens reinvented himself on Reynolds's model after reading *The Mysteries of London* sometime between 1843-4, which prompted him to forget all about his "chatty-series stories" (203) and "immediately master the multi-strand plot, set mostly in London, with inter-relating different social levels and human evaluations" (203). Intriguing as such a claim may be, a more articulated analysis in support of this argument would have been welcomed.

The fourth section, "Dickens Out of His Time," explores the reinvention of Dickens by later authors.

Maria Renata Dolce's "Peter Carey reinventa le *Grandi Speranze* dickensiane: dal capolavoro vittoriano a *Jack Maggs*" ("Peter Carey reinvents Dickens's *Great Expectations*: from the Victorian masterpiece to *Jack Maggs*") explores the interconnections between Dickens's original story and Peter Carey's rewriting. Starting from a reflection on postcolonial³ writers and their interest in Dickens, Dolce shows how Carey's 1997 novel positions at the same time in opposition and continuity with *Great Expectations*, thus representing a tribute to Dickens's original work—albeit "polemico e provocatorio" ("in a polemic and provoking way"; 212). Carey, Dolce notes, does not simply offer a reversed take on Dickens's story, but rather broadens the original perspective to "abbracciare il rapporto tra il centro metropolitano e le periferie dell'impero" ("embrace the relationship between the central metropolis and the peripheries of the Empire"; 213). In investigating the social iniquities that "hanno lacerato l'Inghilterra vittoriana" ("tore Victorian England apart"; 213), Carey indeed follows in Dickens's footsteps, but also ventures further in showing the effects of that same society, and of its flawed system, on the colonies and their identity. Whereas Carey argues that *Great Expectations* reads as a typical imperialist Victorian novel, Dolce convincingly shows that this reading is not entirely appropriate. The major difficulty in rewriting *Great Expectations* from a postcolonial point of view—that is, from the 'other's' perspective—is that Dickens already felt and wrote as an outsider in his society. His stories, and especially his later novels, revolve around characters who are, for various reasons, rejected from the society they wish to fit in. What Carey really does for Magwitch/Maggs, Dolce notes, is give him a life of his own, unbound from someone else's story. The second part of this chapter zooms into the details of the plot of *Jack Maggs* to explore the links between memories, creative expression, and identity that inform the main narrative, and that are also emblematic of the relationship between coloniser and colonised. When writer Tobias Oats—clearly based on Dickens himself—

² Since the publication of this collection in 2013, Reynolds has enjoyed a notable, albeit limited, critical renaissance.

³ It should be noted that Dolce shows reluctance in using the term 'postcolonial', and that she does so here for the sake of convenience.



steals Maggs's memories to forge his identity and make him a character in one of his novels, he is committing an act of literary colonialism, and all the more so when he "demonizz[a]" ("demonises"; 223) him in his portrayal. Carey's novel, *Dolce* sums up, is then built on two levels of intertextuality, that is a narrative layer more or less explicit in Carey's rewriting of *Great Expectations*, and a layer in which Dickens cohabits Carey's novel with his literary creation. Colonialism, then, is not only a form of physical but also of mental, cultural subjugation. What is left to the *postcolonial* writer, then, is to win back their right to a point of view. *Dolce* concludes her absorbing chapter with an appreciation of the many values of Carey's novel, and indeed, after re-reading and digesting her sound argumentation, one could not but agree.

Franco Minganti explores Dickens's lasting influence on American writers. Starting from the connotations that the adjective 'Dickensian' carries for Americans, Minganti embarks on a temporal and geographical journey overseas, chasing Dickens's footsteps across the United States and the pages of the country's literary masterpieces. The result is the portrayal of an alternative world to Dickens's European life and fame—a parallel reality which feels like the American remake of a British film—where the writer's name, work, and fame are taken to eleven and perdure through time and literary space. Minganti showcases a series of American authors whose work bears the unmistakable Dickensian mark. 'American Dickensians' appear to be legion and to belong to disparate backgrounds, genres, and styles. Minganti starts his list with Nabokov, whose *Lolita* positions "'in-between' tra continenti diversi" ("in-between' different continents"; 231), before summoning authors entirely 'made in the US'. These include Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer, who experimented with Dickens's serial form; John Irving, whose self-confessed fascination for Dickens shows in the overabundant information and detail that fill his novels; Anne Rice, whose *Vampire Chronicles* were admittedly inspired by *A Christmas Carol*; T. Coraghessan Boyle for his eccentric, comical characters; Dave Eggers for his pastime of founding and editing periodicals; Jonathan Lethem and his use of the word 'Dickensian'; the whole steampunk movement; Scott Turow and the Dickensian legacy of his legal thrillers. Minganti concludes his chase by stretching outside strictly literary lines, expanding into cinema to include the *Harry Potter* films and Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises*. The chapter ends with Alex Hudson's list of six 'Dickensian things' constituting Dickens's literary legacy, and a somewhat hasty localisation of some of these in contemporary popular culture, ranging from the idea of Christmas, to modern character comedy, to cinematic techniques and parallel montage, to meaningful names. Overall, Minganti's contribution makes for an engaging, informative read, which perfectly reflects the idea of Dickensian interconnection which underlies the whole collection.

In "Dickens secondo Ejzenštejn: montaggio e racconto" ("Dickens according to Ejzenštejn: montage and narration"), Donata Meneghelli explores the relationship between Dickens and cinematic language, focussing especially on Sergej Ejzenštejn's definition of parallel and intellectual montage at the core of his 1944 essay "Dickens, Griffith, and the film today." Ejzenštejn, Meneghelli reminds us, believed in continuity between fiction and cinema, and saw montage as a bridging technique between the two media. Indeed, this chapter opens with a comprehensive overview on the major points of connection between Dickens and cinema, and continues by exploring in detail



the links between Dickens's writing techniques and montage. For Ejzenštejn, montage is not merely a cinematic device, but an all-encompassing technique that spans the entire spectrum of cultural media. The connections between Dickens and cinema are multiple and occur at various levels, and indeed Dickens's use of alternate, contrasting scenes in his fiction performs "funzione sociale e mitopoietica del cinema" ("social and mythopoetic function[s]"; 246), as does D. W. Griffith's use of montage. Both authors used specific narrative devices to expose flaws in their contemporary world and society and built their sequences by associating scenes according to semantic analogies rather than chronological, spatial, or logical contiguity. Ejzenštejn defines this hybrid of technique and ideological expression *intellectual, conceptual, or metaphorical montage*. Meneghelli then zooms in on a scene from *Oliver Twist* to illustrate Ejzenštejn's claims, highlighting Dickens's use of narrative montage to expose the contrast on which the novel is built—that is, between "chi possiede e chi non possiede" ("those who have and those who have not"; 253). This chapter is well-researched and Meneghelli offers a series of interesting, well-presented insights which broaden the scope of the collection by offering a stroll out of strictly literary criticism and into a different media. The analysis of *Oliver Twist* is especially compelling, and convincingly supports the main argument.

Marcos Rico Domínguez' contribution "Un sogno: Charles Dickens in Messico" ("A dream: Charles Dickens in Mexico") closes this collection with a balanced blend of creative afterthought and critical information. After a fascinating, dream-like premise, Domínguez locates the major link between Dickens and Mexico in the mutual ground of picaresque literature, especially Cervantes's *Don Quixote*—incidentally, the first and most successful Dickensian novel in Mexico, according to Domínguez, was *The Pickwick Papers*. Domínguez also offers an overview of the arrival to Mexico of Dickens's novels and of the early translation vicissitudes that accompanied them. Translation, Domínguez reminds us, is not only a linguistic but also and foremost a cultural operation that entails an act of reinvention. In pure Dickensian vein, Domínguez shows how in the world of literature everything is connected by currents that run deep within humanity itself, making it possible for people living so far apart in space and time not only to enjoy the same stories, but also to reinvent them according to their taste and background while maintaining the original core. This oneiric chapter closes the volume with a somewhat lighter note, but at the same time sums up the main idea of this entire collection: Dickens should be celebrated, because the world wouldn't be the same without his work.

Connections, as Scatasta reminds us in his introduction, are the key to anything Dickensian—an underlying current which brings everything together and keeps the story flowing. And that same universal connection is the force that makes this collection a compelling read and an ideal tribute to Dickensian variety—a valuable assemble of essays as various in topic and style as they are homogeneous in their underlying motifs. As for possible shortcomings, the most obvious downside is linguistic inconsistency, as most chapters are in Italian and only a few in English—in some cases, excerpts from Dickens's novels are even reported in translation. Stricter editing might have been beneficial in some cases—sometimes the prose feels a little too much flourishing, and some of the essays could definitely have done with some trimming to keep a clearer focus on the main topic and reduce divagation. Overall, however, this collection is



definitely recommended and is indeed a worthy tribute not only to Dickens and his work, but also to the scholars who participated in Scatasta and Zullo's project, and, of course, to the organisers of the celebrations held in Bologna.

Sara Gazo
University College London
sara.gazo.16@ucl.ac.uk