Tourism, Perception and Genre: Imagining and Re-imagining Venice in Victorian Travel Writing

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Abstract

Venice held an unusual place in the Victorian imagination. In nineteenth-century Britain, Venice was widely documented. It was the subject of sustained inspection both as a textual and a physical space. This article traces a textual dialogue between three key voices in the representation of Venice to the British public in mid-nineteenth century. John Murray's[1] ubiquitous series *Handbooks for Travellers in Northern Italy* (1842-60) is analysed to set John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53) and Charles Dickens's *Pictures of Italy* (1846)[2] in context. A textual and generic dialogue between Murray, Ruskin, and Dickens is traced, showing how each writer used Venice as a site through which to imagine and re-imagine the conditions of the domestic perception of a foreign place. In different ways, Dickens and Ruskin react to the cultural authority held by the Murray guidebooks. Domestic perception of a foreign place is regulated by texts that engaged with it. Murray's guidebooks imagined Venice for the Victorian armchair or actual tourist. Ruskin and Dickens then re-imagined it in opposition to Murray and, in doing so, offered their own way of seeing, writing, and knowing other cultures.

Keywords: Venice, Dickens, Ruskin, John Murray, imagination, perception, genre, tourist, gaze, travel, writing, Victorian, guidebooks, domestic, foreign, nationhood.

Venice held an unusual place in the Victorian imagination. As one periodicalist in *Sharpe's London Magazine* declared in 1866, 'Venice! Of all cities of the world there is perhaps none which is so well known to those who know only by report'. The 'mutation' of the Grand Tour (Buzard 2002), the opening up of Europe to Britons after the end of the Napoleonic war in 1815 (Youngs 2006), and the expansion of the European railway network (Gretton 1993), all combined to offer Venice as a place more and more travellers could visit or visualise. The city was widely documented in

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[1] This article refers to John Murray III as John Murray as he was the heir to the publishing house that oversaw the guidebook series.

[2] Specifically this article focuses on Ruskin's chapter 'St. Mark's' and Dickens' chapter 'An Italian Dream'.

nineteenth-century Britain. It was as the subject of sustained inspection, both as a textual and a physical space. It became a major and favourite focus for many writers, from art critics to tour guides to journalists. The city was captured from many perspectives and appeared in various forms of travel writing. Venice as a specific example, and the history of its representation, can be used to show that travel writing and the representation of another culture is, in terms of genre, inevitably hybrid, and that this hybridity is the consequence of a textual dialogue created by those who wrote about Venice, and fuelled a national fascination with the 'floating city' (Ferraro 2012).

This article will trace a textual dialogue between three key voices in the representation of Venice in mid-nineteenth century Britain. John Murray's ubiquitous series *Handbooks for Travellers in Northern Italy* (1842-60) will be used to set John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53) and Charles Dickens's *Pictures of Italy* (1846) in context. Each text sought to capture Venice for the British reading and travelling public. It is important to pick out exactly what it was about Venice that made it worthy of sustained inspection, but it is even more important to analyse the manner in which the city was perceived. Central to this study, then, is the intricacies of the politics of perception in the written representation of other cultures. How was Venice seen, both visually and textually? How where these perceptions produced? By tracing a textual and generic dialogue between Murray, Ruskin, and Dickens we will be able to see how each writer used Venice as a site through which to imagine and re-imagine the conditions of the domestic perception of a foreign place, which in turn reveals conditions of nationhood, perception and tourism in the mid-Victorian context.

The Murray guidebooks were the authenticating eye of nineteenth-century tourism for the British public. Examples of their ubiquity are littered throughout periodicals, essays and travelogues during the period (*Examiner* 1846, *New Monthly Magazine* 1840, *Saturday Review* 1866). In 1830 the *Times* newspaper explained how Murray set the standard for tourists:

> Mr Murray has succeeded in identifying his countrymen the world
> over. Into every nook which an English man can penetrate he carries
> his *Red Handbook*. He trusts to his *Murray* as he would trust to his
> razor, because it is thoroughly English and reliable. (*Times* 1836)

The suggestion is that the guidebooks became a distinguishing feature of the English traveller. This little red book, clutched in the hand of the tourist, identifies not only the English as English, but as intrepid and penetrating. The book and the traveller are seen to 'penetrate' the world outside Britain. The guidebook and the idea of the traveller became inseparable and indispensible. Due to its ubiquity, it became a marker or a badge of nationality. In the same vein, William Makepeace Thackerary announces the universality of the Murray guidebooks on his travels in 1845: 'Every English party I saw had this infallible red book in their hands' (Thackeray 1844-5).

The sense of the ubiquity of the Murray guidebooks is demonstrable. Yet, despite this obviously popularity, they did not command universal respect. They provoked varying reactions from writers of the period. Indeed, it may have been that their very popularity, their status as the authenticating eye of early British tourism, caused writers such as Dickens and Ruskin to write against Murray and his guidebook style. Dickens and Ruskin saw that the Murray guidebooks were ubiquitous enough to dominate (and therefore determine) the politics of perception of Venice, and therefore, in publishing their own representation of the city, entered into a textual dialogue with the Murray guidebooks, and in doing so offered several important counterpoints to Murray's style. The reaction by Dickens and Ruskin to the Murray guidebooks alternated between mockery, parody and contempt: it is doubtful that they would have sided with Thackeray or the *Times* reporter in describing Murray's guides as 'infallible' or 'reliable'. The tone of Ruskin's opposition to the Murray guidebooks is well illustrated by a letter Ruskin wrote to Murray in 1848. 'The great use of a guidebook…' Ruskin bluntly wrote '… is thoroughly lost in yours' (Ruskin 1848, quoted in Damiens 2010). This is rebuke is followed up by Ruskin in *The Stones of Venice* when he rails that the 'the attention bestowed on second-rate works, in such a city as Venice, is not merely lost, but actually harmful' (Ruskin 1851, Links 2005). The opposition to the sense of cultural authority place on the guidebooks by, among other things, public sentiment, is important because, as can be argued, this reaction guided Ruskin's and Dickens' work on Venice in the decade after the first edition of *Northern Italy* (1842) appeared.

At the centre of this textual dialogue surrounding the representation of Venice is a battle for cultural authority over the way the mid-nineteenth-century British public

perceived the city. A useful framework for thinking about the politics at play in the connection between perception and travel is John Urry & Jonas Larsen's theory of 'the tourist gaze'. A tourist gaze is the perception of a foreign culture by a certain type of traveller. It is neither impartial nor comprehensive, but a way of seeing that is predefined by the interpretive frameworks a tourist learns at home (Urry & Larsen 2011). Travel texts that represent another culture hold the authority over what is seen by the visitor, they act as mediators between the domestic public and a foreign place. Murray, Ruskin, and Dickens set the visual agenda for tourists in Venice. They imagine the city on behalf of actual or armchair tourists. They are all deal with Venice as bizarre urban space. They all engaged with the meaning of the city's history. They are all, in a sense, guidebooks. Yet they all supply very different interpretations of what is significant about the urban space, its history and what the role of a guide should be. In doing each text functions as a mediator between the domestic public and the tourist. The idea of Venice and the tourist's experience of movement through the city are both administered to the tourist via each author's textual productions. Domestic representations of foreign places are agents that deem what the tourist sees and how the tourist moves that foreign space. The tourist gaze is a theoretical framework intended to show this pattern.

In his seminal work on the history of tourism, James Buzard observes two main features of nineteenth-century tourist literature, 'first, that the Continental tour seemed to be surrounded and regulated by a variety of guiding texts' and 'second, that by writing one's own travel record one had to work within the boundaries mapped out by those prior texts' (Buzard, 1993). It seems at first slightly odd to say that the public's engagement with the physical space of Venice is regulated by text. Yet, as should become clear, perceptions of other cultures are produced domestically and find their way into the public imagination. They then in turn guide, govern, and administer the tourist gaze through textual and artistic reporting. Through this theoretical framework we can see how Ruskin and Dickens engaged with the tourist gaze initiated and, to a large degree, governed by the Murray guidebooks. *Pictures from Italy* and *The Stones of Venice* both mention Murray directly and counterpoint the guidebook series indirectly through their conceptual and generic features. Venice turns into a setting for a textual tussle that revolves around the idea that a way of seeing is a way a way of knowing.

The Murray guidebook to Northern Italy, in which Venice is detailed, first appeared in 1842 and was written by Sir Francis Palgrave. It then reappeared in eight new editions between 1842 and 1860, with the name of its writer(s) omitted from every edition after the second in 1846. The series moved from a named single author to a collaborative project with anonymous contributors. It could be argued that the contents of the guidebook became protected by this anonymity. The accountability of the accuracy and relevancy of the descriptions of destinations like Venice became shrouded, a move that could have had the potential to cement the authority of the content of the text. It could have engendered the notion that the guidebooks where built into a multiplicity of perspectives. This anonymity could have fostered the guidebook's ubiquity.

Alongside this authority in anonymity was a claim to completeness. They spoke in the language of perfection, presenting exhaustive and seemingly comprehensive accounts of each place described. Each edition sought to order and consume Venice textually, mapping every single feature systematically. From a sequential on-the-spot perspective the guides confidently offer, with archival spirit, a sense of cultural mastery over the historical, religious, architectural quality of the city. The gaze inculcated in the guidebooks sets itself up as simultaneously 'on-the-ground' and all-seeing, making for exhausting reading. The guides concentrate intensely on vision in and movement through the city, guiding the eyes and feet of the tourist in an overabundant and fatiguingly prescriptive way, endlessly packaging and devouring the sights/sites that a tourist would or should encounter.

The Preface to the 1846 second edition insisted that 'it has been the Editor's endeavour to render the New Edition as a complete Guidebook'. (Ref) It appealed to its editorial form (that is to say its absence of an individual author) because it 'is only by such means that a work of this kind can have any claim to perfection' (*Handbook* 1846). This claim to perfection is important to the guidebooks' generic outcome. The style is one of encyclopaedic itinerary, plotting and mapping routes, strictly directing the eyes from one spot to another and cataloguing what is seen with antiquarian and panoramic verve. As Elsa Damiens observes, Murray's collection of guidebooks 'follow a precise chart of specification: tourists must find in one volume everything they need.' (Damiens 2010). In fact, the guidebooks go beyond this level of utility, describing in minute detail

everything from the dimensions of the arches underneath the bridge that carries the train that carries the tourist, to the sequential location of every painting, one by one, in the Ducal Palace at St. Mark's square (*Handbook* 1846). The overabundance of detail tries to freeze in text a vision of the city on the back of a taxonomical ideal. It imbues Venice with a sense of order, stasis, and coherence which stands in opposition to the city's nature as a living, kinetic, and transitional space. The tourist gaze, as developed by the Murray guidebook series, objectified Venice – in the sense that it turned Venice into a stable artefact capable of inspection – in a way convenient to domestic perception. Yet the nature of the city resisted stabilised objectification. The reason that there were so many new editions of *Northern Italy* released in quick succession between 1842 and 1860 is, in part at least, because the exhaustive and static form of the guidebooks could not keep pace with the city's movement.[3]

Attending this conflict between stasis and motion is another formal feature of the Murray guidebook series. At the same time as the text attempts to catch the city in stasis, Murray's tour guide races around the city at speed, pointing out appropriate and worthy views to the exhausted tourist-reader, guiding their attention to artefacts that the text deems worthy of note. Although its itinerant style attempts to freeze Venice in text, and so give a sense of stasis, the pace with which the artifacts are recorded for the tourist gives a sense of rapid movement. Ruskin's meandering tour guide in *The Stones of Venice* finds this pace unbearable: 'In my last edition of Murray's Guide to Northern Italy, I find the visitor advised how to see all the remarkable objects in Venice in a single day!' (Ruskin 1851, Links 2005) The pace at which the tourist consumes the spectacle of Venice is a major point of divergence between Murray and Ruskin. Ruskin's strolling academic-come-tourist is shocked by the appetite of Murray's assumed tourist. He instead dwells on the minutia of the architectural detail. The politics of perception in the guidebooks rests on a principal of totality and speed. Ruskin, on the other hand, relies on patience and a scholarly intensity.

As well as making claims to completeness, Murray's guidebook also makes subjective and partial value-judgements over what should or ought to be seen.

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[3] It eventually spelled the end for the series. As Buzard observes, 'the fourth John Murray found the series too difficult and expensive to continue, finally selling the copyright to London map publisher Edward Stanford in 1901' (Buzard 1993).

Consequently, a second tension emerges from, on the one hand, the guidebook's seemingly encyclopaedic style and, on the other, its selective function as an arbiter of taste. It proposed to at once see everything at the very moment it directs the tourist gaze towards what ought to be seen, thus confusing its own ideals of perfection and selection. Such confusion gives the illusion that the tourist could direct themselves through the totality of Venice. But, as Rudy Koshar argues in *Histories of Leisure*,

> Tourism is not self-directed. You do not go where you want to go but where the industry has decreed you shall go […] Tourism requires that you see conventional things, and that you see them in a conventional way. (Koshar 2002)

Disguised within the guidebook's pretended totality is a highly selective image of what should be seen. The level of selection in the text does not fit with its declaration of comprehensiveness, although it can be explained by the guidebook's will to see everything and its will to choose what should be seen concurrently.

The Murray guidebooks disguised the authority they had over the condition of the tourist's gaze in a layered rhetoric of vision. Murray himself made the executive decision about what had cultural and artistic value in Venice: 'Arriving in a city like Venice, I had to find out what was really worth seeing there, to make a selection of such objects, and to tell how best to see them' (*Handbook* 1852). He even denied local Venetians the capacity to 'discriminate what is peculiar to the place' (*Handbook* 1842). The domestic perception, constituted largely through Murray's guidebooks, held an assumption about its authority over the meaning of Venice, assuming that it was superior to those who lived there. The list of buildings and paintings that, according to Murray, ought to be seen are propped up with value-judgements like 'splendid', 'pleasing', and 'curious' (*Handbook* 1846); adjectives that are on the whole superficial and under-explained. The criteria for the selection of what spectacles and artefacts are culturally valuable in Venice seems only to be what the editor found 'peculiar'; a feature that Ruskin and Dickens, in their own way, oppose.

Ruskin's connection to Murray is complex. We know that Murray and Ruskin knew one another and that they corresponded via letter. Ruskin actually contributed to the 1846, 1847, and 1852 editions of *Northern Italy*. Effie, Ruskin's wife at the time he was researching *The Stones of Venice*, sent a letter from Venice dated 1849, echoing the

suggestion of the *Times* reporter about the of ubiquity of the guidebook series, declaring that their 'Murray is invaluable' and that they 'never take a step without it' (quoted in Buzard 1993). This is evidence of a close connection between Ruskin and the guidebooks. While in Venice, both John and Effie Ruskin used, in some way at least, the *Northern Italy* guidebook as a resource. Indeed, both the Murray guidebook and Ruskin's text share some formal features. Both are prescriptive and selective about what is of cultural worth. They both guide the body of the reader and show us what they believe ought to be seen.

In 1879 Ruskin republished his text in a smaller format, entitled *The Stones of Venice, Introductory chapters for the use of travellers while staying in Venice and Verona*. This smaller more portable counterpart to the three-volume first edition enabled tourists to use his book while moving around the physical environment of Venice. Ruskin, then, may have seen a certain utility in the travel companion version of his text, and perhaps even took this option to set himself in direct competition with Murray's handheld version. In fact, in the tourist's version of *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin echoes Murray's rhetoric of completeness by claiming: 'I have conscientiously pointed out every characteristic example, even of styles I dislike' (Ruskin 1879). However, despite sharing some technical similarities with Murray, and despite relying on Murray during his own travels, Ruskin's relationship with the guidebook was one marked by discordance more that concurrence – a sentiment epitomized by Ruskin's travel diary entry: '31st August, Monday. Lay long awake dividing the days and planning attacks on Mr Murray's guides' (quote in Evans & Whitehouse 1959).

Ruskin criticised Murray's representation of art and architecture in Venice and challenged the authority it had over the tourist gaze. *The Stones of Venice* figures a tour guide in an altogether different mould than the guidebook. It still takes the reader step-by-step through the city - Ruskin is always 'leading the eye' and guiding his reader 'but a few steps farther on' (Ruskin 1851) - but in a more strategic and less encyclopaedic fashion. Rather than trying to list everything rapidly in order to emit the illusion of completeness, Ruskin makes his selections of worthy spectacles and artefacts on the basis that they display his guiding principle of Venice as an 'awful' warning to Victorian England (Ruskin 1851). Like Dickens, he focuses on Venice as a city of decay and degradation rather than a collection of antiquarian curiosities, patiently

analysing its palimpsestic architecture to tell the story of the city's fall from mighty empire to derelict tourist attraction:

> Since the first dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have set upon its sands: the thrones of Tyre, Venice, and England. Of the First of these great powers only the memory remains: of the Second, the ruin: the Third, which inherits their greatness, if it forget their example, may be led through prouder eminence to less pitied destruction. (Ruskin 1851)

Where Murray is rushing around the city in an attempt to chart and commodify everything 'peculiar' to Venice, Ruskin's narratorial tour guide avoids the swarms of tourists in order to point out sections of the city that remain unseen to the Murrayist. Leading his reader through the Piazza into St Mark's, Ruskin barges past 'lounging groups of English and Austrians' who mingle around the modernised shops:

> We push fast through them into the shadow of the pillars and then we forget them all […] Amidst the horror of this the heavy door closes behind us instantly, and the light, and the turbulence of the Piazzetta, are together shut out. (Ruskin 1851)

This reaction to the modern tourist is emblematic of how Ruskin engaged with the principles of the Murray guidebooks. Where the usual tourists are lounging around St Mark's square, perhaps overloaded with Murray's exhausting and inflexible itinerary and tired from running around Venice in one day, Ruskin's 'superior' tourist barges past through them in order to direct the gaze, in museological and scholarly spirit, at a piece of rudely carved leaf or the damaged tomb of a saint in which to read the morality of Gothic architecture and parables of Man's Fall (Ruskin 1851) There is a deliberate patience to Ruskin's manner that contrasts, perhaps deliberately again, with the tone and the operation of the guidebook text. There seems to be a marked battle for currency over Venice between writers of the period. Each, in their own way, co-opts Venice as a site through which to display domestic ideas of perception.

Both Murray and Ruskin's representation of Venice offer prescriptive judgements on what ought to be seen, but their decisions on cultural value were guided by different motives. Ruskin's articulation of the tourist gaze is in reaction to Murray's, which he deemed shallow and potentially harmful, arguing that the very condition of Murray's tourist and the gaze he implements may be the reason why the British Empire could one day suffer the same fate as Venice (Ruskin 1851). Ruskin tried to explain the

dangers of viewing the city with modern English eyes, while ignoring the crucial lessons of Venice's past for England's present. *The Stones of Venice* re-shaped and re-imagined the Murrayist representation of Venice, and it is this re-presentation of the city that determined the formal and generic outcome of Ruskin's text. *The Stone of Venice* responded to the absolutism of the Murray guidebooks, and, in the process, reconfigured domestic thought on empire and how the foreign other is perceived.

In *Pictures from Italy* Dickens too sought to re-imagine the version of Venice as it emerges in the Murray guidebooks. The text itself makes reference to the ubiquitous guidebook:

> If you want to know all about the architecture of this church, or any other, its dates, its dimensions, endowments, and history, is it not written in Mr Murray's Guide-Book, and may you not read it there, with thanks to him, as I did! (Dickens 1846)

The function of this section is to stress a marked a deviation from the form of the Murray guidebook style, but it also importantly notes a relationship with it. It makes clear that the chapter on Venice and the guidebooks have proximity but no congruity. Like Ruskin, Dickens organised his formulation of the tourist gaze largely in opposition to the generic tendencies of Murray's text. The chapter begins with the figure of the tourist on the road. He is remembering his travel so far in 'half-formed dreams' and dissolving images that, as soon as they became visible, 'melted into something else' (Dickens 1846). Already this marks a contrast with the guidebook. Rather than imagining an objective and deceptively clear representation of travel, Dickens' vision is partial, fleeting, and aberrant. At the beginning of the chapter the traveller drifts off to sleep as he is being conveyed to Venice, only then to be awakened '(as [he] thought) by the stopping of the coach' (Dickens 1846). The question about the narrator's waking state expressed in parenthesis, and the title of the chapter – 'An Italian Dream', leave no doubt that the representation of Venice is a dream sequence. Straight away Dickens is playing with the authority of the guidebook's gaze. The Murray guidebooks are intensely visual, relying only on the tourist's ability to see Venice as the guide rendered it to be understood. Dickens is playing with the relationship between seeing and knowing that the guidebooks established. Rather than assuming the authority to decide what is knowable and then facilitating the relentless consumption of this knowledge, as

in the case of the guidebooks, Dickens questions the capacity of the perception of the tourist and in consequence unsettles the ability of the tourist to know anything authentic and unhampered.

Dickens' narrator is in an in-between state of sleep and wakefulness. Immediately this complicates the cognitive and conscious state of the tourist. The text produces a distortion in the visual and conceptual field, which problematises notions of illusion and reality. The affected gaze relinquishes all prescriptive guidebook-like tendencies, opting instead to represent an image of the city as out-of-focus and obscured, prompting questions about how much a tourist can truly know about the culture he or she visits. Rather than devouring every artefact in order to freeze or memorialise Venice in the text, Dickens resists the taxonomical tendencies of the guidebook offering instead a more impressionistic tourist experience; an experience marked by its ephemerality and incoherence, with only the flickering images of a gaze from a gondola, literally and metaphorically skimming the surface of Venice.

In *Pictures from Italy*, the gaze of the figure of the tourist is constantly interrupted, as when Dickens approaches Venice by boat: 'I turned to gaze upon it […] when it was quickly shut out from my view.' Significantly, his gaze is interrupted upon entering the vicinity of the city: 'Before I knew by what, or how, I found myself gliding up a street – a phantom street […] [in a] ghostly city' (Dickens 1846). The city is seen and then cut from the field of vision alternately: 'I saw some figures coming down a gloomy archway […] It was but a glimpse I had of them; for a bridge [...] blotted them out, instantly' (Dickens 1846). A loss of vision in Murray's guidebook would be unthinkable as it is defined by and engaged in predefining the relationship between seeing and knowing. 'An Italian Dream' debunks the interpretative framework of Murray's guidebooks by offering an alternative to the all-consuming, itinerant, and systematised tourist gaze, one based not on seeing and knowing but on the experience of seeing differently. Dickens' account of Venice writes against the practical realism of the guidebook, offering instead an impressionist aesthetic that confuses dream and reality, representing the city's architecture as being 'as light to the eye as garlands of hoar-frost', and describing St Mark's Basilica as 'unreal, fantastic, solemn, inconceivable throughout' (Dickens 1846). Murray's taxonomical tendencies are refuted as the figure

of the dreaming tourist is carried 'through corridors and galleries innumerable' (Dickens 1846). Dickens is, it seems, consistently counterpointing Murray's generic preferences.

The way Dickens handles the representation of the history of the city is also in opposition to Murray's generic parameters. Rather than attempt to achieve cultural mastery by fetishising over selected historical artefacts in an encyclopaedic form, Dickens' tourist experiences history unfold before his eyes, because, although the field of vision is continuously problematised and interrupted in 'An Italian Dream', the gaze is, at points, hypersensitive to the historical expressions of the architecture of Venice. Rather than feeling the will to document exhaustively all the archival details of the built environment on the basis of taste, the tourist who seeks knowledge of the city by physical, instead of textual, experience can see history emerging through the architecture of the city. The tourist's vision 'often intermingled with the old days of the city: with its beauties, tyrants, captains, patriots, merchants, courtiers, priests: nay, with its very stones and bricks, and public places; all of which lived again, about me, on the walls' (Dickens 1846) Dickens re-imagines Murray's representation of Venice, inverting and parodying the guidebook's generic articulations.

Like Ruskin, Dickens refused to make selections of what ought to be seen based on what is 'peculiar' about Venice. The guiding principle of taste in Dickens' representation is to present Venice as a city of perplexing dreams and as an example of a once mighty but now ruined empire. Brian Murray reads Dickens' representation of Venice as a dream sequence that marks a deviation from the realism of his domestic urban aesthetic. In 'Mere Shadows in the Water', Murray presents Venice as the Other to Dickens's urban realist home, rather than a premonition of the potential fall of London (Murray 2012). He places Dickens' generic preference to write Venice in ruining and impressionistic terms as an excursion from his detail-heavy realist accounts of London in his novels. However, the novel Dickens wrote and published directly before he left for Italy in 1844 was *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-4). Yet this text in fact offers a comparable urban aesthetic to one Dickens adopts in his description of Venice. In the novel, London appears dislocated, disorientated, and labyrinthine 'as if it were a city in the clouds' where a 'resigned distraction came over the stranger as he trod those devious mazes' (Dickens 1843-4). Architecture in London is given non-realist treatment in *Chuzzlewit* just as Venice is in *Pictures of Italy*. 'An Italian Dream', rather than

marking a holiday from architectural realism or the author's 'usual style', deploys its generic formulations in opposition to the stylistic choices of John Murray's guidebooks. Dickens' impressionist techniques replace the guidebook's hyperrealism and pretention to completeness. By contextualising *Pictures of Italy* in proximity to Dickens's domestic fiction we can see that Dickens offers a counter gaze to Murray's ubiquitous visual omniscience and engages the guidebook in a generic dialogue to do so. It attempts to reconstitute how the British perceived Venice, and how the domestic perceives the foreign. Venice to Dickens is an experiment in seeing, reading, and knowing a foreign space that tells of the function of travel writing as a domestic ritual and method of critique (O'Neill 2012).

There is nothing new in the argument that travel writing is an irreducible hybrid genre. Tim Youngs is 'deeply suspicious' of any attempt to define generic boundaries in travel writing (Youngs 2006). Jan Borm asks 'whether travel writing is really a genre at all' concluding that 'it is not a genre, but a collective term for a variety of texts […] whose main theme is travel' (Borm 2004). Rather than settling on its generic hybridity as a generality or rejecting the idea of genre in the discussion of travel writing altogether, the crucial question is to ask what it is that produces such hybridity. It would be unhelpful to disregard the ability to talk about travel writing in generic terms. By analysing travel writing about a certain place, Venice, and at a certain time, the mid-nineteenth century, this article has shown that generic hybridity is produced by a textual dialogue or domestic dialogic friction between travel texts. How the genres of travel writing are formed depends on how the traveller's gaze is governed and formulated, and how generic hybridity is produced depends on the reactions, oppositions, and counterpoints of subsequent representations, emanating from domestic publishing houses, in reference to the guiding authoritative text(s) or authenticating eye. Murray's *Handbook for Travellers to Northern Italy* imagined Venice for the Victorian armchair or actual tourist, while Ruskin and Dickens re-imagined it in opposition to Murray and, in doing so, offered their own way of seeing, writing, and knowing other cultures.

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