



Pictures from Italy

Charles Dickens , Kate Flint (Noted by)

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A delightful travelogue in the unique style of one of the greatest writers in the English language, the Penguin Classics edition of Charles Dickens's *Pictures from Italy* is edited with notes and an introduction by and notes by Kate Flint.

In 1844, Charles Dickens took a break from novel writing to travel through Italy for almost a year and *Pictures from Italy* is an illuminating account of his experiences there. He presents the country like a magic-lantern show, as vivid images ceaselessly appear before his - and his readers' - eyes. Italy's most famous sights are all to be found here - St Peter's in Rome, Naples with Vesuvius smouldering in the background, the fairytale buildings and canals of Venice - but Dickens's chronicle is not simply that of a tourist. Avoiding preconceptions and stereotypes, he portrays a nation of great contrasts: between grandiose buildings and squalid poverty, and between past and present, as he observes everyday life beside ancient monuments. Combining thrilling travelogue with piercing social commentary, *Pictures from Italy* is a revealing depiction of an exciting and disquieting journey.

In her introduction, Kate Flint discusses nineteenth-century travel writing, and Dickens's ideas about perception, memory and Italian politics. This edition also includes a chronology, further reading, notes and an appendix.

Charles Dickens is one of the best-loved novelists in the English language, whose 200th anniversary was celebrated in 2012. His most famous books, including *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *David Copperfield* and *The Pickwick Papers*, have been adapted for stage and screen and read by millions.

If you enjoyed *Pictures from Italy*, you might like Dickens's *American Notes*, also available in Penguin Classics.

Pictures from Italy Details

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Sharon says

A delightful travelogue of Dickens' travels throughout Italy in 1844, "Pictures from Italy" is like a deep, refreshing breath after the angry outbursts of "American Notes" and "Martin Chuzzlewit." This is Dickens at his best observational writing, showing us Italy through his eyes. Unlike his "American Notes," here he has no trouble finding the charm among the squalor and absurdity. He does notice plenty of absurdity, particularly when it comes to Catholicism, the Vatican, and all species of monks. He catalogs almost 2000 years of history, architecture, and art, but it is his description of the people in their everyday lives that truly brings this work to life. As in the best of his novels, Dickens' talent lies in consecrating the mundane. He celebrates the small, the impoverished, the unimportant by simply showing them as real individuals. This is a nice departure from so many 19th century travel writers, who scrabble to impress the reader with the places they have visited, the amazing sights they have seen, and the important people they have mingled with. I enjoyed this trip through Italy immensely.

Karen says

A delight to recall our months in Italy, in 2016 and 1844 respectively. So much is the same, and evoked beautifully, and also so much changed for the better. In his concluding observation, Mr. Dickenson writes: "And let us not remember Italy the less regardfully, because, in every fragment of her fallen Temples, and every stone of her deserted palaces and prisons, she helps to inculcate the lesson that the wheel of Time is rolling for an end, and that the world is, in all great essentials, better, gentler, more forbearing, and more hopeful, as it rolls!"

Jola says

Feeling sorrowful, as my delectable trip with Mr Dickens has just come to an inevitable end. Not surprisingly Italy turned out to be splendid but I have some observations to share about my travel companion also.

Everything you always wanted to know about my trip to Italy with Charles Dickens and his family*
(*but were afraid to ask)

Frequently Unasked Questions

Why Italy?

Italy combines so many things I adore that the list would be endless. Charles Dickens sums up my awe concisely: *'Let us part from Italy, with all its miseries and wrongs, affectionately, in our admiration of the beauties, natural and artificial, of which it is full to overflowing, and in our tenderness towards a people, naturally well-disposed, and patient, and sweet-tempered.'*

Joseph Mallord William Turner, 'Modern Rome – Campo Vaccino' (1839) [Image source]

'Pictures from Italy', a travelogue written by Dickens in 1846, will presumably disappoint the readers who fancy a bath in a fountain of knowledge, *'full to overflowing'* with dates and names. Wrong address, I'm afraid. But if you feel like inhaling sparkling loveliness effortlessly, you will enjoy this book a lot.

Please, be prepared to see Italy as it was in 1844. It may astonish you at times: *'More solitary, more depopulated, more deserted, old Ferrara, than any city of the solemn brotherhood! The grass so grows up in the silent streets, that any one might make hay there, literally, while the sun shines.'* Sorry to disappoint you but making hay in the streets of Ferrara might be a challenge nowadays.

Dickens' travelogue is a love letter to Italy but his infatuation isn't blind. He complains about negligence and poverty he observes at times. It hurts him to notice that some works of art and buildings are falling into decay. However, he sees positive effects of this: *'In another place, there was a gallery of pictures: so abominably bad, that it was quite delightful to see them mouldering away.'*

Jorge Luis Borges wasn't fond of Dickens' travelogue: *'he traveled to France, to Italy, but without trying to understand those countries. He was always looking for humorous episodes to recount.'* Personally I wouldn't rate the author so severely but you may be deluded if you expect an in-depth social or historical analysis. Albeit there is much compassion behind all the enthralling descriptions.

Confucius advised, 'Wherever you go, go with all your heart'. Dickens seems to share this attitude. He travelled to Italy with all his heart indeed. Just look at his description of Coliseum: *'Its solitude, its awful beauty, and its utter desolation, strike upon the stranger the next moment, like a softened sorrow; and never in his life, perhaps, will he be so moved and overcome by any sight, not immediately connected with his own affections and afflictions.'*

Angelo Inganni, 'Notturno di Piazza del Duomo a Milano' (1844) [Image source]

Why Dickens?

When my friend was reading a harrowing study on the Siege of Leningrad, she asked me to guess which author was appreciated most by people who lived in these inhumane conditions. Strangely enough, I suspected correctly. It was Dickens. In terms of giving comfort, his books are invincible.

My relationship with Charles Dickens has gone through two stages so far. The first phase was highlighted by books like 'David Copperfield', 'Oliver Twist' and 'The Christmas Carol'. I liked and appreciated all of them but it wasn't a crush. I perceived Dickens as an affectionate and clever but predictable uncle, who made me yawn at times. Then everything changed. Just one novel revolutionized the way I regarded and rated Dickens. It was 'Great Expectations'. Much more than a crush this time.

I didn't find 'Pictures from Italy' as enchanting as 'Great Expectations' but I was pleasantly impressed by the writing style, the labyrinthine sentences, the onomatopoeia, the loose composition. I was astounded every time I realized the book was written in 1846. My fingers ached from highlighting hectares of passages I loved.

How come?

The aim of the book is explained very clearly. Dickens wants to share some glimpses of a trip he enjoyed immensely. Most of his observations and descriptions were written on the spot and come from the letters he sent to his family.

The title says it all. If he published the book today, it would be probably 'Selfies from Italy'.

James Holland, 'Piazza dei Signori in Verona with the Market Place' (1844). [Image source]

Your itinerary?

Quite breathtaking:

France – Genoa – Parma – Modena – Bologna – Ferrara - Venice - Verona – Mantua – Milan – Switzerland - Pisa – Siena – Rome - Naples – Paestum - Vesuvius – Pompeii – Monte Cassino – Florence.

And the weather?

Come on, when you explore a divine country with an entertaining companion, you don't pay attention to prosaic things like the weather, do you?

'Pictures from Italy' turned out to be a perfect summer read. During ferocious heats Dickens' sardonic observations had a cooling effect on me. However, get ready for bloodcurdling scenes also: for example there is a detailed description of beheading.

Did you enjoy the Italian cuisine?

Of course, some eccentricities excluded: *'There is a stewed pigeon, with the gizzards and livers of himself and other birds stuck all round him.'*

What was your travel companion like?

Truly amusing!

If you read any novels by Dickens, you wouldn't be surprised, that he was much more interested in people he met on the way than in the monuments. No matter how hard he concentrates on picturesque places of interest, he ends up observing people: *'Crossing from these patches of thick darkness, out into the moon once more, the fountain of Trevi, welling from a hundred jets, and rolling over mimic rocks, is silvery to the eye and ear. In the narrow little throat of street, beyond, a booth, dressed out with flaring lamps, and boughs of trees, attracts a group of sulky Romans round its smoky coppers of hot broth, and cauliflower stew; its trays of fried fish, and its flasks of wine.'*

Outdoor dress for men and women, Italy, 'Corriere delle Dame' (1844). [Image source]

Even the people who appear for a few minutes are portrayed masterfully, for instance: *'a monstrous ugly Tuscan, with a great purple moustache, of which no man could see the ends when he had his hat on'* or *'a silly, old, meek-faced, garlic-eating, immeasurably polite Chevalier, with a dirty scrap of red ribbon hanging at his button-hole, as if he had tied it there to remind himself of something'*.

As usual, Dickens' sense of humour is unbeatable: he can notice and point out ridiculous things in people but he describes them with such warmth and cordiality! The book beams with them. No traces of cynism, no patronizing. I know it's irrational but it felt as if Dickens was smiling all the time, while writing his travelogue.

The thing that disappointed me a little was lack of information about Dickens' wife and children who were accompanying him. He probably wanted to stick to the romantic image of a lonely traveller.

How much did it cost?

The peregrination with Dickens was completely free. Let me assure you that I didn't board a pirate ship. The e-book is available in a few formats at the Project Gutenberg website.

Can I join you?

You are more than welcome. No worries if you don't comply with any of the conditions Dickens lists below:
'And I have only now, in passport wise, to sketch my reader's portrait, which I hope may be thus supposititiously traced for either sex:

*Complexion Fair.
Eyes Very cheerful.
Nose Not supercilious.
Mouth Smiling.
Visage Beaming.
General Expression Extremely agreeable.'*

Any plans for the future?

Friends for life.

I wholeheartedly agree with Borges, who stated, *'once one has read some of Dickens's pages, once one has resigned oneself to some of his bad habits, to his sentimentalism, to his melodramatic characters, one has found a friend for life.'*

Carl Spitzweg, 'English Tourists in Campagna' (circa 1845) [Image source]

Martin Bihl says

A curious volume from Mr. Dickens. Much better than his "American Notes", perhaps because he seems less disappointed and is more forgiving, but also because it reads less like a reporter's diary and more like a novelist's travelogue. That is, fewer facts and figures about prisons and asylums, more portraits of people and stores of the land. More heart, less head, one could say. Also interesting because one very much senses the development and evolution of the public persona of Dickens here - and that's interesting to watch as well.

Therefore, worth the read if you're a Dickens fan, perhaps not so much if you're not.

Amy says

This book has given me my new life motto - **"Courage, friend! It is to eat macaroni!"**

If that doesn't get you through anything, I don't know what does.

This was a pleasant read. I found it unexpectedly charming and witty and not as blatantly racist as I expected. Dickens is a master of ironic detail and painting squalor within charming pictures.

Unfortunately, he's also still the Victorian so several passages dragged a bit.

Overall, though, *pleasant* is the word I'd give this one.

Jennifer Royan says

Clearly Charlie enjoys old mud more than new mud (see his American Notes). Interesting insights from nearly 200 years ago!

Amyem says

<http://librivox.org/pictures-from-ita...>

Mark Rugless says

Interesting to get a view of travelling through Italy 150 years ago. The importance of the church and the crowds and beggars in Rome are perpetual problems and the hospitality experienced across Italy familiar to all.

Also interesting to understand the spectacle of a public execution, the excitement and fanfare that accompanies it.

Many highlight similar 'atrocities' being carried out in some parts of the world today yet it was only 150 years ago it was going on in Rome ?? Not that long ago in the scheme of things.

Tony says

PICTURES FROM ITALY. (1913). Charles Dickens. ****.

According to a preface written by the author, "This book is a series of faint reflections – mere shaadows in the water – of places to which the imaginations of most people are attracted." Dickens spent a year touring Italy – including getting there and back – and managed to see a great deal of it, in spite of the difficulty of travel in those days. As a habitual visitor to Italy myself, I really enjoyed his insights into the people and their heritage that he managed to capture in his travels. The trip started out in Paris, and easy enough leg of the journey. From there he went to several towns, including Aix, and on to Albara, a suburb of Genoa. He apparently stayed with his banker in Genoa for almost a month, visiting the local region. From there, he was off by coach to Parma, Modena, and Bologna. He also managed to notice the games that people played in the various towns. He was impressed with "Mora," a game played between two people involving the fingers of one hand. In Parma, he was particularly impressed with the monument to Petrarch and the Farnese Palace. From Bologna he was off to Ferrara, where he first began to notice the great artwork around him. He was later overwhelmed with anecdotes about Lord Beeron by a waiter in a restaurant. It took him a while to realize that the waiter was talking about Lord Byron. Then he was through Padua (without mentioning the Arena Chapel) and into Venice, which he describes as a dream sequence. In any event, the travels went on and on. He spent Holy Week in Rome, and managed to get to see things that I didn't even know existed. It was apparent that he had little time for the rituals of the Catholic Church, but he managed to apologize for his comments in his preface ahead of time. He finally ends his tour through Florence – but in a hurry. It seems that he had little time to spend there. Time to get back to England. This is an excellent book on travel, though not a travel guide. Recommended.

Marcy says

Not as good as his stories, but interesting nonetheless.

Petra says

"I am not easily dispirited when I have the means of pursuing my own fancies and occupations" - made me laugh....aren't we all happy to have the means to pursue our own fancies?

"It is miserable to see great works of art - something of the Souls of Painters - perishing and fading away"

This is a different Dickens than in his novels, and yet the same. He's humorous, descriptive, observant. But unlike his novels, where he gets to the core of his characters and they come alive, the people in this book are distant, even when described in detail. The reason for this may be that Dickens is writing from memory; not as he was travelling.

Dawnie says

i am still it sure how to rate this book!

i loved some parts of it, dickens sharp, sometimes even biting descriptions on main land European lives hat he found lacking or too extreme (mostly there is no in between for him, either he finds it highly lacking and in poor taste or way over the top and mostly in poor taste because of that) but the way he describes moments, scenery and towns is wonderful!

but at the same time i constantly felt as if dickens saw himself and ever english men (person) as something better than everyone else in europe.

he seems to be constantly criticizing, comparing and complaining about all the differences between where he was and england.

and while that clearly brings something to the book and makes the way it is written different it's not really how i personally enjoy travel writing.

on the other hand this was one of the very first books of this kind published, so is there really a way to say that dickens did it wrong if he was one of the first to do it?

and anyway is there really a wrong way to travel or share that experience?

i guess not even if not every reader will absolutely love how the experience is shared - since i didn't really love this, but i also didn't hate it.

i can certainly appreciate how dickens shares his view and it did transport me back in time in some aspects, so it wasn't that bad.

all on all i do think that's something every sickens lover should read and give a try.

or if you are interested in it without loving dickens other works.

it's defiantly readable and interesting and worth a try!

but please don't read the introduction of the penguin black library book before reading the actual book - because of you do why even bother with the rest of it seeing that it's basically a shortened version of what dickens is going to share?

Bianca Cataldi says

Being an Italian reader, this book has been a real adventure for me. It's funny to see your country through the eyes of an English author of the XIX century. From Genoa to Florence, from Rome to Naples, my beloved Italy has been told and described by one of the authors I love the most. Descriptions are accurate as usual, and there're also a lot of funny sketches about daily life in Italy. Some pages have made me laugh, some other have made me angry, of course. There's something I'd wish to say to Charles, old chap, about our country and our uses but it's too late to do that, I suppose. What has surprised me the most was the enthusiastic view of Milan, but we should consider that Dickens has visited this town BEFORE the great industrialisation. This is why he tells us about its architectural and artistic beauty, passing through natural spots that perhaps don't even exist anymore. The most interesting feature of these notes (because these ARE notes and nothing more) is how ironically they've been written, but it doesn't surprise me very much. Dickens has always written like that, and it's really interesting to read something of his that is not a novel and that contains the main features of a real, autobiographical logbook.

For this and other reviews: <https://notsoredheadblog.wordpress.co...>

Charly says

This is not your usual Dickens in that there really are no characters with whom you grow through the story. On the other hand his descriptive talents are at their best as he takes you along on a tour of Italy after a brief visit through France.

For the most part it seems that he enjoyed the views of the Italian cities and vistas from afar but found them "dirty" very often when up close. I drew from his accounts a sincere disappointment in how the monuments and buildings had seemed to be let to crumble from their time of prominence.

His section on the climb to the top of Vesuvius is fun and humorous. He is at his descriptive best when marveling at the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

I read this as I am trying to read his body of work in sequence, but it is not one that i would otherwise put to the top of my list.

Alan says

Dickens wrote Pictures of Italy during his year there in 1844, two years after his first tour of America, and about 7 years after he lived on Doughty Street, London, and wrote both Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby there. Also, it was four years before the Revolution, which began in 1848, finished in 1871. (Garibaldi, during his first attempt to free Rome in 1849, lived in the same place I did at the American Academy, the Villa on the Gianicolo hill; part of our residence was the Ancient Roman wall built by Aurelius.) All over Italy, Dickens finds some doubtful inns, “your own horses being stabled under the bed, that every time a horse coughs, he wakes you” but even the worst Italian inn will entertain you, “Especially, when you get such wine in flasks as the Orvieto, and the Monte Pulciano”(103).

Before Italy, in Avignon, Dickens saw the cell where Rienzi was held, and the instruments of Inquisition torture. He disparages Marseilles, but loves the sail on the vessel Marie Antoinette, to Genova, so beautiful and layered in the sun as they arrive late afternoon, “its beautiful amphitheater, terrace rising above terrace, palace above palace, height above height, was ample occupation for us, until we ran into its stately harbour”(23). Walking uphill, he finds many women wearing blue—to honor the Madonna for a year or two: “blue being (as is well known) the Madonna’s favorite colour. Women who have devoted themselves to this act of Faith, are very commonly seen walking in the streets”(43).

One of the three Genovese theaters is open air, Teatro Diurno, the audience’s faces turned this way, “changed so suddenly from earnestness to laughter; and odder still, the rounds upon rounds of applause, rattling in the evening air, to which the curtain falls”(48). The Marionetti—a famous company from Milan—is, without any exception, the drollest exhibition I have ever beheld in my life. I never saw anything so exquisitely ridiculous”(44).

Of Milano, where I have lived almost yearly, two weeks or a month, Dickens notes the Duomo spire into the fog might as well have ended in Bombay. He mentions La Scala, and the Corso Garibaldi where the gentry ride in carriages under the trees, “and rather than not do which, they would half starve themselves at home”(88). But he astutely notes the city is “not so unmistakeably Italian,” it has an admixture of the French and the north generally...not to mention, now, the world.

Dickens made it to Carrara. When I lived there a couple weeks translating Bruno’s hilarious Candelaio, I loved the huge Meschi sculpture to Union workers, and the small Cathedral, my favorite in Italy —along with San Marco Venice, Dickens’ favorite, “a much greater sense of mystery and wonder” than at St Peter’s (107). I parked on the marble sidewalks while translating. Marble sidewalks sound better than they are when there’s a garage and cars drip oil on ‘em. My Milan daughter’s relative drove us up to the marble caves—the great profit now’s in the marble dust they make kitchen counters from. The trucks with huge marble blocks are dangerous, descending; their brakes don’t suffice, so they depend on low, low gear. If the truck gets away, they’re dead over the side. One monument stands beside the road for many accidents. When Dickens went up to the caves he rode a pony, and he learned some of the mines went back to Roman times (95). He tells of the signal for an explosion, a low, “melancholy bugle” upon which the miners would retreat expecting the blast.

He sees many processions, such as a Roman one after dusk, “a great many priests, walking two and two, and carrying—the good-looking priests at least—their lighted tapers, so as to throw the light with a good effect upon their faces”(143). He witnessed the climbing of the Holy Stairs, one man touching each step with his forehead, a lady praying on each one, but every penitent came down energetic, “which would take a good deal of sin to counterbalance”(147). He calls such a scene “droll enough.” At a dinner where the Pope “served” thirteen Cardinals, the latter “smiled to each other, from time to time, as if they thought the whole thing were a great farce.”

Our Victorian describes exactly what I saw during my N.E.H. seminar in Naples under Jean D'Amato, "The fairest country in the world, is spread about us. Whether we turn towards the Miseno shore of the splendid watery amphitheatre, and go by the Grotto of Posilipo and away to Baiae: or the other way, towards Vesuvius and Sorrento, it is one succession of delights"(156). "Everything is done in pantomime in Naples," with hand gestures—but also with Neapolitan proverbs which I learned to be accepted by the nearest pizza-maker off Via Carraciolo to accept my order for Pizza Napolitano. He talks of Via Chiaja, my route to the Spanish palace with the National Library, and San Carlo Opera house (so that as I studied Bruno their local boy, I heard vocal and instruments practice for the opera). Off of Chiaia the first pizza, Pizza Margherita for the Queen of Naples, was made; the shop's still open, Pizzeria Brandi.

He tells of ladies being carried down Vesuvius on litters, until the litter-bearers slipped, of Leghorn / Livorno being famous for knifing, with an assassin's club recently jailed, and visits to Herculaneum (which the British largely unearthed a century before) as well as Paestum, where three of the finest Greek temples, built "hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, and standing yet, erect in lonely majesty, upon the wild, malaria-blighted plain" (161). I was so exhilarated to tour those temples, where the stone altars are outside, of course, for sacrifice, and only more exhilarated to learn Zeno the Greek Stoic lived there.

He happened across a beheading in Rome, which disgusted Dickens. The gallows had been set up before San Giovanni Decollata. It was supposed to occur at 8:45, but was delayed 'til after 11 because the condemned young man, barefoot on the scaffold, had refused to confess until his wife was brought to him. He had accompanied a Bavarian countess for forty miles pretending to guard her, then killed her, took her clothes and jewelry, gave 'em to his wife, who had seen the countess walk through town, so she told the priest, etc.
