

filmmakers' of early silent cinema 'shared with the Victorian adapters an understanding that to rewrite any work, one first needs to have a deep understanding of it.' (8-9) However, she then goes on to say that 'stage and film adapters continually altered major strands of the Victorian novel – gender, class, and nation – to create new meanings and interpretations out of familiar texts.' (9) And in her chapter on *David Copperfield* on the Victorian stage she admits that her 'five adapters boldly reinvented Dickens's interminably titled novel and tailored it for their respective theatres' target audiences.' (75) One wonders whether such drastic changes stemmed from 'deep understanding'.

But these objections should not be allowed to detract from the interest of the material that she then presents us with. George Almar's *Born with a Caul* of 1850, for example, made 'three innovative decisions that inspired later adapters: he omitted the hero's childhood history, invented a detective plot, and penned a happy ending' (80). And it is fascinating to learn that Almar's play alternated 'with *Hamlet* throughout the week' (81), information that can only add to our sense of the otherness of the Victorian world without holding it up to ridicule. Also, we may feel that there is nothing new under the sun when we learn that E. C. Burnand's *The Deal Boatman* (1863) 'verges on the realm of heritage, as he resets the play in 1748' (97); not content with this its acting edition is keen to 'ensure that all efforts are made at historical and geographical accuracy' (97). Again, it is particularly interesting to learn that Andrew Halliday's *Little Em'ly* of 1869 was 'the only staged version of *David Copperfield* to enjoy the novelist's official seal of approval' (101), a fact no doubt at least partly explained by the fact that Halliday was one of the young men, so called, who assisted Dickens in the running of *All the Year Round*. Indeed, Dickens went so far as to provide Halliday with 'constructive criticism' (101) of his effort while stressing the difficulties involved in reducing a long novel into another form.

Turning to cinema, it is hardly surprising that Laird devotes particular attention to Bentley and Hepworth's *David Copperfield* of 1913 since she sees it, rightly, 'as one of the most ambitious literary adaptations of the middle silent period' which at 'over 70 minutes in length...is considered by many film historians to be Britain's first feature length film' (133). Bentley especially placed enormous importance on the film's authenticity of setting and this was clearly an important selling point when the film was exported to America where 'audiences were essentially being offered fidelity to place as proof of the adaptation's fidelity to the novel at large.' (136)

Laird's concluding claim is that the adapters she has presented us with are figures 'with substantial claims to the authorship of these Victorian adaptations' (204). She then goes on to argue that many 'silent film adapters relied more heavily upon Victorian stage

adaptations...than on the original novels themselves' (205). And this reliance is, in her view, rooted in 'a Victorian cycle of adaptation when the practice of transforming literature into drama was elevated to a highly skilled branch of creative art' (205).

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JEREMY TAMBLING, *Dickens' Novels as Poetry: Allegory and Literature of the City*. Routledge, 2015, pp. x + 238. ISBN: 978-1-138-80827-0. £90.

Jeremy Tambling has published monographs on Dante and Blake; vigorous introductions to poetry, allegory and psychoanalytic criticism; a book on opera; a guide to Macao; and much else. Meanwhile he has written three books focusing primarily on Dickens. The first, *Dickens, Violence and the Modern State: Dreams of the Scaffold* (1995), linked material props, platforms and other constructions in Dickens's works with their textual structures, and with psycho-political forms of regulation. In *Going Astray: Dickens and London* (2008), Tambling took the theoretical/material interplay further, combining psychoanalytic readings with explorations of many real addresses in Dickens's city. The new book, *Dickens' Novels as Poetry*, resembles its predecessors in being structured around a fairly comprehensive, chronological tour through the canon. But it is more a 'descent into', perhaps, than a 'tour through', as it hardly seems possible, or desirable, to emerge at the end.

In describing Dickens's novels as 'poetry', Tambling seems to mean various things at once. At the simplest level, Dickens's words are packed with layers of meaning, and this abundance is achieved, in part, through linking-devices associated with poetry, such as assonance and alliteration: features which Tambling often marks with italics without discussing them directly. Indeed, he has no time to discuss each instance, being so busy pointing out other features, especially less obvious forms of rhyming: cross-references of word, image or idea between Dickens's own texts, throughout the canon, and prolific allusions to other sources (a glut of Shakespeare, in particular). Many things in Dickens's novels, Tambling argues, seem designed to be picked up on second or subsequent readings; he himself clearly knows these texts backwards.

Many of Dickens's characters 'belong to poetry,' according to T. S. Eliot, 'in that a single phrase ... may be enough to set them wholly before us'. Tambling glosses this, through Hölderlin and Heidegger, so that Dickens's constructive art of characterisation is reversed as a deconstructive philosophy of being: 'Existence has no other ground

but poetry; ... people are forms of poetry and speak poetry. ... Nothing grounds an utterance except the completely groundless' (75). In these terms, Dickens is a poet, while Wilkie Collins is 'a writer of prose ... representing what can be affirmed to have existence or be intelligible' (75). 'In Collins, no one acts out of character[,] but "character" implies repression, because its singleness cannot, inherently, do justice to the divided subject. Dickens makes character a state of anxiety or of desire, which divides it' (210). This is probably as good a shot as any at what really distinguishes Dickens, intellectually, from the mass of his contemporaries.

'Poetry', therefore, functions in this book not so much as a generic category but rather as a more abstract term, to some extent paralleling or overlapping other terms such as 'allegory' and even (in the wake of poststructuralism) 'reading'. 'The city' is also a related concept, as in Tambling's previous work (and Benjamin's), insofar as urban modernity overwhelms the observer, frustrating coherent self-presence and stability (which would be illusory, even in a village). These terms, subsumed under 'poetry', are in opposition to the 'intelligible', but above all to 'identity'. The bare and not wholly unfamiliar bones of Tambling's argument, in fact, are that Dickens perpetually stages a search for coherent identity, shows that the search cannot be avoided, and demonstrates that it is bound to be frustrated. But these bones take flesh, in Dickens's texts, in what Tambling, after Mario Perniola, repeatedly calls the 'Egyptian moment': 'a declaration of non-identity, like allegory' (19). Resisting the Mosaic prohibition against images of the animate, which leads to 'a triumph of intellectuality over sensuality' (Freud's phrase, 18), and therefore, in Tambling's terms, to a promotion of the false (Collins-like) belief in coherent intelligibility, the 'Egyptian moment' reveals the never-to-be-completed engagement with being that lurks paradoxically in the tangible products of poetry (and art in general) – or in the solid, unfathomable deities of Egypt. Splendidly, Tambling entangles his exposition of this concept, like almost all of the theoretical propositions in the book, in knotty, exacting, but revelatory readings of individual novels, passages, and single words. In *Little Dorrit* above all (perhaps the novel about which Tambling always has most to say), an 'Egyptian' philosophical orientation expresses itself through instances such as Clennam gazing at an abandoned London church, 'waiting for some adventurous Belzoni [the Egyptologist] to dig it out', or Meagles 'staring at the Nile, and the Pyramids, and the Sphinxes, and the Desert' (16–17). Here and in many other cases (most of them less literally 'Egyptian'), massive content (architectural solidity, the weight of ages) belies the catastrophic loss of meaning, but Dickens's connecting strategies produce 'poetry', developing a way of seeing the world that is sensitive both to the confusions and frustrations of personal identity and to the blind spots and dead ends of a whole society split along

lines of class, gender, and high and low culture. Tambling shows this transmutation taking place with great inventiveness (Dickens's and his own) in hundreds of cases, revealing more than Dickens may have intended, and more than the reader can be sure is there: 'perhaps' is used frequently and unapologetically. A cautious Dickens reader, it is implied, will surely miss the point.

Caution is not something of which Routledge's proof-readers can be accused. While the main text is largely error-free (unless you have strong views about 'Dickens'), both the index and the bibliography contain whimsical irregularities (I look forward, in particular, to Tambling's forthcoming essay on 'Dickens and Chancer'). Such corner-cutting is all too typical of many twenty-first-century academic publishers, but this is a relatively short book, of uniform design, with no illustrations, by a well-known critic, on a very popular subject – priced at £90. It is hard to believe that this makes economic sense; if it does, there is something very wrong with the system.

Powerful insights detonate on almost every page of this book. If anything, there might be too many, producing shell shock, although this could be understood as a purposive, significant, and principled excess: 'Enough! or Too much', as Blake says, I expect to re-visit individual chapters systematically, just before or after re-reading the novels in question. In other words, Tambling assists and inspires further engagement with the primary material. It will not be surprising if he himself re-engages, producing further accounts of exploratory missions through the length of the Dickens canon. The very act of retracing – going, once again, astray – makes a critical point.

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DOMINIC RAINSFORD

Brief Notices

Charles Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller*, ed. Daniel Tyler. Oxford University Press, 2015. £14.99.

This is a distinctly attractive edition of Dickens's late essays in the persona of the *Uncommercial Traveller*. Daniel Tyler's Introduction is sensitive to the complexities of this particular project in the larger context of Dickens's fictional and journalistic writings: 'The versatile narrative mode is the means of convention-defying comic surprise, but it also asks serious questions about the efficacy of fiction, indicating long-held worries for Dickens about whether it merely describes problems or begins their reparation.' The editor is attentive also to the textual history, and there is an 8-page appendix on 'Textual Variants'. There is also a generous provision of explanatory notes. A map of 'Dickens's London' is included (oddly, wholly devoid of any street names to enable us to track Mr Uncommercial's city perambulations). This edition is extraordinarily good value.