

# Tears and Middle-Class Decorum in the Iconotext of the First Italian Edition of *David Copperfield*

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## Abstract

This essay examines the role of the iconotext of the first Italian edition of *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens, published in *Il Romanziere contemporaneo illustrato* in 1868-1869.

Starting from some considerations on the complementary relationship between writing and images in the first edition, *Le memorie di Davide Copperfield* is framed in those areas which still were being defined in the post-unification decade so as to propose a contrastive analysis that will highlight how the illustrations of the Treves edition differ from those of the original.

The impression of greater respectability given by the Italian edition is mainly due to the different treatment of the female characters, who are never shown as 'fallen women'. Having purged indecorous themes and removed irony entirely, the novel is drained of its tragicomic vitality and reduced to a one-dimensional romantic sentimentalism typical of the Italian versions of other foreign novels in this period.

## Keywords

Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*; translation; illustration; Italy; Treves; Nineteenth century

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## Introduction

«What makes the nineteenth-century illustrated book so fascinating», writes Robert Patten, «is, at least in part, that it mediated two competing systems of knowing and representing the world». Whether an author was exploring and representing human psychology or constructing a political consciousness, in the 19th-century English novel verbal and visual codes went hand in hand. Yet «we in the twenty-first century», regrets the critic, «are heirs to the victory of words over pictures» (Patten 2002: 92).

In the pages that follow, the first Italian edition of *David Copperfield* is examined in an attempt to rediscover the role that illustrations played in the way readers understood the novel. After considering the complementary relationship between writing and image in the original Bradbury & Evans monthly edition, we shall analyse the Treves edition (published in instalments in 1868-69)<sup>1</sup> in the context of «the media spaces being staked out»<sup>2</sup> in Milanese publishing in the first decade after Italian unification. A consideration of the iconotexts<sup>3</sup> of both editions will then seek to assess how the fifty-six anonymously produced etchings of the Treves edition differ from the forty Hablot Browne illustrations that graced the English

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<sup>1</sup> The edition referred to in this analysis is the 1869 volume that gathers together the instalments published in *Il Romanziere Contemporaneo Illustrato*. It is held in the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense.

<sup>2</sup> The expression is taken from the title of the second chapter of Piazza 2018.

<sup>3</sup> The first reflection on the literary iconotext appears in the essay collection *Iconotextes* (Montandon 1990). Peter Wagner defines an iconotext as «an artefact in which the verbal and visual signs mingle to produce rhetoric that depends on the copresence of words and images» (1996: 16).

publication. Images, captions and page layout are shown to combine together to offer markedly different visions of Dickens's characters and the world they move in, something that radically shifts the general emotional tone of the novel.

## 1. The balance between comedy and pathos in Browne's original illustrations

Dickens was intensely involved in the illustration of his novels, corresponding regularly with the eighteen artists who between 1836 and 1870 provided almost 900 images for the first editions of his works. The need to meet monthly instalment deadlines obliged the illustrators to work in close contact with the author over long periods, during which, as his friend and biographer John Forster observed, «even beyond what is ordinary between author and illustrator, [Dickens's] requirements were exacting» (Forster 1878: 364): he gave precise instructions as to how he saw each scene, chose which drawings to use and provided titles for the illustrations which were often ironic. Dickens would examine not only the final versions, but also preliminary sketches, specifying the setting, the number of characters to include, their respective positions, their gestures, facial expressions and clothing. He behaved, Forster concluded, as «a benevolent tyrant» (Cohen 1980: 7), such was his determination to integrate the illustrations with the overall architecture of each instalment<sup>4</sup>.

After collaborating with the most famous illustrators of his time, Cruikshank and Seymour, who illustrated his first novel *The Pickwick Papers* in 1837, for his next works Dickens turned to the young and relatively unknown Hablot K. Browne (known as Phiz for his ability to capture physiognomy) in the hope he would prove more malleable<sup>5</sup>. Twelve years later the two worked together to create *David Copperfield* – «my favourite child» (Dickens 1981: 752) – published in twenty monthly instalments, from 1 May 1849 to 1 November 1850 by Bradbury & Evans.

The twenty-three years of their collaboration would see a gradual development in the way Dickens and Phiz brought together word and image; suffice it to say, however, that in *David Copperfield*, the novel that took them to the height of their fame, Browne was given free rein to offer iconographic details that would encourage particular interpretations of the story, so

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Siegel 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ley 1918: 34, cit. in Cohen 1980: 62, n5.

long as his illustrations didn't clash with the letter and spirit of the text. As David grows older, for example, and his observations more mature, Browne introduces subtly connoted details to offer comment on characters and events, as well as characteristically Hogarthian touches emphasising implications that are only hinted at in Dickens's text (this will be evident in the illustration "Our Pew at Church", presented later in this essay). Allusions were permitted to emerge at the visual level that would perhaps have offended Victorian sensibilities, had they been made explicit in the author's writing<sup>6</sup>; other details in the illustrations function as ironic counterpoints to the author's sentimentalism.

The illustrations to *David Copperfield* thus have at least three clear functions: they offer comic or serious comment on characters and events; they look forward to future developments in the story; finally and most intriguingly they suggest, as we shall see, a possible interpretation of one of the novel's central ambiguities: the hero's marriage with Agnes, which some critics consider the moment in which David achieves maturity and others see as nothing more than a form of evasion. By pointing to certain narrative events and themes at the expense of others, Browne's illustrations, which we recall were produced under Dickens's attentive supervision, offer a possible solution to this question, thus becoming, as Steig puts it, «part of the evidence of what the novel is» (1978: 113).

Taken from the narrator's «earlier recollections», the first scene that Dickens asked Browne to illustrate was "Our Pew at Church", a plate packed with people and remarkable for its complex composition. Even in this opening illustration, there is no question of a slavish adherence to Dickens's text, which describes David as being so bored with the church service that he starts to doze and falls off his seat; Browne, perhaps inspired by Hogarth's etching "The Sleeping Congregation" (1736), extends that boredom to the entire community of the faithful, showing the verger, the beadle, various musicians and many others all fast asleep while Mrs Copperfield, under the predatory gaze of Mr Murdstone, listens with lowered eyes as the priest reads from a Bible lying open on a cushion. Murdstone had not in fact been introduced to readers at this point, but later we will hear that he was indeed present at that service, during which, and here Browne's illustration introduces an element not in the narration, he had his prayer book open on the marriage service, a sign that he was already planning to dupe David's mother. Among the many details with which Browne

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Reed 1970.



Fig. 1. "Our Pew at Church" and "I am hospitably received by Mr. Peggotty".

packs the scene, we notice allusions to the animal world like the cobweb on the lamp, the spider hanging from an angel's trumpet and a bird's nest with two eggs. There are also Biblical emblems, such as the bas-reliefs showing the serpent tempting Eve and the lamb of God (something that potentially links David's mother iconographically with the doomed Emily), and a number of inscriptions, notably the words "Requiescat in Pace" and "Resurgam" on the tombstones in the floor of the church<sup>7</sup>. All of these contribute to building up a rich context around the central drama.

This first plate exhibits many of the elements that were to be characteristic of Browne's illustrations throughout the novel: irony, exaggeration, group presentations of characters in social settings, biblical allusion, and the use of emblems and inscriptions to look forward to later narrative events and themes. Constant throughout the illustrations, with the sole exceptions of the frontispiece and the vignette beside it<sup>8</sup>, is the presence of David himself, who is always interacting with one or more other characters.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Steig 1978 for an analysis of the function of symbols in *David Copperfield*.

It should be pointed out that Browne's approach was to some extent determined by the etching technique predominant at the time. His drawings (two per instalment) were etched on steel, which meant that they had to be printed on separate sheets and inserted at the beginning of each instalment; hence, there was the problem of illustrating the story without spoiling it by revealing too much. Browne often overcomes this by offering images that establish the milieus around the narrative, with a striking contrast of emotional tones. In the first instalment, for example, the sleepy congregation in church is contrasted with the human warmth of the fisherman Daniel Peggotty's cheerful family, a warmth suggested by the steaming pot of tea with which the Peggottys welcome David into their curious boat-house.

The motif of the shared meal as an instance of affection and belonging is used on a number of occasions, underlining the positive value of inclusion, so central to a novel where the worst thing that can happen to a character is to be excluded from this or that social group. The theme can be found in the second instalment where the mean lunchtime trick of the supposedly «friendly waiter» lines up alongside Mr Mell's pathetic flute performance at breakfast in «the poor person's house». And again in "We are Disturbed in our Cookery" (number 10), where Mr Micawber prepares the lamb, and in "Mr. Micawber delivers some valedictory remarks" (number 12) where he prepares punch. The motif returns a fourth time in "My Aunt astonishes me" (number 11), where Aunt Betsey drinks tea sitting on her luggage with her cat on her knees, while the only illustration of David's married life with Dora has the young husband carving a joint in a scene of complete chaos amid books and plates scattered on the floor. The suggestion is that there is a certain precariousness to these positive moments, as if their generous spirit were under threat.

Groups are frequent: a noisy class of schoolboys with Steerforth at their head, a group of men in starched-shirts at a business dinner party, David and Dora's wedding guests, a crowd of emigrants, and a group of commissioners crowding at the door of a prison cell. Again these images confirm the importance of belonging to a group or family of some kind; only four illustrations show outside scenes, two of which are set in the vicinity of a house, reminding us of communal cohabitation. The two sketches for the frontispiece have Aunt Betsey peeking out of the windows of the Copperfield home and Little Emily looking melancholy on a beach, expelled from the happy community of those included in society.

Sometimes the illustrations reveal an important development in the story, as for example the paired images that show a newborn in the

Murdstone family, or the illustration showing David ordering a beer in a pub, something unseemly for a young boy, hence suggesting that he is trying to seem more adult than he actually is in the eyes of his two hosts, eager to be included in a group he cannot yet belong to. Other illustrations conflate temporally separate narrative moments in the same physical space: in “I make myself known to my Aunt” (number 5), Betsey Trotwood is seen in her country garden surrounded by gardening tools, while in the background three youths are trying to control their donkeys before having them trample all over the garden, a scene that occurs much later in the book<sup>9</sup>. In others, captions are used to give an allegorical sense to an otherwise realistic scene: “My first fall in life” (number 7), for example, shows a carriage pulled by four impetuous horses putting a gaggle of geese to flight; if it were not for the caption, the reader would have no inkling of the injustice that David will suffer at the hands of one of the passengers.

Not only does David do things that are unseemly, he is also presented in ways that are droll and even disturbing. In his «momentous interview»<sup>10</sup> with the Murdstones in his aunt’s house, for example, David is tied up behind a chair in a corner while the three solemn adults are sitting rigidly straight on their own chairs while they decide his destiny. Meantime all kinds of strategies are deployed to characterise the novel’s dramatis personae: aside from their physiognomies, relational placing and proximity to emblematic objects, some characters are associated with animals: the fawning and deeply untrustworthy Uriah Heep, for example, is shown with a cat, perhaps suggesting his slyness.

Sometimes, rather than introduce new characters or adventures, the illustrations show two sides of the same literary topos, the tragic and the farcical. In instalment 8, for example, the topos of ‘the fallen woman’ is first ridiculed in the figure of the dwarf Miss Mowcher, then explored in all its heavy pathos in a plate that shows Martha sitting weeping while David and the Peggottys look on helplessly. Martha will appear again close to the dark waters of the Thames, which seem to be drawing her towards suicide with St Paul’s in the background, in “The River” (see Fig. 2).

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<sup>9</sup> This image went through multiple drafts before being approved by Dickens and the final version diverges from the text, as noticed by Tobias Wilson-Bates 2016: 95.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. “The Momentous Interview”, second illustration for the fifth monthly number, containing chapters 13, 14, and 15 (September 1849).



Fig. 2. "The River".

In instalment 9 the illustrations place David's future wives, Agnes and Dora, side by side; in the captions Agnes is linked to David with the pronoun «us» ("Uriah persists in hovering near us, at the dinner party"), while Dora is associated with a loss of liberty ("I fall into Captivity").

In other instances it is the general mood that provides a contrast between the paired images. In instalment 12, for example, the eye passes from a gloomy meeting in David's house, with the chimneys of London visible from the window, to a jolly scene around Micawber's dinner table where nobody seems to notice Traddles's empty glass as it falls to the floor. Again the purpose seems to be to suggest to the reader, at the beginning of the instalment, that oscillation between cheerfulness and melancholy typical of the narrative as a whole.

As in Greek tragedy, Browne does not represent death directly in his *Copperfield* illustrations; in Dora's case, for example, her death is alluded to through the objects previously associated with her: a guitar with broken strings, a score of Mozart's *Requiem*, and the sick dog that gives the title to this plate, "My child-wife's old companion" (number 17). That is, it is a sense of absence and regret that is created, rather than the immediate pathos of her corpse. Similarly, when the Steerforth saga comes to an end, we do not see the shipwreck in which the young man drowned but David announcing the news to Steerforth's mother ("I am the bearer of evil tidings", number 18). What is stressed is the loss to the community, not the melodrama of the death.



In the two plates for the final instalment Browne once again sustains the «satisfactory balance between pathos and humor» (Cohen 1980: 101) that characterises all his illustrations: the first, “I am shewn two interesting penitents”, shows Uriah Heep and Mr Littimer coming out of a prison cell, carrying books and arousing the admiration of a crowd of men in top hats, including David and Traddles, who, however, do not seem convinced by their supposed contrition; the second, “A Stranger calls to see me”, shows David, Agnes and their three young children surprised, in the drawing room, by the arrival of Mr Peggotty who has returned from Australia. As Steig has remarked, this epilogue of domestic serenity includes, at least in the illustration, both the other main female protagonists of the novel, Emily and Dora, whose faces appear in two portraits that hang on the wall, each above an angel statuette, creating a layered composition that gives temporal depth and heightened vivacity to the concept of family<sup>11</sup>. This might be seen as an anticipation of Coventry Patmore’s poem *The Angel in the House*, first published in 1854, representing the Victorian ideal of domesticity.

## 2. Respectability and sentimentalism in the illustrated Italian edition published by Treves

The first Italian edition of the novel, *Memorie di Davide Copperfield*, was published by Treves<sup>12</sup> every Thursday from 2 December 1868 to 15 April 1869 in *Il romanziere contemporaneo illustrato*, in instalments of sixteen two-column pages. Other novels also appeared in the same issues: in the first, for example, we find *Il Destino* by F.D. Guerazzi, together with the anonymous novelised biography *Meyerberiana*, George Sand’s *Consuelo*, and *Avventure di quattro donne* by Alexander Dumas, but other titles would appear when these novels ended. As the last page of each instalment explained, the novels were «numbered separately and printed in such a way that each forms a volume of its own, with its own cover».

The periodical was one of a number of initiatives by Milan-based publishers in the first decade after Italian unification, when, with the industrial

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Steig 1978: 129-30.

<sup>12</sup> Bacci 2009: 63 suggests that the model for Sonzogno’s *Il Romanziere illustrato* and hence also for Treves’s *Il romanziere contemporaneo illustrato* was *Oeuvres illustrées* published by Librairie Blanchard and Librairie Marescq et C., which offered illustrated works by major novelists, or again Gustave Barba’s *Romans Populaires Illustrés*.

revolution now penetrating the world of culture, it became possible to introduce woodcut illustrations into such publications<sup>13</sup>. As Adolfo Albertazzi observed, the novels «with pictures» appearing in these periodicals were intended for a new middle-class readership:

In Milan alone, for some years a variety of periodicals were being published for the asinine middle-classes: Sonzogno's *Il romanziere illustrato* and *Il romanziere delle famiglie*; Gottironi's *Il romanziere cosmopolita*; Richiedei's *Il romanziere contemporaneo illustrato* and Treves's *Il romanziere illustrato contemporaneo* [sic]. These periodicals, like the serialised novels and anthologies published in Milan, Turin, Livorno, Florence and Naples, featured for the most part foreign authors.

However, as early as 1867, Treves, with that foresight that was shortly to make them the most successful of publishers, had found room for their love of our own literature, by publishing together in their *Romanziere* one French novel, one German or English, and one original Italian. (Albertazzi 1902: 285-6)<sup>14</sup>

Some months prior to the serialisation of *Davide Copperfield*, Dickens had been presented to the readers on the first page of issue 36 (6 August, 1868)<sup>15</sup> as «the most famous novelist of all nations and all times»<sup>16</sup>. Having mentioned his early novels, the article also cites *Pitture d'Italia* in the translation of Gustavo Stafforello<sup>17</sup>, as «radiating enthusiasm and deep love for our country», while *Davide Copperfield* is presented as «his masterpiece which we will shortly be publishing in translation».

Instalments of the periodical were sold for 15 cents and formed part of the *Biblioteca utile* series, which appeared between 1864 and 1881 and included scientific and historical texts aimed at a general public as well as

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Pallottino 2010: 144-6.

<sup>14</sup> The announcement on the last page of every issue of the *Romanziere contemporaneo illustrato* established the hierarchy governing the choice of novels in the periodical: first an Italian novel, then a French, then either an English, German or Spanish.

<sup>15</sup> Later collected in a volume edition as *I romanziere italiani e stranieri. Galleria di 52 biografie e ritratti*, Milan, E. Treves & c., 1868.

<sup>16</sup> The article cites Cruikshank as Dickens's first illustrator, calling him "the English Teja", a reference to Casimiro Teja, a celebrated Italian satirical illustrator of the time.

<sup>17</sup> In 1868 Treves would publish George Eliot's *Romola* in the same periodical, translated by Stafforello.



Fig. 3. Charles Dickens in *Il Romanziere Contemporaneo Illustrato*.

self-help books that promoted a work ideology. Within this broad church, the *Romanziere*, as Isotta Piazza points out, was the first periodical entirely dedicated to novels that «were only in part the original work of Italian novelists, most being translations of foreign novels» (2018: 67). «Devouring foreign novels», Albertazzi complained, «the frivolous middle classes could make do with very little Italian stuff!» (1902: 286) Yet Treves's aim was to give a renewed dignity to the Italian novel precisely by placing it alongside the best works from abroad.

Treves wasn't the first to have tried this: Sonzogno<sup>18</sup>, the other major player in post-unification publishing, had got there first with its popular periodical *Il romanziere illustrato* which appeared two years earlier, in 1865, with the same number of pages selling at the same price; in 1868, just prior to Treves's *Copperfield*, Sonzogno had published *Our Mutual Friend*, in a

<sup>18</sup> Giovanni Ragone speaks of a «newspaper made up entirely of novels, invented, at the heart of Milanese publishing, by the most brilliant and successful of the new publishers, Sonzogno», describing it as «the most evident example» of an integrated system making possible «the transmigration of genres from the book publishing to newspaper publishing and viceversa». Printed in 10,000 copies *Il romanziere illustrato* was fifth for circulation in Italy in 1872. For his part Treves «aimed at a nationwide market, looking for a formula suitable for the broad middle-brow public attracted to illustrated magazines» (1999: 31, 32 n. and 46).

translation by Ugo Iginio Tarchetti<sup>19</sup>. The main difference between the presentation of these two Dickens novels lay in the choice of the illustrations: while Sonzogno reproduced the illustrations from Chapman & Hall's 1865 edition, Treves rejected Browne's illustrations for *Copperfield* and appears to have commissioned the publication's 56 original etchings from a number of different artists. However, the frontispiece of Treves's *Memorie di Davide Copperfield* placed no other names beside that of the great novelist; it is only from the signatures in the illustrations that two of the artists, both French, can be identified, Louis Paul Pierre Dumont and Auguste Pontenier<sup>20</sup>.

As will be demonstrated here, the illustrations in the Treves edition differ radically from those Browne produced in collaboration with Dickens himself. Nello Ajello has observed of Italian press illustrations in this period that «whatever the scene, the impression they communicated was reassuring [...] solid, respectable, mannered». And he goes on: «A persistent respect for this national bourgeois mythology guided the editorial choices [of Treves] right down to the smallest details» (Ajello 1976: 179-80). The impression of respectability<sup>21</sup> here is largely achieved by deploying different iconotexts in the presentation of the characters;

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<sup>19</sup> According to Venuti 2008: 135, Tarchetti «was credited as the translator» in the case of *Our Mutual Friend*.

<sup>20</sup> Pontenier also worked for the French illustrated periodical *Le Voleur illustré*, each issue of which contained two instalments of highly successful French novels. However, it has proved impossible to track down information relative to other signatures, which include Grout, H. R., O. Muntat (?), Am. R., Thenard, Mulet, and Vahyer. The digital catalogue of the Bibliothèque nationale de France offers no evidence of French editions of the book prior to 1868, though that does not rule out the possibility that one was published. In any event, it is hardly surprising that Treves turned to French artists since «One fact that leaps to the eye is our dependence on foreign craftsmen and artists, who are often invited to work at Italian chalcographers' [...] illustrated periodicals in particular continue to depend on foreigners to the point [...] of substituting for an Italian production that hardly exists as a result both of political obstacles and the lack of a tradition in the craft» (Mazzocca 1981: 409). For the 1840 illustrated edition of *I promessi sposi*, Alessandro Manzoni used an Italian illustrator but had to look abroad for xylographers, noting that «the appeal of the vignette that makes an experience visible is extremely strong. Without looking further than Milan one can see how many illustrated French editions are being sold» (Manzoni 1970: VII, 118-9).

<sup>21</sup> At the beginning of chapter XXI the word “rispettabilità”, referred to Steerforth's servant, is printed in italics; in the English edition the man is described as “a pattern of respectability”.



Fig. 4. "I go to my mother in the garden (Page 4)".

this is especially true for the female characters, who, in the Italian edition, invariably appear as daughters, mothers, wives and aunts, maids and orphans, who may sometimes be mistreated or tearful but are never shown as 'fallen women'.

Again, before considering the separate illustrations, the etching technique must be mentioned. While the steel etchings used in the English edition had obliged the publisher to print them separately from the text, with the result that two illustrations were placed at the front of each instalment, the Italian illustrations were cut into wood, something that allowed the publisher to place them inside the text. There was thus the possibility of illustrating the dramatic moment, rather than, as in the English edition, creating an emotional context for the reader.

In the first plate of the Treves edition Clara Copperfield appears in the garden with little David: elegantly dressed, they look at each other as the mother offers her child an apple she has just picked. Certain elements that recur throughout the edition's iconography are immediately evident, above all the choice of a bucolic setting: twenty-seven of the fifty-six illustrations are set outside, while seven others offer views from windows onto gardens. This seems in stark contrast to Browne's preference for interiors, often crowded interiors.



Fig. 5. "... she took my hand, now taking it to her mouth, now caressing it (Page 38)" and "- I see I shall have to go to Yarmouth (Page 40)".

Together with the shift to immediate event and drama comes a focus on physical gesturing; from this first plate on, the characters' gestures emphasise the theatrical pathos of Dickens's text, particularly moments of touch, something often associated with the expression of emotion<sup>22</sup>, and hence indicating a high degree of intimacy between the characters<sup>23</sup>. As many as twenty-seven of the illustrations involve characters embracing or engaged in other kinds of physical contact: Clara Copperfield puts her arms round David's shoulders, men and women walk arm in arm, in three cases Peggy shakes David's hand, or kisses him or holds him on his knees, while an older David shakes hands with Uriah Heep, puts a hand on Little Emily's and Ham Peggotty's shoulders, twice holds hands with Aunt Betsey, grasps Agnes's hand and kisses Dora while holding her hand. The only people not looking for physical contact are negative characters like Murdstone, or outsiders like the «orfling» from St Luke's workhouse.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Čermáková – Mahlberg 2022: 18.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Mahlberg 2013: 117.





Fig. 6. “... in the future we will love each other tenderly (Page 114)”.

The most dramatic gestures are given to Steerforth, who in one plate grabs David’s foil while teaching him to fence and in another puts his arm round Rosa Dartle’s waist; in this plate the woman is associated with the musical arts by the presence of a harp that recalls her outline, while the whole scene is presented against what looks like a theatrical backdrop (Fig. 6)<sup>24</sup>. On this occasion David is a spectator, almost an alter ego for the reader, sitting next to the open curtain that suggests a stage.

The eighth plate of the Italian edition is thematically akin to the sixth of the English (“Changes at home”, Fig. 7), allowing us to see how differently mother-child relationships are presented. In Browne’s illustration we see Clara sitting in a tender embrace with her baby, but with her back turned to David who peeps in through the door; the mother’s gaze is entirely for the newborn she is nursing, in what looks like a Madonna and child pose, while David evidently feels excluded from the happy scene. Cohen notes how the geometry of the composition, «the graceful curves of her head, the baby’s clothes and draped bassinet, and the oval frames of the pictures behind and above the pair» (1980: 103) contrasts sharply with

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<sup>24</sup> Writing about melodrama in historical and serialised novels, Giovanni Ragone notes that «the romantic imagination is becoming more popular» and that «the reference point for these genres is hardly the newspaper, but the opera» (1999: 46). In this regard one might cite Gramsci’s reflection that: «The serialised novel substitutes (and at the same time encourages) the imaginings of the common man in what amounts to a waking dream» (1971: 136).



Fig. 7. "Changes at Home" and "- He's your brother, my mother said, caressing me: (Page 31)".

David's uncertain posture and bewildered expression. Various details, in particular the paintings above the fireplace showing scenes from the life of Moses, hint at young David's new predicament, now dependent on the care of strangers and little more than an "outcast" in his own family, just as Dickens himself had been for a period in his childhood. The act of breast-feeding is suggested by the low neckline of the female portrait clearly visible over Clara's head and placed alongside a painting with the theme of the prodigal son.

The corresponding image in the Italian edition removes the paintings and replaces them with books, as if the publisher were eager to promote the habit of reading. Clara's sewing box, which in the English illustration was tipped over on the floor, is here upright, open and in good order on the table. Seated at the centre of the composition, Clara has her arm round David while he takes the newborn's hand. While in the English edition an untidy mother is forgetful of her firstborn son, in the Italian version she shares her affection equally with her two children in what amounts to an «idealisation of family values» (Mazzocca: 1981: 414) typical of the period<sup>25</sup>.



The caption contrives to bring together all three characters in one mawkish phrase: “– He’s your brother, my mother said, caressing me”. Across the page another image has David in a carriage saying goodbye to Clara who, baby in her arms, calls to him and waves her handkerchief.

In a gentle warning against transgressions of social decorum, the vices of tobacco and alcohol are presented negatively in three plates: the uncouth Daniel Pegotty, the fisherman, is shown smoking a pipe, the equally coarse and ambiguous friends of Aunt Betsey’s husband succumb to the joys of drink, and David is portrayed after his «first dissipation» getting out of bed to find the eight empty bottles of the night before scattered across table and floor.

In sharp contrast with Browne’s illustrations, a mood of edifying sentimentality permeates the six scenes that show one or more characters in tears. The illustration entitled “Joan Murdstone, replied her brother, be quiet! (pag. 12.)” (Fig. 8), for example, shows four figures in melodramatic poses: Murdstone points his finger at his austere sister who is clutching a handkerchief in one hand and leaning on a chair with the other, while Clara «crying from hot eyes» dries her tears with another handkerchief and David weeps in his hiding place behind his mother’s chair; one notes, in passing, that Murdstone’s face has changed radically from the previous instalment where he was drawn by a different artist. This plate, which illustrates an episode occurring in the third instalment of the Treves edition, is actually placed in the fourth, where it has the function of reminding the



Fig. 8. “Joan Murdstone, replied her brother, be quiet! (Page 12.)”.

reader of past events. In other instalments we find 'before and after' images arranged in narrative sequence (see Fig. 5 *supra*).

Tears can also come as a consequence of shame, as when David is mocked by his companions for the pasteboard placard he is forced to wear on his back, on which, in one plate, we can read in Italian «Guardatevi da lui, egli morsica» – Take care of him, he bites – and in the next, oddly enough, in French «PRENEZ GARDE À VOUS, IL MORD». Of course weeping may also be provoked by grief, as when Peggotty cries for the death of Clara and her baby, or simply from pain, as in the case of the common woman shoved to the ground on a dusty path by a tinker. For his part, David weeps for the death of Steerforth, which, unlike the deaths of Dora and his mother, is actually shown.

Women are mainly shown intent on artistic endeavours, or sewing, or more humble activities in the case of lower-class women: Rosa has her harp, Dora reads (in two plates) and paints, as we can adduce from the colours and paint brush visible on a small table beside a white canvas; Agnes plays the piano for David and both she and Aunt Betsey are shown knitting. The more humble Emily collects pebbles and seashells, while the wives and daughters of the fishermen carry big wicker baskets on their backs.

Meantime the topos of the 'fallen woman', personified in Little Emily and Martha, is simply removed from the Italian translation<sup>26</sup>. The long sequences describing the two women in chapter XXII, "Some old Scenes, and some new People", are mostly cut from the Italian edition while the grotesque figure of the sleazy hairdresser Miss Mowcher disappears altogether. Parts of chapter XL, "The Wanderer", where David meets Martha again and stops to speak to Daniel Peggotty, who is desperately searching for his niece Emily, are also cut and likewise the whole of chapter XLVII, "Martha". As a result, there are of course no illustrations for these sections. There are also significant cuts in chapter XLV, which describes the marriage crisis of Doctor Strong and his young wife Annie, and their eventual reconciliation. In this case the Italian edition offers a bland illustration of the two walking happily arm in arm in their garden.

While most of the illustrations in the Treves edition show daylight scenes, the novel's most emotional moments are seen occurring at night, by the light of a candle, the fireplace or the moon over the sea, which David, alone in his room, gazes at from his window. Of the various scenes of

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<sup>26</sup> Remarkably, there appear to be no studies of the extensive cuts made to this first Italian edition of *David Copperfield*.

grief and bereavement, one has David alone near his parents' grave, where the tombstone bears the inscription «HIC JACET COPPERFIELD» above a skull and crossbones. Another skull is present as a *memento mori*, together with books, writing paper and an inkpot in Mr Wickfield's room.

There is no place for humour in the illustrations of the Italian edition. There are no dogs or cats or donkeys kicking their heels, only noble, well-behaved horses and one tame donkey pulling the gig of a «giovanaccio», a street urchin. Even the childish Mr Dick, one of the book's most ridiculous figures, is shown only at the solemn moment when Aunt Betsey designates him as David's tutor. The grotesque Uriah Heep is presented as a stern serious man, and handsome to boot, apologising to David for his «umble» condition. Traddles, David's friend, loses the dishevelled hair that characterises him in both Dickens's text and Browne's illustrations; in the Italian edition, he is young, very well dressed and entirely reassuring. The plates in this edition include just two, three or four characters; the only group scenes show pupil hijinks in classroom and playground, and men drinking – both unworthy forms of behaviour. They do not, that is, offer a positive vision of the large group, something typical in Dickens's work. Four illustrations have David alone, while in five he does not appear at all.

The use of captions for the illustrations is also quite different in the two books. Dickens often uses them, like his chapter titles, to emphasise the fact that the novel is being told from David's point of view. Hence there are plenty of first-person pronouns and possessives. But he also deploys a great deal of irony as adjectives like «friendly», «musical», «magnificent» and «momentous» are made to clash comically with the scenes drawn. On other occasions vague allusions – “Changes at Home” (number 3), “Somebody turns up” (number 6), “A Stranger calls to see me” (number 19-20) – offer a little mystery to excite the reader's curiosity. In the Treves edition, on the other hand, as seen in the examples given, all illustration captions are simply brief quotations from the text, with a purely informational or linking function.

## Conclusion

Giorgio Bacci claimed that the illustrations used in serialised novels became «a vehicle of the publisher's agenda» and of his desire to give the book a particular «feeling» (2009: 11)<sup>27</sup>. Similarly the captions had a «signpost»

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<sup>27</sup> As Segantini saw it, the point of the illustrations «would be that, going

function (Benjamin 1977: 228), forcibly guiding the reader's interpretation of the text.

Browne's illustrations point up the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion in Dickens's novel, offering the reader more than fifty characters, but with the narrator David always present and never alone. With regards to the female characters, by showing David most often with Clara Peggotty, Little Emily, Aunt Betsey and Agnes, he suggests that they, and not Dora, who occurs in only three scenes, are the main female protagonists.

In the first Italian edition, David is shown most often with his mother in the first part, and Dora in the second, thus shifting the tone of the novel towards something more traditionally sentimental, a development in line with the decision to remove the themes of suicide, prostitution and cruelty to children from the text.

The other major difference in the dialectic between text and image in the two editions is the absence, in the Italian edition, of any of the irony and humour that characterised Browne's work. Carlo Izzo famously remarked that Italians were unable to respond to Dickens comedy because «[they] have no real taste for humour» (Izzo 1974: 121); while this claim seems to overlook the abundant humour in the work of Manzoni, Nievo, Collodi, Vamba, Gandolin, Yambo and De Amicis, it is nevertheless the case that in this edition of *David Copperfield* the illustrations and the editorial strategy in general tend to reinforce a moralising tone at the expense of irony and humour.

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back just to the novel's vignettes, a month later, or a year, or two years or ten, readers would be able to re-evoked the sensations they had experienced reading the book, reconstructing its world of feeling». Giovanni Segantini, Letter to Neera, 2 January 1898, in Quinsac 1985: 705.

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