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REVIEWS OF DIGITISED SCHOLARLY RESOURCES

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The Database of Mid-Victorian Wood-Engraved Illustration, ed. Julia Thomas, 2004–7, University of Cardiff, 23 October 2007, (<http://www.dmvi.cardiff.ac.uk>)

Many readers of the *Journal of Victorian Culture* will know about the 'Database of Mid-Victorian Wood-Engraved Illustration' (hereafter *DVMI*) largely because Julia Thomas, David Skilton and the team at the Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research at Cardiff, who have worked on the project since 2004, have been assiduous in their attendance at conferences and academic events, and ever eager to consult, discuss and demonstrate their work. An AHRC funded project, *DVMI* has sought not just to assemble a particular but comprehensive body of a certain kind of illustration and make it available in the most helpful and refined way possible using current electronic and digital technology, but also to ask scholars a number of key questions about the nature of 'illustration' as a mode endlessly negotiating between textuality and visuality. Clearly there is also an implied polemic here about 'subordination', a riposte to the crudely evidential uses to which images are still frequently subjected by textually focussed academics, and a plea for the visuality of Victorian texts to be emphatically re-instated.

Put simply, which, in the light of the above is a difficult thing to do, the *DVMI* might seem a worthwhile but small-scale project – a data base of nearly 900 wood engraved illustrations taken from periodicals and books published in 1862, seeking comprehensiveness within the terms of its own definitions of 'literary illustration', but acknowledging that, even for a single year's output of this kind, profusion reigns. The assembled images have been drawn mainly a number of repositories, including Cardiff University Library, the Ashmolean Museum and a fortuitously identified collection of illustrations held in Aberystwyth. At the meekest level, then, *DVMI* has established a useful repository of images, reproduced at high resolution in an invitingly usable form, and drawn variously by well known artists such as Millais, by specialist illustrators like Arthur Boyd Houghton or Frederick Walker, and by relatively obscure, or even nameless, artists and engravers drawn into the jobbing marketplace by the development of, especially, monthly

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fiction bearing magazines aimed at what might be called the 'serious leisure' market. The sources are predominantly periodicals but also include illustrated novels, like Wilkie Collins's *After Dark*, gift books and anthologies. It seems likely that, if for no other reason, *DVMI* will become familiar to many teachers as a reliable source of module handbook covers and illustrations for other scholarly purposes.

But, of course, projects like this cannot be described simply as repositories or 'resources', and beyond its intention to provide a searchable and easily navigable source of images, *DVMI* has been conceived as an ambitious attempt to think through and articulate those descriptive categories and modes of approach that scholars might want to bring to images in order to assemble research material and enhance interpretative potential. Working through the implications of this task has been central to the construction of the data-base. The immediate issue was, of course, the onerous but essential task of describing the contents of each image in ways that can then be organised into searchable categories. The difficulty here is the need for both accuracy and objectivity. If one of the scholarly outcomes of *DVMI* is likely to be an increased level of interpretative sophistication in the reading and understanding of images within, alongside or independent from texts, it is nonetheless crucial that the data-base offers no interpretative mechanisms of its own, or else it becomes, disastrously, a map of misreading. It is up to the users of the data-base, and not its compilers, to formulate their own misinterpretations of what they see. Julia Thomas herself tells a wonderful story of sending out a number of images to lay and academic readers both to help form a descriptive method for the data-base and to gauge some of the ways in which misreading occurs. One image showed a scene at a race meeting, (Walter Crane's 'The London Carnival' from *London Society* BRT 101 in *DVMI*), with the foreground dominated by two women in a carriage. One respondent, focussing on what appeared to be a rolled up letter in the left hand of one of the women, saw the image as a narrative of lost or betrayed love, with the two women sprawled in attitudes of despondency and despair. Such a reading might well have been plausible were it not for the information that the rolled letter was in fact a pair of binoculars, thus suggesting quite other readings of the events depicted. Possible misreadings of this kind haunt all of us who work on visual sources. I can recall a moment of acute embarrassment at a conference when, in a pair of papers which coincidentally focussed on the same (admittedly not very clearly drawn) image, my fellow speaker described one of the central figures as a girl, when my entire reading depended on it

being a boy. It proved quite awkward to manoeuvre my paper round to suggest that the previous speaker had made an understandable error in reading the image even as I insisted that it did, indeed *must* in order to make sense, depict a boy. I repeat this anecdote not in a triumphalist way, but as a cautionary tale for all of us. Certainly looking comparatively at other attempts to offer short but full accounts of the contents of a mass of images such as Dorothy George's descriptions of caricatures and satires in the *British Museum Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires*, *DVMI* does provide the kind of studied descriptive neutrality that forms a part of the essential meta-data. This, in itself, is no small achievement, especially given the tendency of much Victorian illustration to construct itself as narrative.

The nature of *DVMI* raises further issues to do with specific content. Why 1862? Why *literary* illustration, and what does that term mean? It must be tempting for the Cardiff team to respond to the first question rather wearily by suggesting that you have to start somewhere. In practice, of course, 1862 makes obvious sense given 'literary illustration' as a second defining characteristic. By 1862 a self-conscious tradition of aesthetically ambitious wood engraving had become established as both characteristic of and economically essential to the fiction bearing monthlies. Three key new largely secular journals of the 1860s which had insisted on the presence of high quality commissioned wood engravings were in their heyday – *Good Words*, *Once A Week* and the *Cornhill Magazine*. All three had been launched into a market place where institutionally sponsored fiction bearing journals with a clear devotional intent like *The Leisure Hour* and *Sunday at Home* as well as more secular monthlies like *The Welcome Guest* had already acknowledged the importance of large scale wood engraved illustrations. A magazine like *Good Words* had even, with the Dalziel brothers, retained what we would now call 'art editors' to oversee the successful development of its illustration. Further evidence of the artistic ambitions of the new monthlies of the 1860s was provided by their willingness to situate at least some of their wood engraved images on pages devoted to single images, thus, like Dickens, maintaining the separation out of image and text. The aim was, perhaps, both to avoid the intrusion of illustration into the flow of the text and to establish an aesthetic claim on the reader's attention through allocating a clear textual space to particular images. (One issue for *DVMI* is that its format makes it hard to work out which images are full page ones and which are dropped into texts). For all these reasons 1862, if not entirely convincingly a 'representative' year, is nonetheless a rich and rewarding one to consider – among the artists represented here are

painters like Millais, comic artists like 'Phiz' and Tenniel, established giants of illustration like John Gilbert, and emergent figures like George du Maurier as well as little known jobbing contributors.

If the choice of 1862 was largely a sensibly pragmatic decision, the use of the 'literary illustration' as a second delimiting factor for the reach of the project can be read in a similar way. The term 'illustration' is clearly used to imply an accompanying or, often, a circumambient text – the whole project is conceived as a mechanism to exemplify and allow exploration of the ways in which illustrations derive from, supplement, write anew, or construct something different from their adjacent texts. Yet, even while acknowledging this interdependence, by physically separating out the illustrations from the printed page to form a visual source, *DVMI* seeks to redress the process whereby meaning is invariably read from text to illustration, thus concentrating on how well the image 'supports' or 'interprets' the text. It is in this area that the database is at its most polemical. There will be many users who would like to see the images situated firmly within their surrounding text as 'pages' rather than 'illustrations'. Certainly a scholar like Peter Sinnema, in his work on the *Illustrated London News*, has shown how necessary it is to consider the 'page' or the 'spread' as a unit of meaning. The organization of *DVMI* ensures that no browser will start with the text, and lays the burden of responsibility on each user to bring the text into full contact with its 'accompanying' image.

'Literary' illustration is also pragmatically taken to mean 'non-explanatory' or 'non-diagrammatic' illustration. The *Illustrated London News*, for example, is represented only by a few illustrations to the relatively little fiction that it contained. Nor is there any attempt to bring into *DVMI* any of the mass of down-market serialised cheap fiction exemplified by G. W. M. Reynolds, many of whose illustrators were substantial if now little known figures. There is a danger of 'canonicity' here. *DVMI* in many respects follows the trajectory of that account of wood engraving that might be called the 'Bewick narrative'. Essentially this narrative comprises a sustained attempt to rescue wood engraving from the many mundane representational functions it was asked to perform in the nineteenth century as a news medium, an expository medium, and a melodramatic/gothic accompaniment to cheap sensational fiction and to re-inscribe its productions back into aesthetic respectability. *DVMI*, perhaps necessarily, is clearly driven by a sense of the need to make a case for the aesthetic sophistication and achievement of wood engraving as well as by a desire to re-inscribe the visual back into the Victorian reading experience. In this respect, it retraces to some extent the steps of the collectors and apologists for

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the aesthetic achievements of wood engraving who have gone before – such pioneering figures as Forrest Reid, Gleeson White, Eric de Mare and, more recently, Paul Goldman - at the expense of thinking through wider questions about the ways in which wood engraving constructed Victorian self-identity. One great virtue of electronic databases is the massive width of their focus and their eclecticism, but such breadth is gained at the expense of adequate meta-data. Inevitably, the more you concentrate on resolving the issues raised by the scholarly requirement for proper meta-data and finding mechanisms, the less room you have for baggy and miscellaneous assemblages.

In trying to take up the wider issues raised by *DVMI*, there is little room left to talk through the experience of actually using the data-base, except to say it is both pleasurable and productive. Of the three search mechanisms, 'key-word' searching will satisfy most users with a known task to perform as it brings up results for whatever journal title, text, artist, or engraver you enter. If the requirement is for a listing under one heading of what the data-base contains, 'key-word' works well, and the simplicity of the single term entry is attractive and time saving. Every bit as useful is the 'advanced' search which introduces a wider range of potential named elements which can be combined to reduce the search field to a fairly precise level. But the fascinating search mechanism is the 'browse iconography' which sub-divides the images into iconographic categories – 'settings' for instance discriminates between 'exteriors' and 'interiors', 'people' leads the searcher on through 'social status' to, say, 'working classes', a group who are perhaps less visible in the middle-class reading of 1862 than you might expect. Such a list of categories should, and undoubtedly will, make all researchers think carefully about what it is they are looking at and how it relates to the wider visual consciousness of the period. I found the categories to do with body postures and with emotions particularly fascinating – I was particularly keen to see what depictions of working-class distress in nineteenth-century British domestic interiors I could come up with in the relatively genteel literature searched by the database. Quite separately from their function in 'illustrating' an accompanying if implicit text, the images brought together here, when organised by the *DVMI* categories (themselves presumably derived from a 'neutral' description of content), offer a fascinating account of what preoccupied, troubled or obsessed the mid-Victorian middle-class consciousness.

I have concentrated on some of the more controversial and theoretical issues raised by *DVMI* at the expense of saying both what a pleasure and what a boon it is. The existence of the database, of

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course, raises the entire profile of illustration as a semi-autonomous category and a proper field for scholarly investigation. It provides a stock of images in both electronic and print form that can be used creatively for teaching purposes. It offers the teacher seeking a moment of refuge from marking first-year essays a sustained visual treat. It both facilitates topic based research and makes the researcher think about the implications of such an approach. It raises thought provoking issues about how to find, describe and interpret Victorian visuality. It certainly suggests that the broad scholarly community is getting some excellent returns from the AHRC's investment in complex electronically-based research projects, and it is to be hoped that, after due thought and assimilation of what has been achieved here, there will be other major projects to bring the printed image into the central position in scholarly awareness of the Victorian period that it so richly deserves.

Brian Maidment

Response to Brian Maidment.

In 2004 I received funding from the AHRC to examine how recent technologies might be employed to collect and display Victorian illustrations and develop a metadata for their bibliographic and iconographic features. Brian Maidment's review marks the culmination of this project (the publicly-accessible online database, *DMVI*, was launched in January 2007) and is suggestive of the ways in which future research in this area could be developed.

As a pilot project, *DMVI* is far from comprehensive. The material was drawn largely from the collection of periodical illustrations of the 1860s and 70s held in the School of Art Museum and Gallery, Aberystwyth, while the focus on 1862 allowed for the inclusion of images that characterise the so-called 'Golden Age' of illustration. Collecting images in this way is always, to a certain extent, constructing a canon. Indeed, this seems to have been the objective of both the anonymous collector of the Aberystwyth images and the other great amasser of Victorian illustrations, Forrest Reid, whose images are housed in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Reid's success is suggested in the fact that his account of Victorian illustrators and engravers is still regarded as definitive. Our aim, however, was to incorporate images (including those by female artists) that Reid neglects.

The fact that the images in these collections had already been cut out from their textual sources necessitated our decision not to digitise

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the full page on which the illustration appears, although a 'Notes' field describes the original format and setting. This emphasis on the images as generating their own meanings in relation to, but distinct from, the text highlights their specific pictorial content, suggesting connections between otherwise disparate images and allowing users to group together the images in new ways. While there is a case to be made for displaying the illustrations in the context of the page, this is just one aspect of their meaning production and does not necessarily illuminate their relation with the accompanying words. Illustrations sometimes appear on different pages in variant editions; their positioning can be decided by binders rather than publishers, authors or artists. Nor does the layout fix the complexities of the dialectic between text and image. Even when a picture appears alongside a specific text, it does not always illustrate those words, or even a distinct episode that can be easily identified. What exactly is being illustrated is not self evident.

By negotiating issues like these, *DMVI* attempts to bring to the fore both the critical impact of new technologies (which is also debated in the roundtable in this issue), and the problematics of illustration and its place in the marginalised visual cultures that Maidment's own work has been so instrumental in exploring.

Julia Thomas

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The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online, ed. John van Wyhe, 2002–7; University of Cambridge, Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities; 25 November 2007, (<http://darwin-online.org.uk>)

Since the 1959 centennial of *On the Origin of Species*, an extraordinary array of Charles Darwin's writings have appeared in print. Readers have been given access to vital manuscript sources ranging from Darwin's notebooks and his massive correspondence to his marginalia and the memorial for his beloved daughter, Annie. His published works and major unpublished manuscripts have appeared in a 29-volume set, while a separate collection of his contributions to periodicals has also been issued. Much of this work has been spearheaded by a relatively small collection of scholars and Darwin's descendants: Nora Barlow, Paul Barrett, Frederick Burckhardt, Gavin de Beer, Mario DiGregorio, R. B. Freeman, Sandra Herbert, Richard Keynes, and Sydney Smith. Modern scholarship on Darwin has been

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made easier, and in many cases just plain made possible, by their labours.

Future Darwin scholars will feel a comparable debt to project director John van Wyhe and his colleagues for *The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online* (or simply *Darwin Online*, as it is called within the site). This mammoth enterprise, launched in October 2006 as a successor to the smaller *Writings of Charles Darwin on the Web*, is the work of the University of Cambridge's Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities, with principal support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Charles Darwin Trust, and additional technical support from Cambridge's Centre for Applied Research in Education Technologies. Historians Jim Secord of Cambridge and Janet Browne of Harvard serve as AHRC principal investigators, and the project is advised by an editorial board that includes prominent Darwin scholars, directors of similar web sites in the history of science, the Keeper of Manuscripts at the Cambridge University Library, and Randal Keynes of the Darwin Trust. *Darwin Online* contains nothing less (in the words of its homepage) than 'Darwin's complete publications, thousands of handwritten manuscripts and the largest Darwin bibliography and manuscript catalogue ever published', as well as hundreds of supplementary works. Its goal is to provide scholarly digital versions of all of Darwin's writings (excluding the correspondence, which is the purview of the *Darwin Correspondence Project*, now also with a significant online presence) in a format that is usable, citable, and searchable. In this the site has fully succeeded. It should now become the standard source for Darwin's writings.

From *Darwin Online's* homepage, a user can access a brief introduction to the site, an overview of its major features, a list of material recently added to the site, a feature called Audio Darwin, a site map, and a user guide. The latter contains information about the site's contents, organisation, navigation, and search tools, as well as technical specifications and protocols. The body of *Darwin Online* has three main sections: Publications, Manuscripts, and Biography. The Publications section sub-divides Darwin's published work into books and pamphlets, articles, and published manuscripts. Each sub-division contains the relevant works in chronological order, with basic bibliographic information. The publication list is based on a corrected and updated version of R. B. Freeman's *The Works of Charles Darwin: An Annotated Bibliographical Handlist* (2nd ed. 1977), the authoritative bibliographic source on Darwin's publications, with each entry identified by its number in Freeman's handlist. Where a

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work appears in multiple editions and translations, these are listed separately. The entry on the *Origin*, for example, includes all six English editions, plus one Danish, five German, and one Russian translation. Clicking on a work's title takes the user to Freeman's bibliographic introduction; where a finch icon appears adjacent to the title, clicking on the icon takes the user to a page containing thumbnail images of all the work's illustrations.

Each individual publication is available in full text in at least one, and generally more than one, of the following forms: Text, Image, Text & Image, PDF. Text view provides a single web page containing the entire work. It reproduces printed characters, page breaks, and formatting, but not font type, font size, or line breaks. It also includes any illustrations. These texts are remarkably error-free, something that often cannot be said of online works that begin their digital lives as OCR scans. Image view provides a series of JPG images of the individual pages of the work. The user can zoom in and out and re-size the image. The text, however, is not searchable in this view, and some works are only available in it. Text & Image view generates a split screen, with the Text view on the left and Image view on the right. This useful feature of course enables the user to compare the transcribed text with an image of the original page. This view does tend to be more difficult to use, however, for the windows are comparatively small and one cannot scroll through the images as quickly as one can through the Text view. PDF views, intended for printing or reading offline, can be large and slow to download depending on the user's connection speed, but even large Text views load quite quickly.

The Manuscripts section is also sub-divided into three areas: Darwin Manuscripts, Manuscript Recollections of Darwin, and Published Manuscripts. The Darwin Manuscripts include the *Beagle* diary and field notebooks, Darwin's personal journal and Emma Darwin's diaries, and the notebooks on geology, transmutation of species, and metaphysics from 1837 to 1844. Neither Charles's personal journal nor Emma's diaries, unfortunately, contain personal reflections, but between them they offer important glimpses into the family's life and the events Charles and Emma regarded as important. In the many cases where a manuscript has already been published, it is possible to view both the manuscript itself and its published transcription and editorial apparatus. From both the Publications and Manuscripts sections the user can also access a collection of nearly 300 supplementary works: obituaries and family recollections of Darwin, works written by others describing Darwin's specimens, reviews of Darwin's works, and a handful of secondary sources.

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The Biography section contains a biographical sketch by van Wyhe, a timeline of Darwin's life by van Wyhe and Janet Browne, a pictorial biography including images of Darwin and of places where he lived or studied, and the obituaries and family recollections.

Darwin Online, despite its size and scope, remains a work in progress, with newly-located and newly-digitised material being added regularly. A list of Darwin's works not included in the site but being sought is posted; most are translations of Darwin's books or printings with minor textual changes. The collection of descriptions of Darwin's specimens is described as 'almost complete', while the collection of reviews of Darwin's books is much more limited, although a full list is aimed for. The Manuscripts section offers the most Darwin manuscripts ever made publicly available, including many transcribed for the first time, with the goal of continuing to expand their numbers.

Several different types of search functions are available in the site. Basic search is available from any page and returns results in probability order. Each search result appears with bibliographic information about the document and links to it (both to the beginning of the document and to the actual spot where the search term appears), plus enough of the surrounding text to give the user a sense of whether the link is worth following. Advanced search capability, allowing users to specify or limit a search in various standard ways, is also just a click away throughout the site. The Freeman Bibliography and Darwin Manuscript Catalogue can both be browsed or searched separately.

Darwin Online is an extraordinary resource for scholars. It assembles virtually the entire corpus of Darwin publications, the vast bulk of them searchable, in clean, reliable form, with their illustrations included. It makes both published and unpublished manuscripts available, and it provides the largest bibliography of Darwin's writings and the largest catalogue of Darwin's manuscripts ever assembled. It includes extensive scholarly apparatus in the form of Freeman's bibliographic introductions, many specially-written introductions to individual publications, and explanatory notes. It offers the first edited and annotated versions of Darwin's periodical publications, a marked improvement over Barrett's edition of Darwin's *Collected Papers*. Comparison of the different editions of the *Origin* is made much easier even than using Morse Peckham's *Variorum* edition. *Darwin Online* thus makes available a set of materials that would simply not be available to any scholar outside of Cambridge, and in a form that is easier and more convenient to work with than the originals, many of which can only be accessed in manuscript collections and rare book rooms.

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A few criticisms can be made of *Darwin Online*. The site is large and complex enough that it would benefit from a Help feature. The User Guide is indeed helpful – anyone working with the site in more than a limited way would do well to read it – but it mixes together material about how to use the site with information about the selection and processing of the site's contents, and this long document is organised only under quite general headings. The Audio Darwin feature – Darwin's books and a few additional works are made available in mp3 files – is a noble attempt to make the works accessible to the visually impaired as well as portable (I delight in the thought of a budding zoologist listening on an iPod to the part of the *Cirripedia* monograph devoted to sessile barnacles while jogging on a treadmill), but I found the synthesised voice difficult to follow. Think Stephen Hawking with his British accent restored but rather breathless and with even less subtlety of intonation.

The only serious complaint I can lodge against *Darwin Online* is the look, and to some extent the layout, of its design. The site's pages tend to be long and to have a cluttered appearance with different fonts, font styles, and colors. A user often has to do a considerable amount of scrolling, and moving from the interior of one part of the site to the interior of another part is somewhat cumbersome. While the home page's banner, with its four radio buttons and search box, is either retained at the top of each page or remains there as part of a split screen, the radio buttons are so general as to leave the user scrolling extensively at both ends of his trip. Both the *Newton Project* (on which much of *Darwin Online* is modeled) and the *Darwin Correspondence Project* offer a better, cleaner layout, with a navigation menu whose items unnest to reveal submenus. Since *Darwin Online* is not icon-driven (the links to the various views of a text do not appear as icons, for example), the finch's head icon is doubly obscure as a way to access a work's illustrations, and the indication that it does so is easy to miss. So, too, with the spine-shots of Darwin's books that appear adjacent to entries in the publication list – unless a user came across the 'virtual bookshelf' of Darwin's works, with its instruction to click on the spine of a volume to 'open' the book, she wouldn't be aware of this possibility. Images are treated inconsistently as well. In the page containing the biographical sketch of Darwin, for example, some images are linked to larger versions, while some are linked to the image overview for the particular work. Some of the images on this page have captions, but most don't.

Such inconsistencies and clutter, however, cannot detract from what is a monumental scholarly and bibliographic achievement. *Darwin*

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Online is likely to facilitate the next wave of work within the Darwin industry. Of even greater importance, perhaps, is the fact that it brings Darwin to a public that needs to encounter him in an accurate, contextualised form even more than scholars do. And judging by its more than twenty million hits to date, *Darwin Online* is reaching more than a scholarly audience.

Jonathan Smith

Response to Jonathan Smith

I would like to offer my thanks to Jonathan Smith for his careful and fair review of *Darwin Online* and the *JVC* for inviting me to respond. Smith's main criticism is the look and the layout. Although I am aware of these shortcomings, I am unable to rectify them at present. *Darwin Online* is largely a labour of love by many contributors (especially Sue Asscher and Gordon Chancellor), the current funding is simply not enough to achieve the ambitious aims of the project. Some of the other projects mentioned by Smith had tens of thousands of pounds to spend on design and construction of a website, *Darwin Online* had only 5000. I hope that further funding can be found.

Smith criticises the use of different fonts. As only one font is used on the site pages (Arial) I am not sure what he means. (The historical documents are provided in Verdana.) The three table of contents pages are indeed long, but I think it is important to provide an unrestricted and exhaustive view of the contents. The forthcoming collection of images of Darwin manuscripts and private papers, the other half of *Darwin Online* as it were, will be so large that it could not possibly be listed on a single page and will be available via searching the manuscript catalogue.

A key problem with organising a site like *Darwin Online* is how to make a vast and varied collection of materials as simply visible and accessible as possible. Smith points out that the thumbnail images of book spines on the contents pages are not clearly indicated to be links. I do not see this is a problem considering that these thumbnails are a few centimetres from the explicit links. The thumbnails are merely illustrations added to enliven what was otherwise a long list of unbroken text entries. I accept that the finch icons which lead to the illustration overview pages are not very clear. I would be grateful for suggestions as to how to improve this.

As for the point that the illustrations on some of the site pages such as the biographical sketch are treated inconsistently, I plead guilty.

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I had no intention of making them so as each serves a different purpose. In addition to illustrating the text, some of the images serve as links to draw readers into different parts of the site's treasures.

Smith criticises the side-by-side view feature. This was one of the main innovations of the site and originally foreseen as useful for manuscript transcriptions. Accepted scholarly conventions use annotations and symbols to allow the reader to make do with not having the original manuscript, this bit was in the margin, or this line is crossed out etc. But with a picture of the original next to the transcription many of these time-consuming annotations can be omitted, thus allowing a vastly greater amount of material to be transcribed. This is part of the philosophy behind *Darwin Online*. I prefer to make as much of Darwin's writing available to as many people as possible rather than making 2 per cent of the materials available in highly annotated form for a few. Of course thinly annotated manuscripts can always be further edited in future.

John van Wyhe

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Dickens Before Sound DVD Collection, British Film Institute, 1901–22; Black and white and tinted; UK/USA; Language(s): Silent with music; subtitles: English for the hearing impaired. 180 minutes. £16.99 (ISBN/EAN 5035673005262).

A couple of years ago, a friend, who knew that I was working on Dickens and adaptation, bought a copy of an *Oliver Twist* DVD for me at Chester Sainsbury's for 97p. What alerted me to the fact that something strange was happening in the market for film was that the DVD was not Carol Reed's iconic musical *Oliver!* (1968) or even David Lean's classic 1948 adaptation: it was the 1933 black-and-white version directed by Will Cowen and starring Dickie Moore (not, as the cover sleeve suggests, Jackie Moore). Whereas film has provided Dickens with an important bridge to the post-Victorian mass cultural marketplace, now it seems that the increasing availability of inexpensive, 'digitally remastered' film versions of Dickens is providing scholars and enthusiasts of Dickens and film with access to a more complete history of both film and of Dickens's cultural transmission.

The BFI's *Dickens Before Sound* DVD is an important and valuable contribution to this reconstruction of the history of the moving image, and to our understanding of the role of film in influencing the popular and critical fortunes of literary authors writing before its advent.

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Dickens is a fascinating case in point. According to Joss Marsh, 'more films have been made of works by Dickens than of any other author's'.¹ Despite Alistair Cooke's claim that 'a silent Dickens [...] is as much of a contradiction as a talkative statue', Dickens was particularly important to the silent movie industry, which relied heavily on adaptation.² Dickens's established popular appeal and the visual, melodramatic, symbolic mode of his novels provided ideal raw material for silent movie makers: indeed, the many stage adaptations of his works facilitated the process of adaptation by providing ready-made scripts for film-makers.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Dickens arguably did more than any other literary author to shape the early film industry; what is interesting is the effect of silent film on Dickens's reputation. The era of high modernism was also the era of silent film: while Dickens's critical reputation reached its all-time low at the pens of his modernist successors, his posthumous respectability with the public was at the same time rising because of his pervasive film presence. This bifurcation was crystallised in the 1940s when, in his essay, 'Dickens, Griffith and Ourselves' (1942), the Soviet Director Sergei Eisenstein famously used Dickens to argue that 'our cinema is not without an ancestry and a pedigree, a past and traditions, or a rich cultural heritage from earlier epochs'.³ In the same decade, Leavis notoriously left Dickens out of *The Great Tradition* on the grounds that he was a 'great entertainer'; *The Great Tradition* was published in 1948, the same year that David Lean brought out his *Oliver Twist*, certainly one of the best Dickens adaptations ever made and a classic film in its own right.

While it can be argued that Dickens's prominence on screen compounded his fall from critical favour during the modernist era, associating him with a mass public of low cultural tastes, it could equally be argued that the viewing public made Dickens impossible to ignore, and that his subsequent survival, even centrality, in academic 'canons' has been forged as much by the viewing public as by literary critics. Critics have had to adjust their tastes to the market. It is no accident that the authors who loom largest in the popular sense of the literary past – Shakespeare, Jane Austen, the Brontës and Hardy, for example – have translated well onto the screen. The re-emergence of texts like *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* onto University syllabi likewise is not unrelated to their screen afterlives and the mass cultural consciousness of those texts the screen has generated. Like *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol*, *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* are what Paul Davis calls 'culture-texts' – myths whose impact on the popular consciousness goes beyond the literary.⁴

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Screen adaptation subverts any notion of a binary opposition between high and low culture. The expansion of the market for affordable DVD films of all eras facilitates the availability of non-mainstream films to the interested public, films like silent movies now considered ‘arty’ though not considered art at the time. (Sol Lesser, the producer of Frank Lloyd’s pioneering silent movie of *Oliver Twist* (1922) – included on the BFI’s *Dickens Before Sound* – recalled why he allowed the destruction of the film’s negatives: ‘I had no sense that it [film] was an art form’.⁵) The increased access to extant film is also, moreover, an enormous boost to scholarship, enabling film to come home to the researcher. It is notable that in recent years, scholarly interest in adaptation has increased significantly. In Dickens studies alone, where it was once difficult to find material on Dickens and film, there is now no shortage of major books on the topic – Michael Pointer’s *Charles Dickens on the Screen*, Grahame Smith’s *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema* (Manchester University Press, 2003), and John Glavin’s *Dickens on Screen* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) have built on pioneering books by F Dubrez Fawcett and A. L. Zambrano, and important essays by Joss Marsh, Jeffrey Richards and Graham Petrie, among others.⁶

The BFI double DVD is aware of its scholarly audience, including for example, a downloadable version of Graham Petrie’s groundbreaking 3-part essay, ‘Silent Film Adaptations of Dickens’, originally published in *The Dickensian* (Nos. 455–7 (2001–2)). It makes sure, however, that the experience of viewing the films themselves is kept fresh, unencumbered by scholarly paraphernalia: while an extremely helpful booklet accompanying the DVDs provides information and background to help educate the viewer, the presentation of the films themselves attempts to recapture the value of the film as entertainment. There is implicit recognition, however, that the ‘original’ viewing experience – which would have taken place with musical accompaniment in a theatre – cannot be replicated, in the decision to include the options of voice-overs by Ken Campbell and Michael Eaton and newly-composed scores by Neil Brand. What André Bazin calls ‘equivalence’ (instead of exact fidelity to the original) is the aim, in terms of the sound experience of most of the films selected.

Before the advent of ‘talkies’, over one hundred film versions of Dickens were made, only a third of which are known to have survived. The compilers of the BFI double DVD initially aimed to shape the selection of films included according to a coherent academic rationale: the aim was ‘to present a selection of titles which had both been made in England and are now held in the archive of the British

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Film Institute'. Both elements of this initial rationale were ultimately shelved as it became clear that to limit the selection in this way would necessitate important omissions. The first film selected is a beneficiary of the decision to put the viewing experience before adherence to a rigid set of criteria for inclusion: *Gabriel Grub* (1880–1910), adapted from one of the interpolated tales in *The Pickwick Papers*, is a pre-cinematic yet far from static adaptation from a late nineteenth-century magic lantern series. As the accompanying booklet argues, Dickens may well have been influenced by the magic lantern when writing the tale in the first instance; this quirky film, presented in colour rather than in black-and-white, revives visual evidence of the argument posited by Grahame Smith (2003) of the close proximity between Dickens's imagination and pre-cinematic and cinematic technologies. The only Dickens adaptation by pioneering director D.W. Griffith, *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1909), likewise makes the cut because of its intrinsic interest: Griffith was always open about the debt he felt to Dickens, and Eisenstein saw Griffith as a bridge to Dickens and the 'rich cultural heritage' of film.

On the same disc (one), several other films are included, like many of their era lasting between 4 and 20 minutes: *Scrooge; or, Marley's Ghost* (Dir. W. R. Booth, 1901), *Oliver Twist* (Dir. J. Stuart Blackton, 1909), *The Boy and the Convict* (Dir. David Aylott, 1909), *Nicholas Nickleby* (Dir. George O. Nichols, 1912), *The Pickwick Papers* (Dir. Larry Trimble, 1913), and an extract from *David Copperfield* (Dir. Thomas Bentley, 1913). On the second disc, the full 74 minutes of the star-studded *Oliver Twist*, directed by Frank Lloyd (and starring Jackie Coogan and Lon Chaney) is included, as well as two fascinating oddities: Miller and Parkinson's *Dickens' London* (1924), part of the 'Wonderful London' series of one-reel documentaries shot by this directorial partnership patriotically celebrating the UK's capital, and *Grandfather Smallweed* (Dir. Hugh Croise, 1926–9), the first 'talkie' adapted from a Dickens source and starring the famous recitalist Bransby Williams, who also became Vice-President of the Dickens Fellowship. The fact that a talkie should have no real place in a DVD-collection called *Dickens Before Sound* is less important than what it contributes to the achievement of this miscellaneous selection: to the mercurial illustration of the journey of early film from short, staccato, filmed scenes or 'tableaux' to an art form altogether more complex and loud.

It is impossible to convey the richness and variety of this collection in a short review: each film will give viewers immense pleasure and researchers a wealth of material to regenerate the indefatigable Dickens industry. What will strike those new to silent film is the

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squareness and flatness of the most primitive adaptations: no close-ups, no change of perspective, simply a stage filmed from a static camera. The use of bodily gestics to compensate for the lack of technological flexibility is a revelation: face, posture and movement used to capture Peter Brooks's definition of melodrama as 'the expressionism of the moral imagination'.⁷ The dependence on the written word, or 'intertitles', to make sense of narratives, brings home the usefulness of literacy to the audience of early film. The gradual use of close-up, perspective, outdoor scenes, and what Eisenstein calls 'montage' (or dialectical juxtaposition of scene) strikes the modern viewer as a miracle of invention rather than a naturalised given. The use of early special effects (like the knife and fork dancing on Oliver's stomach in Lloyd's *Oliver Twist*) and self-conscious play with the new medium, conveys carnivalesque joy in the possibilities of the new medium. In *Dickens' London*, perhaps most memorably, a film which has blended fact and fiction throughout in the interests of literary tourism includes a scene in which various Dickens characters board an advert-strewn London bus together: one asks, 'Is it half price for Quilp, too?'

The DVD-sleeve announces: 'The British Film Institute's purpose is to champion the moving image culture in all its richness and diversity across the UK'. *Dickens Before Sound* not only fulfils this purpose: it reinforces the importance of Dickens to 'moving image culture' and the importance of moving image culture to the modern cultural imaginary.

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Endnotes

1. 'Dickens and Film', *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. John O. Jordan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 204.
2. Quoted by Michael Pointer, *Charles Dickens on the Screen: The Film, Television and Video Adaptations* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 23.
3. In *Selected Works*, ed. Richard Taylor and William Powell, 4 vols (London: British Film Institute, 1996), III, 193-238 (222). The essay title has more commonly been translated as 'Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today'.
4. *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990).
5. Quoted by Pointer, *Charles Dickens on the Screen*, 46.
6. Dubrez Fawcett, *Dickens the Dramatist: On Stage, Screen and Radio* (London: W. H. Allen, 1952); Zambrano, *Dickens and Film* (New York: Gordon Press, 1976); Jeffrey Richards, 'Dickens – Our Contemporary', in *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 326–50.
7. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976), 55.