School of

English



Dr Hazel Mackenzie

Department of English

University of Buckingham

25 November 2014

Dear Hazel,

I am writing to you on behalf of Professors Robert Patton and John Jordan, who with me have been appointed by the Delegates to Oxford University Press to continue work on the *Handbook to Charles Dickens* that the initiating editor, Professor Pamela Dalziel, began some years ago. Professor Dalziel has resigned from the project for reasons of health. Responding to recommendations from outside readers and the Delegates, we have slightly modified her original proposal. We are now writing to ask if you would like to be a part of this revised publication. A copy of the Prospectus is attached.

We would like to invite you to contribute a 6000-word essay on Dickens’s **Journalism and Correspondence [II.23 in the Prospectus]**. We are all admirers of your pioneering work on this topic as part of the *DJO* project.

Oxford’s formula for the Handbook series, which the Press has been publishing successfully for some years, is predicated on three key directives:

1. The individual essays will, after copy-editing, be uploaded onto the Oxford Handbook Online site, from which they may be ordered and read by an international clientele.
2. Thereafter, they will be combined, with an editorial introduction, into a volume that may be released in hard and/or soft cover and supplied as an e-book.
3. The essays will be aimed at post-B.A. students and academic faculty around the world. They should be designed to define the field as it exists at present AND to suggest lines of enquiry for future work.

The Delegates are keen to enlist contributors from around the world, especially since the events of Dickens 2012 have demonstrated his global circulation. We will be at pains therefore to draw from an international range of senior and rising scholars.

At this point, we want to know whether you are interested in contributing to this project. It is possible that we might consult with you about sharing a remit or changing your topic to another that we believe would be congenial to you. We’re simply going to find the very best scholars and writers in the world to produce this Handbook, even if a little juggling is required to accommodate all our team.

There are two inflexible deadlines: an abstract of 500 words must be submitted to us by **January 2015**, and an essay in final form according to OUP’s style protocols must be submitted no later than **1 September 2016**. The abstracts will be forwarded to the Delegates for their approval. At that point, the Handbook may become, officially, *The Oxford Handbook to Charles Dickens.* Thereafter the individual essays will, after we have approved them, be submitted for outside peer review before we proceed to publication.

We very much look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. Please reply to me at c.waters@kent.ac.uk.

Cordially,

Cathy Waters for the editors

Dear Handbookers,

We’re writing to let you know that we submitted the complete set of essays and a near-complete set of supporting materials (missing only a few illustrations) to OUP on 1 September. Once they are ready, the Press will send electronic proofs to the three co-editors, who will pass them along to the contributors for review. We don’t have a time-frame yet for the dispatch of proofs, but OUP has informed us that it is likely they will arrive next year, rather than this year. We will update you about the schedule once we have further information.

Thank you again for enabling us to deliver the typescript on deadline.

Best regards,

Cathy, Bob and John

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**II.23 Journalism and Correspondence**

**Hazel Mackenzie**

‘The amount of detail which there is in them is something amazing,—to an ordinary writer something incredible’—this Walter Bagehot writes of Dickens in his well-known dissection of London’s ‘special correspondent for posterity’.[[1]](#endnote-1) Abundance is intrinsic to Dickens’s genius in Bagehot’s estimation. It was this profusion of detail in his writing, this talent and appetite for observation, that made him the ideal correspondent for the modern city in all its fragmented glory, not only in his familiar and beloved novels but also in the wealth of other writing that poured from his pen throughout his career. At the same time, it is this abundance—in detail and in output—that has allowed much of this writing to remain under-appreciated even today. Digital technology is set to change that, allowing scholars to engage fully with the abundance that Bagehot so rightly lauded.

Recognition of the significance of Dickens as correspondent both in the public and private spheres is long established among Dickensians. However, the impracticalities of connecting with his non-novelistic writings in a substantive way have meant that beyond a few well-known canonical texts much of this material remains relatively neglected. Digitization has opened up the field, widening access and allowing for concrete and meaningful analysis. James Mussell has written of how ‘the increased visibility of nineteenth-century newspapers and periodicals within the emerging digital archive can return the press to its central position in nineteenth-century print culture’.[[2]](#endnote-2) Similarly, digital archives grant scholars the means to appreciate the extraordinary range and wealth of Dickens’s writing in different forms, as well as the tools to engage with that writing. Recent projects such as the University of Buckingham’s *Dickens Journals Online* and the Dickens Fellowship’s *Charles Dickens Letters Project*, as well as the online Pilgrim edition of Dickens’s letters and work by the British Newspaper Archive, Gale Cengage, Project Gutenberg, and the Internet Archive, have revolutionized the ways in which readers can interact with these materials. The result is the emergence of a more complex, more multifarious Dickens.

In recent years the orthodox author-centred narrative of Dickens’s progression from reporter and sketch artist to mature journalist, editor, and publisher established in the mid- to late-twentieth century has been challenged. The collaborative nature of both the earlier and later enterprises, previously subsumed under the ‘Charles Dickens’ brand, has been demonstrated as have the ambiguities of authorial identity implied by Dickens’s negotiation of the roles of journalist, novelist, and editor. Digitization enables the revision to go further, revealing new information as to subject matter, style, trends in editorial policy, and patterns of contribution. It can help to uncover numerous previously-unknown contributors and expose editorial choices that shift previous understandings of Dickens’s role as editor. In providing readier access to full contents, it derails the tendency towards the canonization of certain articles and letters and the neglect of others, producing a more nuanced contextualization of both canonical and lesser-known texts based upon quantifiable data on genre and subject in both a given year and across the journal’s run as a whole. In other words, digitization opens up possibilities for a more intricate consideration of Dickens’s rich and profuse output (journalistic and otherwise) and for his varied and diverse engagements with the periodical press—one that destabilizes traditional myths (often self-fashioned) and acknowledges the changeable and sometimes contradictory nature of his fulfilment of these roles.

Percy Fitzgerald, journalist, biographer, and sometime Dickens protégée, wrote of Dickens’s magazines *Household Words* (1850-59) and *All the Year Round* (1859-95) that ‘without these volumes no one can have an idea of his true character and what he did in his life’.[[3]](#endnote-3) Yet it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that any serious attempt to recover these volumes from the dusty shelves of the archive took place with the pioneering work of Anne Lohrli and Ella Ann Oppenlander. Their comprehensive cataloguing of all currently available information on the journals’ content, authorship, and contributor payments provided a strong basis for further scholarship.[[4]](#endnote-4) Perhaps even more significant was the appearance of the Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens’s Journalism (1994-2000), edited by Michael Slater and John Drew, which contained in four volumes Dickens’s journalism from his early sketches to his later essays.[[5]](#endnote-5) Also critical, both to the study of Dickens’s career as a journalist and editor and to our appreciation of his skill as a correspondent, was the publication of the Pilgrim Edition of Charles Dickens’ Letters (1965-2002), which made available some 15,000 surviving letters in its twelve volumes.[[6]](#endnote-6)

In opening up the archive, however, such works could only go so far. The print publication of Dickens’s letters was a significant step forward, but the quantity of material was an obstacle to comprehensive study. And, as Michael Slater himself notes, the Dent edition could only go so far in contextualizing the journalism it presented and could do little to illuminate Dickens’s role as an editor.[[7]](#endnote-7) The work of Lohrli and Oppenlander in this respect was more productive but in attempting to generate interest in this forgotten area they followed in Fitzgerald’s footsteps in presenting the journals as a window into Dickens’s character. ‘[M]ore and more his theme seemed to be himself’, writes Oppenlander. The journals are presented as a reflection of that self rather than as a complex collaborative enterprise: ‘His imagination for contriving subjects was boundless, but his time limited, so he farmed out his ideas.’[[8]](#endnote-8) Dickens’s styling of himself as Conductor, the larger-than-life impresario from whom all took their direction, was seemingly taken at face value. Similarly, early studies of *Sketches by Boz* declared their intention of doing ‘little by way of comparing Dickens to his contemporaries’ or only sought comparisons among such exemplars as Pierce Egan and Thomas Hood rather than examining the sketches’ original newspaper and periodical contexts.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Nonetheless, these monumental works of archival research generated new interest in studying Dickens beyond his novels and this author-centred narrative has been increasingly challenged from a number of different perspectives as a more detailed understanding of Dickens’s self-fashioning and the intrinsically intertextual and collaborative nature of the periodical press have emerged. As Robert Patten notes, ‘Dickens not only discovered the vocation of authorship but also retrospectively wrote up the story of that discovery’. For Patten, Dickens’s successful creation of his authorial persona speaks to his imaginative genius, but contradicts much of Dickens’s ‘lived experience’ as a writer.[[10]](#endnote-10) In his view, the notion of Dickens’s wielding the tyrant-like control over his texts that Oppenlander and others propagated is only one of many representations of himself as editor and writer that Dickens crafted.[[11]](#endnote-11) Patton argues that the evidence points to numerous ‘conflicting ways in which Dickens imagined himself as playwright, journalist, editor, author, and novelist’.[[12]](#endnote-12) It is the critics who have subsequently attached themselves to one specific model of authorial identity in order to produce a single cohesive narrative of the great man.

The work of Nikki Hessell and Matthew Bevis on Dickens’s early career as a parliamentary reporter points out further complexities. ‘[M]odern critics’, Hessell notes, ‘have been largely dismissive of Dickens’s reporting precisely because most take it that he cannot be considered to be both accurate and creative’.[[13]](#endnote-13) Hessell follows Bevis in emphasizing the extensive discussion regarding the accuracy of parliamentary reporting during this period and the frequency with which artistic recreation took the place of word-for-word dictation, concluding that Dickens most likely participated ‘in the often creative interpretation that was part of the process of reporting Parliament’.[[14]](#endnote-14) All the same, Hessell argues, an examination of Dickens’s early reporting presents ‘a radical challenge to our understanding of the style’ of reporters such as Dickens, ‘because it is essentially about the submersion of individual style’.[[15]](#endnote-15)

In a similar vein, Catherine Waters’s study of his later journalism discusses the shared formal characteristics of the journalism of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* in a manner that goes beyond their superficial designation as ‘Dickensy’, detailing the ‘strategies of defamiliarisation’ that Dickens and his contributors employed, and developing a picture of the journals that allows for both Dickens’s central role as editor and the power of the individual voices that emerge despite the magazine’s policy of anonymous contributions.[[16]](#endnote-16) Waters demonstrates the importance of looking beyond Dickens and certain key contributors if a more nuanced understanding of Dickens and Victorian magazine culture more generally is to be achieved. In the same way, while Lillian Nayder in her study of Dickens and Wilkie Collins ostensibly re-emphasizes the idea of Dickens’s tyrannical control over his journals, counteracting late nineteenth-century notions of the contaminating influence of Collins on Dickens’s later work, her extended treatment of the collaboration between Dickens and Collins demonstrates the complex combination of comradeship, hostility, pride, and rivalry that went into the production of the magazines.[[17]](#endnote-17)

Alongside this exploration of authorial ambiguity, stylistic conventionalism, and collaborative influence, there has been a move towards recognizing the importance of nation, race, and gender in Dickens’s wider writings. Sabine Clemm, in one of the first full-length scholarly studies to focus on *Household Words* as a journal rather than as a vehicle for Dickens’s writing, demonstrates that ‘the distasteful racism’ of Dickens’s notorious essay, ‘The Noble Savage’, is not a minor aberration but an integral part of the journal’s world-view.[[18]](#endnote-18) Likewise, Laura Peters argues that the ‘Fancy’ that Dickens extols, perhaps especially in his journalism, is based on ‘the production of an exotic which exhibits racial assumptions’ rooted in Dickens’s childhood reading: stories of adventures in far-off lands that present anything ‘unEnglish’ as an exoticized Other, both attractive and repellent.[[19]](#endnote-19) The ‘unevenness’ of Dickens’s treatment of gender in his journalism has also been noticed by Waters and Holly Furneaux. Waters notes that the ‘urban streetwalkers’ who feature so prominently in Dickens’s journalism both ‘affirmed and interrogated’ gender identities, male and female.[[20]](#endnote-20) Similarly, Furneaux demonstrates the interrogative power of Dickens’s depiction of male friendship in her investigation of the depiction of military figures in the Crimean period.[[21]](#endnote-21) Thus the picture of Dickens the journalist and Conductor has deepened as further study has revealed the various layers of discourse and meaning embedded in the journals, often only realizable contextually.

For all this, however, before digitization, when scholars considered Dickens’s journalism, or that of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, the focus was generally upon a fairly rigid canon of writing. In 1982 Michael Wolff and Joanne Shattock noted that ‘for the press as a whole, we appear to have little choice except to be satisfied with a casual or glancing knowledge, believing that anything broader or deeper or more systematic is beyond the bounds of reasonable humanistic ambition’.[[22]](#endnote-22) The digitization of archive material has transformed the limits of reasonable human ambition, making possible the kind of systematic analysis that was previously out of reach. Searchable text generated by optical character recognition means that archives that were too extensive to traverse can now be mapped. The cataloguing of these archives with the storage of information on title, authorship, page length, genre, and subject matter, as in the case of *Dickens Journals Online*, further aids navigation. Material formerly all but inaccessible, not only due to the sheer size of the archive but also due to the difficulty of physically locating hard copies only to be found in certain restricted libraries, can now be accessed, analysed, and brought to bear on our understanding of Dickens as a journalist and an editor. Importantly, however, digitization also enables new ways of marshalling that material, allowing for new patterns to emerge and fresh connections to be made.

In other words, the emergence of a quantifiable literary archive of Dickens’s journals can help to refine understanding of their contents. For example, it has long been established that although *All the Year Round* was promoted by Dickens as continuing the ‘fusion of the graces of the imagination with the realities of life’ that was *Household Words*’ modus operandi, there was a shift in the subject matter and focus in the new magazine.[[23]](#endnote-23) John Drew notes that

There was a marked increase of emphasis on foreign affairs in *All the Year Round* […]. Over a representative sample of seven volumes of each periodical, nearly 11 per cent of the non-fiction articles in *All the Year Round* dealt with some aspect of international affairs or cultures, as opposed to 4 per cent in *Household Words*.[[24]](#endnote-24)

*Dickens Journals Online*’s catalogued database of articles, however, provides the basis for establishing trends within the magazines with much greater specificity and ease. It can be seen, for example, that the number of items that dealt with international affairs or foreign cultures in *Household Words* fluctuated between 50 and 80 per volume, and that there was a notable increase in volumes fives through to twelve (1852–56), perhaps due to an increased interest in international relations caused by the Crimean War (1853–56), after which the number of articles moved back to the lower end of the scale.

Similarly, peaks and troughs in the journals’ social campaigning can be mapped: 125 articles or works of fiction that dealt with issues of public health and sanitation appeared in the journals between 1850 and 1870. Of these, 87 appeared in *Household Words* and 38 in *All the Year Round*. Although there were clearly more items that dealt with contemporary social problems in *Household Words* than in *All the Year Round* (another long established difference between the two journals), delving deeper into the statistics shows that *Household Words*’ initial enthusiasm for such subjects quickly dampened. The 20 items on public health in the first volume decreased to 13 in the second volume and 5 in the third volume. After volume ten (1854–55), in which there were 8 articles on matters of public health and sanitation, the figure drops to 1 or 2 articles per volume. Under the wider heading of ‘Great Britain: Social Conditions’, 259 items appear in this category within the same period, 101 in *All the Year Round*, and 158 in *Household Words*. Of those items, however, 42 appear in the first volume of *Household Word*—thereafter, with exceptions for volumes five and ten, the figures are less than 10 per volume. Both sets of figures paint a similar picture: the trend away from social campaigning in *All the Year Round* was already established in *Household Words*’ latter years.

Such data, of course, provides little information as to the reasons behind such trends. The resurgence in interest in public health in volume ten may be attributable to the outbreak of a cholera epidemic in that period, but neither the long hot summer of 1858 and its ‘Great Stink’, the passage of the 1858 Public Health Act (21 & 22 Vict. c. 97) nor that of the 1866 Sanitary Act (29 & 30 Vict. c. 90) seems to have inspired similar interest. This might be the result of Dickens’s own declining interest in the subject due to the long intervals he spent abroad or it may have been caused by other factors. Digital technology assists in opening up lines of research, but more work is required to provide complete answers.

Another line of research opened up by these figures is the place of poetry within Dickens’s journals. Poetry was a major feature there (*Dickens Journals Online* lists 750 published poems between 1850 and 1870, compared to 935 short stories and 1065 instalments of serial fiction), but has yet to be subjected to sustained analysis. Victorian periodical poetry has often suffered from the idea that it was considered to be ‘filler’ by both editors and readers. For almost the entirety of its run, *Household Words* included in its contents one poem per issue, most of which were original works published for the first time within the magazine. The majority were short lyrics that took up less than a column of print and, as Arthur Adrian argues in his article on ‘Dickens as Verse Editor’, they were entirely conventional. He sums them up as ‘Often sentimental, full of moral observations, not deeply philosophical’.[[25]](#endnote-25) However, since Adrian’s article was written more than fifty years ago, little serious work has emerged in this area. Recent re-evaluations of sentimental literature and Linda Hughes’s seminal essay on the structural importance of poetry within the periodical have to some extent redressed the dismissive view of some twentieth-century critics regarding periodical poetry, but as yet little attempt has been made to re-evaluate the poetry in Dickens’s journals. Not only the poetry itself, but Dickens’s relationships with the poets, and how far his editorial control extended to the poetry, remain subjects largely unexamined.[[26]](#endnote-26) Yet when the contents of the magazines are taken collectively, as a project such as *Dickens Journals Online* allows the reader to do, it becomes clear that this poetry was a significant feature within both journals.

Thus in a move away from the necessarily selective practices of the hard-copy anthology, the digital archive allows scholars, as Wolff put it in 1989, to ‘study the press on its own terms and not as though it was an anomaly, and for many a regretful, disturbing, even pathological anomaly within the tidy world of traditional letters’.[[27]](#endnote-27) When the archive is contemplated in its sheer abundance, over-generalised statements such as ‘Dickens himself wrote much of the original matter’ give way to a more nuanced (and accurate) knowledge of the periodicals that does not dismiss the four-hundred-odd other contributors to them, the complexities of collaboration and interconnection alive within the journals, and the skill and finesse required to manage such complexities successfully by both Dickens and his sub-editor.[[28]](#endnote-28) Digitization challenges readers to tackle the difficulties of multi-authorship across platforms: difficulties that Dickens himself as writer and editor tackled with imagination and vigour.

Through computational stylistics and the work of organisations such as the Internet Archive, digital technology also allows scholars to tackle the problem of anonymous publication. Ann Lohrli’s publication of the information to be found in the *Household Words*’ office book and Jeremy Parrott’s recent discovery of Dickens’s annotated set of *All the Year Round* might seem to reduce the necessity for such technical tools, but even if the issue of attribution were to be fully resolved, there is in fact still much that such techniques can reveal. The tracing of texts through archives does not simply bring to light attribution but also the afterlives of articles and stories that originally appeared in Dickens’s journals, which can help expand understanding of publishing practices and particular relations between various Victorian writers and publishers. Similarly, computational stylistics has much more to reveal than simply who wrote what.

The basis of computational stylistics is the contention that language is more than just ‘a cultural artifact’: it is ‘a distinct piece of the biological makeup of our brains’.[[29]](#endnote-29) Scholars such as Hugh Craig and Arthur Kinney argue that psychology, linguistics, physics, and neuroscience have all shown us that ‘each person’s processing of language is individually distinct’ and that ‘word deployment is individual to a high degree’.[[30]](#endnote-30) They argue that each individual has a unique linguistic fingerprint, one that it may be difficult for a reader to perceive but of which a computer can provide a detailed breakdown.[[31]](#endnote-31) More than simply establishing identification, however, Craig and Kinney seek to use this technology to ask a variety of further questions:

[I]s this work early or late? Is prose dialogue consistently different from speeches in verse? Do playwrights from different classes, with different education, or brought up in different places write differently? Which playwrights are more diverse stylistically across their various works? Which show the widest variation across their characters?[[32]](#endnote-32)

Dickens’s young men, writers such as George A. Sala, Percy Fitzgerald, and Edmund Yates, all frequent contributors to *All the Year Round*, were often accused of imitating Dickens’s style—how similar exactly are their stylistic fingerprints to Dickens’s? How uniform in fact is the style across the journals that Elizabeth Gaskell deemed ‘Dickensy’?[[33]](#endnote-33) Does Dickens’s stylistic imprint differ in his journalism compared to his fiction? Does it shift over the years? Does the imprint of writers change when writing for *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*? Does Gaskell’s writing, for example, bear an altered imprint when writing for other publications, or is it consistent across publications? Computational stylistics can provide answers to these questions, which are, arguably, more interesting than simple author attribution.

However, while digitization opens up new ways of reading material, it can, if not used carefully, simultaneously close down other pathways. As Adeline Koh notes, it is important to recognize the manner in which the digital archive can divorce the texts it remediates from the social and material conditions that governed their original emergence. Scholars must be aware of the ways in which the digital environment is shaping readers’ experience of the texts and ‘the limited ways in which researchers are invited to access and explore these resources’, which Kohl warns may ‘risk the reintroduction of a belle lettristic approach to literature where social, political, historical and ideological conditions are suspended from the reading and production of texts’.[[34]](#endnote-34) For example, a keyword search of a database such as *British Periodicals Collection* will produce a disembodied list of numerous articles from a variety of different publications, immediately divorced from their original context through the very process of the search. Thus, for all its potential, digital technology’s ultimate usefulness is determined by how it is used. At the heart of all digital projects is the database. Databases collect information in accordance with certain pre-established rules. While such rules can illuminate material in new ways, they can also be limiting. *Dickens Journals Online*’s database is organised in terms of volume, issue, and article, thus analysis of its contents tends to be shaped by these units. The calendar year, for instance, plays very little part in its organisational structure, which is reflected in the results yielded from the site. This is all to say that the digital scholar must be careful not to create new oversimplifications that reduce the complexity of the material. There must be an awareness of that which digitization does not illuminate and even obscures and that the digital age has its own biases in terms of the information it seeks to gather and reproduce.

Within Dickens Studies, however, digital archives have, so far, rather opened up the exploration of conditions of reading and production than otherwise, as sites such as *Dickens Journals Online* have created opportunities for different ways of reading known material. Key to this is the site’s presentation of scanned images of the original magazines alongside searchable text, reinforcing rather than dislocating the materiality of the original. In 2012 *Dickens Journals Online* and the Victorian Studies Centre at the University of Leicester launched a reading project and blog—one of many such projects in recent years that have made use of online editions of Dickens’s material. The project invited any and all to read *A Tale of Two Cities* week by week in its original periodical context and then to share responses via the blog. While such a project cannot be seen as authentically recreating the original readers’ experiences of reading the novel, it did suggest fresh perspectives from which to view the novel. Shattock wrote of the experience:

I had thought I grasped the significance of serialisation [...] But I had never read the individual parts discretely, in a regular, disciplined way […]. My readerly memory was also caught out by the demands of weekly reading, an experience I was relieved to learn that I shared with fellow bloggers.  I was constantly having to leaf back through earlier instalments to be reminded of where I had first met Jerry Cruncher, how the physical similarities of Carton and Darney were first revealed, or whether we had been told that Miss Pross had a brother.[[35]](#endnote-35)

Further, the reading group found that rather than ending on cliff hangers, the instalments frequently ended with little furtherance of the plot and sometimes at an apparently arbitrary point mid-scene. Thus in the course of the project it became evident that the appeal of a novel in serialization was less to do with the pull of the plot, which was oftentimes difficult to remember, and rather lay in the appreciation of the current moment and the rich detail in which it was invoked. Moreover, the project illustrated the ‘shared concerns across the fiction and journalism’, which were made more than apparent when the novel was read serially in its original magazine context.[[36]](#endnote-36) Such shared concerns of course might also be obvious for the individual reader reading through a bound copy of the original magazine, but digitization allowed readers to come together as a group and share observations and connections almost in real time.

Within the field of digital humanities, such connections and the community they generate are considered to be of key importance. As Jane Dowson notes: ‘the digital space takes the reader and researcher from isolation into a community that consists of experts and enthusiasts […]. By digitally bringing the material into the public arena with self-declared interests and subjectivities, we shift monolithic narratives to multivocal ones’.[[37]](#endnote-37) *Dickens Journals Online* created an open-access digital archive through the work of over 900 active volunteers, including academics, students, and members of the general public, who dedicated time and effort to creating a searchable archive of readable text. The interaction of these groups, however, was not without contention and it was by necessity hierarchical in nature. Guidelines as to the work asked of volunteers were interpreted variously and to differing effect. Similarly, reading groups, and the web of analysis and commentary generated by them, are not necessarily harmonious forums and social tensions and differing knowledge levels are an intrinsic part of the discussion. But it is perhaps through the experience of negotiating such communities that scholars can come to a fuller understanding of the practices of production and reading that marked the journals’ original emergence into the public sphere. For Dickens’s imagined community of readers, a hearthside gathering of men and women was also more complex in actuality than in the imagining. Here again canonization plays a large part, as the conventional understanding of Dickens’s imagining of his audience is built on the idealistic constructions of ‘A Preliminary Word’, the often-quoted address to his readers with which he launched the first instalment of *Household Words*. Instead, scholars might also look to the playful parodies that occasionally appeared as ‘Chips’, in which Dickens and his team present real and faux interactions with an audience that is portrayed as garrulous, tendentious, and in which the hierarchies between writer and audience are invoked both seriously and in jest.[[38]](#endnote-38) Paradoxically, for all this talk of quantifiable data, digital technology can also help to shift our understanding of Dickens’s relationship with his readers from an abstract to a human level, with all the contradiction and conflict that involves.

Much of that which holds true for the journalism also holds true for the letters. Although the surviving correspondence is only a fraction of that which Dickens must have written, owing in part to his deliberate destruction of large quantities of private letters in order to prevent misuse, the number of surviving letters is substantial. Moreover, as David Paroissien notes, ‘the subject matter matches the variety of Dickens’s correspondents and the interests that energized the century’.[[39]](#endnote-39) Similarly, the tone varies extraordinarily. On the death of his friend William Macready’s child, Dickens writes to another mutual friend Daniel Maclise of John Forster’s reaction to Macready’s loss, noting ‘in such an amazing display of grief did he indulge [...] such a very gloomy gulf was he sunk up to the chin’, revealing quite a different Dickens to the one that wrote to an American fan in 1841, ‘I condole with you, from my heart, on the loss you have sustained; and I feel proud of your permitting me to sympathise with your affliction’.[[40]](#endnote-40)

Different collections of the letters have shaped critical understanding of them in different ways, from Mamie Dickens’s and Georgina Hogarth’s *The Letters of Charles Dickens* (1880) to Jenny Hartley’s recent *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens* (2012). Moreover, there has been a tendency to focus on letters that illustrate particularly well-known relationships, such as his friendships with John Forster, Wilkie Collins and Angela Burdett-Coutts, as well as those that help to contextualise periods of controversy, such as the break-up of his marriage. Here again abundance can be limiting. The Pilgrim letters project has been invaluable to Dickens scholars in allowing readers an insight into both Dickens’s professional practices and his personal life, but the ability to make use of the resource in its print form was limited by its size. The production of a digital edition in recent years has alleviated this. Moreover, *The Charles Dickens Letters Project*, dedicated to publishing online all Dickens correspondence discovered since the completion of the Pilgrim edition and committed to both rigorous verification and open access, means that all new additions to the archive will be easily accessible. In one recently-uploaded letter Dickens writes that

A certain faculty of remembrance and imitation, and a certain facility of versification, do not make a Poet. Every day of my life, in the daily experience of a Periodical, I see these qualities leading numbers of people hopelessly adrift.[[41]](#endnote-41)

A keyword search for ‘poet’ reveals 30 results, including letters to Charles Mackay and Robert Lytton, both of whom contributed poetry to the journals (Mackay published 35 poems, Lytton 19, according to *Dickens Journals Online*). To Robert Lytton, Dickens writes:

It is longer than a piece of Poetry usually is in this limited space of ours; but I cannot call, or think, any thing so very good too long. I made one slight alteration which I hope you will excuse. For ‘child of my bowels’, I substituted ‘child of my bosom.’ Your word I very well know to be more in keeping with the speaker, but I think mine the better for the public.[[42]](#endnote-42)

And so from within the archive, relationships emerge, and a new picture of Dickens as Verse Editor and correspondent begins to take shape: all with an ease and speed previously unimaginable when presented with the sheer mass of the hard-copy archives. ‘Reasonable human ambition’ begins to be measured on a new scale.

Dickens as correspondent and journalist wrote with startling imagination and detail about the world around him, investing squalid scenes with beauty, and demonstrating the vitality of the wretched. Technology was not needed to reveal this. Those writings, however, only become richer through the wider contextualization that modern technology provides, through its ability to marshal data, and sharpen the reader’s sense of allusion and connection. From within the archive new information emerges and demonstrates, for example, the interest down to the level of the word that Dickens took in the poetry that he published. At the same time, it now seems that the much-vaunted title of ‘Conductor’ was in fact a fairly common address for the editor of a magazine as digitization means that the curious can easily find the ‘Letters to the Conductor’ of numerous periodicals with a few simple clicks.[[43]](#endnote-43) Similarly, to search through 15,000 letters to seek out information on Dickens’s practices as a verse editor would have been an incredibly time-consuming enterprise. *Household Words*’s pioneering social investigations may be seen to have tapered out earlier than was once thought, but other areas of interest came to the fore, such as poetry. The engagement of both journals with international affairs is shown to be greater and more intense than previously thought. Similar discoveries undoubtedly await researchers when Dickens’s early pieces are analyzed in the context of the *Morning Chronicle*. Digitization has allowed a new Dickens to emerge for the twenty-first century reader: a richer, more complex Dickens and perhaps ironically a more human one.

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2. James Mussell, *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age* (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Percy Fitzgerald, *Memories of Charles Dickens: With An Account of “Household Words” and “All the Year Round” and the Contributors Thereto* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co, 1913), 206. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Anne Lohrli, *Household Words: A Weekly Journal, 1850-1859. Conducted by Charles Dickens* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); Ella Ann Oppenlander, *Dickens's All the Year Round: Descriptive Index and Contributor List* (New York: Whitston Publishing Company, 1984). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
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6. Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Madeline House, Graham Storey, et al., Pilgrim/British Academy Edition, 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-2002). Subsequent citations: *PLets* followed by volume:page range, page. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
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8. Oppenlander, 36. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Duane Devries, *Dickens’s Apprentice Years: The Making of a Novelist* (New York: The Harvester Press, 1976), ix; Virgil Grillo, *Charles Dickens’ Sketches By Boz: End in the Beginning (*Boulder, CO: Colorado Associated University Press, 1974). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Robert Patten, *Charles Dickens and “Boz”: The Birth of the Industrial-Age Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 21. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Oppenlander, 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Patton, 23. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Nikki Hessell, *Literary Authors, Parliamentary Reporters: Johnson, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Dickens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 164. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Matthew Bevis, *The Art of Eloquence: Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 89-90. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Hessell, 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens’s* Household Words*: The Social Life of Goods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 13, 17. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins and Victorian Authorship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Sabine Clemm, *Dickens, Journalism, and Nationhood: Mapping the World in Household Words* (London: Routledge, 2008), 13, 157. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Laura Peters, *Dickens and Race* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
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21. Holly Furneaux, *Military Men of Feeling: Emotion, Touch, and Masculinity in the Crimean War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 54-86. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
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23. Charles Dickens, ‘All the Year Round’, *Household Words*, 28 May 1859, 19: 601 <http://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/ volume-xix/page-601.html >. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
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26. One notable exception is Gill Gregory’s *The Life and Work of Adelaide Procter: Poetry, Feminism, and Fathers* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998). See in particular chapter 6 on Dickens and editorial authority (192-250). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
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31. Craig and Kenney, 9-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
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33. Elizabeth Gaskell, ‘Letter to Charles Eliot Norton, 9 March 1859’ in *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, ed. J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 534-39, 538. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
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36. Holly Furneaux, ‘The Best of Times: Reading *A Tale of Two Cities* Week by Week’, *Journal of Victorian Culture Online*, May 2013, accessed 7 August 2016 <http://blogs.tandf.co.uk/jvc/2013/05/14/the-best-of-times-reading-a-tale-of-two-cities-week-by-week/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
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38. Charles Dickens, ‘A Preliminary Word’, *Household Words*, 30 March 1850, 1: 1 <http://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-1.html >. For examples of ‘Chips’ see [Richard H. Horne], ‘From Mr. T. Oldcastle concerning the Coal Exchange’, *Household Words*, 6 July 1850, 1: 352 <http://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-352.html > or [W. H. Wills], ‘Chips: A Card’, *Household Words*, 17 May 1851, 3: 187 < http://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-iii/page-187.html >. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
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42. ‘To THE HON. ROBERT LYTTON, 4 OCTOBER 1861’, *The Charles Dickens Letters Project*, accessed 20 August 2016, <http://dickensletters.com/letters/robert-lytton-04-october-1861>. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Periodicals as diverse as the *Ladies Magazine and Museum of Belles-Lettres*, *The Magazine of Natural History*, *The Farmer’s Magazine*, *The Floricultural Cabinet*, the *Cornhill Magazine*, and *Good Words*, to name but a few, make reference to the editor as ‘Conductor’ throughout the nineteenth century.

**Further Reading**

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