

“NOTHING BUT EVASION” Narrative Opacity in Charles Dickens's “The Italian Prisoner”

FEDERICA RUFOLO
UNIVERSITÀ DI TRIESTE

Abstract - Although Charles Dickens is renowned for detailed narration, his fiction also relies on strategically significant omissions. The article examines these absences through Lamarque's concept of “narrative opacity” (2014), according to which textual meaning stems from the relationship between narrative content and its mode of presentation. Also drawing on Gerald Prince's notions of “unnarration” (i.e. events that cannot be narrated) and “disnarration” (i.e. events that only occur hypothetically or negatively), the essay analyses Dickens's short story “The Italian Prisoner” (1860) and explores the author's uneasiness in representing Italian criminality. Through close textual analysis, the paper argues that the story's tripartite structure foregrounds opacity surrounding time, space, and criminal agency. The protagonist, Giovanni Carlavero, is imprisoned and released without clear explanation, and narrator and reader alike are excluded from complete knowledge of events. These omissions generate narrative tension, while simultaneously inviting the reader to actively reconstruct meaning. The only plausible interpretation, however, casts the Italian legal system in a negative light, depicting it as opaque and corrupt. Through these strategies, Dickens articulates a broader critique of continental justice and aligns with nineteenth-century representations of Southern Europe as a morally and institutionally deficient Other. “The Italian Prisoner” thus reflects Victorian anxieties about foreign criminality and resonates with Dickens's portrayal of foreign offenders in *Little Dorrit* (1857) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

Keywords: Dickens; narrative opacity; unnarration; Italy; continental justice.

1. Introduction

In the 1837 preface to *The Pickwick Papers*, Charles Dickens attests to his inclination towards richly detailed descriptions of space and characters by stating that the author's main aim is “to place before the reader a constant succession of characters and incidents; to paint them in as vivid colours as he [can] command; and to render them, at the same time, life-like and amusing” (1983, p. 41). It is therefore unsurprising that critical attention has long focussed on the Dickensian penchant for lists, repetitions, and redundancy, stylistic features that involve what Orwell famously defined as an accumulation of “*unnecessary detail[s]*” (1972, p. 128, emphasis in the original). Adding up to the creation of the distinctive Dickensian atmosphere, these strategies ultimately result “in a delightful superfluity of telling” (Warhol 2010, p. 45) and thus chime in with Dickens's own conception of realism, which he understood as “a matter of detail and atmosphere rather than plot or action” (Davis 1963, p. 13).

Although realism is recognised as the dominant Victorian literary mode, it is often imaginative and selective, excluding from narration those elements that that could be deemed too vulgar or counter-educational (Marucci 1996, p. 549). In this respect, Dickens proves difficult to categorise since his narrative is not always as ‘delightful’, clear, and detailed as it initially appears. His plots, perhaps influenced by contemporary Darwinian theories of evolution, which “profoundly unsettled the organizing principles of much Victorian thinking” (Beer 1983, p. 47), are dense with detail and feature a strong sense of

interconnection (pp. 47-48), which consequently leads the reader not to expect the narrative gaps or ellipses which, conversely, can be found in his fiction. Still, Dickens often provides a sort of filter, “keeping his readers, through a carefully imposed artistic control, from being overwhelmed by the world around them” (Schor 2006, p. 93). This happens when his narrative authority withholds certain thematically relevant details from his intricately woven plots, only to reveal them at the very end of the story, as in the case of the discovery of *Oliver Twist*’s true family relations in the eponymous novel or of Dr. Manette’s unspeakable secret in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Nonetheless, it would be inaccurate to say that suppressed details are always clarified in Dickensian fiction. Sometimes these details are withheld altogether and never revealed as the following sections of this paper will demonstrate. Though admittedly less frequent than Dickensian excesses in narration, these absences – whether clarified or not – are nonetheless striking, as they offer meaningful insights into Dickens’s style. These elliptical moments also shed light on the author’s conflicting desire to both conform to the conventions of realism and, at the same time, get away from them, seeking refuge in other, less detail-oriented, narrative tools, thus exemplifying the Dickensian “avoidance or suppression of realism” (Brooks 2005, p. 40), those “murky” narrative clues never made explicit and left for the reader to decipher (p. 40).

Despite their significance, then, these suppressions have received considerably little attention, with scholars only becoming increasingly aware of them in the last two decades. The critical works of Robyn Warhol (2010), Emily Heady (2016), and Kathleen Pacious (2016) address the presence and use of gaps and refusals in the works of Dickens by respectively tackling “disnarration” (Warhol 2010, p. 48), narrative closure, and incorrect interpretation of events. Taken together, these studies underscore the importance of Dickensian narrative omissions and the context in which they appear.

The longstanding lack of critical interest in these suppressions has also resulted in the absence of a univocal terminology to define them. In this regard, Peter Lamarque’s concept of narrative opacity (2014) offers a useful theoretical background to approach them. According to Lamarque, narrative opacity is a prominent feature of all fictional narratives (2014, p. 3), thus implying that no narrative can ever be read transparently. He compares narratives to panes of glass that are not clear, but rather opaque:

Rather than supposing that narrative descriptions are a window through which an independently existing (fictional) world is observed, [...] we must accept that there is no such transparent glass—only an opaque glass, painted, as it were, with figures seen not *through* it but *in* it. (2014, p. 3, emphasis in the original)

Although some scholars argue that photography had a greater impact on the literary scene than pictorial art,¹ Lamarque suggests here that fictional narratives bear more resemblance to paintings and that their opacity is directly linked to authorial and narrative intentionality (2014, p. 9). From this perspective, his views align with Kate Flint’s studies on Victorian visual imagination, and in particular with the concept that nineteenth-century fictional narratives represented the world pictorially and engaged with the visual faculties of the spectator (2000, pp. 198-199). When conceived in this light, the Dickensian tendency towards “pictorial accumulations” (Gilmore 2013, p. 20) is better accounted for.

Lamarque further locates the root of fictional opacity in the relationship between narrative content and its mode of presentation, arguing that the reader plays a crucial role

¹ See for example Jennifer Green-Lewis’s *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (1996) and Nancy Armstrong’s *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (1999).

in determining whether a narrative is to be approached opaquely or transparently (pp. 11-12). Hence, because "a literary narrative's content is largely indivisible from its form" (Lamarque 2014, p. 12), opacity and transparency cannot be understood as intrinsic properties of a text but rather as interpretive effects that depend on the interests and orientations that the reader bring to the text: "[w]e can read (or interpret) a narrative transparently or opaquely relative to the interest we bring to it and the kind of attention we give to its linguistic form" (2014, p. 12). In addition to its relevance for the analysis of Dickensian omissions, the concept of narrative opacity also chimes in with the narratological theories of gaps and ellipses developed by Genette (1966) and Bal (1997), as well as with what Gerald Prince terms "unnarration" (i.e. events that cannot be narrated) and "disnarration" (i.e. events that only occur hypothetically or negatively) (1988, pp. 1-2), as will be argued in the following section of this paper.

These areas of opacity are all the more revealing when analysed through a geographical lens. When thinking about Dickens, the overarching idea is that of a writer deeply concerned with Britain, and more specifically with the city of London. While his fiction is firmly grounded in the British milieu and reflects a British essence, Dickens also maintained an intricate and profound relationship with continental Europe, especially France and Italy. Although European settings and characters are considerably less common than their British counterparts, they nonetheless play a significant role in his oeuvre, permeating its pages and stories. Significantly, it has been argued that, when it comes to matters of opacity, Dickens seems particularly uncomfortable in narrating events that take place beyond British borders, a tension that manifests itself most evidently in the partial, hesitant, or fragmented representation of non-British spaces and characters. While narrative gaps and omissions flourish in Dickensian narratives set abroad, scholars have mostly focussed on their presence in the author's London-based works, such as *Hard Times* (1854) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865).² Interestingly, the effects of these gaps on Dickens's fictional portrayals of English law have been analysed in relation to his most legally overt novel, *Bleak House* (1853), where the shifts in narrating voice and the lack of a complete knowledge of events shed light on the author's suspicions of the Court of Chancery.³

Through a close reading of the short story "The Italian Prisoner" (1860), this paper aims to explore instances of narrative opacity in Dickens's portrayal of Italian criminality, demonstrating how techniques of unnarration and disnarration function as tools to criticise the corruption of the Italian legal system. In particular, the story offers valuable insight into the writer's perception of what could and could not be narrated in geographical contexts located outside the boundaries of Great Britain, thereby both reflecting the difficult Italian political situation of the second half of the nineteenth century and the growing Victorian anxieties regarding foreign criminality.

Viewed in this light, the story also reflects Dickens's personal interest in Italy and the cause of the Risorgimento, a topic well documented by scholars such as Gabriella

² Contributions tackling the issue of narration in these novels have been proposed by Emily Heady (2016) and Kathleen Pacious (2016), respectively.

³ Examples of studies focussing on the vagueness of the legal system in *Bleak House* include Audrey Jaffe's *Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and Subject of Omniscience* (1991) and Katherine Williams's "Glass Windows: The View from *Bleak House*" (2003). The latter is especially interesting as it asserts that partial knowledge is a prominent feature of *Bleak House* (p. 61). In *Literature and the Legal Discourse* (1999), Dieter P. Polloczek also mentions the novel's "formal disintegration in terms of length, density, and closure" as an instance of Dickens's concern to expose the moral failure of legal institutions (2004, p. 124).

Caponi-Doherty (1996) and Eleonora Gallitelli (2022). Before travelling to Italy, Dickens had already formed certain expectations about the country, and his mind was shaped by both contemporary views of this nation as a land of “injustice and oppression” (Hollington and Orestano 2009, p. xv) and by past literary traditions, including Shakespeare and the Gothic (Caponi-Doherty 1996, 152-153). Upon visiting Italy for the first time, Dickens’s attitude towards the country became more complex: the “attraction of repulsion” he initially felt soon developed into a tension that allowed him to deepen his engagement with it (Hollington and Orestano 2009, pp. xv-xvi).

Besides his appreciation of the Italian landscape and way of life, his interest was also drawn to the Italian legal and penal system, as frequently attested in *Pictures from Italy* (1846), an interest that is especially striking in the long and detailed account of the Roman public beheading of a “young man – six-and-twenty – vigorously made, and well-shaped” (1998, p. 143). In this instance, the author’s attention is captured by the various phases and rituals of the execution itself, particularly the absence of any “fixed times for the administration of justice, or its execution” (1998, p. 140), the parade of clergymen, monks, and the cross that precede the arrival of the condemned, and the many attempts of petty thieves to plunder his “empty pockets” (p. 144).

As a result of his travels, Dickens grew increasingly concerned with the nation’s political struggles and, like many of his contemporaries, became a supporter of the Risorgimento (Gallitelli 2022, p. 524-525). By the 1850s, he was so deeply involved in the Italian political cause that he became acquainted with Antonio Panizzi’s⁴ public denunciation of the inhumane living conditions endured by Neapolitan political prisoners. Dickens even wrote to Panizzi, expressing a desire to report faithfully on the prisoners’ sufferings (Caponi-Doherty 1996, p. 159). Although this project never became a reality, Dickens nonetheless condemned the Italian political situation in the narrative of “The Italian Prisoner”: through its deliberately vague and opaque plot, the story serves not only as a denunciation of Italian (in)justice, but also as a reflection of Dickens’s broader interest in the Italian social and political condition. As such, the story confirms that Dickens’s sustained concern with the social issues of his time is often symptomatic of a broader political consciousness (Childers 2006, p. 198).

2. “Evasion, refusal, and ridicule”: a brief narratological overview

Before turning to the analysis of the story, a brief introduction to some key narratological concepts is necessary. Narratology is, as defined by Mieke Bal, “the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that ‘tell a story’” (1997, p. 3). This paper will concentrate on narratological critical approaches that specifically investigate instances of opacity and suppression in Victorian fiction. In this context, alongside the concept of narrative opacity outlined above, Gerald Prince’s differentiation between “unnarratable”, “unnarrated”, and “disnarrated” (1988, pp. 1-3) will provide the theoretical background against which to analyse “The Italian Prisoner”.

In his discussion on the “disnarrated”, Prince begins by observing that in certain periods and literary genres the representation of specific experiences is considered taboo

⁴ Antonio Panizzi (1797–1879), known in Britain as Anthony Panizzi, was an Italian patriot and naturalised British citizen. From 1856, he served as Principal Librarian of the British Museum (Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. “Sir Anthony Panizzi” <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anthony-Panizzi> 10.02.2026).

(1988, p. 1). Prince thus engages with the idea of the “tellability”⁵ – or rather, *untellability* – of specific events and themes (1988, p. 1). To clarify this perspective, Prince outlines three different typologies of narrative *untellability*: the “unnarratable”, or “that which, according to a given narrative, cannot be narrated or is not worth narrating” (1988, p. 1, emphasis in the original); the “unnarrated”, namely the narrative ellipses that are either made explicit by the narrating voice or are inferable from a lacuna in the chronological order of events (1988, p. 2); and finally the “disnarrated”, which instead takes into account those “events that *do not* happen but, nonetheless, are referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text” (1988, p. 2, emphasis in the original). Although this taxonomy applies across all genres and eras, it is particularly relevant when it comes to the study of nineteenth-century fiction, where it is not unusual for large quantities of information to be deliberately omitted (Warhol 2010, p. 48).

Prince’s theories have become seminal for many modern scholars, but it is Robyn Warhol who revises the original categorisation and adapts it more specifically to the Victorian novel. She argues that the “unnarrated” and the “disnarrated” make evident the “boundaries of the narratable” (2005, p. 221) and maintains that “the ‘unnarratable’ does not always lead to a textual silence” (2005, p. 222). This claim is especially significant, as narrative silences are never meaningless. Rather, the absence of narration is crucial not only because it allows for an infinite range of alternative possibilities to flourish in the reader’s mind (Warhol 2007, p. 259), but also because it foregrounds “what the novelist is unable or unwilling to say” (2007, p. 267). In doing so, the audience is drawn into a metafictional dimension that resonates with the broader idea that all literary texts somehow “invite attention to their own literary artifice”, thereby granting a non-transparent access to the fictional world (Lamarque 2014, p. 70).

If, as Prince suggests, “narrative is not only a matter of counting, accounting, and recounting, but also one of discounting” (1988, p. 6), then the reader is necessarily required to take on a functional role in the construction of meaning, actively participating in the narrative process by reconstructing what has been suppressed or withheld (Pacius 2016, pp. 334-5). Throughout this process, the reader implicitly adopts what Lamarque terms a “fictive stance”, an interpretative attitude towards the fictional narrative that entails a responsive engagement with the text (2014, pp. 46-47), while simultaneously drawing attention to the universal features of narrative form (p. 49).

Furthermore, the reluctance to narrate particular topics offers an interesting lens through which to examine the social and cultural anxieties of a given historical moment. In Victorian fiction, the “discounting” of events (Prince 1988, p. 6) is most often associated with sensitive and taboo topics, including sexuality, illegitimate pregnancy, or bodily functions, and, overall, with everything that was deemed indecent (Rosaler 2016, pp. 35-44). In contrast, other, more overtly violent phenomena such as murder, criminality, and social injustice, are rarely elided from narration and instead occupy a central position within the Victorian literary imagination.

Narratives of violence and crime, in fact, had already enjoyed a wide circulation in the English literary scene long before Queen Victoria’s reign. Originating from the Newgate novel and later developing into sensation and detective fiction (Schwarzbach 2005, pp. 231-38), Victorian crime narratives flooded the literary market in the form of pamphlets, opuscles, and popular novels dealing with felonies of all sorts, from minor offences to brutal murders.

⁵ “Tellability” (also referred to as “Reportability”) is defined by Prince as “The quality that makes situations and events reportable, worthy of being told” (Prince 2003, s.v. “Reportability”).

It is important to note, however, that the popularity and circulation of these accounts was not limited to representations of English criminality. New technological advancements, and especially the invention of the telegraph, facilitated the rapid dissemination of news, consequently “allowing newspapers to contain same-day reports of stories from all of the British Isles and later from continental Europe and even the rest of the world” (Casey 2011, p. 373). As a result, reports of international criminality began to attract increasing attention. While this development reinforced common Victorian perceptions of the Continent as exotic and dangerous, it also contributed to the consolidation of the very concept of English identity in contrast to a familiar European otherness.

Hence, from this point onward, the European Other, a category that aligns with Pfister’s theorisation of the growing awareness of “differences *within* Europe” (1996, p. 3, emphasis in the original), came to be associated with specific types of crimes and weapons. Both newspapers and fiction fed on the idea that there was an almost ethnological “relation between certain kinds of crime and national identity” (Wiener 2004, p. 204). For instance, Latin Europeans were “seen as impulsive and hot-blooded” (Wiener 2004, p. 204), as the French were associated with crimes of passion and the Italians with knife violence (p. 207). Echoing Gothic attitudes towards Italian villains as potentially criminal subjects, as exemplified by Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), these Victorian perceptions of Italy and continental Europe in turn contributed to the circulation of “certain views as to how ‘an Englishman’, as opposed to a foreigner, was expected to behave” (Wiener 2004, p. 204), even in the context of criminal activity.

It is precisely against this backdrop that Dickens’s opaque and often evasive portrayals of Italian offenders acquire significant implications.

3. “A curious little drama”: the case of “The Italian Prisoner”

Although there is a general tendency to consider Dickens as a master of novel writing, the significance of his short fiction should not be underestimated, as it provides the basis for a comprehensive understanding of his oeuvre (Thomas 1982, p. 3). Within Dickens’s prolific production of stories and sketches, Thomas (1982) identifies three distinct phases: an early phase marked by the failure of *Master Humphrey’s Clock* in the 1840s; a second phase dominated by the composition of Christmas stories; and a final phase (1859-1870) where Dickens returned to the production of short fiction and used it as a means of artistic experimentation (1982, p. 3), thus demonstrating an awareness “of the imaginative license” afforded by the genre (p. 134).

“The Italian Prisoner” pertains to this latter phase and exemplifies Dickens’s narrative maturity as well as his wish for experimentation. Originally appearing in Dickens’s weekly journal *All the Year Round* in October 1860, the story was later included in the collection *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1861), which gathers several other stories printed in the same journal (Tyler, 2021b, p. xxviii). The collection is unified by the figure of an anonymous narrator, the Uncommercial Traveller of the title, “both a town traveller and a country traveller, [...] always on the road” (Dickens 2021, p. 5), who provides a sense of formal, narrative, stylistic, and thematic cohesion across the volume (Tyler, 2021a, p. vii).

Notably, the tales collected under this title are cosmopolitan in essence and themes. In his “wandering[s] here and there” (Dickens 2021, p. 5), the Uncommercial Traveller frequently ventures beyond English borders, both literally and figuratively. As a matter of

fact, his journeys are both physical and metaphorical: while his professional duties take him to Paris ("Travelling Abroad"), the Belgian countryside ("In the French-Flemish Country"), Italy ("The Italian Prisoner"), the French coast ("The Calais Night Mail"), and even the United States ("Aboard Ship"), the Uncommercial Traveller also imaginatively ventures to the territories of the British Empire ("The Great Tasmania's Cargo") and to the fairytale landscapes of his childhood fantasies ("Nurse Stories").

This cosmopolitan impulse, also present in some of his novels, thus finds renewed expression in his short fiction, allowing for further stylistic and thematic investigations. Of all the tales set abroad, however, "The Italian Prisoner" stands out for the pervasiveness of narrative opacity. Not only is the story's structure marked by significant gaps, but its characters – particularly the Italian ones – are depicted in a manner that is often elusive. This is rather unusual given that Dickens generally seems to encounter little difficulty in portraying European individuals, usually managing to vividly convey the personality and quirks of his continental heroes.

Yet, the characterisation of Italian criminals appears rather problematic in his fiction. Figures such as Giovanni Battista Cavalletto (*Little Dorrit*, 1857) and Giovanni Carlavero ("The Italian Prisoner", 1860) are but rapidly sketched,⁶ a tactic that, in turn, reduces them to stereotypical embodiments of Italian values and identity (Coste 2009, p. 206). While this narrative strategy may be linked to the author's broader interest in "the expression of a self and the unknowability of that self to itself" (Dever 2006, p. 217), it also performs an ideological function, reinforcing Victorian perceptions of Italy as an exotic space inhabited by poor, villainous, and disreputable Others (McAllister 2009, p. 38).

Although these characters possess individual personalities and ideals, a conspicuous lack of information surrounds their personal histories, as neither the precise nature of their crimes nor the circumstances leading to their imprisonment are fully narrated. While the author provides a brief description of Cavalletto's offence and identifies him with "a mere smuggler; [...] a poor little contraband trader" (Dickens 2012, p. 23), a dense aura of mystery surrounds Giovanni Carlavero: the reader only learns that he has been sentenced to life in prison, and that he eventually secures his freedom through the combined efforts of an anonymous English gentleman and an Italian lawyer.

In addition to this opaque characterisation, "The Italian Prisoner" also seems to challenge the sense of unity that characterises *The Uncommercial Traveller*. Whereas most of the collection's narratives are mediated through the narrator's perspective – confirming Thomas's assertion that Dickens's short fiction consists of stories "told by someone", thus evoking a tradition of oral storytelling (1982, p. 4) – this tale instead plays with multiple levels of narration that divide the text into three distinct sections (Majer 2009, p. 323).

The first section, delivered by the Uncommercial Traveller himself, introduces the setting and recounts the narrator's first encounter with Carlavero, now the owner of a "small wine-shop" located in a stereotypically Italian "narrow dull street" (Dickens 2021, p. 169). The second one – the longest and most important section of the narrative – consists of a proper flashback detailing Carlavero's meeting with his English saviour and

⁶ It is worth mentioning that Dickens's vague characterisation of Italian criminals may bear a direct link to Wilkie Collins's depiction of his famous Italian villain, Count Fosco. In *The Woman in White*, Collins appears almost reluctant to describe Fosco in detail, stating that "Laura is provokingly circumspect and silent" (2008, p. 204) about him and that the man "puzzles her" (p. 204). Although the Count's characterisation becomes increasingly detailed as the plot progresses, he nonetheless remains a difficult-to-interpret figure. Significantly, *The Woman in White* was serialised in *All the Year Round* in 1859, just a year before "The Italian Prisoner".

the events leading to his release. Here, the Uncommercial Traveller shares with the reader what he has learned from the English gentleman prior to travelling to Italy, insisting it to be “strictly a true story” (Dickens 2021, p. 168). The third and final section offers instead a humorous account of the narrator’s countless difficulties in bringing back to England a “corpulent bottle” (Dickens 2021, p. 174) of wine given to him by Carlavero as a sign of gratitude to his anonymous benefactor.

This peculiar narrative structure exemplifies the artistic experimentation of Dickens’s short fiction (Thomas 1982, p. 1) and is especially interesting in terms of narrative levels. Although the Uncommercial Traveller remains the main narrator, the central section of the tale is a second-hand account of what he has learned from a character in the story, namely the anonymous English gentleman. Majer interprets this structure as “itself a sort of bottle” (2009, p. 323), noting that the gentleman’s story is contained within “two more or less comic episodes” delivered by the Uncommercial Traveller himself (p. 323).

“The Italian Prisoner” thus exemplifies what Mieke Bal describes as “embedded” (or “frame”) narrative structures, namely those “narrative texts in which at the second or third level a complete story is told” (1997, p. 52). On this basis, the reader might expect the central section of the narrative to offer a detailed account of Carlavero’s relationship with the English gentleman, or at least a chronicle of the prisoner’s incarceration and liberation. Instead, everything is shrouded in a veil of mystery that is never completely lifted. A close analysis of the story reveals that its very structure is imbued with instances of what Prince defines as “the unnarratable” (1988, p. 1). As a matter of fact, “The Italian Prisoner” opens with two such unnarratable elements: neither the time nor the place in which events unfold are specified. Instead, the story opens with the Uncommercial Traveller remarking that “The rising of the Italian people from under their unutterable wrongs” has often prompted him to think about his “own small wanderings in Italy” (Dickens 2021, p. 168).

Temporal and spatial coordinates are normally crucial in setting the narrative tone, creating “verbal pictures of the world [...] that in turn explain and motivate characters, their actions and reflections” (Brooks 2005, p. 17). Their omission therefore carries important connotations and aligns with Lamarque’s theories on fictional opacity (2014). Although the narrator states that “the curious little drama” that he is about to recount is directly linked to his Italian travels (Dickens 2021, p. 168), no precise date is ever provided, leaving the temporal structure of both the frame and the embedded narrative indeterminate. While it can be inferred that Carlavero’s imprisonment likely occurred in the recent past, the interval of time between his release and his meeting with the Uncommercial Traveller remains unspecified. As a result, “The Italian Prisoner” perfectly exemplifies Dickens’s broader views on temporality, which is never straightforward: “The experience of time in reading Dickens [...] can be compelling, difficult, and disorienting” and the reader plays a pivotal role in its conceptualisation (Bowen and Patten 2006, p. 9).

Spatial indeterminacy further reinforces this opacity. The narrator states that he finds himself “in a certain small town on the Mediterranean” that is “far from Naples” (Dickens 2021, p. 168) when he first meets with Carlavero, a rather vague geographical clue that may suggest that the man lives somewhere between Genoa and Rome. Similarly, when the account of Carlavero’s adventures finally begins, the exact position of his prison is never disclosed. The jail, “an arched underground and under-water gallery, with a grill-gate at the entrance” (Dickens 2021, p. 170), thus assumes a generic quality. Rather than being a specific, locatable place, it acts as a stereotypical representation of Italian correctional facilities, becoming “one of the vile, old prisons of Italy” (Dickens 2021, p. 170) that permeated Victorian imagination.

This initial ambiguity hints at the unnarratable and opaque essence of Italian justice and remains unresolved in the central part of the story. Not only is Carlavero's tale filtered through an intermediary narrator, but it also opens with a conspicuous omission, as the name of the English gentleman who so piously decided to help the prisoner is never disclosed, possibly implying his sympathy for Italian patriots and exiles. While some critics read this anonymity as a means of transforming the gentleman into a stereotype of English generosity (Gallitelli 2022, p. 529; Majer 2009, p. 318), the absence of the name carries both symbolic and graphic connotations. The name is replaced by a dash, a graphic device frequently used in nineteenth-century fiction to indicate a defective utterance, an "ellipsis mark" that is clearly printed on the page (Toner 2015, pp. 134-35).

When the Uncommercial Traveller asks Carlavero, "'Do you recollect—?'" (Dickens 2021, p. 170), the absence of the gentleman's name becomes impossible to ignore. This omission draws attention to the man's motives and identity and embodies what Warhol defines as "narrative refusal", that is, "a strategy for addressing the unnarratable in fiction" (2007, p. 259). This technique highlights the "artificiality of [...] fiction" while simultaneously inviting the reader "to participate in the craft, and ethics, of play" (Pacious 2016, p. 348), and ultimately aligning with Dickens's narrative "profusion" (Beer 1983, p. 48). In doing so, "The Italian Prisoner" reaffirms Lamarque's claim that literature draws attention to its own artifice (2014, p. 70), thus foregrounding the reader's interpretive engagement (p. 3): it is left to the reader to speculate on the reasons behind the gentleman's anonymity.

From the outset, then, "The Italian Prisoner" alerts the reader that its plot will be characterised by missing details. This expectation is fulfilled throughout the account of Carlavero's release, which is marked by gaps and opacity. Most notably, the reason for Carlavero's imprisonment is never made explicit: the narrator sketches a very rapid portrait of the prisoner, describing him as "a political offender, having been concerned with the last rising, and [...] sentenced to imprisonment for life" (Dickens 2021, p. 170). He has been held in a cell at "the upper end of [the] dungeon [...] the furthest removed from light and air" (Dickens 2021, p.170) which consequently led to the formation of a tumour in his neck. Nonetheless, the precise nature of his political offence is never revealed, thus leaving both the gentleman and the reader to question the legitimacy of the sentence.

Several textual clues further suggest Carlavero's innocence: he is repeatedly referred to as a "poor prisoner", a "wretched prisoner", and an "unfortunate sufferer" (Dickens 2021, p. 172) and overall has "nothing in common with the faces of the malefactors with whom he was associated" (p. 170). The main hint at Carlavero's innocence is rendered through an evocative instance of unnarration. After his first encounter with the prisoner, the English gentleman repeatedly inquires about the reason behind Carlavero's incarceration. Yet the answer he gets is far from satisfactory:

When the Englishman emerged from the dreadful den into the light of day, he asked [...] the governor of the gaol [...] why Giovanni Carlavero was put in the worst place?

"Because he is particularly recommended," was the stringent answer.

"Recommended, that is to say, for death?"

"Excuse me; particularly recommended," was again the answer.

"He has a bad tumour in his neck, no doubt occasioned by the hardship of his miserable life. If he continues to be neglected, and he remains where he is, it will kill him."

"Excuse me, I can do nothing. He is particularly recommended." (Dickens 2021, p. 170)

The words "particularly recommended" (p. 170), reiterated three times, seem to beat the time of Carlavero's doomed existence, recalling the tripartite structure of the story while also implying that the man may have never been sentenced at all. Ultimately, this

repetition suggests that both the nature of Carlavero's alleged crime and his experience as a captive cannot be rendered in words, thus functioning as a reminder of the unreliability of the Italian legal system.

The resulting narrative tension that surrounds Carlavero and his criminal actions thus serves as the prime mover of the plot and aligns with Lamarque's "character identity principle", namely the idea that "*character identity is indissolubly linked to character description*" (2014, p. 70, emphasis in the original). Although the reader never gains access to the real reason behind Carlavero's arrest, it is implied that the English gentleman knows something he does not wish to disclose. As a matter of fact, the gentleman admits to having had a private conversation with Carlavero, during which he "learnt how he [Carlavero] came to be there" (Dickens 2021, p. 170). Yet the details of this exchange are never made explicit. The reader nonetheless understands that the conversation must have been important, as it is only after this private talk that the anonymous gentleman truly starts to empathise with the prisoner and becomes fully committed to securing his release. The exclusion of the Uncommercial Traveller from this information further emphasises his status as a second-hand, unreliable narrator who lacks direct knowledge of events. Just like the reader, he is left to imagine what was said between the two men.

The aura of suspicion that surrounds Italian justice intensifies when reading about the gentleman's efforts to get Carlavero pardoned, and the sense that the man is an innocent victim of a corrupt legal system grows stronger:

If the prisoner had been a brigand and a murderer, if he had committed every non-political crime in the Newgate Calendar and out of it, nothing would have been easier than for a man of any court or priestly influence to obtain his release. As it was, nothing could have been more difficult. Italian authorities, and English authorities who had interest with them, alike assured the Englishman that his object was hopeless. He met with nothing but evasion, refusal, and ridicule. (Dickens 2021, p. 171)

By opening the paragraph with a conditional, Dickens successfully manages to convey what Carlavero *is not*. If it is true, as Allingham (2023) remarks, that the story replicates patterns of evasion and refusal, it must be noted that this passage also aligns with the idea that "negation of action or situation" are typical Dickensian strategies of "narrative refusal" (Warhol 2010, p. 47). By defining Dickens's "narrative refusals" as "the specifics of *what might have been and yet is not*" (Warhol 2010, p. 46, emphasis in the original), Warhol refers to those instances in which the narrating voice explicitly tells what a character does not do or does not feel, usually rendered by the structure "'it was not ... not ... not'" (2010, p. 47).

Although this pattern is not exactly the one found in the previously mentioned example, the narrating voice manages to effectively use a hypothetical clause to emphasise what Carlavero *did not do*. He is *neither* a brigand *nor* a murderer, *nor* has he committed "every non-political crime in the Newgate Calendar" (Dickens 2021, p. 171). This example, structured around a double negation, illustrates a process that could be defined as *double-disnarration*: by stressing that Carlavero has *not* committed a *non*-political offence, the narrative implicitly categorises his alleged crime as political, not as penal or civil. Consequently, this pattern of *double-disnarration* grants the reader partial access to the truth while simultaneously preserving opacity and leaving the reader to ponder about who Carlavero truly is.

Disnarration and unnarration also govern the actions of the anonymous gentleman. Although the reader learns that he "went on persistently trying, and trying, and trying, to get Giovanni Carlavero out" (Dickens 2021, p. 171), there is no mention of his exact proceedings. The legal and institutional battle he fights to help his Italian friend is

undisclosed, and nothing is said about the gentleman's strategy or course of action. The only information provided is that the gentleman is aided by an Italian lawyer, "a certain sprightly Italian Advocate" (Dickens 2021, p. 171), who comes to him in rather mysterious circumstances. It is highly likely that the lawyer has heard about the gentleman's cause through hearsay, but there is no explicit mention of how he found the gentleman.

The Italian lawyer – who, just like the gentleman, remains anonymous for the entirety of the tale – is a rather intriguing character who embodies the story's gaps and opacity. The man approaches the English gentleman with a request for "a hundred pounds to obtain Carlavero's release" (Dickens 2021, p. 171), a request which is nonetheless never explained as the advocate explicitly refuses to reveal what the money is for: "I *cannot* tell you what I am going to do with the money, *nor* must you ever ask me the question if I succeed, *nor* must you ever ask me for an account of the money if I fail." (p. 171, my emphasis).

Once again, reader and narrator alike find themselves in front of an example of disnarration as the lawyer instructs his client on what he *must not* do. Here, the "it was not ... not ... not" form indicated by Warhol (2010, p. 47) is rendered through the equivalent structure "cannot [...] nor [...] nor" (Dickens 2021, p. 171). By positioning the lawyer's actions within the realm of the unnarratable, Dickens reinforces contemporary Victorian views of the Italian justice system as corrupt and opaque, ultimately strengthening the perception of Italy as a lawless, dangerous, and immoral country (McAllister 2007, p. 183).

The gentleman, just like the reader, has some doubts about the advocate's character and proceedings but finally resolves "to hazard the hundred pounds" (Dickens 2021, p. 171) despite his lack of trust in the man. His sense of having fallen victim to a vile scam intensifies when the lawyer asks him for "fifty pounds more" (Dickens 2021, p. 172), a sum of money that the gentleman only sends after careful consideration. Indeed, the advocate's refusal to disclose how he intends to use the money contributes to the general perception of this character as untrustworthy. Dickens's use of disnarration and unnarration thus casts a shadow of suspicion over the advocate, leading the Englishman to conclude that "the Advocate was a heartless sharper, who had preyed upon his credulity and his interest in an unfortunate sufferer" (2021, p. 172) a perception that echoes common nineteenth-century stereotypes about Italian amorality (McAllister 2007, p. 181) and the unpredictable threats these people posed to English identity and integrity (p. 160). Nonetheless, the man proves true to his word and successfully manages to get Carlavero out of prison. Thus, despite the mistrust he is met with, the Italian lawyer emerges as more trustworthy than the many unscrupulous and manipulative lawyers that pervade Dickens's fiction.

Still, the mysterious atmosphere surrounding the lawyer's conduct intensifies following Carlavero's release. After successfully saving the prisoner from his doomed fate, the lawyer states in a letter to his English client that "There are many things, as you know, in this Italy of ours, that are safest and best not even spoken of – far less written of. We may meet some day, and then I may tell you what you want to know; not here, and now." (Dickens 2021, p. 173). Once again, the advocate employs disnarration to suggest that silence is prudent and it is best *not* to speak and *not* to write about Carlavero's release. At the very least, he implies that the circumstances of Carlavero's liberation exceed the limits of narratability, insofar as the present context allows.

This aura of *unnarratability* is further stressed by a significant narrative ellipsis. Indeed, there is a seven-days interval between the gentleman's payment of the additional sum to the lawyer and Carlavero's release: "Within a week, the Englishman was sitting at

breakfast, when he heard some suppressed sounds of agitation on the staircase, and Giovanni Carlavero leaped into the room and fell upon his breast, a free man!” (Dickens 2021, p. 173). Since the length of the gap is clearly stated, this may be considered as an example of “explicit ellipsis”, namely one that indicates the period of time elided from narration (Genette 2019, p. 189).

The omission of this crucial interval of time prevents any reconstruction of the events surrounding Carlavero’s release. Reader and narrator alike are unaware of whether the advocate has used the money to corrupt some Italian legal representative, or of how exactly Carlavero arrived at the gentleman’s house. In her seminal work on narratology, Mieke Bal suggests that “[a]n ellipsis cannot be perceived”, indicating that the reader has no way of possibly knowing what happened during that time (1997, p. 103). Nevertheless, these omissions are rarely arbitrary: they may signal events that are too “painful” (Bal 1997, p. 103) to be narrated, too difficult to put into words, or that the narrator may wish to deny (p. 103). In “The Italian Prisoner”, the one-week ellipsis that breaks the narrative flow may suggest that Carlavero’s release is an example of an event that is “so difficult to put into words that it is preferable to maintain complete silence about it” (Bal 1997, p. 103).

The pervasive narrative silence that surrounds Carlavero’s liberation is further emphasised by the impossibility of knowing anything about the lawyer’s efforts to secure it. Although the lawyer suggests that there may be an opportunity to meet with the gentleman and explain what truly happened during that time, this never occurs. Nor can the Uncommercial Traveller track the lawyer down and get an explanation, for “the Advocate was dead” (Dickens 2021, p. 173) when the gentleman first presented him with Carlavero’s story. Consequently, retrospective clarification is denied, and Carlavero’s liberation remains a “great [...] mystery” (Dickens 2021, p. 173).

This phrase aptly captures the essence of “The Italian Prisoner” as a whole. The central section of the narrative, with its missing pieces and unresolved questions, does not offer any clear answers regarding the events described. Rather, it resists the conventional Victorian narrative structure that typically consists of a sequence of events that culminate in resolution, achieving a sense of reconciliation (Klingopulos 1969, p. 102), and supporting the idea that Dickensian realism is “characterized by a resistance to the formal imperative toward closure” (Glatt 2022). In this light, “The Italian Prisoner” inadvertently anticipates the post-modern tendency to leave works structurally ambiguous, inviting the reader into direct engagement with the text (Eco 1976, pp. 35-36): in the story, significant questions remain unanswered, the nature of the lawyer’s proceedings and the reason behind Carlavero’s incarceration are unresolved, and the fairness of the Italian legal system is inherently questioned.

Even the ostensibly comic final section of the narrative – which reports the Uncommercial Traveller’s adventures in transporting Carlavero’s bottle of wine to England – echoes this pattern of opacity and omissions. When Carlavero appears at the narrator’s hotel, he has with him “one of those immense bottles in which the Italian peasants store their wine” (Dickens 2021, p. 174), an object that, due to its massive dimensions, would have been difficult for a single man to carry. While tracking the exact movements of the bottle from its original departure point to the narrator’s hotel may seem rather unimportant, the Uncommercial Traveller expresses an interest in this brief journey, stating that “How the bottle had been got there, did not appear” (Dickens 2021, p. 174). Although seemingly trivial, this very minor instance of unnarration gains significance when contrasted with the detailed account of the bottle’s subsequent voyage.

Furthermore, the account of the bottle’s journey acquires symbolic weight when read alongside Carlavero’s story: like the prisoner, the bottle too is subjected to suspicion,

accusation, and scrutiny while travelling through Italy, thus almost being comparable to a prisoner attempting to escape. Both a product of Carlavero's work and a token of gratitude to his English benefactor, the bottle is marked by instances of elusive narration that seem to disappear once it crosses national borders. So, as with Carlavero's story, narrative opacity marks the bottle's adventures on the Continent while transparency is resumed upon the wine's arrival in England: the great "vehemence of speech and countenance and action" (Dickens 2021, p. 175) that the bottle experiences while in Italy contrasts diametrically with its "safe arrival" (p. 176) in London's harbour.

The Uncommercial Traveller summarises this difficult journey by declaring that he "had so much difficulty in working my way with the Bottle, as if it had bottled up a complete system of heretical theology" (Dickens 2021, p. 175). Yet, the reason behind all these troubles remains once again opaque: no explanation is ever given to the reason why the bottle should be examined, "left at this place, or that" (Dickens 2021, p. 176), and thoroughly inspected. It is only when the wine reaches Genoa and is "consigned [...] to a trusty English captain [...] to be conveyed to the Port of London by sea" (Dickens 2021, p. 176) that the Uncommercial Traveller can finally be sure that the bottle will be safely delivered to the anonymous gentleman. In this regard, the disnarration surrounding both bottle and prisoner underscores Dickens's reluctance to narrate Italian spaces and characters, reinforcing the geographical and cultural asymmetries that characterise the tale.

Ultimately, this latter part of the narrative could be read as an example of Dickensian humour, often found in "the bathos of the great event", with the comic episode sparking from "apparently everyday incidents" (Andrews 2013, p. 26). The "suspicions attached to [the] innocent Bottle" (Dickens 2021, p. 174) transform the latter part of the story into a comic counterpart to the tragic account of Carlavero's persecution. This juxtaposition both lightens the mood of the narrative and provides a happy ending while simultaneously inviting the reader to reflect on the oppressive and unjust Italian political and legal situation.

4. Conclusion

Despite having received relatively little critical attention, "The Italian Prisoner" proves quite significant to an understanding of Dickens's attitude towards continental criminality. What may appear as a minor sketch is, on closer inspection, a revealing example of the Dickensian attitude towards Italy, its political situation, and its corrupt legal and penal system. While Dickens is recognised for his detailed and nuanced portrayals of English criminal characters, his treatment of Italian offenders reveals a marked sense of narrative unease, which manifests itself through gaps and omissions.

The figure of Giovanni Carlavero therefore emerges as a paradigmatic example of the Dickensian narrative opacity, highlighting the author's use of techniques such as disnarration and unnarration in the portrayal of Italian criminals. These strategies are not irrelevant: they compel both reader and narrator to take on an active role in the reconstruction of Carlavero's story, challenging them to fill in narrative blanks and perhaps also subtly suggesting the author's sympathy for the Italian cause. Yet, the only possible reconstruction consistently casts the Italian justice system in a negative light, depicting it as a monstrous entity that incarcerates innocent individuals without a valid motive and that can be easily corrupted with large sums of money. Such a representation reinforces nineteenth-century visions of Italy as both an attractive and a repulsive "Orient", a foreign land where political and legal institutions are tragically underdeveloped (Vescovi *et al.* 2009, p. 9).

Although Gallitelli interprets Dickens's strategic suppression of details as "a general denunciation of the obfuscation and injustice that pertains to both British and Italian society" (2022, p. 529), by analysing the story it is possible to suggest that the critique of Italian injustice is intensified through the systematic use of unnarration, disnarration, and opacity. These devices generate a tension in the reconstruction of events, destabilise narrative transparency, and ultimately leave the reader to wonder whether it will ever be possible to gain complete knowledge of the proceedings of Italian justice.

Furthermore, although this depiction aligns with common nineteenth-century constructions of Italy as simultaneously alluring and repellent – a politically and legally marginalised European Other in line with Pfister's theorisation of "intra-European 'Meridionism'" (1996, p. 3), a familiar Orient against which to define British culture and identity (Pfister 1996, p. 3). However, Dickens, likely affected by his second Italian visit of 1853 during which he perceived the country as "more hostile and threatening than before" (Orestano 2013, pp. 134-135) and also by the historical and political events of 1860, may well have conceived "The Italian Prisoner" as a vehicle to implicitly disclose his own personal support for the liberation of Italy from foreign oppression. While "The Italian Prisoner" structures the representation of Italy through the dichotomic opposition rooted in the "North vs South" argument (Pfister 1996, p. 3) and sustained through a hegemonic "meridionist" discourse that positions this country as a subaltern space to be contained and domesticated (Cazzato 2017, p. 32), the techniques of under-narration that characterise the tale nonetheless shed light on Dickens's deeper sympathy for the Italian cause.

Ultimately, the strategies of narrative opacity, disnarration, and unnarration that characterise "The Italian Prisoner" extend and expand beyond individual characterisation. Not only do they cast the Italian legal system under a dubious light, but they also reveal Dickens's broader anxieties about Italian justice and his sympathy for its difficult political situation, while simultaneously reinforcing Victorian stereotypes that associate continental Europe with specific forms of criminality and moral danger. In light of this, the narrative peculiarities of "The Italian Prisoner" resonate with the author's wider concerns about continental justice that are prominent in *Little Dorrit* (1857) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

Bionote: Federica Rufolo is a second-year PhD student at the University of Trieste (Italy). Her research project focusses on the representation of foreign justice systems in nineteenth-century novels, travelogues, and short stories. Her interest in Victorian literary representations of the law stems from her MA thesis. She is a member of the Trieste's research group for the PRIN project "Open Air Theatres in Italy" (OATI) and is one of the coauthors of the article "'Wait. Trees are they? An optical illusion.' An Ecocritical Reading of Plant Life in Ulysses" published in *Joyce Studies in Italy* (vol. 25, 2023, pp. 219-36).

Author's address: federica.rufolo@phd.units.it

References

- Allingham P. 2023, *Narrative Voice in Charles Dickens's The Italian Prisoner*, in "The Victorian Web". <https://victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/prisoner.html> (10.12.2025).
- Andrews M. 2013, *Dickensian Laughter: Essays on Dickens and Humour*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Armstrong N. 2002, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Bal M. 1997, *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Second Edition), University of Toronto Press, Toronto.
- Beer G. 1983, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Boston, Melbourne & Henley.
- Bowen J. and Patten R.L. 2006, *Introduction*, in Bowen J. and Patten R.L. (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 1-10.
- Britannica Editors. 2025, *Sir Anthony Panizzi*, in "Encyclopedia Britannica". <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anthony-Panizzi> (10.02.2026).
- Brooks P. 2005, *Realist Vision*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London.
- Caponi-Doherty G. 1996, *Charles Dickens and the Italian Risorgimento*, in "Dickens Quarterly" 13 [3], pp. 151-163.
- Casey C.A. 2011, *Misperceptions: The Press and Victorian Views of Crime*, in "The Journal of Interdisciplinary History" 41 [3], pp. 367-91.
- Cazzato L. 2017, *Sguardo inglese e Mediterraneo italiano: alle radici del meridionismo*, Mimesis, Milano & Udine.
- Childers J.W. 2006, *Politicized Dickens: the Journalism of the 1850s*, in Bowen J. and Patten R.L. (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 198-215.
- Collins W. [1860] 2008, *The Woman in White*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Coste M-A. 2009, *Literal-Minded British and Stereotypical Foreigners in Dickens: the Limits of National Identity and the Definition of the Personal*, in Hollington M. and Orestano F. (ed.), *Dickens and Italy: Little Dorrit and Pictures from Italy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge, pp. 205-17.
- Davis E. 1963, *The Flint and the Flame: the Artistry of Charles Dickens*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia.
- Dever C. 2006, *Psychoanalyzing Dickens*, in Bowen J. and Patten R.L. (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 216-233.
- Dickens C. [1838] 1966, *Oliver Twist*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
- Dickens C. [1837] 1983, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
- Dickens C. [1846] 1998, *Pictures from Italy*, Penguin Books, London.
- Dickens C. [1838] 1999, *Oliver Twist*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Dickens C. [1859] 2008, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Dickens C. [1857] 2012, *Little Dorrit*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Dickens C. [1861] 2021, *The Uncommercial Traveller*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Eco U. 1976, *Opera Aperta*, Bompiani, Milano.
- Flint K. 2000, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge & London.
- Gallitelli E. 2022, *'If the True Story of the Matter Is to Be Told': Dickens and the Neapolitan Prisoners*, in "Dickens Quarterly" 39 [4], pp. 524-31.
- Genette G. 2019, *Figures III*, Editions du Seuil, Paris.
- Gilmore D. 2013, *The Victorian Novel and the Space of Art: Fictional Form on Display*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Glatt G. 2022, *Narrative and its Nonevents: the Unwritten Plots that Shaped Victorian Realism*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville & London.
- Green-Lewis J. 1996, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London [ebook].
- Heady E. 2016, *Reading to Mourn: Narrative Gaps and Ethical Burdens in Dickens's Hard Times*, in "Victorians Institute Journal" 44 [1], pp. 130-56.
- Hollington M. and Orestano F. 2009, *Introduction*, in Hollington M. and Orestano F. (ed.), *Dickens and Italy: Little Dorrit and Pictures from Italy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge, pp. xiv-xxvi.
- Jaffe A. 1991, *Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and Subject of Omniscience*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Klingopulos G.D. 1969, "The Literary Scene", in Ford B. (ed.), *The Pelican Guide to English Literature: From Dickens to Hardy*, vol. 6, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, pp. 59-116.

- Lamarque P. 2014, *The Opacity of Narrative*, Rowman & Littlefield International, London.
- Lewis M. [1796] 1980, *The Monk*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Majer G. 2009, *Gift and Narrative in Charles Dickens's 'The Italian Prisoner'*, in Vescovi A. et al. (ed.), *The Victorians and Italy*, Polimetria International Scientific Publisher, Monza, pp. 317-28.
- Marucci F. 1996, *I testi nel tempo: il Vittorianesimo*, in Marengo F. (ed.), *Storia della civiltà letteraria inglese*, vol. 2, *Il Settecento, il Romanticismo, il Vittorianesimo*, UTET, Torino, pp. 545-566.
- McAllister A. 2007, *John Bull's Italian Snakes and Ladders: English Attitudes to Italy in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle.
- McAllister A. 2009, *'A Pair of Naked Legs and a Ragged Red Scarf': an Overview of Victorian Discourses on Italy*, in Vescovi A. et al. (ed.), *The Victorians and Italy*, Polimetria International Scientific Publisher, Monza, pp. 19-43.
- Orestano F. 2013, *Back to Italy: Dickens's Stereoscopic Views*, in Leroy M. (ed.), *Charles Dickens and Europe*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 126-140.
- Orwell G. 1972, *Decline of the English Murder and Other Essays*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
- Pacious K. 2016, *Misdirections, Delayed Disclosures, and the Ethics of the Telling in Charles Dickens's Our Mutual Friend*, in "Narrative" 24 [3], pp. 330-50.
- Pfister M. (ed.) 1996, *The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Italies of British Travellers. An Annotated Anthology*, Rodopi, Amsterdam & Atalanta.
- Polloczek D.P. 2004, *Literature and the Legal Discourse: Equity and Ethics from Sterne to Conrad*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Prince G. 1988, *The Disnarrated*, in "Style" 22 [1], pp. 1-8. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42945681> (28.12.2025).
- Prince G. 2003, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln & London.
- Radcliffe A. [1794] 1998, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Rosaler R. 2016, *Conspicuous Silences: Implicature and Fictionality in the Victorian Novel*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Shaw W.D. 1990, *Victorians and Mystery: Crises of Representation*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London.
- Schor H.M. 2006, *Dickens and Plot*, in Bowen J. and Patten R.L. (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 90-110.
- Schwarzbach F.S. 2005, *Newgate Novel to Detective Fiction*, in Brantlinger P. and Thesing W.B. (ed.), *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp. 227-43.
- Tandon B. 2013, *Reading the Book of Himself: The Uncommercial Traveller and 'Dickensian' Style*, in Tyler D. (ed.), *Dickens's Style*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 214-30.
- Thomas D.A. 1982, *Dickens and the Short Story*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.
- Toner A. 2015, *Ellipsis in English Literature: Signs of Omission*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Tyler D. 2021a, *Introduction*, in Dickens C. *The Uncommercial Traveller*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. vii-xxvii.
- Tyler D. 2021b, *Note on the Text*, in Dickens C. *The Uncommercial Traveller*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. xxviii-xxxi.
- Vescovi A. et al. 2009, *Introduction*, in Vescovi A. et al. (ed.), *The Victorians and Italy*, Polimetria International Scientific Publisher, Monza, pp. 9-15.
- Walpole H. [1764] 1998, *The Castle of Otranto*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Warhol R. 1994, *Narrating the Unnarratable: Gender and Metonymy in the Victorian Novel*, in "Style" 28 [1], pp. 74-94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42946183> (17.12.2025).
- Warhol R. 2005, *'Neonarrative'; or, How to Render the Unnarratable in Realist Fiction and Contemporary Film*, in Phelan, J. and Rabinowitz P.J. (ed.), *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford, & Victoria, pp. 220-31.
- Warhol R. 2007, *Narrative Refusals and Generic Transformation in Austen and James: What Doesn't Happen in Northanger Abbey and The Spoils of Poynton*, in "The Henry James Review" 28 [3], pp. 259-68.
- Warhol R. [Published as Robyn Warhol-Down]. 2010, *'What Might Have Been Is Not What Is': Dickens's Narrative Refusals*, in "Dickens Studies Annual" 41, pp. 45-59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44371442> (17.12.2025).
- Wiener M.J. 2004, *Homicide and 'Englishness': Criminal Justice and National Identity in Victorian England*, in "National Identities" 6 [3], pp. 203-13.
- Williams K. 2003, *Glass Windows: The View from Bleak House*, in "Dickens Studies Annual" 33, pp. 55-85. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44372073> (15.03.2026).