

Little Dorrit's Fourth Volume Twenty-First Century Remediation of a Victorian Classic

Simonetta Falchi

“For, you see,” said Little Dorrit’s old friend, “this young lady is one of our curiosities, and has come now to the third volume of our Registers. Her birth is in what I call the first volume; she lay asleep on this very floor, with her pretty head on what I call the second volume; and she’s now a-writing her little name as a bride, in what I call the third volume.”

Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*

Introduction: **in favour of and against the remediation process.** **The case of *Little Dorrit***

The term ‘remediation’ implicitly carries a double connotation in its two different meanings of ‘ameliorating’ and ‘repurposing’ from one medium to another, as observed by J. D. Bolter and R. Grusin (1999). It is a widely disputable matter whether a re-writing – or repurposing – of a work of art may ameliorate or worsen it. The present work therefore sets off from the belief that what is ameliorated in the twenty-first century is the ‘reputations’ of *Little Dorrit* and of

Victorianism itself. Reputation was in fact one of the most treasured values for the Victorians, but the status of Victorian literature and culture has been impaired by the Bloomsbury Group's bias against it. Bloomsbury disapproved not only of its hypocrisy, its dim atmosphere, and its old-fashioned concerns, but also of its techniques.

In *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror*, Simon Joyce highlights how contemporary readers often have a distorted perception of Victorianism because of

a continuing insistence on seeing the Victorians in terms that were established by self-defined modernists in their first moment of recoil. Doing so also commits us to a perpetuation of modernism's sense of itself as a negation of the past, an attitude that has already helped generate more than a century of denigrations and revivalist reversals. Each of these has tended to recycle the same clichés and characteristics; as if seen only through a rearview mirror of history, the Victorians have thus remained in a fixed relationship to the present, incapable either of being brought closer to us or fading into the distance (Joyce 2007: 174).

However, several scholars (e.g. Brugnolo 2012, Marucci 2009, Marroni 2002 and 2004) argue that the long nineteenth century succeeded in imbuing contemporary reality with Victorian values, and prejudices, more than we are generally prone to admit. Further, many problems investigated by Victorian writers, especially Dickens, retain a durable topical relevance in the twenty-first century, such as the gap between the poorest and richest strata of society, the cost of progress, and the financial crisis caused by speculation. Finally, other universal themes strike a chord in our time just like in any other: problematic love relationships, complicated family relations, and the burdensome expectations of society.

The twenty-first century scholarly re-evaluation of Victorian literature and culture coincides with the more popular 'Victorianomania' which can be easily observed in the multitude of

successful period dramas and cinema productions deriving their inspiration from Victorian sources, or at least from nineteenth-century history and culture: it may here suffice to mention *Bleak House* (2005), *Jane Eyre* (2006 and 2011), *Little Dorrit* (2008), *Desperate Romantics* (2009), *Sherlock* (2010, 2012 and 2014), *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), *Great Expectations* (2011), *Penny Dreadful* (2014), and *Dracula Untold* (2014).

This interest in period drama might reflect a contemporary necessity for leisure programmes to distantiate the twenty-first-century crisis – the difficulties of understanding a ‘new’ world dominated by more and more complicated machines and markets – without ignoring the problem. This aim seems to be achieved by using fiction from a similarly crucial period when these problems were, if not successfully overcome, at least profitably investigated in art and literary works.

Little Dorrit is a perfect paradigm for a remediation of the Victorian reputation because the novel was harshly criticized at the time of its publication, but it has recently become an online phenomenon after its 2008 BBC adaptation. Apart from the *Athanaeum* (Rotkin 1990), Dickens’s critics censured *Little Dorrit* for its excessively gloomy atmosphere and the loss of the sarcastic buoyancy of *The Pickwick Papers*. George Eliot, under the pseudonym of Von W. H. Riehl, also reprimanded Dickens for a supposed lack of psychological penetration into his characters:

We have one great novelist who is gifted with the utmost power of rendering the external traits of our town population; and if he could give us their psychological character... with the same truth as their idioms and manners, his books would be the greatest contribution Art has ever made to the awakening of social sympathies. But while he can copy Mrs. Plornish’s colloquial style [...] he scarcely ever passes from the humorous and external to the emotional and tragic. (Eliot 1856: 55)

Yet, in the twenty-first century *Little Dorrit* still manifests its relevance and modernity «in its indictment of society’s ability to

destroy through greed and crushing self-interest» (Kirschner 2009), while scrutinizing the universal forces that drive human life. Further, Dickens's «terrible and wonderful novel» (Byatt 2008) has recently reached the centre of attention after the 2008 BBC TV adaptation, which was re-aired to celebrate Dickens's 2012 bicentenary. As a consequence, the novel and the TV series have been extensively discussed on the web (forums, blogs, websites), eventually giving birth to new literature in the form of fan fiction.

Convinced with Kirschner (2009) that, if Dickens lived today, he would be «experimenting now with the form of this novel, seeking ways to expand his impact on readers», this study carries out a threefold analysis of *Little Dorrit's* remediation in the twenty-first century: visual remediation – Xue's 2012 *Little Dorrit*; audio-visual remediation – the BBC series; and web remediation – fan fiction – in order to demonstrate Dickens's appeal and longevity in contemporary media¹.

***Little Dorrit's* visual remediation:**

The great social Exhibition

Literary texts offer “images” (Hillman 1989: 22) that can create political or revolutionary potential in mass art, and this is particularly true for *Little Dorrit*, where Dickens's magisterial denunciations of the problems, and people, of his time purportedly raise awareness and aversion to the point that Bernard Shaw in his “Preface” to *Great Expectations* wrote «*Little Dorrit* is a more seditious book than *Das Kapital*» (1937: ix).

Little Dorrit in fact is not merely a love story of two children of ill-fated families – Amy Dorrit, born in the Marshalsea prison, where her

¹ Due to space constraints, the analysis of each kind of remediation will here necessarily be rather limited in favour of a synoptic view of the topic. Further detailed study will be provided in my future research on *Little Dorrit* and its fortune in the twenty-first century.

father was imprisoned for debt, and Arthur Clennam, the illegitimate child of a poor singer and a wealthy businessman, whose house literally falls to pieces: rather, it is the story of the social inequities and contradictions hidden behind the Victorian Compromise. To say it with Alber's words: Dickens «draws a homological structure between prison and society that gradually turns into a critique of society and defines society as a prison» (2007: 50). This indictment of society generates sentiments of revolt against such injustice on account of images that synthesize the soul of the age in Dickens's sketches, which capture the psyche of his characters by means of material details used as objective correlative. In this, his art is comparable only to that of Hogarth, the great painter of British vices and perversities, as demonstrated by the description of the banker Mr. Merdle. In the scene when his wife reproaches him for appearing burdened by his business, the «eighth wonder of the world»² Mr. Merdle appears rather uncomfortable and «a little common» as he clumsily enters the room where his wife and Mrs. Gowan are talking: «He came in, and stood looking out at a distant window, with his hands crossed under his uneasy coat-cuffs, clasping his wrists as if he were taking himself into custody» (LD I. 33: 294). The coat-cuffs here metaphorically stand for the handcuffs that Mr. Merdle would wear in prison if the bubble of his financial speculations exploded, placing him in prison rather than within respectable society.

Dickens's attention to the details of the story is reflected in the details of 1820s style; Osborn (2012) notes that Dickens's fidelity to the minutiae of *Little Dorrit's* time includes several items of clothing:

Flintwinch's breeches and gaiters [...]; Mr Tite Barnacle's folds of white cravat and other details of his late Georgian clothes; Mrs

² Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, with Illustrations by H. K. Browne, London, Bradbury and Evans, 1857 (First published in monthly instalments between Dec 1855-June 1857), II. 15: 452. References to *Little Dorrit* are to this edition and are given parenthetically in my text by book, chapter, and page preceded by LD.

Merdle's décolleté evening gown and 'fillet' and Mr Dorrit's (post-Marshalsea) 'resplendent dressing-gown and cap'. In Chapter 18 of Book I, young John Chivery courts Amy Dorrit in full fig as a sort of post-Regency Dandy, including 'silken waistcoat' and a 'chaste neck-kerchief much in vogue at that day'. (Osborne 2012: 48)

Dickens's attention to particulars and iconographic perfection led him to take an active interest in the graphic representations of his stories by his illustrators. When *Little Dorrit* came out, in instalments of thirty-two pages and two illustrations, he chose as illustrator Hablot K. Browne – aka Phiz, for 'physiognomy' – with whom he discussed almost all the engravings (Kitton 1899, Osborn 2012, Stein 2001), which strongly influenced the reception and subsequent iconography of Dickens's characters, before authorising publication.

The front cover of the instalments shows "The Great Social Exhibition" (LD I. 13: 108) of the people of London: right in centre of the frontispiece, a poor Little Dorrit emerges to the light from the shadowy gates of the Marshalsea to embody the hope of the innocent victims of poverty, on top of the page Britannia drives her carriage surrounded by several 'noteworthy' figures from the Circumlocution Office and 'respectable' society, while a crowd of poorer characters populates the bottom of the scene. This juxtaposition of images provides a remarkable synthesis of the main topics of the novel: Little Dorrit's story, British society, the 'common' people, and their physical and metaphorical prisons.

Despite Dickens's supervision, the plates that comment on the text do not always succeed in being either meaningful or artistically proficient: "Mr Flintwinch has a mild attack of irritability" (Image 2), in its chiaroscuro representation of violence, is undoubtedly far more accomplished than "Little Mother" (Image 3), the execution of which is, to use Kitton's words, «timid and lifeless» (1899: 110). Yet even this unimpressive plate managed to permeate the collective unconscious to the point that it is evident how similar Maggie is in the 1998 cinematic

adaptation, and in the BBC TV series, to the girl who called Amy her “Little Mother” in Phiz’s etching.

Very different is the contemporary visual remediation of *Little Dorrit* painted by Xue Wang, an emergent Chinese artist³. “Little Dorrit” was exhibited at the ‘WHAT THE DICKENS! Solo Show’ (2012) in the George Thornton Art Gallery, Nottingham.

Xue defines her art as

driven by a fascination with childhood paraphernalia: dolls, toys, fairy tales, stage sets, fun fairs, found objects mixed with whimsy. These personal recollections are complimented [sic] by the cultural heritage of Victoriana, vintage fashion, film iconography, pin-up imagery etc. [...] If one word were chosen to describe my paintings, it would be ‘edgy’. Superficially they may appear ‘cute’ but my intention is to unsettle, albeit subtly. As the creeping wasp on the fairy cake does. (Xue Wang 2014)

In fact Xue’s synthesis of *Little Dorrit* is rather unsettling. Amy Dorrit is depicted in the centre in the guise of a Jack in the Box. On the box’s lid an inscription, “Little Dorrit. Made in London”, states the subject of the painting, and on the only visible side of the box a disconcerting smiling mouth stands out against a green background. Amy is represented in the act of springing out of the box and taking money out of a magic hat, as if to comment on the mysterious legacy of her inherited sum of money; her function appears to be that of a mere puppet in the hands of her family, who regard her as a means by which to improve their lives economically.

The pale mementos of her domestic duties contrast with the grey background: a broom in a bucket, and her father’s laundry hanging on the pegs. On the left, the sneering trio of Amy’s family: Fanny, Tip/Edward and their father. Fanny, with a severe look, hides her face behind a fan, which hints at her innate ability to hide her own feelings

³ Further info can be derived from the artist official website <http://xuewang.weebly.com/>.

while alliteratively recalling her name. Next to her, their brother Tip, with a grimace on his face, casts a scornful glance towards Arthur Clennam. Their insatiable father, in handcuffs and chains, smiles at the sight of money, while on the table a soup and two jacket potatoes await to satisfy his terrene appetite.

On the right, Arthur Clennam is visible only from his back, where he hides a lollypop, possibly waiting to offer it to his 'child', thus stressing the 20 year age gap between the two, and his patronizing attitude towards her.

The painting is interesting for its strong caricatural power, and also because it adds an element absent in Dickens's Marshalsea prison: a little dog wagging his tail at Amy. This may perhaps be a memento for Lion, Mr. Gowan's dog, cruelly killed by the evil Mr. Blondois, one of the strongest symbols of gratuitous violence in the novel. Thus, Xue's portrait after almost two hundred years properly renders, in a discomfoting picture, the unsettling injustice that rules *Little Dorrit's* world.

***Little Dorrit's* audio-visual remediation: from the page to the screen**

Dickens approved the illustrations of the *Little Dorrit's* instalments; the same was obviously not possible for its filmic adaptations. However, it would be deceitful to think Dickens uninfluential in the cinematic world. In fact, as illustrated by the Soviet theorist and director Sergei Eisenstein, in his renowned article "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today", the Victorian writer proved an astonishing skilfulness in the «optical quality» of the construction of his characters:

The observation in the novels is extraordinary – as is their optical quality. The characters of Dickens are rounded with means as plastic and slightly exaggerated as are the screen heroes of today. The screen's heroes are engraved on the senses of the

spectator with clearly visible traits, its villains are remembered by certain facial expressions, and all are saturated in the peculiar, slightly unnatural radiant gleam thrown over them by the screen.

It is absolutely thus that Dickens draws his characters – this is the faultlessly plastically grasped and pitilessly sharply sketched gallery of immortal Pickwicks, [...] and others. (Eisenstein 1944: 208-209)

Although Eisenstein wrote his analysis sixty years ago, it remains relevant. Not only is Dickens's ability to create unforgettable characters magisterial; his anticipatory use of 'dissolve' techniques is also essential to his diegesis. The passage after Fanny Dorrit lends Mr. Merdle a penknife proves this particularly well:

Thoroughly convinced, as he went out of the room, that it was the longest day that ever did come to an end at last, and that there never was a woman, not wholly devoid of personal attractions, so worn out by idiotic and lumpish people, Fanny passed into the balcony for a breath of air. Waters of vexation filled her eyes; and they had the effect of making the famous Mr. Merdle, in going down the street, appear to leap, and waltz, and gyrate, as if he were possessed by several Devils. (LD II. 24: 531)

Notwithstanding its intrinsic cinematic potential, *Little Dorrit* is one of the least represented of Dickens's novels. Carnell Watt and Lonsdale (2003) count just three English language adaptations in the twentieth century: two black and white silent films – the American *Little Dorrit* (1913) directed by James Kirkwood, and *Little Dorrit* (1920) adapted and directed by Sydney Morgan – followed almost 70 years later by the 1987 British film directed by Christine Edzard, starring Derek Jacobi as Arthur Clennam. Jacobi's performance was highly praised as "breathtaking" but the production was criticized for "sentimentality" and "mistakes" (Carnell Watt and Lonsdale 2003).

In 2008 Andrew Davies decided to remediate the novel adopting the serial format⁴. In his view:

Particularly after the success of *Bleak House* on television in 2006, it was clear that the viewing public not only had an appetite for Dickens, but for Dickens at full length, Dickens in all his richness and complexity. (Davies 2008: xvi)

Yet, watching the BBC series adaptation, one has the feeling that Dickens's «richness and complexity» have been lost. The claustrophobic feeling generated by the inner and outer prisons of Dickens's characters is replaced by the romance of frustrated love relationships, which presage an unproblematic happy ending. If one considers that Davies was more interested in rendering Dickens the «explorer of the human heart» than the «social reformer and satirist» (Davies 2008: xvi), the director's aim is to be considered accomplished, but the TV series is not.

The first broadcasts in the UK (2008) and USA (2009) received mixed reviews. In *The Guardian*, Wollaston enthusiastically wrote:

Little Dorrit (BBC1, Sunday) was brilliant, obviously. Dickens, Andrew Davies, lots of money, top names... how could it be anything other than brilliant? And because it's Dickens, those top names can get away with a little bit more showing off and look-at-me acting than they would be able to in, say, Jane Austen. [...] Splendid. (Wollaston 2008)

⁴ J. D. Bolter and R. Grusin seem to exclude the possibility of defining 'remediations' most of the «filmed versions of classic novels» because they often appear to be mere borrowings of narrative content (1999: 44-55). Yet, in the case of Andrew Davies's TV series, the director made a double effort to adapt the content, and to innovate the medium of serialized narrative. His attempt indeed produced «an interplay between the media» (1999: 55) – and the texts – which generated more remediations of *Little Dorrit* on the web.

Writing for *The Times*, Chater (2008) also affirms that «Every week, *Little Dorrit* guarantees the viewer a couple of half-hour interludes of total content». More critical was the show's reception in the USA, with Lowry labelling the TV series «a big, gloriously messy package» (Lowry 2009), to which Lloyd (2009), on the *Los Angeles Times*, added:

not every character is exactly as described on paper; some don't stay around long enough to register and others who have earned our interest just disappear. And the story can be confusing at times. But all in all, this is a dynamic addictive rendition of a complicated novel that catches the spirit of Dickens's «roaring streets» where “the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the forward and the vain, fretted and chafed, and made their usual uproar”. (Lloyd 2009)

The prisons and the “roaring streets” of London play a secondary role in Davies's remediation, where the plot evolves mainly around Amy Dorrit's story, her intricate relationship with her family, and the story of her and Clennam's relationship. The cast is amazing, especially Tom Courtenay, who succeeded in transmuting the Father of the Marshalsea, William Dorrit, in «a new classic role, comparable to Falstaff or Uncle Vania» (Davies 2008: xviii). Excellent also is Russell Tovey's performance as John Chivery, which gives proper dignity to Amy's unrequited suitor – and his tragicomic epitaphs – which might have otherwise turned into a ridiculous caricature:

Here lie the mortal remains of John Chivery, Assistant Turnkey and later Chief Turnkey of the Marshalsea Prison for Debt. He was unlucky in love and endured a good deal of sorrow, but he rose above it and performed many an act of kindness, even to his rival. And always engraved, on stone, deep into his very heart, is the name of “Amy Dorrit”. (LD 14: 48:52-49:19).

Amy's heart is dedicated to Arthur Clennam, played by Matthew Macfadyen, already known to film audiences as Mr. Darcy of the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* adaptation. This association with Mr. Darcy connotes Macfadyen as the perfect romantic hero, influencing also the reception of Arthur Clennam. Moreover, the age gap between the actor and Claire Foy is actually of ten years, while in the novel that between Amy and Arthur is twenty. This choice may partially be due to the fact that a similar gap might have seemed awkward to the British primetime audience.

In order to preserve the aura of childlikeness that surrounds Amy, the other ladies who compete for Arthur's love – although impersonated by actresses of almost the same age – are more curvaceous. Further, Amy's dresses and hairstyle are rather plain and make her appear not only poor and remissive, but also petite and pubescent.

The series was awarded BAFTAs for Best Production Design, Best Costume Design, Best Make Up & Hair Design, Best Original Television Music, Best Sound Fiction/Entertainment. Yet the readers of Dickens's novel feel a terrible sense of loss because, as Valerie Purton notes:

It would have taken a much more "interior", expressionistic filmic style to convey the Chinese boxes of every character's inner and outer prisons, culminating in the pathological world of Mrs F's Aunt. [...]

Davies instead gallops on, having miles to go before the end of each episode, sacrificing too much to narrative pace and to the presumed needs of the mass audience. There is nothing wrong in itself, of course, in appealing to a mass audience. Walter Benjamin writes passionately about the importance of dispensing with the "aura" of "Great Art" and of democratizing access to cultural artefacts – an objective one could imagine Dickens himself sharing. (Purton 2010: 132-133)

Davies's series has the indisputable merit of adapting a literary masterpiece for the mass audience, and it also succeeded in leading new readers to the original novel, which was in fact re-published in 2008 by BBC Books with a director's introduction. However, this adaptation missed the opportunity to «promote revolutionary criticism of social conditions» (Benjamin 1968 [1937]: 231) and prior readers who read the book before watching the TV series cannot avoid expressing their sorrow for what is lost in remediation.

Little Dorrit's fan fiction: Dickens wrote fan fiction!

In November 2009 an intriguing post appeared on Dickensblog entitled «Dickens wrote fan fiction!»

The Wall Street Journal has been Charles Dickens Central for the past couple of days – they've got a nice review of Michael Slater's new biography [here](#), and an excerpt from that biography [here](#). And speaking of the Slater book, I've got it now -- thanks to the fine folks at Yale University Press for getting me my review copy so promptly -- and wanted to share this, from the first page:

“While the Dickens family were still in Chatham, Forster tells us, the young boy wrote a tragedy called *Misnar, the Sultan of India* based on a favorite story of his.”

It tickles me to think that, had Dickens lived a couple hundred years or so later, he might have started his career over at [Fanfiction.net](#).

This post presents Dickens as an artist able to master a medium which even his flourishing imagination could not have dreamed of. Yet, somehow it was inevitable with Dickens. It is nowadays frequent that television serial narratives – deriving their forms, when not their stories, from serial publications – grow to be cult phenomena, and from there move onto the web, in specialized fan communities. It may here suffice to mention the sci-fi TV series *Doctor Who*. In his essay on “Casablanca”, Eco observed how books and movies turn into «cult

objects [...] part of the beliefs of a sect, a private world of their own» by virtue of «some archetypal appeal» (1985: 3). These cult objects become the centre of the fans' attention and discussion, and can generate cult-specific narratives, typically called fan fiction, characterized by their being «complex and involved: They require the concentration of the reader to piece together narrative events and plot elements inter- and intra-textually separated both by space and by time» (Booth 2010: 79).

The undeniable appeal of fan fiction resides in its potential to accomplish the final «goal of literary work (of literature as work)», which as Barthes declared in *S/Z* «is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text» (Barthes 1974: 4).

In order for fan fiction to operate, it is necessary that a community is involved, sharing the same interests and ambitions. It is not the purpose of this text to assess such issues as «defining fans, understanding their motivations, and debating fandom's socio-political effects and limitations» (Hellekson and Busse 2006: 7-8); rather, my aim is to offer a snapshot of this particular moment in the development of *Little Dorrit's* fan fiction. This study focuses on fan fiction published on FanFiction.net, not only because it is the one indicated in the above mentioned Dickensblog post, but also because FanFiction.net is «the largest multifandom archive [...], it contains literally thousands of stories, with more than 200,000 of them from *Harry Potter* alone» (Coppa 2006: 57).

The archive is user-friendly and easily searchable. The words 'Little Dorrit' yield 19 entries under the category "TV series" and another 12 under "Books". From this first check, it is possible to infer that the TV series had the stronger force in motivating the writers (Image 4). By comparing the dates of publication of the fan fiction with the dates of first broadcast of the TV series (beginning 26 Oct 2008 in the UK; 29 March 2009 in the USA and 27 June 2010 in Australia) it is deducible that the writing impulse derived from watching, rather than reading, Dickens's story (Image 5).

A further search among the titles shows that 6 stories are actually published in both the "Books" and the "TV series" categories and only one author, Dickensian812, has published exclusively in the "Books"

section. Yet while reading her fiction it is easy to see how Dickensian812 also wrote under the influence of the BBC series. She admits it in her author's note to *Friends*:

I wrote this story some time ago and put it up on my *LiveJournal*, but for some reason I never got around to posting it here. These characters don't belong to me – but they don't belong to Andrew Davies either, and I'm pretty sure I can do a better job with this scene than he did. Actually, that's not saying much, because I'm pretty sure my four-year-old goddaughter could have done a better job with this scene than he did. The thing is in desperate need of a rewrite, is what I'm saying – so here is my attempt to, as one of my friends put it, "recuperate" it.

This note is relevant because it shows another essential aspect of fan fiction: the community. Fictioners don't work alone; they endeavour to embrace fandom, their comments and their mutual sense of belonging. The aim of the writing becomes to investigate the original story, in order to 'remediate' its faults and make it more enjoyable for fellow fans. «I sincerely hope you enjoy it! :)» writes Aithion in her note to *Primvale*.

Apart from this virtual friendship, it is difficult to find any constant features in the works: the number of words vary from 119 in *On the Lock* (Dickensian812) to 18,830 *Primvale (Volume One): 1841*, which is just the first chapter of what Aithion announces to be a long story (Image 6). As a result, the genre and style differ substantially: tiny epiphanies like *On the Lock* (Dickensian812) harmonize with short-stories like *Friends* (Dickensian812), and lists of 'moments of being' like the specular *Daytime Stars* («Five very private moments in the Life of Arthur Clennam») and *The Little Woman's Shadow* («Five things nobody knows about Little Dorrit»), both written by Laura Schiller, the most prolific of Dickens's fan fictioners.

The 25 titles in the *Little Dorrit* series cover different themes, even though love is the central topic: 10 explore the love relationship between Arthur and Amy, one (*Apples*) offers John Chivery the

opportunity to meet a new love, one is a femme-slash implying a non-consensual lesbian affair between Harriet and Miss Wade. Other stories, like *Lock and Key*, investigate «how the characters escape their various prisons... or not» (Laura Schiller), a future life with the protagonists' children (*Her Father's Daughter* and *Mirror Image*), or even alternative finales like *The House that Rigaud Built*, where the villain is arrested by the police with the aid of Cavalletto and Mr. Panks, who are thus invested with a superior dignity.

All *Little Dorrit* fan fiction is accompanied by comments from both the author and her readers. Next to the title, key words help the reader decide whether or not the specific story may be of interest. The whole apparatus is structured around the idea of being helpful and user-friendly, and demonstrates the fan writers' thorough meta-knowledge, not only of the canon they refer to, but also of the medium they use. This structure becomes an ever-increasing body of literature and comments, which like the Bakhtinian Carnival «outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits» (Bakhtin 1984: 26). Yet, no 'horror vacui' seizes the casual reader because the sense of belonging and of comfort received in approaching these texts produces a mesmerizing effect, to the point that the curious reader will beg «Please Sir, I want some more», and, if they do not get it, they may always write it.

Conclusions

The twentieth-century remediation of *Little Dorrit* shows the enduring appeal of Dickens's text, due probably to the thematic relevance of the topics challenged by the Victorian novelist. Although any study of contemporary remediation may only be a discourse in progress, it offers some features to reflect upon.

Comparing the re-purposing of this literary text in various media, it is possible to note how television was the key element in the re-evaluation of *Little Dorrit*. The novel was in fact almost entirely neglected in visual art and on the web until the 2008 BBC series.

The appeal of period drama – and of charming actors – raises new interest around the novel, favouring the republishing of the book and viral discussion on the acting, the characters, the themes, and Andrew Davies's remediation. From this sprang a whole new set of stories, which one may very well imagine Dickens himself reading eagerly and commenting on. Even though fan fiction might not seem Great Literature, it shows that Dickens accomplished his purpose in reaching wide audiences, amusing them, and making them aware of the iniquities of the so called Good Society and of wider life in general.

A further development of this study could be the analysis of the impact of remediation – especially fan fiction – on students, who often find long Victorian novels too hard to approach. But for this, we will have to wait for *Little Dorrit's* fifth volume.

Simonetta Falchi, *Little Dorrit's Fourth Volume. Twenty-first Century Remediation of a Victorian Classic*

Images

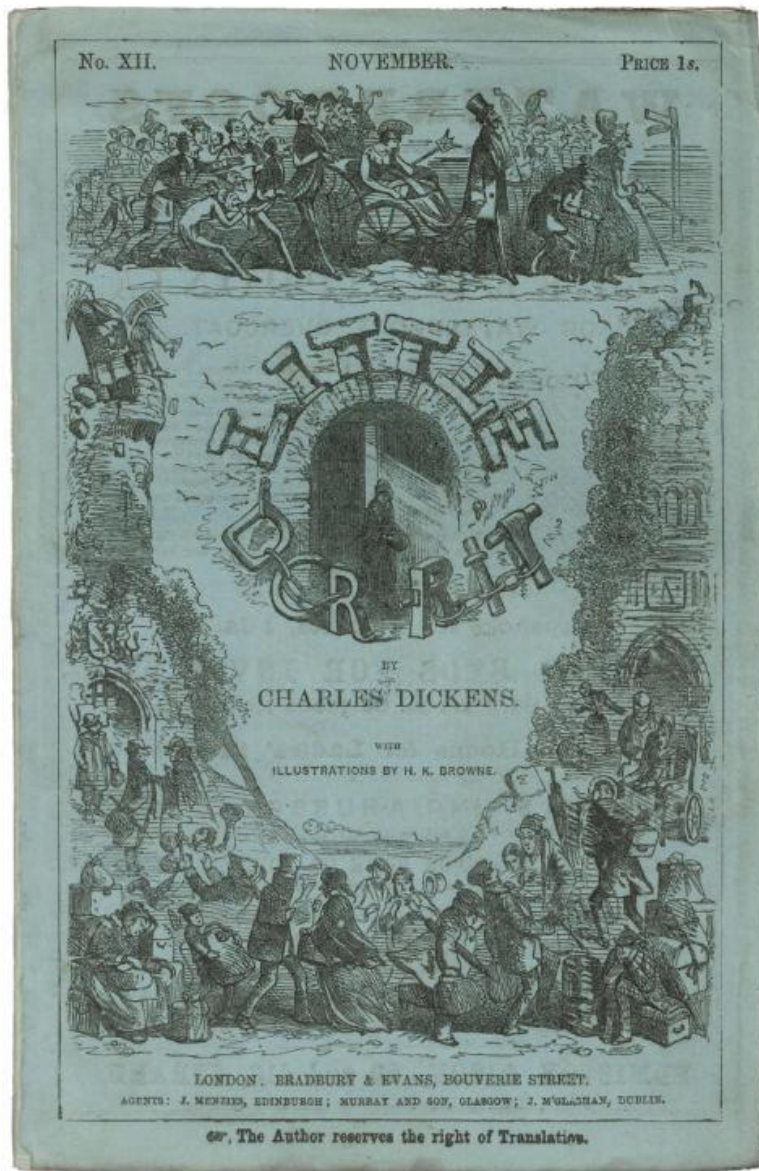


Image 1. *Little Dorrit*, Frontispiece.

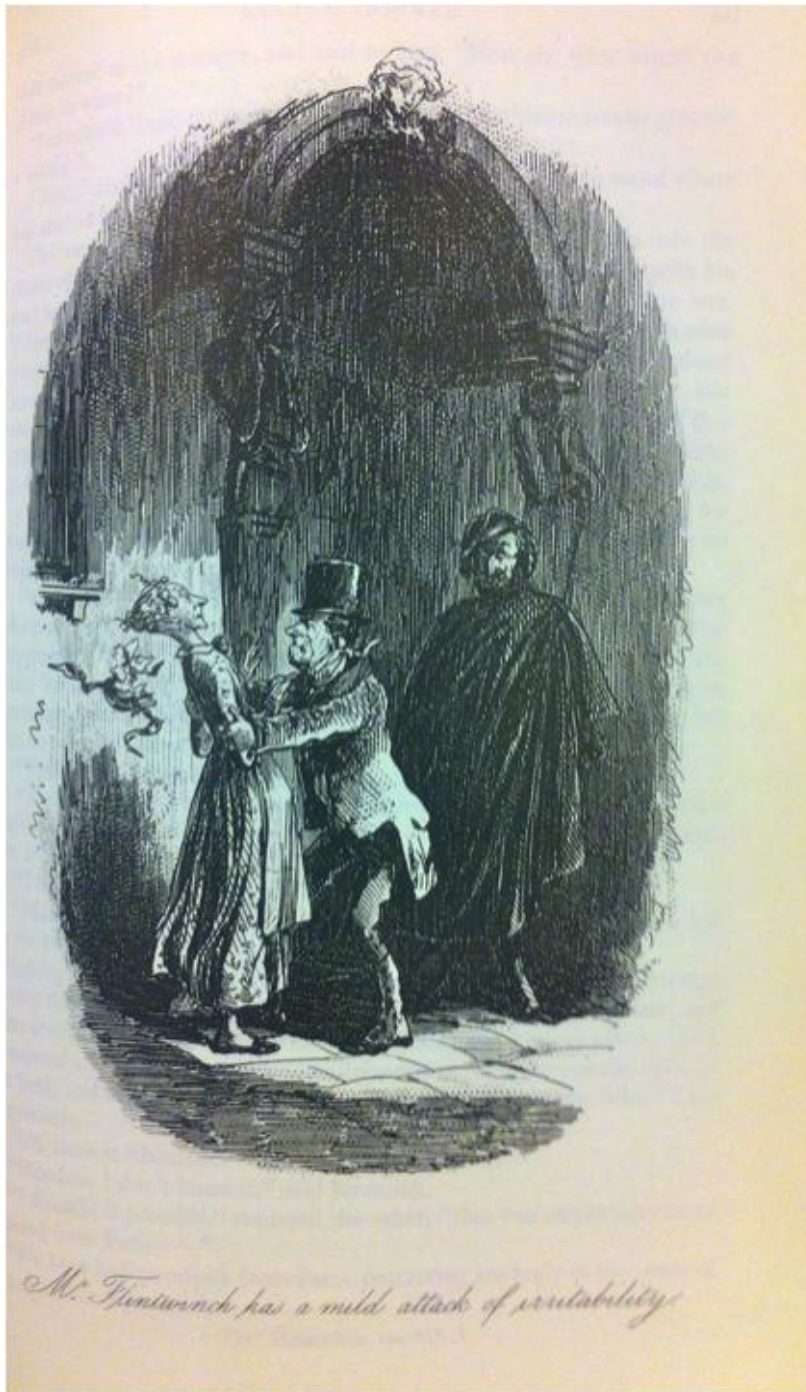


Image 2. Mr. Flintwinch has a mild attack of irritability

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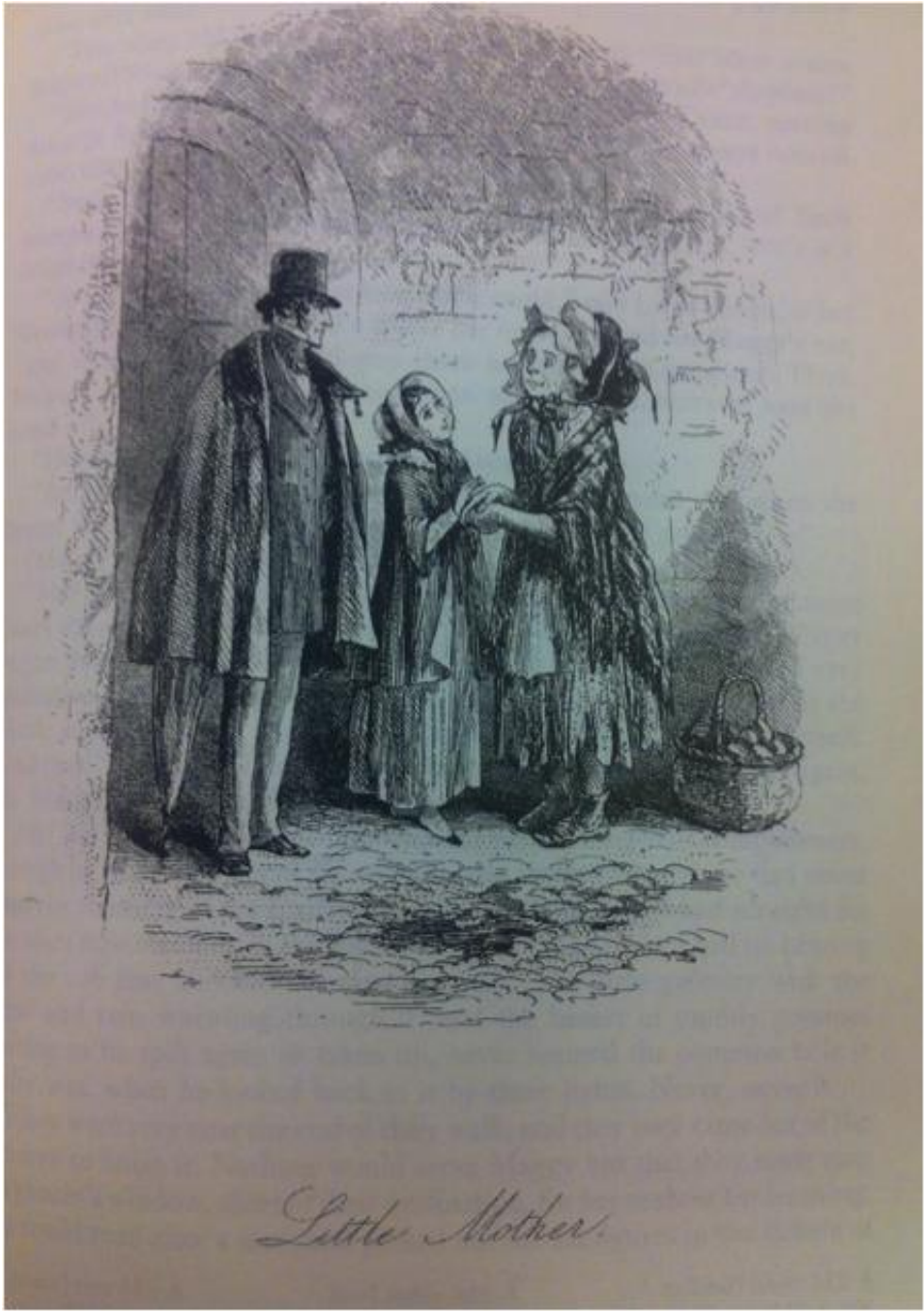


Image 3. Little Mother

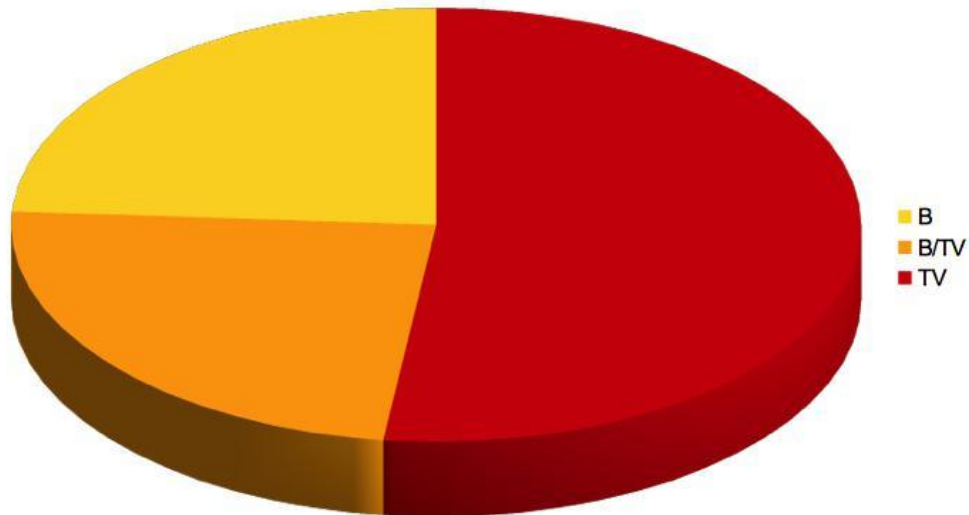


Image 4. Fan fiction published in the sections “Books” (B), “TV shows” (TV) and both (B/TV) on FanFiction.net. Graphics courtesy of Dr. Davide Bilò.

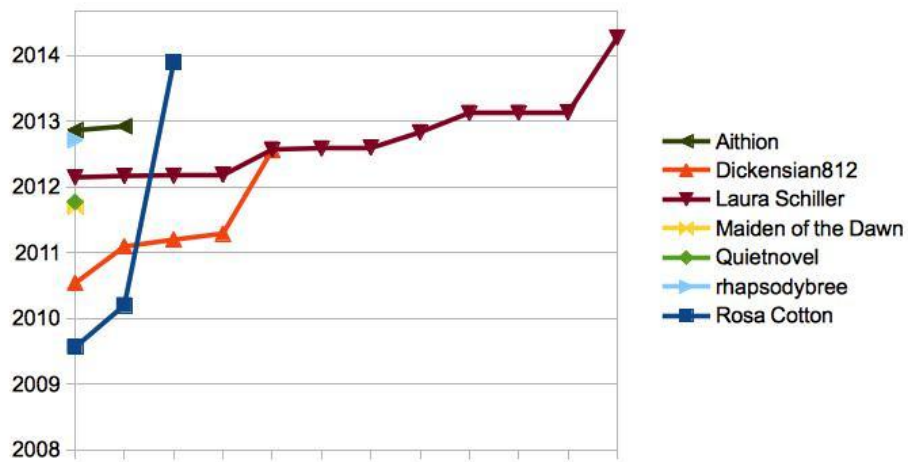


Image 5. Time representation of the fan fiction published on FanFiction.net. Graphics courtesy of Dr. Davide Bilò.

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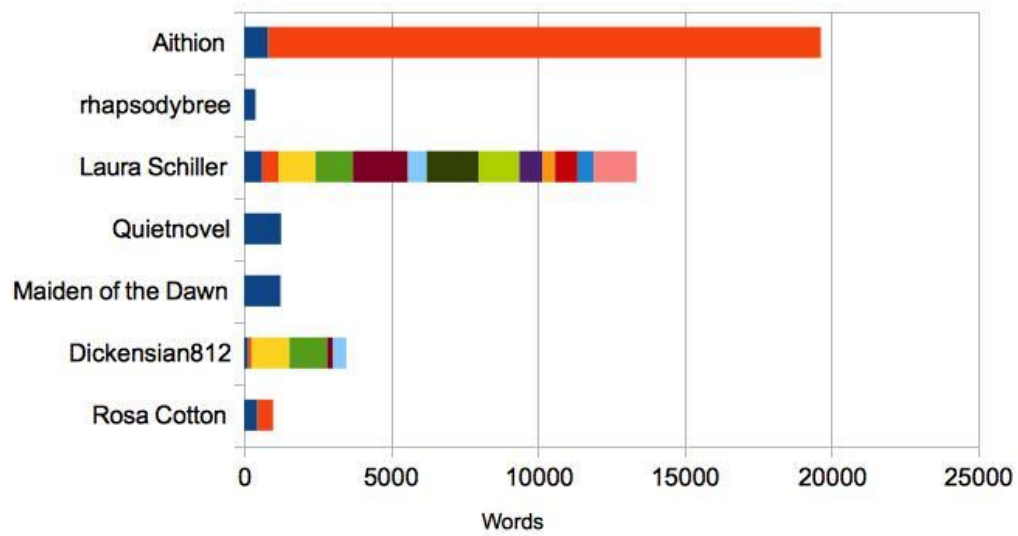


Image 6. Number of Words of the fan fiction published on FanFiction.net, divided by author. Graphics courtesy of Dr. Davide Bilò.

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