

**CHANGING REPRESENTATIONS OF CHARLES DICKENS,  
1857-1939**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines representations of Charles Dickens in the period 1857 to 1939, arguing that both the period and the texts themselves have been critically overlooked and treated as homogeneous in the history of Dickens's reputation and biographical archive. It analyses biographical discourse including Dickens's speeches and journalism in the period 1857 to 1870, John Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* (1872-74), auto/biographical writings by Dickens's family from 1880 to 1939, institutional forms of commemoration in the twentieth century, and writings by Dickens's collaborators and colleagues George Augustus Sala, Edmund Yates, Percy Fitzgerald, Marcus Stone and Wilkie Collins. It shows that there are recurring questions of memory, self-fashioning, authority, authorial identity, interpretation and commemoration, and provides a fuller understanding of the history of Dickens biography. The texts are brought into dialogue with letters, articles and unpublished archival material. Chapter 1 focuses on Dickens's self-construction with regard to his childhood and career, and his approach to death. It shows how Dickens was thinking, writing and speaking autobiographically in the 1850s and 1860s, highlighting the author's ambivalence about commemorating writers. Chapter 2 contextualises Forster's biography against other accounts from the 1870s, contending that the *Life's* success stems not only from its revelations about Dickens's childhood but also from Forster's attempts to interpret and explain Dickens, which tie together biography, literary analysis and the idea of the 'characteristic' Dickens. Chapter 3 discusses accounts published by the Dickens family alongside other commemorative acts, including the editing of letters and the founding of the Boz Club and the Dickens Fellowship. Chapter 4 offers a nuanced analysis of the different kinds of life writing undertaken by Dickens's 'young men', analysing Collins, Fitzgerald and Stone as well as the better known Sala and Yates. Together the chapters offer a metacritical analysis of Dickensian biographical discourse in the period.

## LIST OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	2
List of Contents.....	3
List of Illustrations.....	5
Acknowledgements.....	6
Author’s Declaration.....	7
Introduction: “reflect[ing] and refract[ing] in all kinds of ways”.....	8
Chapter 1. Charles Dickens’s Self-Representation in Speeches and Journalism, 1857-70 .....	39
1.1. The Art of Speech-Making.....	44
1.2. Speeches and Self-Fashioning.....	51
1.3. The Workings of Memory.....	57
1.4. Death and Eulogy in Dickens’s Late Journalism.....	65
Chapter 2. The Inimitable: John Forster’s <i>Life of Charles Dickens</i> and Other Biographies of the 1870s.....	71
2.1. Contextualising Forster’s <i>Life of Charles Dickens</i> .....	75
2.2. From Death to Childhood.....	84
2.3. Explaining Dickens.....	92
2.4. Remembering Dickens.....	98

Chapter 3. Family Representations, 1880-1939 .....	107
3.1. Georgina Hogarth: Guardian of the Beloved's Family .....	114
3.2. Supplementing Forster: The <i>Letters of Charles Dickens</i> , Edited by His Sister-in-Law and His Eldest Daughter .....	122
3.3. From the Family to the Fellowship .....	131
Chapter 4. Dickens's Old Men.....	144
4.1. Devotional Writing in the 1870s.....	148
4.2. Twenty Years After.....	157
4.3. A 'Lost' Autobiographical Sketch by Wilkie Collins.....	169
4.4. "There is only one Dickens, and Mr. Fitzgerald is his prophet": Dickensian Accounts of the Twentieth Century .....	176
Conclusion.....	187
Appendix. "Wilkie Collins", an Autobiographical Sketch .....	194
Bibliography .....	198

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1. Samuel Luke Fildes, *The Empty Chair, Gad's Hill – Ninth of June, 1870*. 1870. Watercolour on paper. Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia .....13
- Fig. 2. Samuel Luke Fildes, *The Empty Chair* (1870), engraving of a watercolour; rpt. in *Graphic* (Christmas edition 1870) .....14
- Fig. 3. Edward Banes, *Chalet Interior*. 1870. Photograph. Dickens Museum, London  
.....21

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and that I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university. All sources are acknowledged in the bibliography.

## **INTRODUCTION: “REFLECT[ING] AND REFRACT[ING] IN ALL KINDS OF WAYS”**

A case study: to begin with.

The Swiss chalet owned by Charles Dickens holds an unusual place in Dickensian biography: it is the site of his final hours, but its existence is often reduced to that final day. The wooden structure, comprising two rooms of about sixteen square feet each, with ten windows in total and five mirrors in the upper room, was erected at Dickens's home, Gad's Hill, early in 1865 as a gift from the actor Charles Fechter. It was positioned across the road from the house, accessible by a tunnel and overshadowed by two large cedar trees. It was, and continues to be, a failed tourist site, owing to its problematic position as both a place to visit and a moveable object. During its history it has been a site to which Dickensians made pilgrimages in the early twentieth century, and (briefly) an object to view in the grounds of the Crystal Palace. In a period increasingly interested in the world of literary tourism, from the Victorians conducting pilgrimages to the Brontë Parsonage at Haworth to Alfred Tennyson's experience of being "hounded" at Farringford House recounted by Charlotte Boyce (2), the lack of biographical and critical focus on the afterlives of Dickens's chalet suggests that it does not fit with the ideals and aims of Victorian literary tourism. Julian North discusses the centrality of the motif of the poet's home for Lord Byron's biography. She also suggests that for biographers influenced by James Boswell, "the ideal biographer was one who had cohabited with his subject" (83). John Forster, compared to Boswell more than once in his career, would have been aware of this. Dickens's family and the 'young men' who worked for him could also draw on shared experiences and shared physical space to position themselves as 'ideal' biographers. John Plunket, in providing a survey of nineteenth-century celebrity, describes the rise of articles focused on 'Celebrities at Home' and the ways in which they tied an author's domestic life to his or her interiority, and how this is, in turn, impacted the fiction (554). The case study that follows will highlight some of the ways in which that image was complicated by Dickens's own writing habits, as a way of drawing out some of the key themes of this thesis.

Switzerland in the Victorian imagination was a paradoxical image: its scenery was hailed as a model of the Romantic sublime, while its population was denigrated in John Murray's guidebook to Switzerland, popular throughout the mid-nineteenth century, as man "in his most degraded and pitiable position", both physically and morally (lxvii).

Christine Gmür's PhD thesis, "Dickens and Switzerland", has shed light on the overlooked ways in which Dickens himself drew on Switzerland, while Angela Esterhammer, Diane Piccitto and Patrick Vincent have outlined Switzerland's impact on the Romantics and Victorians. They give us the country as "a virtual place where authenticity is staged" (7). That 'staged authenticity' included the idea of a Swiss chalet. Swiss chalets and cottages were not uncommon in Victorian England, and often functioned as follies with a stereotypically Swiss design; Queen Victoria and Prince Albert had a Swiss cottage (in name only – it was built in England) erected in the grounds of Osborne House in 1853-54 that was similar to Dickens's in that it was secluded, hidden amongst the trees. The cottage, much larger than Dickens's chalet, was built for the royal children, with a kitchen at three-quarter scale for them to play in.<sup>1</sup> It was very different in purpose, then, from the author's summer writing retreat, used up to the day he died. Secluded away from the life of the house, Dickens's Gad's Hill chalet epitomised the author's introspection and desire for privacy, as also shown by the burning of his letters in 1860 and the controversial "Personal Statement" he published in 1858 regarding the breakdown of his marriage. It also removed him from London, and positioned in the countryside an author often defined by his urban observations.

The chalet itself, emblazoned with the lion figure of the Dickens family crest, is difficult to assimilate: it is wooden, designed to be temporary, is an object as well as a space, acts as a study and also as a window to nature, and is a reflective space as well as an isolated one. Within it, Dickens is alone with the reflections of nature – and reflections of himself. Its position, not quite outside but also not part of the house, is also problematic. Margaret Flanders Darby has written about the conservatory of Gad's Hill as "a contradictory space, associated with protective nurture, yet also with artificiality, with atmospheric intensity; it offers and defies control on the metaphoric level as well as the literal one" (137). The chalet, with its mirrors and position amongst the trees, represents a similarly conflicted space. Darby further suggests that "The Victorian conservatory was thought of as a space midway between drawing room and garden, one used particularly to express emotional tensions and allow them to escape the controls imposed by formal society" (138). What, then, was the chalet?

It is, perhaps, a kind of 'inter-text' in the sense outlined by Nicola Watson (9). It has the capacity to change how we perceive Dickens both as a biographical figure and also, consequently, as an author, but hovers at the edge of discourse about literary tourism,

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<sup>1</sup> See Nicholas Tucker's "Swiss Cottage, Osborne House".

lacking the status and impact of other sites more typically associated with Dickens (9). The chalet tells a story about early posthumous image-making and invites metacritical discussion about what is and is not important – and why – in Dickensian biography and related criticism. Andrew Miller’s conception of the ‘optative’ in literature is useful here: Miller focuses on Henry James and Dickens to argue for optative reflections – the counterfactual ‘what might have happened’ – as part of the structure of realist fiction. I would argue that Miller’s optative reading is also applicable to life writing, which necessarily involves making decisions about how to present the biographical subject that preclude other narratives. It also stresses one of the risks of biographical reading: that biographies and life writing are read in an attempt to access a ‘true’ version of events, rather than as showing contemporary concerns and ideologies. What follows is an account of the chalet which embraces an optative biographical reading that would rewrite the chalet in a way that was deliberately unwritten in early Dickens biography.

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, biographical information about Dickens was disseminated through articles, obituaries, sermons, memoirs and biographies, both authorised and unauthorised.<sup>2</sup> There are familiar aspects of biography that recur in these different forms: Hermione Lee describes the “hallmarks” of Victorian biography as “morality and reticence”, characteristics “quite unlike the risky narratives of the generation before” (57), epitomised by Boswell’s *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791). Harold Nicolson also described the Boswell tradition as ‘dead’ by 1840, arguing that “people reverted with relief to the old, unworthy origins of English biography” (125); nevertheless, its continued popularity has been demonstrated by Francis R. Hart, who traces its many editions in the nineteenth century. Trev Broughton offers a more nuanced interpretation, suggesting that “By the mid-century, the hagiographical tradition had competition, with a multitude of subgenres and approaches jostling for attention and legitimacy” (“Life Writing and the Victorians” 47). Broughton identifies at least three competing models: Boswell’s “table-talkative model”, a “‘Life and Times’ format” propelled by Forster himself, and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (47). While there are moments in the late nineteenth century that challenge Nicolson’s characterisation – Forster, Dickens’s friend, executor and biographer, was compared to Boswell by way of a compliment early in his career, and the controversy surrounding

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<sup>2</sup> See the exhaustive annotated bibliography of *General Studies of Charles Dickens and His Writings and Collected Editions of His Works* edited by Duane DeVries and the earlier compilations of Dickensiana, Frederic George Kitton’s *Dickensiana: A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to Charles Dickens and his Writings*, *Dickens Student and Collector: A List of Writings Relating to Charles Dickens and His Works 1836-1945* edited by William Miller.

James Anthony Froude's 1882 biography of Thomas Carlyle centred on it being too personal (and certainly not hagiographic)<sup>3</sup> – it seems to loom largest in contemporary reviews and discussion of Victorian literary biography, as I will show in chapter 2.

In line with an emphasis on morality, reticence and Victorian conceptions of masculinity, there is a move to avoid or ignore the implications of the chalet for Dickens's image. Margaret Oliphant's response to Froude in "The Ethics of Biography" (1883) highlighted many of the same issues that Dickens's biographers faced, eloquently summing up what was at stake in literary biography: "if he [the biographer] is at all equal to his subject, permanent public opinion will be fixed, or at all events largely influenced, by the image he sets before it" (277). This introduction will demonstrate how representations of the chalet in Dickensian life writing helped to 'fix' Dickens's image, as well as offering an optative interpretation. The author used the chalet over five years. In contrast, he lived at Doughty Street, now the location of the Charles Dickens Museum, for only two years. I argue that the chalet's neglect – physically as a tourist site (as at the time of writing it is in desperate need of renovation) as well as biographically – is due to its incompatibility with the image of Dickens that Dickens's family, together with Forster, sought to create and preserve.

Following his father's death, Charles Dickens Jr (Charley) bought Gad's Hill (Arthur A. Adrian 158). In response to his own financial worries, and against the wishes of the rest of the family, Charley planned to exhibit the chalet at the Crystal Palace (167). The impressive glass structure, itself so striking and reflective, might have seemed an appropriate setting for Dickens's mirrored chalet had the author not decried the "terrific Puffery of the Crystal Palace" in his lifetime, calling it "the most gigantic Humbug ever mounted on a long-suffering-people's shoulders" (Pilgrim 7.453). Charley had a more amiable relationship with the Palace, working with Fred Evans on the Crystal Palace Press from 1873 (Adrian 213). Although the chalet arrangement fell through, the incident, and the chalet itself, are indicative of many of the wider concerns around Dickensian biography and how the family thought he should be remembered: Dickens's sister-in-law Georgina Hogarth viewed the chalet as sacred and was worried that the family would be perceived as capitalising on the author's memory, while ultimately the Crystal Palace rejected the object on the grounds that it did not, in fact, offer the public anything new worth paying for.

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<sup>3</sup> See Ira Nadel's *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* (84).

As such, several key issues in representations of Dickens coalesce in the chalet's history: identity, domesticity, gender, and how – or where – the author should be remembered. Gad's Hill, rooted in its connection to William Shakespeare's Falstaff and Dickens's own description of meeting himself as a "very queer small boy" (86) in the 1860 article "Travelling Abroad", aspiring to live in the house that he would eventually own, forms part of the dominant narrative of Dickens's life: he was fated to live in Gad's Hill, just as he was fated to be an author. It also has a distinct sense of English literary heritage: the "Travelling Abroad" article, Charley claimed, "has been more extensively quoted, it may be fairly assumed, than anything he ever wrote" (*Uncommercial Traveller* xviii). It fits nicely into the trajectory of Dickens's life and career, representing his financial success and his overcoming of the difficulties of his childhood poverty. How does the chalet fit into this image? Quite simply, it does not fit: it is a foreign object, rooted in an aestheticised, artificial understanding of Swiss culture, a gift from an actor who was publically known for his bad temper and later in life for his drinking.<sup>4</sup> It took an author often associated with the intimate, domestic life of the house, both in terms of the content of his work and also in the act of reading, away from the house entirely. Perhaps this is why the image favoured by the family after Dickens died was *The Empty Chair* by Luke Fildes, showing the Gad's Hill study sadly lacking its 'usual' occupant: this image was reproduced for the reminiscences published by Dickens's eldest daughter Mary (Mamie), the "Personal Reminiscences of My Father" published by Charley, as well as being used by youngest son Henry's wife as a mourning card after his death in 1933 (London, Dickens Museum Suzannet Research Library, Storey Papers, Envelope P). The Gad's Hill study space, as immortalised in *The Empty Chair* and later Robert W. Buss's unfinished painting *Dickens's Dream* (based on *The Empty Chair*), could fit with the family-sanctioned image of Dickens: it shows a masculine, domestic space appropriate for a distinguished author. Juliet John has suggested that Dickens's investment in the life of the house can be attributed to his "perfectionism and his impulse to control" (*Dickens and Mass Culture* 262); she argues that "Dickens created his homes as he created his fictions and his public persona, stroke by stroke", and ties this to "an attempt to anchor his restless and, at times, rootless existence" (262) in a way that clearly draws on the idea of the "vagabond" that the Dickens-narrator of the autobiographical fragment fears becoming (Forster 26), as I will discuss in chapter 2.

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<sup>4</sup> See the entry for Charles Fechter in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB].

Again, this reading focuses on the familiar aspects of the author's domestic life as interpreted by Forster.

*The Empty Chair* has endured in a way that the chalet has not, perhaps partly because it represents more conventionally Dickens's absence from the house and the literary world.<sup>5</sup> There are two slightly different versions of this image. The one used by Charley is copied from the painting itself (fig. 1), while the one reproduced in Mamie's *My Father As I Recall Him* is taken from an engraving of the painting published in the *Graphic* (fig. 2). The engraver has modified the image, tilting the chair away from the desk and adding a quill to the writing slope on the desk. With these small additions, the sense of the desk waiting for its master's return is clearer. Fildes's painting is almost *too* ordered, in contrast. Mamie describes her father's various studies as "the personification of neatness and tidiness" (50), but Fildes's depiction looks unused rather than abandoned. Nevertheless, the image has proliferated, and represents the loss both for the family and also for the public: Mamie writes "alas, the empty chair!" (50) to communicate her sense of the loss of her father.



Fig. 1. Samuel Luke Fildes, *The Empty Chair, Gad's Hill – Ninth of June, 1870*. 1870. Watercolour on paper. Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia.

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<sup>5</sup> There was a sketch of Dickens after he died made by John Everett Millais, who travelled to Gad's Hill to produce a drawing, which was also never as popular (Gerard Curtis 161).

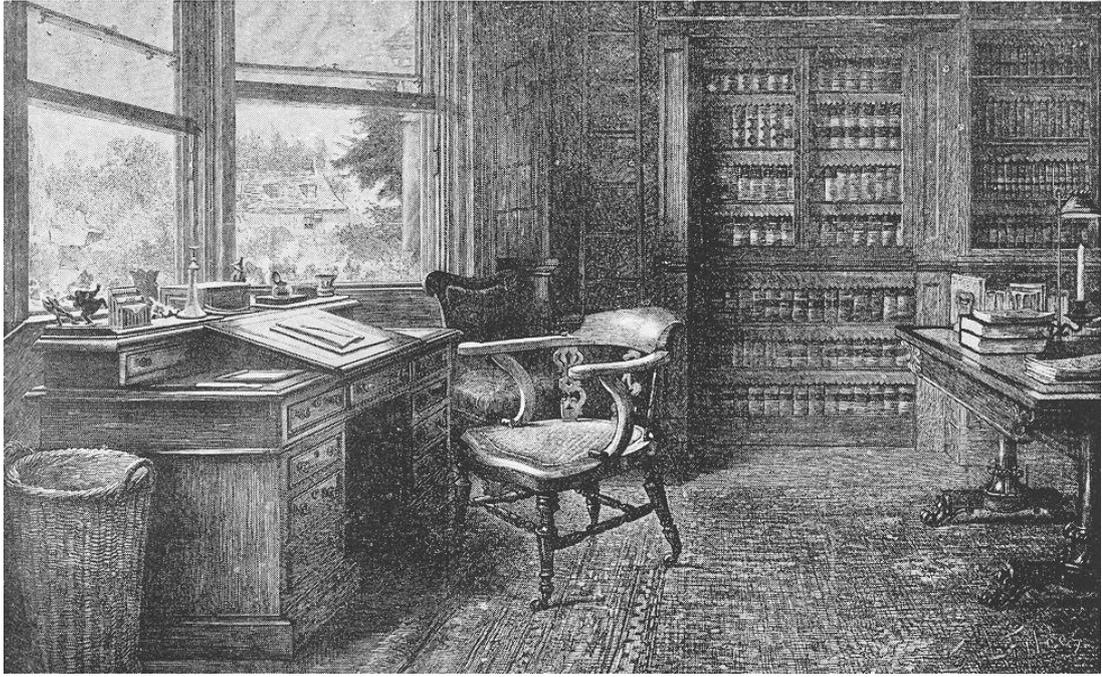


Fig. 2. Samuel Luke Fildes, *The Empty Chair* (1870), engraving of a watercolour; rpt. in *Graphic* (Christmas edition 1870).

As well as its personal significance for the family, the study is central to representations of Victorian authors and literary figures. John Tosh outlines the need for a ‘man of letters’ to have both the domestic space that the home represents and also a professional space within it to work.<sup>6</sup> He argues that men who worked from home were “particularly prone to demonstrate their power over the domestic sphere” (50), while Broughton has shown how women – and, most importantly, women writers – shaped and subverted this space, more often conducting their work as part of the household rather than sequestering themselves behind closed doors.<sup>7</sup> The domestic was a key part of Dickens’s self image: he sought to be a personal friend to his readers, and prided himself on the intimacy he had with his public in their own homes through their reading of his texts. Added to this, the author’s own domestic life would become an increasingly important part of posthumous representations of the author. In the *Letters* published by Georgina Hogarth and Mamie, they write, “in the midst of his own constant and arduous work, no household matter was considered too trivial to claim his

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<sup>6</sup> See Tosh’s *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*.

<sup>7</sup> See Broughton’s “Studying the Study: Gender and the Scene of Authorship in the Writings of Leslie Stephen, Margaret Oliphant and Anne Thackeray Ritchie”.

care and attention” (1.ix). This would seem to fit with Tosh’s description, emphasising that Dickens was part of, and dominant over, household life. The attention to the domestic side of the author was also a way to defend him from charges of cruelty in his treatment of his wife Catherine Dickens, and positioned Dickens as a father and also as an adequate substitute for a deficient mother: if he interrupted his work to attend to household matters, he was fulfilling the maternal domestic role as well as being the man of letters. This characterisation will be discussed in chapter 3. However, writing in his chalet, across the road from the house, removes the author from the domestic life of the house that Tosh outlines. Perhaps this is why, following his death, it became so important for his friends and family to emphasise the importance of Dickens’s home life and the study as the site of his work. In the many biographical articles and reminiscences written by Dickens’s children, there appear to be few instances of any of them entering the chalet: daughter Katey (who first married Wilkie Collins’s younger brother Charles, before marrying the artist Carlo Perugini) enters it once in Mamie’s reminiscences (119), and granddaughter Mary Angela describes entering it once to replace the flowers (105). Although it is mentioned, it is most often a space for the author alone.

These early biographies do, however, speak of the study space, and use it to characterise Dickens as both a father and as an author. In *My Father As I Recall Him*, Mamie relates her experiences on an occasion when she was ill and was brought into the study at Tavistock House so that her father could keep an eye on her:

my father wrote busily and rapidly at his desk, when he suddenly jumped from his chair and rushed to a mirror which hung near, and in which I could see the reflection of some extraordinary facial contortions which he was making. He returned rapidly to his desk, wrote furiously for a few moments, and then went again to the mirror. The facial pantomime was resumed, and then turning toward, but evidently not seeing, me, he began talking rapidly in a low voice ... he had actually become in action, as in imagination, the creature of his pen. (48-49)

According to Robert Gottlieb, next to Mamie’s suggestion that “special treatment was always given her when she was ill”, Katey added “Once” (153). Nevertheless, the description is a powerful one that creates a sense of speed and action, and the

implications it has for our understanding of Dickens, based on one short memory, sheds light on the power of such anecdotes in Dickens's afterlife. Dickens seems almost mad, unable to see his own daughter, and less the measured, thoughtful author than a 'creature' that is worked upon by forces outside of his control. The way in which biographers and critics interpreted Dickens's imagination, and balanced competing accounts and criticisms of Dickens, will be discussed in chapter 2.

Anecdotes about Dickens's studies are found throughout the writings produced by the family. However, aside from its mirrors, the interior of the chalet is rarely described or alluded to. Mourning the empty chair, then, allowed the family and friends to mourn Dickens's role in their domestic life as a man in his study and a father in the home, both directly and indirectly part of the life of the house, rather than the isolated figure in the Swiss chalet. The one account that does convincingly paint a picture of Dickens working collaboratively, rather than alone, is not a published one, and the difference between public autobiography and more private forms will be discussed in chapter 4. In a letter to Frederic Chapman, who was hoping to ascertain which parts of *No Thoroughfare* Wilkie Collins had written so that he could cut them out, Collins claimed: "We put the story together in the Swiss chalet at Gad's Hill, and we finished the Fourth Act side by side at two desks in his bedroom at Gad's Hill" (qtd. in Frederic George Kitton, *The Minor Writings of Charles Dickens*, 173). Collins's answer appeals to the chalet as a protected space: the truth of who wrote what is kept there, and cannot be revealed. It is striking that he appeals to the chalet in an attempt to have the last word on the subject, gesturing at the structure's impenetrability and sacred status.

The chalet also seems to have been, for Dickens, much more stimulating than the quiet study. His own account of it, given in a letter to Annie Fields, wife of his American publisher and friend James T. Fields, focuses on the reflections and refractions of nature, the birds and the butterflies, creating a sense of a busy, occupied space shared with nature rather than an isolated, lonely one:

Divers birds sing here all day, and the nightingales all night. ... I have put five mirrors in the Swiss ch  let (where I write) and they reflect and refract in all kinds of ways the leaves that are quivering at the windows, and the great fields of waving corn, and the saildotted river. My room is up among the branches of the trees; and the birds and the butterflies fly in and out, and the green branches shoot in, at the open windows, and the lights and shadows of the

clouds come and go with the rest of the company. The scent of the flowers, and indeed of everything that is growing for miles and miles, is most delicious. (Pilgrim 12.118-19)

This porousness is compounded by the mirrors, creating an overwhelming sense of boundless nature with Dickens at the centre. Mamie's anecdote about her father pulling faces in the mirror could also account for the five mirrors installed in the chalet's upper room. Switzerland's 'staged authenticity', discussed at the beginning of this introduction, is transformed into Dickens staging his texts in order to imbue them with a kind of authenticity. Once again, we have a description of Dickens that undermines the image of the empty chair: the mirrors of the chalet may even suggest restless action on the author's part, and gardener George Woolley recounted hearing "what sounded like someone making a speech. I wondered what it was at first and then I found out it was Mr. Dickens composing his writing out loud" (qtd. in Philip Collins, *Dickens: Interviews and Recollections*, 272). In fact, further complicating the pathos of *The Empty Chair*, Dickens was known to have varied writing habits including standing and walking as well as acting characters out and sitting at his desk, as Gaskell related when writing about the Devonshire Terrace study: she writes that there were "books all round, up to the ceiling, and down to the ground; a standing-desk at which he writes; and all manner of comfortable chairs" (letter to Anne Green, 13 May 1849, 828). Even this description gives us something quite different from the chalet: there were no books there, and only a small chair and stool. What we have, then, in stark contrast to the solemnity of an empty chair in a meticulously organised study, and also in contrast to the comfortable Devonshire Terrace study piled with books, is the sound of birds, the scent of the garden, and the endless reflecting and refracting of the mirrors.

To extend the optative reading further: unlike the Gad's Hill desk, in the chalet the desk did not directly face out of the window but faced into the room, giving a view of the mirrors. The result is reflection and refraction not only of the birds and trees of Dickens's letter, but also of the interior and of the man himself, suggesting a kind of 'feminised' narcissism: no one else entered the chalet, so it was Dickens reflected back upon himself. This 'feminised' position is unusual in author representations. Martin Danahay suggests that Victorian men were not shown to have the 'self-interest' of women looking in mirrors, and describes male authors "us[ing] the feminine as a sort of 'mirror' through which to represent themselves as subjects", calling women the "mirror

images' of male desire" (2). Isobel Armstrong develops this idea in the context of Victorian poetry, describing examples that use the mirror as the locus of a specifically feminine identity, and also as a way of measuring absence. She considers poets as diverse as Katharine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper (who wrote as Michael Field), Algernon Charles Swinburne, Thomas Hardy (particularly "Lament of the Looking-Glass") and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (particularly "Without Her" from *The House of Life*); what the latter two examples have in common is the sense of loss felt by the mirror, using the absence of the reflected image as a way of communicating grief and mourning (112-13). It is revealing that the mirrors of the chalet, then, are never used or alluded to in this way. Indeed, the only member of the family to write directly about the chalet in terms of absence and loss is granddaughter Mary Angela Dickens, whose description is unparalleled in Dickensian biography:

I have said that I was never afraid of him, and this is true. I was never afraid of his presence. But I recall very clearly a vague sense of dread, only to be described as "creepy," with which his absence – under certain circumstances – inspired me. And the circumstances were these: ... [i]t was when "Venerables" betook himself to the chalet for long mornings – as I know now, to write – that the haze of the mysterious rose about him in my little mind, and all sorts of undefined and dreadful possibilities presented themselves to me. I can feel myself, now, creeping indoors, when I had been sent to play in the gardens, because the thought of that little house among the trees, with its solitary occupant, haunted me. (71)

Mary Angela is afraid of her grandfather's absence – the absence that would later be conveyed by *The Empty Chair*. The sense of the chalet as 'creepy' and 'haunting', and the fear of 'dreadful possibilities', anticipates his last day in that space and his death shortly after, but they also show a sense of unease at Dickens in an unfamiliar space. When he is not the author in his study working, or the father checking flower arrangements and entertaining in the house, who is he? Or is it the working Dickens that Mamie describes, the "creature of his pen" making "facial contortions" (48-49) that she is afraid of? The tunnel compounds the oddity of the space: Dickens had it constructed to give himself access to the area of land without having to cross the public road (Alan S. Watts 32). It, too, reinforces the sense of isolation that pervades the chalet. As I will demonstrate in

chapter 3, this sense of Dickens as an isolated author is in stark contrast to the ways in which Dickens was memorialised by both the family and institutions like the Boz Club and the Dickens Fellowship: while the family sought to bring Dickens back into the home, the Boz Club and Dickens Fellowship were built on a reading of Dickens as a social, and specifically homosocial, figure.

In a letter to W. H. Wills in 1868, Dickens wrote, “I sit in the chalet, like Mariana in the Moated Grange – and to as much purpose” (Pilgrim 12.167). For an author so influenced by Shakespeare, the comparison to *Measure for Measure*’s Mariana is particularly evocative: Dickens feminises himself, positioning himself as an abandoned lover. At the time he was involved with Ellen Ternan, and it is striking that this is a letter to Wills who, as well as serving as editor of *All The Year Round*, forwarded Dickens’s letters to Ellen during the American reading tour of 1867-68. The allusion to Mariana also invokes Tennyson’s “Mariana” (1830) and “Mariana in the South” (1832), two poems concerned with despondent self-reflection: Dickens admired Tennyson, naming one of his sons after him. Tennyson’s first Mariana repeatedly wishes herself dead among the “broken sheds... sad and strange” (line 5), while the second examines her reflection and repeats her sadness at being alone and forgotten. Dickens is surrounded by noisy, vibrant nature, just as Tennyson’s “Mariana” hears birds, from the cock (line 27) to the sparrow (line 73). The passage of time indicated in “Mariana” by the different examples of birdsong is complemented by Dickens’s nightingales, although for “Mariana” these repeat “without hope of change” (line 29). Nature for her, in its reflected, refracted boundlessness, is oppressive company in the absence of her lover. The repeated phrase “I would that I were dead!” emphasises this isolation, and this refrain haunts Dickens’s invocation of Mariana: Mary Angela’s fears are about the ‘solitary occupant’, further identifying Dickens with Mariana, isolated, fearful and worrying alone. Contemporaneous with “Mariana in the South”, “The Lady of Shalott” (1832), in which the cursed, isolated Lady is weaving her tapestry from the “Shadows of the world” (line 48) reflected in her mirror, can also inform our understanding of Dickens’s “shadows of the clouds” (Pilgrim 12.119) in his room of five mirrors. The shared etymological root of ‘text’ and ‘weave’ aligns Dickens once again with a feminised, weary, isolated figure. Even granted the characteristic humour of the letter to Wills, the chalet brings together these complex associations. While this might seem to be a simplification of the issue of feminisation, critics had begun a reductive feminising of Dickens for his ‘emotional’ writing during his later years that continued after his

death. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2, H. A. Taine, a French philosopher and historian, wrote that Dickens had the “feverish sensibility of a woman” (2.349) in his *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* in 1863 (first translated into English in 1871 as *A History of English Literature* and frequently reprinted),<sup>8</sup> while John Bowen gives several examples of a “sexual ambivalence” (“Dickens’s Umbrellas” 38) identified in Dickens’s styles by contemporary critics including David Masson and James Fitzjames Steven. The tendency to interpret Dickens’s imaginative faculties as representative of his ‘feminised’ imagination complicates how the chalet might have been ‘read’ at the time, and perhaps offers one reason why it was often avoided in the family writings. Andrew Dowling has conducted a detailed study of Victorian masculinity, and argues that a “metaphor of controlled energy” (7) was an important aspect of Victorian manliness. He argues that “The hegemonic truth about manliness in the nineteenth century was established through metaphors of control, reserve, and discipline, that were placed in opposition to images of chaos, excess, and disorder” (13). As such, the emphasis on the orderliness of Dickens’s desk and his investment in home life makes sense in building the picture of a controlled author. The chalet could be used to argue that Dickens deliberately controlled this excess of feeling by keeping it isolated and contained in the chalet. At the same time, that he gave in to such feelings complicates his relationship with this particular kind of Victorian masculinity.

Although the chalet does not seem central to the Dickens family writings, there is some indication that they wanted to preserve the memory of it after his death: a photograph was taken of the interior two days later at the request of Georgina (fig. 3). Most of the furniture at Gad’s Hill was to be auctioned, including the desk, and the wooden summerhouse was stripped bare (Adrian 169). As will be discussed in chapter 3, mementoes and papers had been claimed by Georgina under the terms of Dickens’s will, and small objects were distributed to friends over the course of years. The photograph taken by Edward Banes was the last relic of the chalet for a family departing their home, but the image compounds the difficulty of interpreting the chalet: in black and white the distinction between the mirrors and the windows, covered in lined curtains, is unclear, and the perspective does not give a sense of the view from the desk in the way that *The Empty Chair* does. The role of the mirrors, so central to Dickens’s own account, is downplayed even in this photograph.

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<sup>8</sup> See Nathalie Vanfasse’s “A Historical Survey of French Criticism and Scholarship on Dickens”.



Fig. 3. Edward Banes, *Chalet Interior*. 1870. Photograph. Dickens Museum, London.

The importance of preserving the structure as a sacred space would become key to Georgina's actions in the 1870s (and would result in literary pilgrimages to see it in the early twentieth century). Charley's purchase of Gad's Hill at auction was a controversial move: Georgina had organised, together with Forster, to keep the house for the estate if the bidding price was not high enough (Adrian 158). Charley, attending the auction, feared it would go for too little and unknowingly outdid the reserve price, despite lacking the funds to pay for it. This left him in a difficult financial position, with a large family to support and problems at the offices of *All The Year Round*. The Swiss chalet formed part of his plan to solve this problem; however, in planning to exhibit the chalet at the Crystal Palace, Charley did not consult Georgina. Georgina, as joint executor of Dickens's will (with Forster) and 'Guardian of the Beloved Memory', as Adrian would later call her, was appalled that this move was made "without consulting the family" (qtd. in Adrian 167). Moving the chalet to the Crystal Palace took it from part of the family home and made it into an exhibit, placing Dickens as an author alongside

imperial collections and oddities in the ‘Palace of the People’, as it had come to be known. Georgina only discovered Charley’s plans through a notice in the newspapers advertising that the chalet had already been moved to the Crystal Palace. In her letters she wrote

I cannot imagine *how* Charley could do such an indecent action. Also, I maintain that he had no right, to do it – without consulting the family ... because when this dear sacred little place where his Father spent his last living day comes to be puffed and hawked about, ALL his family will be held responsible – and will be disgraced by it. (qtd. in Adrian 167)

Georgina’s complaints centred on the inappropriateness of the financial transaction: ‘puffed’ has gambling origins, later gaining the sense of inflating the price of an item (and echoing Dickens’s accusation against the Great Exhibition of ‘Puffery’), while ‘hawking’ invokes selling in the street. By charging entry and placing the chalet in such a public place, Dickens’s private space would become a public spectacle: a product for consumption. Her concerns mirrored Dickens’s own: as John has discussed in *Dickens and Mass Culture*, he had “an ambivalence about the element of veneration so important to the emotional dynamics of the heritage sensibility” (248). John is talking about the sale of Dickens’s household objects, but the uneasy relationship to celebrity set against a desire for a strong relationship with the public is central. This tension between public interest and private mourning will be seen throughout the following chapters.

The desire to view the chalet was particularly problematic due to the chalet’s position as a substitute for a Victorian deathbed scene, albeit an unsatisfying one. Judith Flanders has outlined the importance of the deathbed scene: “Around the deathbed were the immediate family, praying for the soul of the departing one to be taken into heaven, saying their final farewells. These deathbed scenes were the staples of nineteenth-century fiction” (328). Pat Jalland also describes a “literary ideal” of death (38), owing much to Dickens’s own fiction, and a situation similar to that described by Flanders. What is key is the presence of family and the possibility for final words and comfort for both the dying and those attending (Jalland 26-27). Dickens, unconscious for nearly twenty-four hours, did not share his final moments with his family in that way. Georgina was the only family member present when he lost consciousness for the last time, and his final hours of consciousness were therefore lost to the chalet at the

bottom of the garden. As will be discussed in chapter 3, this enabled slightly different accounts of the dying man's final moments.

As this thesis will show, there was a clear conflict about how Dickens should be remembered, the role of the family in that remembrance, and what access the public should have to his 'private' space. The conflict invokes a central problem of Victorian biography: representing the subject without intruding on private matters and, particularly, offending those still living. Georgina's own ambivalence about this question is shown most clearly in the *Letters* edited by herself and Mamie in the 1880s, discussed in chapter 3. Georgina's concept of 'public' interest was different from Charley's, and centred on showing Dickens to be a caring, involved head of the household, a warm friend, and a generous correspondent. The chalet complicates Georgina's idea of Dickens, confronting the viewer with an author removed from domestic life and deliberately eschewing company, even while it is able to offer the viewer an image of Dickens as an artist and genius, which could in fact help to preserve that culturally weighted image of him.

Charley invested the chalet with quite a different meaning from Georgina's, but was equally motivated to manipulate its place in narratives of Dickens's life. In his own "Reminiscences", he does not mention that his father was writing there the day that he died but instead focuses on his own working relationship with him – one that necessitated Dickens working in the house, or in the offices of *All The Year Round* in a room that connected to Charley's own (30). In spite of Georgina and Mamie claiming that Dickens would interrupt his work for household matters, Charley tells us "he was on no pretext to be disturbed by any one whatever" (23). The only one who can interrupt him is Charley: a few days before, "The door of communication between our rooms was open, as usual, and, as I came towards him, I saw that he was writing very earnestly" working on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (30). As Dickens's literary heir and editor of *All The Year Round*, it was important for Charley to emphasise a closeness with his father at work, and therefore closeness to his father's creative process, that he simply could not have if Dickens was in the chalet. He reinforces the idea of the author in his study by reiterating that "At something before ten he would sit down – every day with very, very rare exceptions – to his desk which, as to its papers, its writing materials, and the quaint little bronze figures which he delighted in having before him, was as neat and as orderly as everything else in and about the house" (24). The description of the bronze statues establishes the scene as the indoor study, rather than the chalet, in spite

of Dickens's own assertion in a letter to Fechter that he "never worked better any where" than in the chalet (Pilgrim 11.75). The stipulation of 'very, very rare exceptions' leaves space for competing accounts, but makes it clear that we are to picture Dickens in the house.

Charley goes even further to separate his father from the strange structure in the 'Wilderness', arguing that Dickens "never took at all to what most people understand by a country life", separating this from "merely living in the country" and arguing that his appreciation of Gad's Hill "was due to the fact that it was very near those streets of London which always had so strong a hold on his imagination" (23-24). Although Charley's comments gesture more broadly at the cultural aspects of country life, the "Reminiscences" work to bring Dickens closer to his literary life in London and its busy streets. Charley's judgement of Dickens's relationship has been borne out by later criticism: Andrew Sanders argues that "The more placid rhythms of rural life elude him" (91). As well as paving the way for such criticism, this reinforcement of London's primacy for Dickens echoes Forster's account of Dickens and Switzerland itself. The author had not found Switzerland conducive to writing: spending time there in the 1840s, he wrote that "the difficulty of going at what I call a rapid pace, is prodigious: it is almost an impossibility. I suppose this is partly the effect of ... the absence of streets and numbers of figures. I can't express how much I want these" (Forster 423; Pilgrim 4.612). Dickens "craved for the London streets" and was "dumbfounded without them", in Forster's account (346). The veracity of this claim has been challenged recently by Gmür, whose study highlights the role of Switzerland in the author's work, but both Charley and Forster's accounts move the focus decisively back to Dickens and London.

Charley refused to call off the sale of the chalet in spite of Georgina's protestations (Adrian 168). She then considered putting a public notice in the newspapers outlining the family's disapproval, but changed her mind: after all, the dispute centred on keeping things private. In the end, the chalet was in the Crystal Palace grounds for less than a year. Although Georgina's negotiations with Charley were largely unsuccessful, ultimately the Crystal Palace did not want the structure without its effects (169). They wanted to charge the public a shilling to go in, but there was no furniture left inside and Charley did not have the means or inclination to restore it. Ironically, this space, so sacred to Georgina, had no value to the fee-paying public. Removed from its secluded location and stripped of its owner's personal items, the wooden summerhouse could

not serve as an attractive site for literary tourism. Georgina paid for its return, including its removal from the Crystal Palace. Having purchased the chalet, but with nowhere to keep it, Georgina and the family gave it to Dickens's friend John Stuart, the sixth Lord Darnley, for his private garden at Cobham, "to be held sacred, and not exposed to being scribbled over, according to the custom of the British Public, as it would be, if it were placed in an open part of the Park" (qtd. in Adrian 167). Georgina did not want the venerated space that saw Dickens's last day of writing to be ruined by a second kind of writing, that of graffiti. The term 'sacred' is applied again here, challenging once again the public ownership of Dickens.

The chalet was to stay in the grounds of Cobham Hall until the early 1960s, moving from the private garden to the open park in the 1920s – after Georgina and those most intimately connected with Dickens were no longer alive (Amy Butler 148). It became part of the Dickens tourist route: the 1891 *A Week's Tramp in Dickens-Land* describes a visit to Cobham and the chalet, while the Dickens Fellowship continued 'pilgrimages', as they called them, to the site into the 1920s. In 1929 it was offered for sale, but there was nobody interested in buying it, so the wooden structure, unwanted, was to suffer badly from neglect. The Dickens Fellowship raised the money to restore the chalet after it fell into disrepair, and it was opened to visitors in Rochester in 1961 with a copy of Dickens's writing table and chair, and restored mirrors (L. C. S. 6). The chalet's original site did not fare much better. Charley only lived in Gad's Hill for nine years, and in 1910 the two big cedar trees of the 'Wilderness', planted in 1786, were cut down and new ones were planted (Robt H. Cooper 46). The sites that Dickensian pilgrimages visited were increasingly changed from what they had been in 1870; however, mementoes were made from the wood of the cedar trees for the Dickens Centenary in 1912 – for example, a likeness of the author framed in cedar was given to the Charles Dickens School in Vancouver (Helen V. Carr 45-47).

The chalet is a problematic space, incompatible with the kind of literary tourism that animates the Dickens Museum in Doughty Street: it is small and wooden, designed to be a short-lived summerhouse and a personal, individual space. It cannot fulfill that promise of literary tourism, to get the tourist closer to Dickens's creative process. It is no longer located at Gad's Hill but in the grounds of Eastgate House in Rochester, so the boughs and birds that Dickens describes cannot be seen or heard. Its objects have been removed, and although the Fellowship has worked to restore it and find facsimiles of its effects, it has mostly failed to capture the public imagination. It stands for the

selectiveness of the Dickensian archive: it is unassimilable but stubbornly idiosyncratic. Claire Tomalin's biography calls it a "perfect present" (338) but says little else, while Michael Slater describes the gift but largely only mentions the chalet in passing (*Charles Dickens: A Life Defined By Writing* 538, 566, 612). Peter Ackroyd calls the chalet "a fantasy of boyhood" (956), convincingly spinning the structure into the kind of childhood fantasy fulfilment that Gad's Hill represents in the "Travelling Abroad" anecdote and aligning the chalet with the Swiss Cottage that Victoria and Albert bought for the royal children. Dan Simmons's biofictional *Drood*, about Dickens, Collins and mesmeric influence after the Staplehurst railway accident of 1865, picks up on Collins's suggestion that he once entered the chalet and unfolds several scenes between the two men there. In the novel, Collins (the narrator) links the mirrors to Dickens's vanity (148) and describes the chalet as "mak[ing] one feel rather as if he were standing on an open platform – a child's house in a tall tree, minus all walls" (148). The process of creating Dickensian biographical discourse continues, and the archive adjusts accordingly.

Dickens's own description of the chalet is strikingly echoed in the last page of *Edwin Drood*, claimed by Forster to have been written in the chalet on the last day of his life:

A brilliant morning shines on the old city. ... Changes of glorious light from moving boughs, songs of birds, scents from gardens, woods, and fields – or, rather, from the one great garden of the whole cultivated island in its yielding time – penetrate into the Cathedral, subdue its earthy odour, and preach the Resurrection and the Life. The cold stone tombs of centuries ago grow warm; and flecks of brightness dart into the sternest marble corners of the building, fluttering there like wings. (215)

The changes of light, the scents and sounds, and the sense of being surrounded by nature, resonate with Dickens's earlier description of "green branches shoot[ing] in" and "the lights and shadows of the clouds" that "come and go with the rest of the company" (Pilgrim 12.118-19), suggesting that the chalet had a tangible influence on his writing. Its neglect and marginalisation in the narratives of Dickens's life, in spite of its importance to our understanding of the author and the man, demonstrate a deliberate shaping of Dickensian biography: the Swiss chalet gives us the possibility of Dickens as a narcissistic Mariana, isolated in the country in a structure designed to be temporary

and removed from his domestic identity – an alternative, optative biographical reading. The structure’s temporary nature is belied by Dickens’s continued use of it, and its stubborn continued existence in an overlooked location in Rochester. What we have is a glimpse of what a different Dickensian biography could be like: the chalet’s precarious position in Dickens’s afterlives stands for the deliberate shaping of the narrative of his life and career at the hands of friends and family, and has ramifications for our readings of other Victorian literary celebrities and life writing among families. I suggest that exploring those kinds of biographical choices and selectivity can shine a light on the myth-making process inherent in literary celebrity, and raise questions about that process in a way that enriches our understanding of Victorian biography and literary afterlives. The chalet’s uneasy status in narratives of Dickens’s life, in spite of its potential to inflect our understanding of the author and the man, draws attention to the deliberate shaping of Dickensian biography that I will analyse in the following chapters.

This thesis offers a metacritical analysis of the ways in which Dickens and others wrote about his life, and how it was commemorated in the early twentieth century, addressing the oversight identified by Philip Holden, who suggests that biography “is usually only a transit point: scholars travel through it, accumulating references to other texts, on a journey elsewhere” (918). I aim to demonstrate significant moments in the formation of Dickens’s biographical archive, building on existing research that elucidates Dickens’s identity formation in the early years of his career to show that the author’s family, his friends and his early biographers all attempted to control and suppress different aspects of his life in order to create and shape a dominant image of Dickens. The thesis centres on the key problem of how to remember Dickens, whether as a man, father, friend or author, questioning who and what has influenced that legacy. I argue for the importance of considering the moves and motivations of those shaping representations of Dickens up to 1939, offering detailed textual analysis of a wide range of sources, including speeches, letters, biographies, newspapers, diaries and archival material. In the chapters that follow, I analyse biographies as literary artefacts, exploring the relationships between different representations of Dickens not as a linear trajectory of influence, but as a more complex interrelationship in an environment of homosociality, cultural restraint and debate around masculinity. I consider a wide breadth of life writing and commemorative acts, both biographical and autobiographical, to show how Dickens’s legacy is refracted by different kinds of identification and competing legacies.

Rosemarie Bodenheimer has argued that “Generations had to pass, family members had to die, before full-blown experiments in more elaborate forms of biographical criticism could begin” (“Dickens and the Writing of a Life” 58). Although this is true in one sense, in that biographical *criticism* of Dickens would begin to happen in earnest from the 1940s onwards, the sentiment also captures the elisions of the intervening period that have taken place. For example, Slater’s excellent book on *The Great Charles Dickens Scandal* contains a chapter on the period 1859-1928 labelled “Keeping up appearances”. Although his book is focused on the Ellen Ternan story, it is a large period of time to deal with so briefly. Critics have viewed the 1940s as a turning point in Dickens Studies (Slater 110; Collins, “1940-1960: Enter the Professionals”, 143; Ella Westland, “The Making of Dickens: Conflicts in Criticism 1940-1970”). In the 1970 special issue of the *Dickensian* which dealt with ‘Dickens and Fame 1870-1970’, the period 1900-1920 is titled “The Age of Chesterton” (Sylvère Monod 101), which maintains the focus on Dickens’s scholarly legacy rather than his public one. Albert D. Hutter has traced the roots of the tendency to psychoanalyse Dickens and reinforces this interpretation, describing “Most biographers before 1940” as “uncritically reflect[ing] Forster and Dickens himself” (2). For Hutter, Chesterton is the exception. Slater admits that “the Twenties and the Thirties will never loom large in any history of Dickens criticism” (“1920-1940: ‘Superior Folk’ and Scandal mongers” 142). Nevertheless, he argues, Dickens “probably cut more of a figure in the press of the period than he had done at any time since 1870” (142). Dickens was also consistently popular with the public, and John Gardiner has shown this by using the example of a randomly selected day in the 1920s at a Newcastle library: fifty-three out of seventy-five Dickens novels were on loan on that day (164). Gardiner also traced Dickens’s continued popularity and use in wartime (165; see also Gerard Curtis 164), and identifies 1940 as a dividing line in thinking about the Victorians (178). This division between ‘popular’ Dickens and ‘critical’ Dickens is well documented. What I intend to do in this thesis is explore the way life writing has fed into, and drawn from, both aspects, before the ‘dividing line’ of 1940 and, rather than trace the history of ‘popular’ or ‘academic’ Dickens, focus on the life writing and commemorative acts of this period.

Gardiner provides an overview of the periodisation of the Victorians and the role of Dickens within this, suggesting that biographies published after the 1880s “eschewed hagiography” (128); this turning point for ‘modern’ biography seems very late. Studies of life writing in the last thirty years have increasingly explored ‘hidden’ lives and

marginalised communities,<sup>9</sup> and while any study of Dickens can hardly claim to be illuminating marginalised groups, my work benefits from the ways in which such studies have opened up life writing and shown just how difficult it is to apply rigid models, like Nicolson's binary of hagiographic/Boswellian biography. Gardiner further identifies ways in which Dickens has become "crucial" to our sense of the Victorians (161), and discusses the interrelatedness of the 'Victorian' and the 'Dickensian'. This is also highlighted by Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist* (4). Curtis identifies specific "cultural elements" that Dickens engaged with, and that were familiar to readers of Dickens in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly "the Victorian emphasis on the role of observation or 'the art of seeing'" and "the increasing importance of portraiture" in the period (103), suggesting that this aided in his transformation "from writer to cultural icon" (164). Leon Litvack has also discussed the role of photographs in Dickens's plans for posterity ("Dickens Posing for Posterity: The Photographs of Herbert Watkins"). Boyce has shown that, with regard to Tennyson, "admirers pursued opportunities to scrutinise his face and body for clues to his interiority or true selfhood, to solve the mystery of their fascination with his allure" (5). I will show the connections that have been drawn between Dickens's face and physical characteristics on the one hand, and his personal and literary ones on the other. Douglas-Fairhurst convincingly delineates Dickens's formation of his authorial identity against the background of Victorian celebrity culture. He suggests that "it is tempting to read his life backwards as well as forwards. ... everything that happens to him starts to acquire the same even sheen of inevitability. Every chance event becomes a stepping-stone that fate drops into his path" (5). He adds that, as Dickens got older, he "enjoyed promoting a view of his fiction as deliberate and artful" (15). I argue that the narrative of fate is supplemented by a call for hard work and focus. I show that this fatedness is established by Dickens in his late speeches and journalism, as well as how Dickens's friends and collaborators adopt a similar tone in writing the narratives of their own careers.

North's work on Byron is particularly helpful here, because she demonstrates the relationship between life, afterlives, celebrity, personality and biography. She shows how Byron used biography as "the linchpin of his reputation" (58), and she includes

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<sup>9</sup> See for example Regenia Gagnier's *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920*, Mary Jane Corbett's *Representing Femininity: Middle-Class Subjectivity in Victorian and Edwardian Women's Autobiographies* and Juliette Atkinson's *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century "Hidden" Lives*.

“memoirs, conversations, anecdotes, fictional and semi-fictional representations of the poet” as well as “the poetry itself, its editorial apparatus and its reviews, ... portraits, artefacts, and other cultural manifestations” (58) under the heading of ‘biography’. She draws attention to Byron’s attempt to control his image, and the ways in which control “slipped away as reviewers, relatives, friends, enemies, and other self-appointed commentators capitalized on his life” (58). I uncover a similar process in Dickens’s afterlife. North seeks to “question the caricature of nineteenth-century biography as a simplistically repressive and politically homogeneous discourse” (5), and this is a central feature of my thesis: as already discussed, there is a tendency within studies of Dickens’s reputation to view the biographies of the 1870-1939 period as homogeneous and unrevealing. I challenge this by drawing attention to the differences between the members of the Dickens family, a selection of Dickens’s young men, and the role Dickens played in establishing facets of his afterlife in the 1850s and 1860s. Boyce has identified something similar in discussing Tennyson and his circle, suggesting that “celebrity identities are by no means ‘inexorable or fixed’, but are moulded by fans and critics, as well as by celebrities themselves” (11). I would widen this definition to include the shaping influence of family and friends.

Following North’s lead, I will apply the concept of auto/biography loosely in discussing different representations (in his study of memoir, Alex Zwerdling poses the pertinent question “What *doesn’t* it include?” [1]). Philippe Lejeune identifies autobiography as “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (4), arguing that “the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist* must be identical” (5). The connection to personality that Lejeune discusses is useful in how I theorise the way in which Dickens’s ‘young men’, George Augustus Sala, Edmund Yates and Percy Fitzgerald, incorporate biographical information about Dickens into their autobiographical narratives. North has also demonstrated the interconnectedness between different facets of what she calls ‘biographical discourse’ in her study of Romantic poets. Her work emphasises that, in the period,

Biographical discourse – and literary *Lives* especially – became part of the daily fabric of reading. It appeared in a variety of formats including magazine essays and reviews, encyclopaedia articles, volumes of collective biography, individual *Lives and Letters*, and introductory material to editions of writers’ works. (3)

This thesis thus takes a broad view of biography and life writing, including unpublished memoirs and manuscripts, articles, speeches, biographies, memoirs, reminiscences and autobiographies.

Zwerdling's study of memoirs moves very quickly from discussion of Jean-Jacques Rousseau to memoir in the twentieth century. He argues that there is a shift from the "idiosyncratic *I*" of Rousseau to "a *we*, linking the refractory individual life to a collective fate" (6). This argument could also be applied to Dickens in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as the connotations of the 'Dickensian' began to inflect the meaning of the 'Victorian' and vice versa. Although Zwerdling's study does not discuss the nineteenth century in any detail, he offers a way to group the different representations of Dickens discussed here. He suggests that life stories, though "grouped under a variety of labels – memoirs, confessions, autobiographies, testimonies, reminiscences, among others ... [are] far from fixed" (1). For him, memoirs are narratives that "focus on the author's inner life rather than place in the world" (1). I will show how Dickens's 'young men', specifically, bring both aspects together.

Another key feature of Zwerdling's study is his use of authors' archives to explore what is excluded from life writing (4). To avoid the dangers of appealing to a 'perfect' Dickens biography (and therefore judging biographies for what they do *not* include), the following chapters of this thesis focus on textual analysis of life writing rather than the optative biography-that-might-have-been. In avoiding extensive analysis of Victorian biography, Zwerdling indicates some general trends that are also applicable to this thesis. He views post-Victorian biography (and fiction) as characterised by "irreverence" that is "often rooted in ... filial entitlement, the right to inspect, examine the evidence, reach a judgement" (33). For him, family memoir is "prosaic, rhetorical, evidentiary, apparently artless – a kind of testimony rather than invention" (33). This is particularly relevant to chapter 3, in which I discuss the ways that the family wrote about and commemorated Dickens. However, I will also show this desire to interpret and classify in texts written by friends and even those who did not know Dickens. Zwerdling credits Virginia Woolf with shifting "the ground of the family memoir from male achievement to women's labor" (68), but I demonstrate that this was already contested ground in the 1880s. Strikingly, Woolf was also part of a Memoir Club founded by the Bloomsbury Group in 1920, which met several times a year "for a dinner followed by the reading of formal memoirs written not for publication but for each other" (Zwerdling 68). Chapter

3 discusses the Boz Club, founded in 1900, which followed a similar format. As such, this thesis provides a more complete picture of memorialisation, life writing and family commemoration in the Victorian period. Deborah Nord provides a more nuanced approach to Victorian biography than Zwerdling, arguing that the Victorians “placed the psychic and philosophical battle between generations at the very heart of the autobiographical form” (87). I show this in relation to Dickens’s younger writers in chapter 4.

As part of narrowing down the field of life writing and commemoration, it is necessary to consider the role of the archive. Jacques Derrida has suggested that “There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory” (*Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 4). Control of the archive necessitates exclusion: there is “*No archive without outside*” (11). Derrida also eloquently captures the ambivalence behind archival construction, describing archives as both “Revolutionary and traditional” (7). I show how this works in practice for Dickens’s biographers, friends and family: the family particularly seek to create an image of Dickens that builds on the existing biographical tradition. However, the urge to reveal something new about his life, and the attempt to supplement and supplant earlier authorities, makes the process one of revision and, occasionally, revolution. Derrida’s discussion of the development of Sigmund Freud’s archive is also pertinent: in it he argues that “The question of the archive remains the same: What comes first? Even better: Who comes first? And second?” (37). This sense of jostling for position and the biographer/archivist as prophet is discussed at length in chapter 4.

Several critics have discussed the tensions between Dickens’s friends and family in writing about Dickens. K. J. Fielding has suggested that Dickens’s friends were pitted against those “already professed to be tired of him [Dickens] and wanting a change” (“1870-1900: Forster and Reaction” 85), and sees this as one reason for contemporary criticism of both Forster and Dickens (86). For Fielding, this impacts on Dickens’s reputation “for the next hundred years” (86). He is right to highlight the ‘autobiographical’ nature of Forster’s biography, and I show that the desire to respond to criticism of Dickens, as well as the ‘irritation’ with Forster that Fielding identifies, were incorporated in the life writing of Dickens’s friends and family in diverse ways.

Although several critics have recognised Forster’s importance, there are relatively few explorations of the rhetorical and narrative strategies that he used. Jane Smiley has called Forster’s *Life of Charles Dickens* “the grandfather of all Dickens biographies” (212),

and this is true inasmuch as it is not possible to write about Dickens without using Forster's *Life*. As Engel has suggested, it "stands as one of the few secondary sources which most critics feel compelled to consult" (3). Ira Nadel has a chapter on Forster in *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* in which he argues that Forster "alters material and its presentation to provide them [the Victorian audience] with a picture of the subject they themselves imagine" (77). This argument does not quite seem to work with regard to the autobiographical fragment: as I show in chapter 1, the Dickens imagined by the Victorians had a very different childhood from the man that Forster wrote about. Warwick Gould and Thomas F. Staley's *Writing the Lives of Writers* mentions Dickens only twice, in passing (295, 299), while Trezise has argued that "biographers such as Jack Lindsay, Edgar Johnson, Peter Ackroyd and Claire Tomalin" have made it "difficult to treat the early examples of Dickensian biography as anything but fictions" (26). He uses Sala's lack of knowledge about Dickens's childhood as an example, but once again repeats the mistake of calling early Dickens biographies "hagiographies rather than biographies" (27). Although his characterisation of some of them as "examples of the writer as ventriloquist and the biographer as his dummy" (27) rings true in the case of scissors-and-paste biographies, it is a simplistic understanding of Dickens biographies of the nineteenth century. Trezise's characterisation would seem to make little distinction between pieces like the first biographical sketch of Dickens published in August 1840 in the *Town*, which describes Dickens's life as "perfectly smooth" (1358) and suggests that "his career has been altogether unchequered by those numberless rubs of fortune, those changes and chances which rarely fail to wait on the footsteps of those who reap a precarious subsistence from the pen" (1358), and the writings by Sala, Yates and others, who had known Dickens personally, more than thirty years later.

There seems to be an implicit binary in Trezise's argument of those who know and those who do *not*, which does not account for those between, and different hierarchies of memory and knowledge. Trezise extends this categorisation to Forster, suggesting that he "often allowed him [Dickens] to develop his own image of himself rather than the image which others had of him" (27). As I show in chapter 2, the two facets of this are quite different. Firstly, Forster deliberately gave the impression that he was letting the author speak for himself. However, he was very sensitive to criticisms of his work that suggested he did not use sources other than Dickens's own letters to himself in presenting Dickens. As such, there is a complex balance of appearing to have Dickens

speak for himself, speaking for Dickens, and integrating other accounts. Engel similarly describes the biographies published in the author's lifetime as "few and largely uninformative" (11), using this to explain the positive reception of Forster, which he describes as greeted with "universal praise" (3). This is not completely true: there were several significant criticisms of Forster, some of which Forster himself responded to in the third volume of the biography. What these arguments show is that in spite of increasing research in the field of life writing that challenges reductive models of biography and biographical discourse, much of what has been written about Dickens biography still makes use of these restrictive and unhelpful terms. This thesis, then, provides a more complex picture of representations of Dickens, arguing that there was a shared desire among the author's family and friends to supplement and replace Forster as the foremost authority on the life of Dickens. This manifested in different ways. I uncover the role of friendship, family connections, patronage and personality.

Existing studies of authors' legacies and posthumous fame seem most often to focus on the Romantics rather than the Victorians,<sup>10</sup> and the ways in which mourning and grief animate the literary work of the Romantics have been discussed by Kurt Fosso and Mark Sandy. Nevertheless, this thesis does not explore Dickens's own desire for fame in detail: Douglas-Fairhurst and Timothy Spurgin have discussed the author's early relationship with celebrity culture. Lucasta Miller's detailed examination of *The Brontë Myth* is suggestive in thinking about Dickens, showing the ambivalence inherent in the ambitious desire for fame and the need to protect a reputation. Similarly, *Writing the Pre-Raphaelites: Text, Context, Subtext*, edited by Michaela Giebelhausen and Tim Barringer, charts the ways in which the Pre-Raphaelite archive has been selectively shaped. In contrast, Geoffrey Thurley's *The Dickens Myth: Its Genesis and Structure* takes each of the novels in turn, and is more focused on vindicating each than providing a coherent study of Dickens's reputation. Gareth Stedman Jones's biography of Karl Marx shows how biography and afterlives can be brought together. He describes how "Ever more expansive claims were made about the scale and significance of Marx's achievement, while areas in which his writings or activities had failed to meet these mythical requirements were glossed over or hidden" (3). He builds on this to suggest that it was not only Marx's writings that needed to be reshaped and controlled, but also his "personal character" (4); this was done through the publishing of censored

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Tom Mole's *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy*, H. J. Jackson's *Those Who Write For Immortality: Romantic Reputations and the Dream of Lasting Fame* and Jacob Sider Jost's *Prose Immortality, 1711-1819*.

correspondence between Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1913. This fits with my use of the Derridean archive and associated questions of power and control, and is suggestive in thinking about the publication of Dickens's letters in 1880, as I do in chapter 3.

Chapter 1 discusses Dickens's speeches and journalism from 1857-1870, focusing on his self-construction: how he valorises and experiences memory, how he conceives of his career, and how he represents his childhood. As Matthew Campbell, Jacqueline M. Labbe and Sally Shuttleworth have pointed out, by the mid-nineteenth century "memory became enshrined in British culture" (1). I will show how this manifested in Dickens's writings to an extent that has not previously been recognised. His approach in the 1850s and 1860s can be thought of in the context of Michael Millgate's *Testamentary Acts: Browning, Tennyson, James, Hardy*. Millgate's work shows how four nineteenth-century writers shaped their literary and biographical legacies before death. Dickens, too, burned letters, 'appointed' his biographer and produced the Charles Dickens Edition of his works. I argue that, towards the end of his life, he also began to self-consciously shape biographical accounts of his childhood and his career, and sought to strengthen his relationship with the public following the controversy surrounding his separation from his wife and his continued living arrangement with Georgina.

Chapter 2 focuses on Forster's biography as perhaps the single most important text in Dickens's literary afterlife, and puts it into conversation with other accounts of the 1870s to explore how he drew on literary criticism and trends in life writing and show how the *Life* shaped the representations that came after, functioning as a definitive text that all subsequent Dickens life writing had to respond to. The conversation is moved away from Forster's failures, towards a clearer understanding of his relationship with existing biographical material. I argue that Forster's *Life* was singularly successful not only due to the close relationship between Dickens and Forster and the revelations it made about the author's difficult childhood, but also in the ways in which it established Forster as the first person to truly understand Dickens: as a consequence, Forster also made himself appear to be the first person with the ability to correctly interpret Dickens's work. I will also explore the implications of Forster's own proof copy of the *Life*.

In chapter 3, I argue that the Dickens family sought to complicate and add to Forster's image through the publication of letters and reminiscences of their own. Dickens had a very large family: as such, I analyse their different relationships both with

him and also with life writing, centring on their points of contention with Forster. They also played an important, and previously unrecognised, role in the formation of societies such as the Boz Club and the Dickens Fellowship, which sought to find a more public way to honour and commemorate Dickens in the twentieth century. John has argued that “commemoration is not just an act of remembrance; it involves veneration, the idea of value inhering in an emotional yet hierarchical relationship between the past and the present” (“Stardust, Modernity and the Dickensian Brand” par. 2) The ways in which these accounts and activities seek to venerate Dickens and create their own hierarchies, not necessarily between the past and present but between different perceptions of the past, will be discussed.

Chapter 4 builds on P. D. Edwards’s work on *Dickens’s Young Men: George Augustus Sala, Edmund Yates and the World of Victorian Journalism* to develop a more nuanced picture of the different kinds of life writing undertaken by Dickens’s ‘young men’, also contextualising the better known publications of Sala and Yates against the writings of Percy Fitzgerald and Marcus Stone. An autobiographical sketch written by Wilkie Collins, previously thought to be lost, is analysed and contrasted with Fitzgerald’s writings and the unpublished memoir written by Stone in the 1900s. Sala, Yates and Fitzgerald are the focus as they were the most favoured of Dickens’s ‘young men’ and wrote the most about him, also coming into conflict with Forster – and, later, the family. Other accounts by friends and colleagues, such as George Dolby’s *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him: The Story of the Reading Tours in Great Britain and America (1866-1870)*, are not discussed at length because, for example, Dolby was only close to Dickens at the very end of his life, becoming his reading tour manager in 1866 until his final reading in 1870. Focusing on Sala, Yates, Collins and Stone allows comparison of writers who had known Dickens over many years, although these four men knew him in different ways.

It is also useful to point out what is not within the scope of this thesis. John Rodden’s book *The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of “St. George” Orwell* focuses on dominant historical images of Orwell to argue that “we should neither reduce reputation merely to an interaction among institutional forces nor presume cynically that all established judgments are largely groundless, the products of ruling class ‘mystifications’ which demand ‘unmasking’ and ‘demythologizing’” (ix). What follows is not a cultural study of Dickens’s reputation. I am not attempting to ‘unmask’, ‘demythologise’ or otherwise pass judgement on the validity of Dickens’s reputation,

but to complicate the idea that the biographies, and the author's own autobiographically inflected writings, can be read as homogeneously advancing one image of Dickens. I am not seeking to revise Laurence Mazzeno's survey of *The Dickens Industry: Critical Perspectives 1836-2005*, or uncover the origins of the Dickens heritage industry, as brilliantly delineated by John in *Dickens and Mass Culture*. Several wide-ranging studies have been conducted, and while John's study is a particularly effective and nuanced picture, in other cases the kinds of generalisations and elisions highlighted above seem to be a consequence of taking a broad-strokes approach to Dickens's reputation and celebrity. Other focused cultural histories, such as those by Mary Hammond and Paul Davis, maintain a stronger, more compelling argument through remaining tightly focused on individual texts and characters. In the same vein, what follows is an exploration of select texts' approaches to auto/biography, legacy, memory, mourning, nostalgia, and writing. It is not a simple task for any of the writers mentioned to remember Dickens; instead there is a process of mourning, letting go, adapting and appropriating. While the texts I discuss occasionally do similar things, they are done in different ways: eulogising a fellow writer, as Dickens did William Makepeace Thackeray; writing a biography, as Forster and Fitzgerald did; editing letters, as in the case of Georgina and Mamie; remembering Dickens socially, as the Boz Club and Dickens Fellowship did; and writing an autobiography or reminiscence, a decision made by several of Dickens's 'young men'. Close readings of these texts can be revealing in bringing to light how they seek to memorialise and revise Dickens's life. This manifests differently because of a number of factors including gender, social standing, and their relationship to Dickens as affected by the passage of time. All privilege competing ideas of knowledge and hierarchies of memory. There is a balance of revelation and reticence, compounded by self-positioning within complicated relationships and even some resentment.

There is an overwhelming amount of possible material to consider in addressing representations of Dickens. As such, this thesis maintains a tight focus on the author and his closest friends and family, concentrating on significant life writing by his circle. It takes as its end point the publication of *Dickens and Daughter* in 1939, viewing this as the 'final word' from the immediate family. Thomas Wright's 1935 *Life of Charles Dickens*, which challenged existing images of Dickens in aggressively asserting that he had engaged in an affair with Ellen Ternan, is discussed briefly in the context of the family's project to protect Dickens's reputation, but is otherwise out of scope for this

thesis. The 1930s, as I will show, is therefore a fitting end point: the phase of Dickens biography initiated by Forster and characterised by writings from those who had known Dickens personally was replaced by one led by a new generation of enthusiastic Dickensians, keen to preserve their own idea of the man and the author. The intervening period (from Forster to Wright), characterised by debate around hierarchies of knowledge, gendered approaches to life writing, competing kinds of authority and a desire for control, is central to our understanding of the man himself and the very nature of his artistry.

## CHAPTER 1. CHARLES DICKENS'S SELF-REPRESENTATION IN SPEECHES AND JOURNALISM, 1857-70

Forty-five is the age of recklessness for many men, as if in defiance of the decay and death waiting with open arms in the sinister valley, at the bottom of the inevitable hill.

Joseph Conrad, *Victory*

I must entreat you, to pause for an instant, and go back to what you know of my childish days, and to ask yourself whether it is natural that something of the character formed in me then, and lost under happier circumstances, should have reappeared in the last five years. The never-to-be-forgotten misery of that old time bred a certain shrinking sensitiveness in a certain ill-clad, ill-fed child, that I have found come back in the never-to-be-forgotten misery of this later time.

Charles Dickens, letter to John Forster (June 1862)

The last few years of the 1850s were a time of great change for Charles Dickens in many ways, both personally and professionally. He first met his future mistress Ellen Ternan in 1857; he moved into Gad's Hill in 1857; his marriage broke down, publicly, in 1858; he ended his involvement in Urania Cottage, the house of fallen women, in 1858; the divorce proceedings of his brother Fred began in 1858, giving Dickens fears of another public scandal in the family;<sup>1</sup> he began his public readings in 1858; he broke with *Household Words* and began *All The Year Round* in 1859; the *Uncommercial Traveller* series began in 1860; he made a bonfire of his letters in 1860;<sup>2</sup> and his fiction changed radically. It may be unsurprising, then, that towards the end of 1857, and particularly in 1858, there was a notable shift in Dickens's self-representation. The letter to John Forster above also makes it clear that Dickens was self-consciously revisiting his childhood around 1857, whether by choice or compulsion, while Joseph Conrad's characterisation of men 'of a certain age' suggests that their gaze is turned towards death. Both, I argue, are true of Dickens.

Several critics have drawn connections between the private and public events: it is

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<sup>1</sup> Lillian Nayder is writing a biography of Dickens and his brothers, and discussed Dickens's fears about being called upon to testify in court on his brother's behalf in her paper "Adapting Dickens: The Dickens Brothers In and Out of Fiction" at Dickens Society Annual Symposium 2015: Adapting Dickens (University of Iceland, 11-13 July 2015. Paper presentation).

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to W. H. Wills, he writes "Yesterday I burnt, in the field at Gad's Hill, the accumulated letters and papers of twenty years" (letter 4 September 1860, Pilgrim 9.304).

notable that Dickens's marriage broke up within a fortnight of his first public reading, and the marriage crisis "naturally made familiar essay-writing for *Household Words* inappropriate" (John Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, 134). It is striking, then, that several studies stop short of tackling Dickens's self-representation during the late 1850s and 1860s. Joseph W. Childers focuses on *Household Words* in discussing the 1850s, while *Becoming Dickens* establishes the early tropes of Dickens's writing and self-creation but does not discuss the later years. Similarly, Timothy Spurgin has discussed Dickens's relationship with celebrity in his early work, particularly *The Pickwick Papers* and *Nicholas Nickleby* but, once again, does not continue the narrative into the 1850s and 1860s. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's suggestion that "The figure of the child who is lost and found again haunted Dickens like a restless ghost" (*Becoming Dickens* 24) seems particularly pertinent to Dickens's comment to Forster, as does his claim that "Dickens was equally haunted by the irrevocable consequences that one wrong turning in life might have" (25). By 1858, he was afraid that he had already made that wrong decision, and the feeling clearly raised the spectre of his time in Warren's Blacking Factory. If, as Rosemarie Bodenheimer argues, Dickens's "Autobiographical writing of one sort or another is usually triggered ... by moments when he is compelled to defend himself from what he perceives as attack" ("Dickens and the Writing of a Life" 50), the period beginning in 1857-58 starts to look absolutely crucial to exploring the question of Dickens and autobiography. Bodenheimer also argues that Dickens was too busy to engage "reflectively with his own character or his own past, except through the transformations and projections of fiction writing" (49). I hope to show that this is untrue: as well as fiction, public speaking and the journalism of the 1850s and 1860s also prompted Dickens to reflect.<sup>3</sup>

The change was most obvious in his publication of a statement on his marriage in 1858, in which the author claimed "For the first time in my life, and I believe for the last, I now deviate from the principle I have so long observed, by presenting myself in my own Journal in my own private character" (489). The statement first appeared in the *Times* and was widely reprinted, not only in Dickens's own journal *Household Words* but

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<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Parrott's discovery of an annotated set of *All The Year Round* (2015), naming the contributors, including many who were previously unknown, has only so far yielded one 'new' Dickens article, "What is Sensational?", published in March 1867 and previously attributed to Joseph Parkinson. As it is not autobiographically inflected and it is unclear how much was written by Dickens himself (rather than Parkinson), it will not be discussed.

also in regional and international newspapers.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of this statement was to address rumours about the separation from Catherine, and it was received with some bemusement as “somewhat unintelligible to those beyond the reach of the gossip of London” (*Leeds Mercury*, 12 June 1858, 7). The reaction seems to have been the opposite of what Dickens desired, as newspapers sought to clarify his carefully ambiguous statement. While this is an unusual example of Dickens directly addressing gossip and rumour in *writing*,<sup>5</sup> as he says, “in my own private character” (489), the author made more *speeches* in that same year, 1858, than he had done in any year previously or would ever do again.<sup>6</sup>

Speech-making as a form could be more ‘personal’ than journalism. While some of the speeches share traits with his fiction in choice of topic and rhetorical style, Dickens was always speaking as himself. At a time when circumstances meant that the author was more aware of the risks of speaking to his public directly, the recurrence of biographical anecdotes and information, and the particular self-narrative Dickens was shaping, are highly suggestive. During this period the author also chose to perform public readings, a decision that tells us a lot about the importance of that famously ‘personal’ relationship with the public. Malcolm Andrews describes the choice to do the readings as Dickens coming “out from behind his texts altogether” (*Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves: Dickens and the Public Readings* 25), and yet the Dickens of the readings always had an urtext to read from. Surely, then, this characterisation of Dickens can be applied more directly to Dickens as speech-maker than as public reader of published novels. However, much less attention has been paid to Dickens as a speech-maker than as a novelist or even as a public reader. John Bowen has highlighted this, suggesting that although “It is often thought that Dickens was a rather naïve artist who, particularly in his early years, wrote in a rather instinctive and unself-conscious way”, it is in fact “increasingly clear how often and how interestingly he reflects on his art and fiction in his journalism, letters, and speeches” (“A Garland for *The Old Curiosity Shop*” 2). Bowen focuses on Dickens’s early years, drawing on Dickens’s 1841 speech in Edinburgh as an example (2), but does not discuss the later speeches. While it might not be surprising that the speeches have been treated as of minor critical interest, the

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Jackson’s Oxford Journal*, the *North Wales Chronicle* and the *Bristol Mercury* (12 June 1858).

<sup>5</sup> The other key example is Dickens’s “Violated Letter” (25 May 1858, *Pilgrim* 8.740-41).

<sup>6</sup> Fielding lists fourteen in total, including three short speeches that prefaced readings. Even excluding these, the next most prolific year was 1857 with seven speeches.

speeches work with the fiction, journalism and public readings to enhance our understanding of the author's representation of his own life.

The relationship between speech-giving and the private self is a complicated one. In a letter to Forster (29 October 1859), Dickens complained that opinions voiced by the narrator of the short story "Hunted Down" were attributed to him "as if I had delivered it in a speech" by the *Bath Chronicle* in an article from 13 October 1859 (an incident which also inspired the satirical piece "The Tattlesnivele Bleater" [1859]).<sup>7</sup> Speech-making as a way of voicing 'true' opinions and anecdotes is particularly telling; pre- and post-Forsterian biographies and memoirs have drawn anecdotes and accounts of Dickens's life from his speeches and journalism, quoting sections presumed to be autobiographical verbatim, without attribution.<sup>8</sup> For example, the author's recollection of the "very queer small boy" and his desire to one day own Gad's Hill, from the 1860 article "Travelling Abroad", was so influential, as mentioned in the introduction, that Charley Dickens suggested that it was "more extensively quoted" than anything else his father had ever written" (*Uncommercial Traveller* xviii). That this article was written in 1860 further demonstrates that the author was beginning to recognise that such anecdotes would be influential: for example, his description of his early reporting career came from a speech made during this time.<sup>9</sup>

Scissors-and-paste journalism that brought together speeches, anecdotes and biographical pieces, common in newspapers during the period, gave Dickens the opportunity to shape his self-image indirectly; he knew that his speeches would be widely reported and disseminated. This is particularly important for an author who was notoriously vague about his life and disliked giving biographical information to a celebrity-hungry public. In outlining very basic details to Wilkie Collins in 1856, he wrote that "This is the first time I ever set down even these particulars, and, glancing them over, I feel like a Wild Beast in a Caravan, describing himself in the keeper's absence" (*Pilgrim* 8.132). Robert C. Hanna has shown how the details Dickens provided in this letter were used by Paul-Émile Daurand Forgues to write a biographical article about Dickens that concludes "with an insinuation regarding his relationship with his sister-in-law" (170). Hanna suggests this may have laid the foundations for the

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<sup>7</sup> The article is misdated in the *Pilgrim* edition of Dickens's letters as 15 October 1859.

<sup>8</sup> As well as numerous examples in Forster, this curation can be seen in Phebe A. Hanaford's *The Life and Writings of Charles Dickens, A Woman's Memorial Volume* (1871) and William Watkins's *Charles Dickens: with Anecdotes and Recollections of his Life* (1870), among others.

<sup>9</sup> Speech for the Newspaper Press Fund, 20 May 1865 (Fielding 342-48).

gossip of 1858, but it certainly would have confirmed Dickens's suspicions about engaging directly with biographical discourse and might have suggested to him that he exercise greater control over the dissemination of biographical material. His claim that he did not present himself *as himself* in his journalism may have been true in one sense – he wrote as the 'Uncommercial Traveller' or adopted a persona for many of his articles – but his journalism was mined for biographical information by contemporaries in an effort which has continued in modern Dickens scholarship.

Michael Slater has stressed the problem of reading Dickens's journalism biographically, discussing the tendency to read the articles – particularly those written as the Uncommercial Traveller, “as though it contained chunks of straight autobiography” (“How many nurses had Charles Dickens? *The Uncommercial Traveller* and Dickensian Biography” 253). He traces this tendency in Forster's biography, and the ways in which Forster aligned Dickens's life and works are discussed in chapter 2; however, the suggestion that readers “were no doubt intended to glean” that Dickens “had had a very orthodox middle-class upbringing, including a period at boarding-school” (255) is important here. Slater is discussing the 1860 article “Nurse's Stories”. The other pieces published at this time should be seen as building on this image, even where not directly making assertions about Dickens's childhood: they rely on the reader having built up a picture of Dickens based on earlier articles, and allow such assumptions to colour the autobiographical impact of the articles. Slater concludes that Dickens “had no objection” to readers viewing his articles as autobiographical (256), but I would take it further and suggest that Dickens expected them to. Very rarely do the articles draw directly from life, however. In “Poor Mercantile Jack” for example, the narrator describes joining the Liverpool Police Force for a beat but there is no evidence this happened; Dickens was last in Liverpool in 1858, and the article appeared in 1860. “Dullborough Town” (1860) appears to be an amalgamation of Chatham, Strood and Rochester (Slater and Drew 138), and the author claims not to have returned to this town since childhood. However, articles like “The Short-Timers” (1863), in which Dickens talks about his experience of school, and “Mr. Barlow” (1869), deal with childhood experiences that would seem to recall Dickens's own. These articles are less often discussed in conversations about the autobiographical Dickens. Added to this, Forster uses extracts from “Dullborough Town” and “Travelling Abroad”, among others, in his *Life*, without accounting for the peculiarities of the narrative voice adopted within them, particularly the 'Uncommercial Traveller' pieces.

This chapter explores some of these lesser-known examples to argue that, in the speeches and journalism of this period, there are recurring threads that show Dickens was thinking deeply about questions of legacy, remembrance and self-fashioning. As Simon James suggests, “One of the keys to understanding remembering in Dickens is that memory must serve a purpose – that it must ... do some work, or serve some value.” (49). Reading the journalism and speeches is not a task of simply identifying autobiographical information that Dickens might have, deliberately or otherwise, let ‘slip’. The anecdotes and references he made were usually subservient to his purpose, whether that was the occasion for which the speech was tailored or the shape and mood of the article. What I hope to stress is the role of autobiography in the speeches and journalism, and what the preoccupations that arise in this period suggest about Dickens’s self-image. Future chapters expand on this theme, showing how later interpretations of that image were shaped and changed.

By adopting different personae and using different forms, the author was able to explore the increasingly complex relationships between autobiography and fiction, and between other forms of writing and self-representation, that emerged in the nineteenth century, and reshape forms that his readers were used to. Ira Nadel suggests the greatest concern about autobiographical writing at this time was the danger of a “debilitating, over-involvement with the self in his [the autobiographer’s] pursuit of self-knowledge” and a resulting “morbid, paralyzing self-consciousness” (“Apologize or Confess! The Dilemma of Victorian Autobiography” 190), visible both in poetry and fiction and autobiography. It is present in Matthew Arnold’s warning of the dangers of the “dialogue of the mind with itself” (654) and in Harriet Martineau’s *Autobiography*: “I had now plunged fairly into the spirit of my time, that of self-analysis, pathetic self-pity” (1.157). As I will show through a series of close readings of speeches and journalistic material, Dickens also perceived this danger and adopted strategies that made his speech-making and journalism effective while avoiding simply writing conspicuously autobiographical material.

### 1.1. The Art of Speech-Making

The after-dinner speech given by Dickens in Edinburgh in 1841 is described in Forster’s biography as the “first practical experience of the honours his fame had won for him” (175), and is related by Robert L. Patten in *Charles Dickens and “Boz”*: *The Birth*

of the *Industrial-Age Author* as an important episode in Dickens's self-construction: he chose to go to a city "which had been a center of history and historiography, philosophy, law, poetry, journalism, and fiction for nearly a century", and spoke as "a lover of Scottish literature", and as a "spokesperson for commoners and cottage hearths", rather than any political party (301). Here Patten highlights the choices made in selecting venues, audiences and topics, and the significance of the context of one of Dickens's most famous speeches. This same approach can be applied to the later speeches. The author spoke at charities and institutes that concerned education, particularly the education of children and the working class. This would be more fully understood by the public after Dickens's death. His profession was another key theme, and underscoring both was the desire to maintain a close relationship with his public.

Efforts to collect Dickens's speeches prior to 1960 were incomplete at best, and misleading and fragmentary at worst. John Camden Hotten's collection of speeches, begun without the author's consent (although he never responded to Hotten's letters, Dickens did begin efforts to block the publication [K. J. Fielding, *The Speeches of Charles Dickens*, xvi]) and published together with a hastily-compiled biography shortly after the author's death, remained the primary collected version of the speeches until the Nonesuch Dickens of 1938-39, which was an expensive, limited print run. Finally, Fielding brought all of the speeches together in 1960. Fielding damningly describes Hotten's as "inadequate, incomplete, badly transcribed, and often no more than a travesty of what Dickens actually said" (xv).<sup>10</sup> Hotten only featured the text of fifty-six speeches, while the Nonesuch edition of the speeches provided an additional nine, and Fielding presented one hundred and fifteen in total.<sup>11</sup> Collections of Dickensiana, like Frederic George Kitton's *Dickensiana: A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to Charles Dickens and his Writings* (1886), largely omit the pamphlets and reports of these speeches outside of those published in the *Times*, and yet, in conjunction with the journalism, they formed the basis for much of what was known about the author's childhood and early life until the publication of Forster's *Life*.

From his earliest biographers (John Forster, George Augustus Sala and Charles Kent among others, many of whom are discussed in later chapters) to Andrews's *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves: Dickens and the Public Readings* (2006), the skill of the

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<sup>10</sup> After Hotten died in 1873, Richard Herne Shepherd came forward and claimed to have compiled the speeches, attributing the book to himself rather than Hotten in his *Bibliography of Dickens* (1880).

<sup>11</sup> Philip Collins's article "Some Uncollected Speeches by Dickens" claims that there are "a dozen or so" more that Fielding omitted, possibly in an effort to print only public speeches (89).

author on the stage and the impact of the readings on his health have made them a central part of the narrative of Dickens's life. However, long before the author was a public reader he was a gifted speechmaker. He made more than a hundred speeches between 1837 and 1870 at charitable dinners and banquets in his honour, touching on politics, education, literature and even public health. In 1837 the author was only twenty-five, but he was a naturally eloquent orator and already establishing himself in the literary world; by 1870 he was a weary man, old before his time, vanishing from the "garish lights" of the stage forever (Fielding 413). However, following this final reading he gave public speeches on two other occasions.<sup>12</sup> His speech-making worked *with* his public readings, but extended beyond it: he gave speeches long before he gave readings, and continued to give speeches once the last reading was done. The form allowed him to explore topics that were familiar from his fiction and journalism in a way that blurred the boundary between public and private to an even greater extent than his written work.

At a presentation and banquet in his honour in Coventry in 1858, Dickens claimed, "it is one of the rules of my life never to make a speech about myself" (Fielding 286), and in a letter to Arthur Ryland regarding a forthcoming speech, he reinforced this:

I have very strong opinions on the subject of speechification, and hold that there is, everywhere, a vast amount too much of it. A sense of absurdity would be so strong upon me, if I got up at Birmingham to make a flourish on the advantages of education in the abstract for all sorts and conditions of men, that I should inevitably check myself and present a surprising incarnation of the soul of wit. But if I could interest myself in the practical usefulness of the particular institution; in the ways of life of the students; in their examples of perseverance and determination to get on ... and so forth, then I could interest others. This is the kind of information I want. Mere holding forth "I utterly detest, abominate, and abjure." (Pilgrim 12.394)

It may seem a strange claim for a man who made so many speeches, but he argued against a certain type of self-interested oration – well conveyed by his paraphrased quote from Deuteronomy 7:26, which warns against the worship of graven images. The

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<sup>12</sup> These were 5 April 1870 for the Newsvendors' Benevolent Institution (Fielding 414-18) and 30 April 1870 at the Royal Academy Banquet (419-22).

reference suggests Dickens baulked at creating a gilded image of himself for his audience to worship. The tailoring of his speeches to his audience, specifically the way in which the author used anecdotes from his life to make a wider point that would resonate with the listeners, showed Dickens was focused both on giving an entertaining speech and also making sure it was moving for his audience. Juliet John's insightful assessment of the 'personal' in Dickens's journalism as paradoxically also "'universal' in the sense that his characteristically successful tone in public pronouncements (on the page or on the stage) eliminates, where possible, complexity and detail" (*Dickens and Mass Culture* 120) also applies to Dickens's speech-making. He did this particularly well as an orator: as with his readings, he wanted to forge that personal connection, and one way of doing this was to pull back the curtain ever-so-slightly, sharing a personal anecdote or experience with the listener.

Practised at crafting successful speeches, Dickens chose which institutions he spoke at and which invitations he accepted. Fielding suggests that while Dickens was not "free to choose his topic or his audience", he "made an almost independent platform for himself, free from affiliation with most social and political movements, by agreeing to speak at the 'Public Dinners'" (*Oxford Companion to Dickens* 549). In 1842 he gave many speeches throughout America, and became a more prolific speech-maker on his return to England, largely on behalf of charitable funds and institutes (Collins tells us that "Adult education was a cause dear to his heart" [*Sikes and Nancy and Other Public Readings* vii], reflected in his choice of venue). Dickens's early years as a parliamentary reporter prepared him well, both for writing fiction and for public speaking. Matthew Bevis, writing about the influence of his early parliamentary reporter career on his fiction, suggests that "What Dickens esteemed most in public speaking was a balance between temporalities, a balance of present needs with the need for more than the present. ... For Dickens, to be 'by far' the greatest speaker is to be both far-seeing and short-sighted" (93). Bevis focuses on the impact of these early speeches on Dickens's fiction and his drive for social reform within it, but this could also be seen in the author's speaking. The choice to speak largely for the benefit of benevolent institutions, celebrating their work but looking to the future, is a clear example. The paradoxical suggestion of rhetoric that is both far-seeing and short-sighted adds another dimension to Dickens's use of anecdote. By 1858 he was an established literary celebrity. By capably drawing on his own experience and uniting it with a call for reform – or even a celebration of charitable funds and educational institutes – Dickens could satisfy the

short-sighted need for an entertaining story while addressing wider issues. As such, I will argue that he used the form to shape his biographical archive with anecdotes about his childhood and early career, responded to critics and gossip, and reinforced his commitment to social reform and literature while maintaining a reputation as an excellent speech-maker.

Some critics, but by no means all, have bracketed the speeches off as something separate from the fiction and journalism, perhaps most famously F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis, who describe the Dickens of the fiction as a different man:

The Dickens who wrote his excellent journalistic pieces and made admirable speeches appropriate to public functions ... was not the Dickens who wrote the novels. ... When he created as a novelist ... it was to express a deeper level of self than the journalist, actor, social friend or even, on the whole, the letter-writer, drew upon. This should be axiomatic. (123)

While this sentiment is, indeed, axiomatic in the sense that the speeches are undeniably of less literary value than the novels, and were not intended to be compared with them, the specific division of these two Dickenses is striking. While the quotations I have used so far show that he himself viewed the speeches, journalism and fiction as different in their portrayal of selfhood (berating those who read his fiction as if it were a speech, claiming to keep his private self out of his journalism and ‘abjuring’ those who hold forth in speeches), Dickens’s comments would suggest a conscious sense of inhabiting himself more in his speeches than in other forms. Leaving aside considerations of the relative ‘depth’ of self, my intention is to expose the process of writing – or speaking – selfhood. The author’s self-representation within the speeches and journalism contains elements of his fiction, and troubles the division between the two Dickenses of Leavis and Leavis.

In the speeches there was a rhetorical use of ‘fancy’ or fantasy and anecdote that recalled the fiction. It also allowed Dickens to acknowledge things about his life in a way that he was not able to do explicitly in fiction – given that the parallels between his life and *David Copperfield*’s were not publically known until the publication of the first volume of Forster’s biography in 1872. For example, in a speech for the Commercial Travellers’ Schools in 1859 he described himself going out “like the heroes in fairy tales” to “seek my fortune” and entering a castle and seeing “one hundred young male

giants, and fifty young female giants” (Fielding 291); the anecdote closes, “Gentlemen, this castle is your own, and I assure you that its solid timbers, bricks and stones are not more solid than the effects which I have fancifully set before you” (292). The idea that the impact of the school as expressed in this fairy tale anecdote is as real as its physical presence elevates its achievements to the level of a fairy tale’s ‘happy ever after’, although the awkward phrasing of ‘not more solid’ also risks sounding like the school itself is unreal. As well as this blend of fantasy and anecdote, echoes of Dickens’s novelistic style appear, particularly in the speech given for Great Ormond Street Hospital, then the Hospital for Sick Children, in 1858. This speech is described by Fielding as one of the finest: “It has something of the power of his writing, though this cannot be said of other speeches which were composed in his head, and not revised” (*Oxford Companion* 549).

The parallels go further than this. In the speech Dickens related the living conditions of a poor mother and child:

In a room in one of these places, where there was an empty porridge-pot on the cold hearth, with a ragged woman and some ragged children crouching on the bare ground. ... there lay, in an old egg-box which the mother had begged from a shop, a little feeble, wasted, wan, sick, child. With his little wasted face, and his hot worn hands folded over his breast, and his little bright attentive eyes, I can see him now, as I have seen him for several years, looking steadily at us. (Fielding 250)

The repetition, of ‘ragged’, ‘little’ and the idea of seeing, makes this a rhetorically effective passage. Dickens bridges the gap between past and present, bringing to life a child who, in reality, may no longer be living. The egg box image would have been familiar to readers of the novels. In *Hard Times* (1854) Josiah Bounderby claims that he was placed in an egg box instead of a crib (16, 19), as part of the untrue story of his poor upbringing. It is notable that this image of a starving child, filled with pathos and suffering in its 1858 iteration, would first be used to furnish the lies and exaggerations of Bounderby. Bharat Tandon has suggested that the journalism of the 1860s “can often read as if it has been transfigured by style into one of his own fictions” (214). Examples like this from the speeches show the same cross-fertilisation is present here, too. Tandon reads this style as an indication “to readers that the essays belong not only

in the same world as the problems they document but in an imaginative continuum with his earlier fictional treatments of related topics” (224), and I would argue that this also holds true for the speeches. Standing in front of an audience as an author, Dickens was able to show an imaginative connection to his fiction.

The Hospital speech was revised specifically for publication, which perhaps accounts for its more ‘literary’ feel, but it is unsurprising that some speeches should be better than others; some that Fielding records were impromptu and unplanned, in contrast to the aim of raising money by printing the speech for the Hospital. Measuring the success of the speaker against the art of the novelist is difficult, and not necessary here. I argue, rather, that the roles complement each other – at least in Dickens’s case, although the tedium of after dinner speeches given by his contemporaries is also documented, suggesting that it is more than just Dickens’s role as author that infused his speeches with such power. That he could reuse a simple image like an egg box both for humour and pathos is one such example. He was described by Anthony Trollope as “the best after-dinner-speaker of an age which highly regarded that accomplishment” turning a public dinner into “a blessing instead of a curse, if he was in the chair” (qtd. in Collins, *Critical Heritage*, 325) and similarly praised in a review of Hotten’s edition of the speeches in the *Graphic* (23 July 1870): “At all places whereto he went, whether surrounded by Cabinet ministers, by practical speakers, or by authors, Dickens made the best speech of the evening; what he said was not witty, but it was far better than wit, it was genial, full of kindness, abounding in anecdote and perfect in manner” (83). Not only did Dickens bring a literary sensibility to speech-making but, as with the Hospital speech, his speeches became literature themselves: they were sometimes turned into published pamphlets,<sup>13</sup> sent to the author to correct, and circulated by societies both internally and externally as well as appearing in newspapers regionally and nationally.

The printing of speeches was an industry, particularly following the abolition of newspaper stamp duty in 1855, which opened up the market to smaller, cheaper newspapers. Other newspapers complained when supposedly only the *Times* was given a reporter’s ticket to the Royal Academy Banquet in 1858 (see Fielding 264-65), and the sale of Thomas Carlyle’s inaugural address as Lord Rector of Edinburgh University was ruined when Hotten, notoriously unethical, printed his own version first (xv). John has

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<sup>13</sup> For example, Dickens’s speech on behalf of the Hospital for Sick Children (9 February 1858) was corrected by Dickens in print, printed as a pamphlet and sold to raise money, enjoying several reprints (see Fielding 434-35). The Playground and General Recreation Society speech (1 June 1858) is another example (269-75).

argued that “Even when writing in the first person in his own person, there is a sense in which Dickens’s sense of himself is always metamorphic and infused with a sense of his own cultural mediation” (*Dickens and Mass Culture* 125-26). This is also true of the speeches, and Dickens was able to use them to his advantage in shaping his self-image.

## 1.2. Speeches and Self-Fashioning

The speeches were an opportunity for Dickens to directly address his audience, complement his role as author and public reader, and fashion himself. He corrected some reports of his speeches but still suffered misinterpretation of his words, particularly in the case of a throwaway comment made at the close of the Birmingham and Midland Institute annual meeting (27 September 1869). The line that led to the confusion was “My faith in the people governing, is, on the whole, infinitesimal; my faith in The People governed, is, on the whole illimitable” (407). To assure the clarity of the remark, intended to express support of the populace and lack of ‘faith’ in those in charge, regardless of party, he corrected capitalisation in the reports. The comment, which he made at the end of the speech, is almost a throwaway, and yet his careful correction shows its weight for Dickens. Taken out of context, it led to speculation about the author’s political leanings and was interpreted favourably by the Tories, unfavourably by the Liberals and seemingly wrongly by all (Fielding 407-408). Dickens wrote to the institute to explain and returned to a prize-giving there shortly after. Following this, he claimed in a letter to James T. Fields and his wife Annie (14 January 1870) to have been deliberately Radical, revelling in the uproar:

I hope you may have met with the little touch of Radicalism I gave them at Birmingham in the words of Buckle? With pride I observe that it makes the regular political traders, of all sorts, perfectly mad. Sich (sic) was my intentions, as a grateful acknowledgment of having been misrepresented. (Pilgrim 12.466).

To William Macready on 2 March 1870, he wrote, “It gives me true pleasure to have your sympathy with me in the second little speech at Birmingham. I was determined that my Radicalism should not be called in question. The electric wires are not very exact in their reporting, but at all events the sense was there” (Pilgrim 12.484). This incident makes it clear that he viewed his speeches as contributing to his reputation and

affecting his relationship with the wider public: certainly, enough to respond directly to misrepresentations.

Dickens also expressed his views on international copyright in America through speeches, and following a reading for the benefit of the Mechanics' Institute in Chatham (18 December 1860) he directly repeated remarks made in the *Uncommercial Traveller* article "Dullborough Town" (Fielding 298-99). Dickens found the Institute flourishing and "of the highest benefit to the town; two triumphs which I was glad to understand were not at all impaired by the seeming drawbacks that no mechanics belonged to it, and that it was steeped in debt to the chimney-pots" (Fielding 299, Slater and Drew 144). While Dullborough is not identified as Chatham in the article, which in itself is written in the persona of the *Uncommercial Traveller*, in the speech he makes the association clear. Those who did not know about the author's childhood in Chatham could not fail to associate the words of the speech with the memories of the article. That Dickens sometimes accompanied his readings with short speeches further blurs the supposed distinction between fiction and oration.<sup>14</sup>

References to his early or current life largely drew on his schooling and career. In an 1857 speech for Warehousemen and Clerks' Schools, for example, Dickens said he did not like "the sort of school to which I once went myself, the respected proprietor of which was by far the most ignorant man I have ever had the pleasure to know" (Fielding 240). This vagueness is characteristic of the speeches; he referred to walks he had taken without giving specific dates,<sup>15</sup> and to childhood incidents that frame him as a well-educated, middle-class child,<sup>16</sup> but are difficult to verify and date. Speech-making allowed him to leave space for implication and inference; he could mention his childhood in a way that left room for the happy middle-class upbringing his audience believed he had, rather than exposing the misery of his family's financial troubles and the blacking factory. However, his description of his years as a reporter in a speech for the Newspaper Press Fund was particularly detailed. Dickens presented his career as a reporter in dramatic language: he was "a boy not eighteen" (346) and "pursued the calling of a reporter under circumstances of which many of my brethren at home in

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<sup>14</sup> For example, his speeches at: Bradford (28 December 1854); Sheffield (22 December 1855); Manchester (31 July 1857); Edinburgh (26 March 1858); Edinburgh (27 and 28 September 1858); Chatham (18 December 1860 and 16 January 1862); Providence, R. I. (20 February 1868); New York (20 April 1868); and his farewell reading (15 March 1870).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, in the speech at the Royal Hospital for Incurables (233) and in the speech for the Playground and General Recreation Society (271-72).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, speech for Warehousemen and Clerks' Schools (240-44).

England here, many of my modern successors, can form no adequate conception” (347):

I have often transcribed for the printer from my shorthand notes, important public speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising, writing on the palm of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post chaise and four, galloping through a wild country, all through the dead of night, at the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour. (347)

Dickens seems to have been keen to demonstrate his aptitude, and his insistence that many of those working in 1865 could not understand the conditions he faced in the late 1820s is striking, made more so through the humour of the ‘surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour’. His audience was made up of reporters; and the speaker made himself one of them, but also better than they.

The idea of the author as a talented reporter first, accurately and efficiently taking down events, characters and speech from life in even the most difficult circumstances, fit the narrative of a man born to be an author and moulded by circumstance. He expressed pride in his shorthand ability and claimed in a speech on 18 April 1868 to “have never quitted” the calling “in spirit” (379): “To the wholesome training of severe newspaper work, when I was a very young man, I constantly refer my first successes; and my sons will hereafter testify of their father that he was always steadily proud of that ladder by which he rose” (379). The reference to his children is striking: in chapter 3 I discuss the aspects of Dickens that his children *did* ‘testify’ to. While making the speech in support of the New York Press, he also joked that he had “now and again been more surprised by printed news that I have read of myself, than by any printed news that I have ever read in my present state of existence” (380). In this same speech, while admonishing the press, he took the opportunity to deny that he was writing a new book, as had been rumoured (381). Speech-making allowed Dickens to shape what was known about his life both through revelations about his early career and also through refutations of these kinds of rumours.

Speeches were a good medium through which to cultivate a public image: many of the speeches were in support of charitable funds and societies, often for the arts and literature, and a certain shaping of the author’s literary life becomes apparent through

the anecdotes used. Literature represents “my delight in life, my means of usefulness in life”, and he described himself as being “true to my calling” (371). This is further seen in response to a speech by Lord Dufferin, Chancellor of the Exchequer, who said that Dickens “would have been a great power in our great national assembly” (385). Dickens replied,

When I first took Literature as my profession in England, I calmly resolved within myself that whether I succeeded or whether I failed, Literature should be my sole profession. [*Hear, hear, and applause.*] It appeared to me at that time that it was not so well understood in England as it was in other countries that Literature was a dignified profession [*hear, hear*], by which any man might stand or fall. [*Applause.*] I made a compact with myself that in my person Literature should stand, and by itself, of itself, and for itself [*hear, hear*]; and there is no consideration on earth that would induce me to break that bargain. (389)

Although a relatively short statement, this response has great rhetorical power. In it, the author insists on his ‘calm’ resolve, reinforced by the cadence of ‘by itself, of itself and for itself’, invoking Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.<sup>17</sup> That Dickens was influenced by such an important political speech is unsurprising, but his choice of political oratory for inspiration is revealing. Dickens’s stories emphasise the need for commitment and hard work. While he had been very successful by this time, he was presenting his motivation as something more than financial. He presented himself as a kind of hero of literature, standing up for the dignity of the profession – in spite of the other paths he had considered. These are documented by Slater, who writes of the “fascinating” idea of Dickens trying his fortune in the West Indies (*Charles Dickens* 35), and describes him in the early 1830s as an “ambitious young-man-in-a-hurry” (39). The dignity of literature is an important aspect, and Dickens’s commitment to it, rising from a debate, primarily between William Makepeace Thackeray on the one side and Dickens and Forster on the other, was born out of an editorial dispute in the *Morning Chronicle* and Forster’s writing for the *Examiner* in January 1850 over the giving of state pensions to authors and the question of literature as a profession. The preoccupation with literature as a profession is evident in his journalism, would be important in Forster’s

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<sup>17</sup> Lincoln ended, “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth” (Lincoln).

*Life*, and influences Sala's account of Dickens; as such, the thread is taken up again in chapters 2 and 4.

The biographical Dickens's early, unfocused ambition contrasts strongly with the lifelong commitment to literature the author would claim, and it was reiterated in a speech given later that same year (1869):

The one serviceable, safe, certain, remunerative, attainable quality in every study and in every pursuit is the quality of attention. My own invention or imagination, such as it is, I can most truthfully assure you, would never have served me as it has, but for the habit of commonplace, humble, patient, daily, toiling, drudging attention. (406)

We must imagine the string of adjectives here delivered verbally, delaying the noun, stressing the weight of 'attention' (defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* [OED] as "earnest direction of the mind, consideration, or regard"). The idea of this 'earnest direction of the mind' as the one 'safe', 'certain' and 'remunerative' quality is striking: not only does it have connotations of reliability and financial security, but casts doubt on the other qualities that are required. No particular kind of education is said to be necessary, for example, which is an important claim for a man with an unconventional educational background. Like Dickens's anecdote about his time as a literary reporter, there is an emphasis on hard work over imagination. The varied adjectives give way again to 'attention' in the second sentence, both emphasising its centrality and also normalising it. Dickens stands before his audience as a celebrated author, but never seems to suggest that he has any innate skill, or a particularly gifted imagination: in these anecdotes literature is a career, like reporting, that requires hard work – and, as was important to Dickens, deserved recognition as a career and profession. The passage also echoes *David Copperfield*, in which David tells the reader:

I never could have done what I have done, without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one object at a time, no matter how quickly its successor should come upon its heels, which I then formed. ... I have never believed it possible that any natural or improved ability can claim immunity from the companionship of the steady, plain, hard-working qualities, and hope to gain its end. ... there is

no substitute for thorough-going, ardent, and sincere earnestness. (517-18)

For ‘attention’ we have ‘the determination to concentrate myself on one object at a time’, and the ‘steady, plain, hard-working qualities’ have the same ponderous weight as the adjectives of the speech. The connection to Dickens’s most autobiographical novel also emphasises the autobiographical nature of the speech itself.

The fact that this idea is repeated from 1849 to 1869 also challenges John Carey’s argument that Dickens was initially an advocate of education but had come to see it as “a breeder of pedantry and social pretensions” (28). Rebecca Richardson offers a more nuanced approach, suggesting that while in fiction Dickens “turns the self-help story to his own ends” (269) – primarily in creating his antagonists, such as Uriah Heep, Josiah Bounderby and Bradley Headstone (270) – he saw two possible paths for such ambition: the first “channeled towards the inspirational self-help anecdote”, and the second as a “cautionary tale” (285). Nevertheless, this binary is problematic because it is deceptively simple: what is more interesting is the particular choice of repetition, twenty years apart and across different forms. The repetition of an idea for different audiences unites Dickens in 1868 with the Dickens of the “autobiographical decade” of the 1840s (Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 15). Spurgin has suggested that, in the 1830s, Dickens had “begun to hope that a public refusal of celebrity will help him to gain a more respectable position and a more permanent sort of fame” (47); this is perhaps reflected in the focus on hard work in the speech. This does not fit with Richard Salmon’s suggestion that the “mid-century ethos of professional labour” meant that the author had “a desire to *re-enchanted* and *re-consecrate* his vocation” (*The Formation of the Victorian Literary Profession* 212); Dickens’s words seem to *disenchant* the literary profession, describing it in terms more familiar to a working class audience.

Dickens once spoke to his readings manager George Dolby of speech-making as the tire of a cart wheel, with himself as its hub and the spokes of the wheel demonstrating the subjects to be dealt with in the speech (this account comes from Dolby’s 1884 *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him*):

From the hub to the tire he would run as many spokes as there were subjects to be treated, and during the progress of the speech he would deal with each spoke separately, elaborating them as he went round the wheel; and when all the spokes dropped out one by one, and nothing but the tire and space

remained [...] his speech was at an end. (Dolby 274)

It is striking that rather than assembling the wheel he is disassembling it, knocking spokes out rather than building them in, and what connects the subjects is the speaker at the hub, with the topics revolving around him. The subjects that he discussed seem to serve multiple purposes for him, creating an image of the author at the same time as addressing rumours and entertaining his audience. He was always at the centre of the speech, creatively and expertly crafting the form. As I will show in the following section, although the possibilities of a different medium were explored by Dickens, recurrent strands can be found across both the speeches and the journalism of the period.

### 1.3. The Workings of Memory

Bodenheimer has argued that Dickens's self-knowledge was "fluid, inconsistent, and subject to the influence of strong emotions" (*Knowing Dickens* 6). She sees "a complex fracture between Dickens's valorised idea of memory and the unwilling, negatively inflected recollections that return again and again to shape his work" (57). The journalism of the 1850s and 1860s seems to draw more clearly on valorised memory, although it is not without its spectres: in a humorous article on Spiritualism, which Dickens had satirised in previous articles,<sup>18</sup> the spirit responds to the question "What, upon the whole, is most like you?" with the "terrific reply" of "Blacking" ("Well-Authenticated Rappings" 478). To the pre-Forsterian reader, this fits with the absurd responses the spirit gives to other questions posed to it within the article. However, the reference to 'blacking' from beyond the grave surely had more significance for Dickens. The double-meaning of 'terrific', causing terror as well as being impressive, and the naming of Dickens's shameful past, turn a passing reference into a paranoid moment. Several other articles of this period including "Travelling Abroad" (1860), "Dullborough Town" (1860), "Nurse's Stories" (1860), "Birthday Celebrations" (1863) and "The Short-Timers" (1863) allude to Dickens's own childhood. "Shy Neighbourhoods" is the *Uncommercial Traveller* article most quoted by Forster (Slater, introduction to "Shy Neighbourhoods", 117), but more as an example of Dickens's walking habits and for its observations of London than its dealings with memories.

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<sup>18</sup> See "The Spirit Business", published in *Household Words* (1853).

The overlooked position of the speeches in Dickensian biography resonates clearly with the author's ambivalence about biographical accuracy in his journalism, and the use of moments from his articles to create a picture of his life. Patten, writing primarily about the earliest *Uncommercial Traveller* pieces, suggests that "We don't want to allow his imagination any kind of free rein and so we take any reference to places, persons and situations similar to ones Dickens might have known as transcriptions of his own life" ("The One and the Many" 278). The question of imagination is addressed in more detail in chapter 2, particularly with regard to questions of control and influence. Patten calls such biographical tracing a "very Victorian assumption" (278) that does not account for "the way in which "Dickens's fiction ... illustrates the possibility of confusing our contemporary categories of truth/reality/reporting versus fiction/imagination/inventing with the blurrier status of writing in Dickens's time" (278). Instead, he argues that Dickens uses his personal experience to speak to "larger aggregations and categories, in order to produce something like an account of the nation, but with feeling, not statistics, with persons, not categories" and as such blends "fact with fancy" (295). Patten is correct in that this is a very 'Victorian' way to read, but his argument seems almost contradictory in that it complains that we read like Victorians if we read biographically, but also suggests that Dickens's writing would not be categorised as autobiographical during the period. G. K. Chesterton, in contrast, describes the *Uncommercial Traveller* articles as "a collection of Dickens's memories rather than of his literary purposes. ... All these works of his can best be considered as letters; they are notes of personal travel, scribbles in a diary about this or that that really happened" (xxvii). Although, as shown, Chesterton's argument has been successfully challenged since, it highlights the ongoing, unresolved difficulty in classifying Dickens's journalism.

The example of an 1858 biography, published by John Hain Friswell, serves the point. The biography claims to give "facts ... inferred from the written and public declarations of Mr. Dickens himself" (75). In it, Friswell points out that we do not know Dickens's schooling, but suggests that he was a "thoughtful, retired" child because of "The power with which he describes them" (3). This is clearly based on the works of Dickens the novelist. Friswell goes on, "Certain it is" that Dickens wanted to be a reporter (4). This must surely be drawn from the speeches. He also says that Dickens became a "public declaimer" in 1858, adding "soon after [he] stepped in another sense before the public, thus doubly breaking through that mysterious veil

which hangs – and which, we cannot help thinking, ought to hang – before the desk of the author” (60). It is interesting that Dickens as ‘public declaimer’ is separated from Dickens’s public readings, to which the passage above clearly refers. This would suggest that Dickens was seen as establishing himself as a public speaker in 1858; although, as mentioned, this was his most prolific year, he had given speeches for many years before 1858. Friswell also provides the “Violated Letter” in full (67-71). Friswell claims that his biography is “within due bounds” (77) because it draws on Dickens’s own words, adding “we can hardly go wrong” (78). Within his biography, Friswell draws on newspaper accounts, speeches, journalism, the novels and Dickens’s letters. The biography, part of a popular series of volumes called ‘Our Contemporaries’, shows the extent to which these different forms were treated as fluid and studded with autobiographical detail.

As Slater argues, there was a tendency to read journalism biographically. Patten’s overall point about the purpose of Dickens’s writing is useful, however, because it resembles the far-seeing and short-sighted distinction set up by Bevis (93); just as Bevis argues that the author admired a speech-maker’s ability to bring together immediate needs with future ones, Patten argues that he brings together individual needs, moments or stories with the bigger picture in an ‘account of the nation’. This is a compelling account of what Dickens does in his fiction, which reveals his cultivation of self-image in the journalistic pieces. Anecdotes and biographical moments could help him to bond with his audience in a speech, and in his journalism they also have a dual purpose in creating a sense of the personal while at the same time asking questions about the nature and role of childhood, education and legacy in telling the story of a life. Biographical readers conduct paranoid readings: they are expecting to find moments of autobiographical revelation based on their knowledge of Dickens. One way to appreciate the art of Dickens’s journalism is to resist such reading. I do not intend to engage in a psychoanalytical reading of Dickens’s childhood reflections or offer a biographical narrative to fit Dickens’s articles. Instead, I draw attention to the ways in which the journalism can be read as attempting to form a pseudo-coherent narrative of Dickens’s life.

The references made to Dickens’s schooling in his speeches and journalism provide an image of a middle-class education and make no mention of his troubled childhood, but there is still a discernible sense of the vagabond child finding his calling: in a speech to the Newsvendors’ Benevolent Institution (5 April 1870), he told his audience that he

had “never witnessed a Lord Mayor’s Show except from the point of view obtained by the other vagabonds upon the pavement” (416) and in the article “New Year’s Day” describes himself as “a little animal revolting to the sense of sight” (491), an “object of just contempt and horror to all well-constituted minds” (492), narrating his belief in the powers of the ‘magic wand’ gifted to him by his nurse. Dickens wrote several articles about (and on) New Year’s Eve, from 1836 to 1859. The last of these celebrated the end of another year and the end of the author’s affiliation with *Household Words*. In this short piece, on the cusp of his new venture and reflecting on a year of great change in his life, Dickens conjures many New Year’s Days past, blurring them together in a mix of memory and fantasy. A Wand bought for a young Charles by a Mrs Pipchin figure fails to transform her into something more agreeable, and this memory spurs a whirl through the past years:

The failure of this wand is my first very memorable association with a New Year’s Day. Other wands have failed me since, but the Day itself has become their substitute, and is always potent. It is the best Harlequin’s Wand I have ever had. It has wrought strange transformations – no more of them – its power in reproducing the Past is admirable. ... I throw up and catch my little wand of New Year’s Day, beat the dust of years from the ground at my feet with it, twinkle it a little, and Time reverses his hour-glass, and flies back, much faster than he ever flew forward. (493)

The idea of New Year bringing about strange transformations that Dickens will not speak of perhaps hints at his falling out with Bradbury and Evans, but also hints at the way in which memory distorts, and creates flashes, of the past, not always as they happened, as Dickens goes on to describe. The Harlequin’s wand is also a feature of pantomime used to ‘magically’ change the scenery. The reference to popular entertainment is a telling one: in *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, Paul Schlicke argues that because of “his belief in the special attributes of the child, Dickens emphasizes the separation of its world from that of adults” (18). In “New Year’s Day” the Harlequin’s wand, rather than emphasising the gap between childhood and adulthood, as Schlicke argues (19), connects the past and the present. Andrews suggests that “Dickens, more than any other Victorian writer, relished the deconstruction of this very Victorian polarity of child/adult” (foreword to *Dickens and the Imagined Child* xiii), and this

interpretation feels closer to the heart of “New Year’s Day”, which sits uncomfortably in Schlicke’s account of Dickens, memory and popular culture. It also qualifies Bodenheimer’s suggestion that “the glossy sheen of time travelling disappears” (*Knowing Dickens* 87) from Dickens’s memory writing after the crisis in his marriage in 1858. Critics such as James have also noted this fascination in Dickens with “making and remaking” memory (35), focusing primarily on its manifestation in the novels. Although the memories begin with a sense of failure, rather than the hope for the year to come or enjoyment of the festive period, the childish recollections given are happy moments.

Next, as a child carried in someone’s arms, he envisions a party:

a New Year’s Party revealed itself to me, as a very long row of ladies and gentlemen sitting against a wall, all drinking at once out of little glass cups with handles, like custard-cups. ... Why the company should all have been drinking at once, and especially why they should all have been drinking out of custard-cups, are points of fact over which the Waters of Oblivion have long rolled. ... It is possible enough that I, the baby, may have been caught up out of bed to have a peep at the company, and that the company may happen to have been thus occupied for the flash and space of a moment only. But, it has always seemed to me as if I looked at them for a long time – hours – during which they did nothing else. ... (493-94)

Dickens presents the flash of childhood memory, blending the ridiculous with a religious image that solidifies into a temporally and spatially muddled early experience. It is unclear if this is a scene of a particular kind of house (one without enough space to seat everyone around the table, without enough glasses for everyone – and so reduced to offering custard cups as receptacles) or if the memory is coloured by a child’s lack of understanding. The ‘Waters of Oblivion’ refer to *The Tales of the Genii: Or, the Delightful Lessons of Horam, the Son of Asmar*, in which Sadak is sent to search for the Waters of Oblivion (1764). The reference emphasises the simultaneously recuperative and oblitative power of memory.

These mixed and forgotten memories are also notable in the light of what readers would only know about the author’s life with the publication of Forster’s biography. Humorous recollections, like the idea that Dickens was “an innocent accomplice in the secreting – in a coal cellar too – of a man with a wooden leg!” (494) and that he fought

a duel at the age of ten, provide tantalising suggestions of biographical detail, but equally read like the adventures of young protagonists in stories like 1868's *Holiday Romance*. Crucially, all of them give us a largely happy, securely middle-class view of his life, underscored by a more melancholic reflection on the passage of time and the role of memory: a particularly poignant moment is the invocation of his sister's final days, in which she shares with him a vivid memory of "the smell of fallen leaves in the woods where we habitually walked as very young children" (494).

Dickens fulfils many roles in "New Year's Day", from precocious child to non-commissioned officer, imagining both the New Year's Days of the past and the way those places would be later, without the people from his memory present. Ghosts haunt the author's new years, including the ghost of himself: "If my old type has disappeared for the moment, it will come up again in its right place, when its right time brings it upward. Moreover, what am I, even as I know myself, that I should bemoan the disappearance, real or fancied, of the like of Me?" (497). The Dickens of this piece is playfully unknowable, even to himself, conveying half-formed memories and ideas in which he is both actor and observer: his own history is conveyed through symbolic, representative 'types' that he is able to watch. Weaving through anecdotes that recall Scrooge's travels with the Ghost of Christmas Past, from the experience of a child to a festive party that echoes Fezziwig's, we also have an Italian New Year, and French New Year, and the year in which the article is written.

The article is almost devoid of references to Victorian New Year traditions, but engages with the spirit of the New Year as a time of reflection and memory, anticipating the bright unknown of the year ahead through the memory of past hope – and failure. At the end of the article we leave Dickens, alone, enjoying a particularly untraditional New Year: "So, I pass this New Year's evening, which is a French one, looking about me until midnight: when, going into a Boulevard café on my way home, I find the elderly men who are always playing dominos there ... not in the least moved by the stir and novelty of the day, not in the least minding the New Year" (501). However, Dickens wrote of finishing the article on 20 December 1858 from Tavistock House (letter to W. H. Wills, 20 December 1858, *Pilgrim* 8.723) and was in Gad's Hill by 3 January 1859 (letter to Richard Bentley, 3 January 1859, *Pilgrim* 9.1). This final scene seems just as fictional and distorted as the earlier anecdotes, perhaps including bits of his previous Parisian story, so it is notable that Dickens places himself abroad, alone, observing the New Year in the way he tells us he always has done: by watching others.

It is a melancholic end to a light-hearted piece, bringing together the half-truths of Dickens's childhood with half-truths of his present.

Various pieces in the *New Uncommercial Samples* also reflect on Dickens's childhood. If we bring this together with what Wilfred P. Dvorak has identified as a more developed concern with money in the journalism of the 1860s, at a time when "something new is happening both in the way in which Englishmen accumulate wealth, and in the way in which they distribute its blessings: thus the rash of articles on speculation and investment" (90), a clearer picture of Dickens's preoccupations comes into focus. Dvorak suggests Dickens is concerned with the ways that money "shapes and directs social and moral behaviour" (95). What better time to reflect on periods of his life in which a lack of money directed his own social behaviour? I have discussed the articles of 1867-69 at greater length in my Master's thesis, "More Than A Fly-Leaf: Experimentation and Autobiographical Undertones in Charles Dickens's Writings, 1867-1870". Among these is "Mr Barlow", which again discusses the influence of childhood experience on adulthood, as "New Year's Day" does, but this is a humorous kind of haunting. The idea of the man haunted by childhood, like the egg-box image of the Great Ormond Street Hospital speech and *Hard Times*, is utilised in both humour and pathos. Schlicke has described Dickens's autobiographical journalism as "recollections of his happiest childhood days" (*Dickens and Popular Entertainment* 14), arguing that "The fact that his childhood contained other, far less lighthearted events unquestionably made such moments all the more precious" (15). The sentiment is a useful one, if we consider instead the juxtaposition of the happy childhood memories with the narrative persona in the articles, who emphasises the happy childhood memories in terms of what has since been lost.

The pieces, then, should be read as inflected with nostalgia rather than against a background of childhood misery. This has been discussed by Drew, who suggests that:

Wiser and not worse is not Dickens's usual gloss on returning to the present from the past, but where the lost world of youthful illusion is concerned, it is the prevailing conclusion, and is often bound up ... with a recognition of physical decay in once-thriving areas of public life that have been superseded by modernity. (*Dickens the Journalist* 153)

Similarly, Bodenheimer suggests that "personal memories" in the *Uncommercial Traveller*

are “recalled in a context of changing times” (*Knowing Dickens*, 87). Drew’s formulation, ‘wiser and not worse’, draws from Dickens’s own conclusion to “Dullborough Town” in which he writes, “All my early readings and early imaginations dated from this place, and I took them away so full of innocent construction and guileless belief, and I brought them back so worn and torn, so much the wiser and so much the worse!” (148) For Dickens, though, it is wiser *and* worse rather than Drew’s ‘wiser and not worse’. The suggestion is that his imagination has been damaged by time, as well as the physical environment itself. It is not just modernity that has caused change, but the Dickens-narrator himself. The “dungeons of Seringapatam” (140), which were never truly there, have been destroyed just as thoroughly as the buildings knocked down by “Pickford” (141), but not by modernity or changing times.

It is significant, then, that Dickens has given his childhood home the fictional title of Dullborough and amalgamated his experiences of several towns (138). It is a deliberately universalising move: we are told “Most of us come from Dullborough who come from a country town” (139-40). The speeches Dickens gave moved from personal experience to wider applicability, and the journalism does too, in a slightly different way. It is not just the town itself which is symbolic, universal, shifting: when meeting a greengrocer, seemingly unchanged by age, the narrator is disappointed because “I was nothing to him: whereas he was the town, the cathedral, the bridge, the river, my childhood, and a large slice of my life, to me” (143). The movement in this phrase is striking: rather than building from small detail to larger significance (i.e. from ‘the bridge’ to ‘my childhood’), which is also a move from community, to object, to temporal designation, the phrase narrows down before becoming even more inclusive. As such, it strikes a nicely evocative balance between tangible objects and symbolic meaning. It is also characteristic of the tone of the piece: at once sentimental and self-consciously humorous (elsewhere in the piece, Dickens refers to the knocking down of several buildings as “an act of boyslaughter” [141]).

As well as this dual vision, we are given a clear sense of the difference between the narrator himself as a child, and as an adult. We are told, “I had seen an Indian (who I now suppose wasn’t an Indian) swallow a sword (which I now suppose he didn’t)” (143). The parentheses represent adult knowledge, imposed on childhood perception. Here the narrator is engaged in a kind of reparative experience of his past. The reparative reader, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s account, “has room to realize that the future may be different from the present. ... it is also possible for her to entertain such

profoundly painful, profoundly relieving ... possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did” (146). Dickens is a sort of reparative reader of his own childhood. There is a sense of rewriting the past that contrasts with the flashes of memory in “New Year’s Day”: in the earlier article, Dickens did not attempt to account for the oddity of the memory. In “Dullborough Town”, the narrator is actively rewriting – and rereading – memories. Although the narrator retains a (humorously) disgruntled tone throughout the piece, we are left with the assertion that “in my heart I had loved it all day” (148) in spite of his disappointment.

Drew specifically references “Dullborough Town” and “Travelling Abroad”, arguing for a “division between ego and alter-ego” (193); the alter-ego contains aspects of the “vagabond” Dickens felt he might have become in his days at the Warren’s Blacking (Forster 26). This is clear in how “Travelling Abroad” has been used by critics who identify the “very queer small boy” (86) as Dickens. Bodenheimer argues that Dickens’s use of memory in his later years is characterised by “more complex and troubled images of self-division” (“Dickens and the Writing of a Life” 50), and this example fits that mould well. Is it complex, though? With regard to what we can learn about Dickens from this self-division, it is remarkably simple. We learn that the child lives in Chatham, that he someday wants to live in Gad’s Hill, and that he goes to school (86). However, as I have endeavoured to show, that glossing over of his childhood and the focus on schooling, alongside the fatedness of his living at Gad’s Hill, are strong evidence of the facets that most concerned Dickens in his autobiographical writings during this period.

#### **1.4. Death and Eulogy in Dickens’s Late Journalism**

As well as increased reflection on his childhood in the 1850s and 1860s, Dickens was increasingly looking towards death. His severe illness in 1869, treated with humour in “A Fly-Leaf in a Life” (1869) (which opens “I give and bequeath” [390]), led to his writing his will,<sup>19</sup> and the Charles Dickens Edition of his books included new prefaces and minor corrections. The unlooked-for intimacy that irritates Dickens in “A Fly-Leaf in a Life” suggests that the autobiographical aspects of his work have engendered overfamiliarity in his correspondents, and shows Dickens’s conflicted feelings about his relationship with the public as an ageing man, concerned with his health, rather than an

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<sup>19</sup> See Slater’s introduction to “A Fly-Leaf in a Life” (386).

immortal author, concerned with his legacy. Michael Millgate has written of the ‘testamentary acts’ of Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Henry James and Thomas Hardy, particularly their attempts to maintain personal privacy and to ensure the afterlives of their works by producing collected editions with new prefaces – as Dickens also did. In addition, during this time Dickens was called upon to write about William Makepeace Thackeray, Clarkson Stanfield, and Walter Savage Landor; the first two as eulogy, and the last in reviewing Forster’s biography of his and Dickens’s mutual friend. In each case there is a deliberate eschewing of biographical detail in favour of personal characteristics, as I will show. “Birthday Celebrations” also has a notable link to the question of authors’ afterlives. The latter part of the article discusses William Shakespeare’s birthday and its celebration in Dullborough (236-37). In this humorous send-up of commemorative clubs and festivals, Dickens shows his contempt for the kind of institutions that would be set up after his own death (as discussed in chapter 3). He describes the “Institution” at which “the Debating Society discussed the new question, Was there sufficient ground for supposing that the Immortal Shakespeare ever stole deer?” (237). In addition, “The City of the Absent” (1863) makes a striking comparison to “Dullborough Town”: in the latter the happy places of childhood are tinged with disappointment, while in the former graveyards are the narrator’s “little treat” (262). Instead of the dead haunting the Dickens-narrator, he himself is the one who tells us “I love to haunt” (262). This is not the only reversal in the piece: Dickens does not focus on the graveyard as a site of quiet repose, but where the private is made public, as he returns twice to spy on a pair of lovers (265). In both “Birthday Celebrations” and “The City of the Absent”, the failure of posthumous celebration and the *lack* of absence are made clear.

In suggesting what Dickens thought *should* be said about an author after their death, and what he hoped would be remembered about himself, “In Memoriam, W. M. Thackeray”, published in *Cornhill Magazine* in February 1864, is revealing. Dickens had known Thackeray since 1836, and felt that he could not refuse the request to write something about the author for *Cornhill* (Slater, introduction to “In Memoriam, W. M. Thackeray”, 326). The Thackeray Dickens describes is quite remarkable, however, and for an author so concerned that his public and his friends focus on his published works (Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 859), Forster is very focused on vindicating Thackeray’s character. He describes him as “supremely humorous”, “irresistibly extravagant”, “softened and serious” and “charming with children” (327-28), giving an example of

him “announcing how that some passage in a certain book had made him cry yesterday” to show how “genial, natural, cordial, fresh, and honestly impulsive” he was (328). Dickens does mention their disagreements very briefly,<sup>20</sup> but insists “No one hearing him could have doubted his natural gentleness” (328). After three pages of this tone, the piece begins to ‘protest too much’ in its defence of Thackeray’s character. However, this makes sense in the context of Dickens’s own relationship with the public. Andrews identifies in Dickens “a sense that the serial writer has a special licence to be more open with his feelings. The stress on the immediacy of the transmission of feelings, unrefined, spontaneous, and on the reciprocation of those feelings anticipates the special dynamic of the Readings” (*Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves: Dickens and the Public Readings* 18). Although Andrews’s book specifically describes Dickens’s intimacy in the context of the public readings, Dickens’s account of Thackeray begins to reflect as much about what the living author felt was important, as Thackeray himself. The focus is on personality rather than specific biographical detail.

Many of the anecdotes and comments about Thackeray tell a public audience what Thackeray’s private feelings were. In his study of Lord Byron, Tom Mole suggests that Byron used a “hermeneutic of intimacy” that “worked by suggesting that his poems could only be understood fully by referring to their author’s personality, that reading them was entering into a kind of relationship with the author and that that relationship resembled an intimate connection between individuals” (23). Dickens had an ambivalent approach to this intimacy, as already hinted at. Regardless of his feelings about Byron, he benefited from the example, and his piece on Thackeray suggests that the author’s personality was – and should be – connected to his writings. Notably, it does *not* necessarily argue that his biography should be similarly connected. The tone of the piece moves towards describing what cannot be told: Dickens suggests that “greater things that are known of him, in the way of his warm affections, his quiet endurance, his unselfish thoughtfulness for others, and his munificent hand, may not be told” (328), adding “In no pages should I take it upon myself at this time to discourse of his books, of his refined knowledge of character, of his subtle acquaintance with the weaknesses of human nature, of his delightful playfulness as an essayist, of his quaint and touching ballads, of his mastery over the English language” (329). There are two possible meanings at play here. The first is Dickens’s own disavowal of his authority and right to speak, suggesting that it is not his place to pass judgement on Thackeray’s

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<sup>20</sup> The ‘Dignity of Literature’ debate will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

work or divulge his personal character. The second is a suggestion that Dickens cannot – or will not – put his name to any discourse about Thackeray’s literary qualities. It is an interesting moment, either way, because so many of Dickens’s colleagues and friends would later have no qualms about discoursing on Dickens’s works.

The close of the article deals with Thackeray’s uncompleted novel *Denis Duval*, and has ramifications for how we might think of Dickens’s own uncompleted novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Dickens has the manuscript of *Denis Duval* in front of him while writing, and tells the reader that Thackeray was “in the healthiest vigour of his powers when he wrought on this last labour”, that he “bestowed great pains upon it” (329), and that “The condition of the little pages of manuscript where Death stopped his hand, shows that he had carried them about, and often taken them out of his pocket here and there, for patient revision and interlineation” (329). The emphasis on Thackeray’s planning, revision and skill surely aims to deter any enthusiastic writer from trying to edit, improve, or complete the unfinished work. The passage also makes Thackeray into an author in Dickens’s vein: hard-working and careful.

The other example of Dickens writing about the life of an author is “Landor’s Life” (1869), which was a review of Forster’s biography. Landor had been a mutual friend, as well as a respected poet and author. Dickens opens his review by discussing the engraving included as a frontispiece to the second volume of the biography. The reproduction does not include Landor’s hands, and Dickens focuses on this, drawing attention to the connection between Landor’s face, hands and personality. Mole has argued that Byron’s poems “suggested that bodies could be read like texts and that texts could metonymically substitute for bodies” pointing out an erotic tenor to Byron’s works (24). While the erotic undertone is not a characteristic of Landor or Dickens’s legacies in the same way, his formulation is relevant here: Dickens ‘reads’ Landor’s body like a text, interpreting it as a friend, as Forster would do of Dickens (discussed in chapter 2). We are told that the picture without the hands “gives a most inadequate idea of the merit of the picture and the character of the man” (397); this language is also reminiscent of the language used by Georgina to discuss Forster’s biography, as explored in chapter 3. Dickens adds that “From the spirit of Mr Forster’s Biography these characteristic hands are never omitted, and hence (apart from its literary merits) its great value” (397). Peter J. Capuano draws attention to ways in which hands are characteristic in Dickens’s novels (127), ultimately arguing for a more complex reading of hands as shaped by changing political and scientific understanding, but in “Landor’s

Life” the hands are simply characteristic. They also do not give the reader any biographical details. Dickens adds “Let the face be never so intense or fierce, there was a commentary of gentleness in the hands, essential to be taken along with it” (397). As well as suggesting that the only relevant commentary is one of personality and characteristics, this would suggest that the presence of a spirit of ‘hands’ means Forster has provided a gentle commentary to Landor’s intensity or fierceness. As I show in chapter 2, this is a prescient comment that proves true in Forster’s biography of Dickens, too.

The speeches and journalism of the period 1857-70 represent an important part of Dickens’s life and work, interacting in suggestive ways with his fiction, his journalism and his readings, particularly in the absence of a fully developed autobiography. As shown, the speeches and journalism occupy a liminal space that enables them to do something different from Dickens’s novels. They are revealing in their interactions and invocations of the novels, but also enabled Dickens to ‘step out from behind the curtain’ in different ways from his public readings or letters. The concern with social justice in his fiction is shown by his commitment to charitable societies and institutions, as is his blend of anecdote and fancy, humour and pathos, and the importance of an intimate relationship with the public, particularly those who may not have been able to afford his public readings. In this period of his life, Dickens seems to have been experimenting with his self-representation. While expressing strong opinions regarding appropriate speech-making, the author was able to explore ways of introducing autobiographical information and fiction that show a shaping of the story of his literary career and of his childhood. Dickens claimed not to read anything written about himself,<sup>21</sup> but this is demonstrably untrue: responding to allegations formed an important part of his self-representation, and speeches particularly presented a useful format for disseminating rebuttals, almost as an afterthought to the context of the occasion. This also resonates with his journalistic responses to criticism and rumour. The concerns I have identified through these diverse articles and speeches reflect the aspects of Dickens’s relationship with the public which he saw the need to protect: he denied a new book was being written and affirmed his Radicalism, talking about his literary career as one forged through hard work and identifying with his audience. In contrast to the rumours that Dickens aimed to dispel is the image he created of himself:

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<sup>21</sup> In a letter to Mark Lemon (15 November 1847) he claimed to have “a principle” of not reading negative reviews, one, he writes, “I have never once violated, for ten years” (Pilgrim 5.196).

as a precocious child, a gifted reporter, and ultimately a hard-working disciple of literature. He also used autobiographical modes and anecdotes in his writing to address questions of legacy, the influence of childhood and the traces that a life might leave, whether written, verbal, physical or in terms of influence. He did this without giving many verifiable biographical details of any kind, but rather focusing on personality. Douglas-Fairhurst has described the self as “an unfolding process, rather than a static object” in considering Dickens’s early career (307), and the self-reflexive themes and tendencies in the late journalism show that this is a process that continued in the later period. Chapter 2 builds on this in focusing on Forster’s *Life of Charles Dickens* and the way it negotiated Dickens’s childhood, career and legacy, creating its own representation of the author that works both with and against Dickens’s self-representation.

## CHAPTER 2. THE INIMITABLE: JOHN FORSTER'S *LIFE OF CHARLES DICKENS* AND OTHER BIOGRAPHIES OF THE 1870S

John Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* (1872-74) is the single most influential biography of Charles Dickens, containing as it does the author's own account of his childhood, generally referred to as the "autobiographical fragment".<sup>1</sup> Because of this, it is not possible to write a biography of Dickens without reference to Forster. Many scholars have discussed the psychological reading of Dickens's works encouraged by Forster's revelations,<sup>2</sup> and Catherine Peters has summarised the *Life* and explored its relationship to the biographies written by Edgar Johnson and Peter Ackroyd. This chapter contextualises the *Life* against a background of other biographies and accounts published in the 1870s, highlighting the ways in which Forster establishes his authority and shapes the narrative of his subject's life. Peters argues that Forster "has difficulty in appreciating the centrality of Dickens's emotional and sexual life" (53). This rather ungenerously assumes Forster was unable to understand these aspects, rather than choosing to avoid them. She further adds that the biographer:

acknowledged that Dickens the man and the novelist were all of a piece but mostly treats them separately, giving no consideration to the effect Dickens's other activities had on his work, except in the obvious instances when Dickens uses an actual event or parodies an actual person. (55)

While this is largely true (though the effect of the reading tours on the author's health are also key to Forster) this chapter shows the deliberate strategies used by the biographer to tie Dickens the man and Dickens the novelist together and moves the

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<sup>1</sup> Although Forster is the first source to describe Dickens's experiences, since his *Life* more details have come to light. Michael Allen demonstrates in his article "New Light on Dickens and the Blacking Factory" that some of the details that Forster goes to great pains to describe have been proven to be incorrect. Dickens was not employed by Jonathan Warren at the blacking factory, but most likely by William Edward Woodd (5), and he was most likely eleven, not twelve, when he began working there (5).

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Welsh's 1987 *From Copyright to Copperfield: The Identity of Dickens* is positioned by Welsh as "an assault on Warren's Blacking warehouse" (vii), while Michael Allen argues that the story of Dickens's childhood is "dominated" by it (1). Slater has claimed that it "became central to his [Dickens's] fictional world" (*Charles Dickens* 22); Claire Tomalin argues it "gave him a subject he used again and again" (*Charles Dickens: A Life* 30); J. Hillis Miller calls the period a centre from where "a thousand paths radiate" (ix); John Carey argues that it is an experience that "Dickens goes on writing ... in novel after novel" (149); Robert Douglas-Fairhurst calls it "the fixed center around which his imagination continued to revolve" (36); Elliot Engel calls the fragment "Dickens's most important preface", one "to all the novels" (11).

focus to the ideological underpinnings of the biographer's choices in writing Dickens's life.

When Dickens died on 9 June 1870, there was an almost unprecedented outpouring of grief. As he was one of the first literary celebrities, it is unsurprising that his death was followed by an immense number of articles and reminiscences appearing in newspapers and journals all over the world. Duane DeVries, Frederic George Kitton (*Dickensiana*) and William Miller give us a comprehensive list of publications of all kinds that followed the author's death, from published sermons to biographical pieces and critical analysis. Many, such as William Watkins's *Charles Dickens: with Anecdotes and Recollections of his Life* (1870), were simply collections of obituaries and published anecdotes. DeVries and Miller show that there was huge demand for biographical material about Dickens, but there were relatively few extended biographies with new material.<sup>3</sup> The few that did appear, including George Augustus Sala's *Charles Dickens*,<sup>4</sup> John Camden Hotten's *Charles Dickens: The Story of His Life* (1870), Charles Kent's *Charles Dickens as a Reader* (1872) and Forster's seminal *Life of Charles Dickens*, enjoyed great popularity in spite of their very different approaches, formats and authors, and in fact provided material for further curation and collation in future articles. James A. Davies describes Hotten and Sala as "the most important pre-Forster biographers of Dickens" ("Striving for Honesty: An Approach to Forster's *Life*" 43); however, he dismisses Hotten as "blandly uncritical" and Sala as "adulatory" (41). While these assessments are broadly true, the texts provide useful comparisons with Forster and the other writings by Dickens's 'young men'. Sala, as one of them, is discussed in chapter 4. Kent who, like Sala, contributed to *Household Words* and *All The Year Round*, offered a perspective somewhere between the opportunistic and hastily-compiled biography that Hotten published and the family-authorised format employed by Forster. Hotten's book, written in collaboration with the journalist H. T. Taverner, was bound in such a way as to be uniform with Chapman and Hall's Charles Dickens Edition of the novels (Michael Slater, *Scandal*, 35). In a clear attempt to appear to have gained family authorisation, Hotten submitted proofs to Catherine Dickens to correct – though we have no evidence to show that she ever actually read them (35). While this chapter primarily focuses on Forster, these examples will be used to discuss on one hand the

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<sup>3</sup> Duane DeVries, in analysing these articles and memoirs, claims in the instance of Phebe A. Hanaford's *The Life and Writings of Charles Dickens, A Woman's Memorial Volume* that the memorial is ninety-five percent excerpts from Dickens's own works (DeVries xliii).

<sup>4</sup> A pamphlet elaborating on his original obituary published in the *Daily Telegraph* on 10 June 1870.

typicality, and on the other the originality, of Forster's account.

While the 1870s also saw notable memorial volumes and biographies in America and Canada,<sup>5</sup> I am focusing on the biographies first published in Britain in the early 1870s, as part of the larger aim of exploring the creation of the 'characteristic' Dickens in the mind of the English reading public. Focusing on the 'characteristic' enables us to follow Dickens's lead, established in chapter 1, in exploring the personality of biographical subjects. 'Characteristic' as both an adjective and a noun focuses on the essential quality or nature of a person or thing; it is a "distinctive mark" or "essential peculiarity or quality" (*OED*). These definitions highlight many of the questions I will be discussing: the word both as a noun and adjective connotes the construction of 'essential qualities'. As I show, many anecdotes and descriptions are presented as typical, and characteristics are used to create a 'characteristic' Dickens, but the plurality of these accounts precludes the idea of there being an 'essential' Dickens – although Catherine Peters has credited Forster with seeking "to tell the truth about the essential Dickens as he saw him" (55). Although the various biographies and memorials are starkly different in style and format, there are consistencies and points of comparison that start to create a picture of how Dickens was perceived and remembered in the 1870s and onwards. His skills of observation and imaginative powers, the nature of his posthumous reputation and the impact of his public readings are found in each of these biographies, and while it is Forster's work that remains influential in the field of Dickens Studies, the popularity of these other biographies into the mid and late 1870s – Hotten's appeared in a popular edition even after Forster's first volume was published, and Sala's enjoyed a "tremendous sale" (letter to Edmund Yates, 27 June 1870, 131) and several reprints – demonstrates their importance in the early stages of Dickens's literary afterlife.

Hotten's biographical account, fairly representative of the scissors-and-paste biographies of the period, received a largely positive critical response. A review in the *Era* described it as "well and gracefully told" (31 July 1870), while the *Graphic* was more denigrating: "the author's scissors have been at least as much employed as his pen, and ... his story is, in fact, a compilation bearing numerous signs of haste, and exhibiting

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Shelton Mackenzie's *Life of Charles Dickens; With Personal Recollections and Anecdotes; Letters by "Boz", never before published, and uncollected papers in prose and verse* (1870) and Frederick Beecher Perkins's *Charles Dickens: A Sketch of his Life and Works* (1870) were among the first of the more fleshed out, lengthy biographies to appear. After these, 1871 saw R. A. Hammond's *The Life and Writings of Charles Dickens: A Memorial Volume, containing personal Recollections, Amusing Anecdotes, Letters and Uncollected Papers by "Boz", never before published* and Hanaford's *The Life and Writings of Charles Dickens, A Woman's Memorial Volume*. The most notable is perhaps James T. Fields's *In and Out of Doors with Charles Dickens* (1876) as Fields was a friend and colleague of Dickens's.

not a few errors and misconceptions. ... As his narrative advances it becomes ... more strictly a compilation” (23 July 1870, *Graphic* 3). The *Graphic* focused on Hotten’s revelations both in the advert that appeared on 8 July 1870 (35) and in its review a couple of weeks later: those of Dickens’s middle names and the supposed ‘lost’ novel that was started before *Pickwick*, *Gabriel Vardon*. The biographer carefully played up the pathos of the ‘lost’ novel while admitting that the name existed in a minimally altered form as Gabriel Varden: the revelation was carefully staged, but its impact was immediately diminished by admitting that the name appears in *Barnaby Rudge*. This invites comparison with Forster’s biography and the careful build-up to the autobiographical fragment: Hotten was attempting to compete in a market saturated with repetitive accounts of Dickens’s life, and his advertising shows an attempt to sell his book through these revelations, while Forster’s served to demonstrate his authority. Hotten was also presenting his as the first full-length biography to come out after Dickens’s death.<sup>6</sup> While Hotten’s biography was cruder than that of Forster, there are many similarities. The idea that Dickens died from overwork also seems to have taken root in the public imagination, and is repeated here (328). However, Hotten also adds his own interpretation of Dickens’s fame, as expressed through Pickwick cigars, hats and canes (60).

The way Forster stresses aspects of Dickens’s life resonates with the facets of the author’s self-representation discussed in chapter 1. Forster too was concerned with his subject’s childhood, the standing of the literary profession and Dickens’s lasting reputation. This chapter explores the rhetorical and biographical techniques the biographer used in narrating his subject’s life, to argue that Forster was able to position himself as unique in terms of knowledge, interpretation and reputation. First, his exclusive knowledge of Dickens’s time in the blacking factory gave Forster an authority above earlier biographies. He used the revelations to make his subject’s successes even more impressive and tied them to questions of literary judgement and understanding: any flaws in Dickens’s writing were suggested to stem from this experience, but so too were the best of his descriptions and characters. Secondly, Forster created an image of the author through letters, engravings and physical descriptions. While appealing to a readership who may have seen Dickens at one of his public readings and who would be

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<sup>6</sup> Although the preface is dated 29 June 1870, suggesting that it was written less than a month after Dickens’s death, it appears to have been published in mid July of that year: on the same day that the *Examiner* published a review of Sala’s recent publication (9 July 1870), the *Graphic* was advertising Hotten’s as forthcoming.

familiar with his image, Forster could sharpen and interpret the image of Dickens, for example in connecting Dickens's eyes not only with him as a public reader but also with his powers of observation, demonstrated through his writings. While newspapers were able to *report* speeches, and other biographies quoted from these to furnish their accounts, Forster could contextualise them more deeply and intimately. Through comparisons with writers such as Oliver Goldsmith, of whom Forster had also written a biography, and against a background of childhood struggle and hard work, the biographer was able to emphasise his friend and subject's contribution to literature through financial and literary success. For Forster, Dickens's life represented a (qualified) victory in the debate surrounding the dignity of literature: he was loved, critically respected and financially successful. I argue that Forster guided future understandings of Dickens and his work through his weaving of the author's life with his fiction. He also addressed particular criticisms about Dickens's imagination from H. A. Taine and George Henry Lewes directly, again legitimising his own interpretation by 'proving' it with biographical details. A key question that runs through the accounts handled in this thesis is *how* to remember Dickens: the particular balance that is achieved in narrating his life, fiction and non-fiction is important, and raises further questions about suppression, choice and ownership that is developed in chapter 3. I also discuss Forster's proof copy of the *Life*, possibly used in preparing the revised 1876 edition.

## 2.1. Contextualising Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*

The very fact, as demonstrated by Kitton, Miller and DeVries, that biographical information about Dickens was being collected and disseminated through such a wide range of forms demonstrates the difficulty of classifying and comparing biographical forms. Hotten is the only biographer considered here not to have a personal connection with Dickens or his family, and yet the taboo of passing judgement on domestic problems is determinedly observed (all of the biographies discussed here touched delicately on Dickens's separation from his wife, for example). The following section shows how Forster's life interacts with existing biographical discourse of the 1870s.

The particular balance between reverence and revelation in Victorian life writing has been the subject of debate since at least the early twentieth century, particularly in understanding the impact of James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*. Boswell's narrative

of Johnson's life is focused on their friendship, drawing from letters but also from conversations between the two men: he described his text as deliberately interweaving "what he [Johnson] privately wrote, and said, and thought; by which mankind are enabled, as it were, to see him live" (4). He added, "What I consider as the peculiar value of the following work, is, the quantity that it contains of Johnson's conversation" (5); as such, verifiable biographical facts are presented as equal in importance to witticisms and conversation, often framed by them. What has been understood by the 'Boswell tradition', then, is a picture of a life created through anecdote, letters, and published material which pays great attention to the "minute details of daily life" (5). Boswell denigrated biographies that

rarely afford any other account than might be collected from public papers, but imagine themselves writing a life, when they exhibit a chronological series of actions or preferments; and have so little regard to the manners or behaviour of their heroes, that more knowledge may be gained of a man's real character, by a short conversation with one of his servants, than from a formal and studied narrative, begun with his pedigree, and ended with his funeral. (6)

In contrast to dismissal of Boswell's influence (Nicolson 125), critics including Juliette Atkinson have suggested that the influence of eighteenth-century biography was strong throughout the century and that the spectre of Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* in particular haunted the Victorian biographer with the threat that "no biography published in the nineteenth century could rival Boswell's" (17). I contend that many biographies (Hotten's included) were content not to try, deliberately eschewing this model for a more restrained, often primarily factual rather than interpretative biography dealing with numbers of serialisations printed, dates and occasions – just the kind of biography Boswell decried as "barren and useless" (6). At the same time, they sought to differentiate themselves by offering some new perspective or information: Hotten advertising details of a 'lost' novel, for example, while a *Christmas Memorial of Charles Dickens* (1870) was advertised as containing a facsimile of the last letter that Dickens ever wrote.<sup>7</sup>

Forster's *Life*, however, combined personal reminiscences and analysis of income

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander Hume's *Christmas Memorial of Charles Dickens*. By A. B. Hume. With a Facsimile of his Last Letter is discussed later in this chapter.

and popularity with the reticence required of Victorian biography. Forster glossed over other periods of Dickens's life in favour of rather dry accounts of his earnings (656), particularly his domestic life, which may have led to one reviewer's impression of Dickens's obsession with money; one reviewer complained that Forster self-confessedly did not "admit the reader to his full confidence about his [Dickens's] writing" (409) but gave more peculiarly specific information about his finances. In a review for the *Spectator* in February 1874, R. H. Hutton argued that:

Dickens depended more than most men on the stimulus which outer things provided for him; first, on the excitement caused by the popularity of his books, and on that which he drew from his own personal friends' private appreciation; then on the applause which attended his acting and readings, the intensity of the eagerness to hear him and the emotion he excited; and lastly, on the triumph excited by the counting-up of the almost fabulous sums which the readings produced. (584)

Hutton characterised Forster's Dickens as a man seeking constant approval and caught up in his own fame. The biographer meticulously recounted profits and circulation figures for the novels (see for example 315, 624) and related Dickens's own amazement at the sums he received for readings in America (798). While creating an image of the author's lively nature and complexities, Forster seemed particularly concerned with the more practical, public aspects of his life, framing the narrative in terms of his publications and, subsequently, relationships with publishers.

The biography is a blend of the very personal and the public, even while Forster sought to repress some of the more personal details and present Dickens's relationships with the public – and his publishers – in the best possible light. Forster even felt the need to address his inclusion of some more treacherous dealings with publishers recorded in the first volume:

The only fair rule ... was, in a memoir of his life, to confine the mention of such things to what was strictly necessary to explain its narrative. This accordingly has been done; and, in the several disagreements it has been necessary to advert to, I cannot charge myself with having in a single instance overstepped the rule. Objection has been made to my revival of the early

differences with Mr. Bentley. But silence respecting them was incompatible with what absolutely required to be said, if the picture of Dickens in his most interesting time, at the outset of his career in letters, was not to be omitted altogether. ... (670)

It is striking that Forster described the outset of Dickens's literary career as his 'most interesting time', and the biographer's choice of particular anecdotes and scenes shape the biography. He included an instance where the author was pages short of an instalment, for example (85), but did not provide a physical description of Catherine. He dedicated a chapter to Gad's Hill, but the author's children often appear as almost an afterthought in passages quoted from Dickens's letters from America (225, 237, 241-42).

The Boswell tradition is clearly important to understanding Forster's biography. However, John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*, written at the end of the seventeenth century, is also a significant tonal influence. Aubrey sought to incorporate accounts from friends and others who had known his subjects, creating a more rounded image of famous figures. In the final volume Forster addressed criticisms that he was not enough like Boswell: "A book must be judged for what it aims to be, and not for what it cannot by possibility be" (816). Perhaps Forster had another model, like Aubrey in mind; nevertheless, it is Boswell to whom reviewers (and even friends) returned. For Forster, it was not possible to emulate Boswell because of the subject, rather than the biographer. The biography explains that Dickens was unlike Johnson in that his conversation was not "bookish" and had "no ostentation", and so while his conversation was "attractive because so keenly observant, and lighted up with so many touches of humorous fancy", unlike Johnson's "there were not many things to bring away" (816). As such, Forster could not rely on the pithy witticisms that animate Boswell's account of Johnson.

According to Forster, Dickens was to his closest friend as he was to himself, rather than being best expressed in his social persona (817). Even Forster, compared to Boswell by contemporaries and later critics,<sup>8</sup> sought to defend himself from comparisons. However, contrary to Nicolson's suggestion in 1927 that turning away from the Boswell tradition meant returning to a hagiographic style, Forster did not

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth G. Gitter argues that Forster is trying to be a "Boswellian authority" (129), while the kind of criticisms that Hermione Lee notes about Boswell – the biography's focus on the years he knew Johnson, for example – resonate with criticisms of Forster (43).

argue that Boswell's intimate biography was inappropriate but that the subjects were too different. Boswell is clearly present as a comparison, and Forster's 1848 *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith* had also been compared to Boswell's – though in terms of its mastery of the genre of biography, rather than the intimacy between biographer and subject.<sup>9</sup> Thomas Carlyle wrote to him, having received a copy, that “it is capital, equally good to the end. ... Except *Boswell's* there is no Biography in the English language worth naming beside it” (13 April 1848, *Carlyle Letters Online*). The shadow of Boswell does not seem to haunt Hotten or Kent however, and while Nicolson underestimates the importance of Boswell in the nineteenth century, Atkinson would seem to overestimate it. I argue that Forster was able to use the resonances with Boswell and Johnson occasioned by his comparably intimate friendship with Dickens, and that both biographers sought to use their subjects' own words, but these work very differently in the two texts. Forster's skill is in bringing the facts of his subject's life together with his published works in an act of biographical interpretation in which he has positioned himself as uniquely qualified.

A particularly important moment within the *Life* is the death of Dickens's daughter Dora, and it is related almost dramatically. Forster withheld the fact that the child had died until his friend had finished making a public speech:

Half an hour before he rose to speak I had been called out of the room. It was the servant from Devonshire-terrace to tell me his child Dora was suddenly dead. ... I satisfied myself that it would be best to permit his part of the proceedings to close before the truth was told to him. But as he went on, after the sentences I have quoted, to speak of actors having to come from scenes of sickness, of suffering, aye, even of death itself, to play their parts before us, my part was very difficult. “Yet how often is it with all of us,” he proceeded to say, and I remember to this hour with that anguish I listened to words that had for myself alone, in all the crowded room, their full significance: “how often is it with all of us, that in our several spheres we have to do violence to our feelings, and to hide our hearts in carrying on this fight of life, if we would bravely discharge in it our duties and responsibilities.” (539-40)

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<sup>9</sup> The biography was published in 1848 as the *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith*, but retitled the *Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith* when republished in 1854, and revised substantially. Percy Fitzgerald said of this later edition that “all the pleasant air of story-telling so suited to the subject were (sic) abolished” (qtd. in Matz 119).

It was Forster alone who could understand the weight of Dickens's words at that moment: the narrative emphasises the pathos but was written to spare the feelings of the author's remaining family,<sup>10</sup> setting Forster up as the most qualified to interpret and understand his famous friend. Unlike the biographies that simply collated information about Dickens's life from his speeches, Forster was able to impart new meaning to the speech using his own memories: it became a part of the story, not simply the source of it. A brief reference to Dora's grave at Highgate is given (540), and then Forster moves on to the author's next public engagement. In contrast, the life and death (and replacement) of the pet raven Grip forms a large part of an early chapter,<sup>11</sup> one in which the birth of the author's second son occupies less than a sentence (164). The death of the raven is described as a "domestic calamity" (165) in hyperbolic language, was announced in a black-lined envelope indicative of mourning, and the humour of the situation is clearly the focus. Forster even went so far as to include a facsimile of Daniel Maclise's covering letter, while the biography contains only short references to the deaths of Dickens's children and many of Forster's friends.<sup>12</sup>

The children and women in Dickens's life are one area of conspicuous reticence picked up on by readers like Harriet Martineau, who wrote that, "To how great an extent the women of his family are ignored in the book! The whole impression left by it is very melancholy" (letter 20 March 1873, *Memorials of Harriet Martineau by Maria Weston Chapman* 367). This absence, equally noticeable in the other biographies discussed in this chapter, is perhaps explained by the fact that Forster (and other biographers) had to take into account the privacy and wishes of those still living: his sensitivity to this issue is demonstrated in a footnote in which he suggested he is able to include an anecdote from the biologist, geologist and physician Louis Agassiz because his "death is unhappily announced while I write, [and] ... it will no longer be unbecoming to quote his allusion" (766). This does not explain the full extent of the exclusion, however. Tomalin suggests that Dickens learned mimicry from his mother, but was ashamed of her (75). She too is only a shadowy figure in the biography, in spite of the fact that she lived until 1863.

The glossing over of Catherine is conspicuous: Elizabeth G. Gitter notes that

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<sup>10</sup> Georgina wrote to Annie to say she had faith in Forster relating the marital breakdown in a way that gave "no gratification to scandalous curiosity" (qtd. in Slater, *Scandal* 37).

<sup>11</sup> Chapter 14 of volume 1 of the first edition (1872), book 2 chapter IX in the revised edition (1876).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the death of Walter Dickens (173) or the death of Douglas Jerrold (629).

Forster presents himself as indispensable while Catherine is hardly mentioned and is never described (132). Georgina received more of a physical description than Dickens's wife, despite the fact that Georgina was still living (292-93). Gitter writes of Forster "extinguishing" Catherine, and the wariness in Victorian biography of exposing the private lives of literary figures while being respectful is brought to light here. Slater has highlighted the "studied anti-sensationalism" of the title Forster used for the section on Dickens's marriage, "What happened at this time" (*Scandal* 38, Forster 635), which is not quite the same as 'extinguishing' Catherine. In Elizabeth Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë the "sacred doors of home are closed upon her married life" (450), but Charlotte's words are used to describe her engagement to and admiration of Mr Nicholls in a way that Forster never does with Catherine (447), although the Pilgrim letters reveal some tender moments in their courtship. Catherine is most vividly represented when Dickens had been worried about her (or she has had a near-death experience), and his stories made it seem (humorously) as if she was regularly in these kinds of situations. The inclusion of these anecdotes emphasised Dickens's domestic life and the humour that he found in the everyday. In the second volume Catherine is nearly plunged into a ditch, and Dickens's mix of humour and concern is given to us in his own words:

At the top of a steep hill on the road, with a ditch on each side, the pony bolted, upon which what does John do but jump out! ... The reins immediately became entangled in the wheels, and away went the pony down the hill madly, with Kate inside rending the Isle of Thanet with her screams. The accident might have been a fearful one, if the pony had not, thank Heaven, on getting to the bottom, pitched over the side. ... (494)

Nothing remains of this letter outside of the biography so we cannot know if and to what extent Forster had edited the anecdote, but Dickens's concern for his wife is palpable. A similar incident – another near miss – occurs in the first volume at Glencoe. In torrential rain Kate was induced to exit the carriage rather than cross the Black Mount inside of it, and the horses and carriage were nearly lost in the river. Dickens was "quite sick to think how I should have felt if Kate had been inside" (188). The role of the family's reminiscences and the *Letters of Charles Dickens 1833-1870* edited by Georgina and Mamie in responding to these omissions is addressed in chapter 3 but,

like Boswell, these examples demonstrate a focus on the homosocial friendship over family bonds that the remaining family sought to redress after Forster's own death in 1876.

Within an essentially chronological framework, Forster sometimes moved out of sequence, comparing the younger Dickens to the "grizzled" figure of the author's later life (84), tying a chance use of the phrase "NO THOROUGHFARE" to a moment three years before the author's death (96) and even leaping from Dickens's art in *The Old Curiosity Shop* to a full citation of Bret Harte's poetic tribute in 1871 (153). John Bowen has described this as a "strange, slightly anachronistic, thing for Forster to do, as the poem dates not from the early 1840s ... but from 1870 and the immediate aftermath of Dickens's death" (203), and revealed that this was the only time that Forster quoted any literary work in full (other than by the subject himself) anywhere in the biography (204). Dickens had wanted Harte to contribute to *All The Year Round* and admired him, but the two had never met. Harte is brought up here as the "very last" tribute to Little Nell and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (153), but again the author's fate is presented as bound up with his character's, as her death brings memories of his. This bringing together of different pasts, and the past and present, aids the biography's cohesiveness but also allowed Forster to consider Dickens's characteristics and appearance at different stages of their acquaintance. Consequently, we get a more nuanced picture of the author. One of the final chapters of the *Life* sums up the characteristics of the man over his whole life, returning to descriptions Forster laid out in the first volume (84-85).

Forster was also able to refine his arguments and portrayals by publishing the biography in three volumes: he was able to respond directly to critics and shape his depiction of Dickens as he wrote. As such, the third volume of the biography was received differently from the first two: Francis Cunningham wrote to Forster that he wished "that you had ... finished the book as you commenced it on the C.D. to J.F. principle – it was evidently what C.D. himself desired, and it gave the Biography a character distinct from any other Biography – making it in fact an Autobiography [without the] Ego" (London, National Art Library, Forster Collection, "Letters to John Forster About His *Life of Dickens* 1871-75", MS F.D 18 33, letter 8 February 1874). In a way that is not replicated by any other of the writers discussed in this chapter, the figure of Dickens that Forster has left us with at the end of the biography has been modulated and mediated by the biographer through the act of writing. Although it might not be

unusual for a biography to contain much of the personality of the biographer, Forster's close relationship with Dickens makes it a singular act of mourning, remembrance and image control.

This writing-as-mourning is exemplified in Forster's own copy of the *Life*, with minor annotations by the author, held in the British Library (C.144.d.1). The volumes were not bound at the same time, and though the first and third volumes are first editions the second is a ten thousandth. Forster's annotations dwindled after the first volume, the final including only a minor correction to the index (3.178) – possibly ahead of the revised edition of 1876. Forster was still making minor alterations post-publication, correcting dates and mistakes in grammar and syntax, redrafting marginal headings and marking out sections with ticks, crosses and lines alongside whole paragraphs for emphasis. Interestingly, there is a minor correction to the grammar of the autobiographical fragment – a “was” to a “were” (1.39) – that raises further doubts about the integrity of the autobiographical text. Not only does the process of writing seem to have been a way of mourning his friend, but Forster seems to have been unable to let the work go. There is a mix of authorial fussiness over capitals (1.176, 2.157), and highlighting that seems to have no editorial function, suggesting that he has marked the copy for his own use. This is a work that he seems to have returned to and drawn something personal from. In several places in the first volume he has noted ‘C.D. to J.F.’ next to quotations from letters; perhaps criticisms that he relied too heavily on his own correspondence caused him to begin to count how often, and where, he did so (1.98, 1.99, 1.101, 1.02, 1.105, 1.115, 1.116, 1.117, 1.118, 1.123). One of the paragraphs highlighted with a simple pencil line is a letter from Dickens in response to Forster's doubts about his friend setting up a daily or weekly periodical called the *Cricketer*:

Many thanks for your affectionate letter, which is full of generous truth. These considerations weigh with me, *heavily*: but I think I descry in these times, greater stimulants to such an effort; greater chance of some fair recognition of it; greater means of persevering in it, or retiring from it unscratched by any weapon one should care for; than at any other period. And most of all I have, sometimes, that possibility of failing health or fading popularity before me, which beckons me to such a venture when it comes within my reach. At the worst, I have written to little purpose, if I cannot *write myself right* in people's minds, in such a case as this. (Forster 2.191; Pilgrim 4.423)

The sentiment must have resonated with Forster, also facing his own mortality and rereading the *Life* at the end of his own. Perhaps he saw in it a call to effort, a call to ‘write himself right’, from his dearest friend.

## 2.2. From Death to Childhood

Because of the ‘secret’ of Dickens’s childhood, how biographies write the author’s early years is an obvious point of difference. Another striking opportunity for comparison across various biographies is how they represent the readings: parts of Dickens’s life that are not hidden but just the opposite. The readings have also been interpreted as one of the causes of the rift between Forster and Dickens later in life, and Forster himself argued that they showed Dickens meant “to abandon every hope of resettling his disordered home” and fixing his marriage (642).

Kent’s *Charles Dickens as a Reader* (1872) is a very different kind of memorial from Forster’s biography.<sup>13</sup> Broken down into detailed descriptions of each of the public readings, and recounting anecdotes from particular instances, it culminates in the final reading and famous parting speech. Laurence Mazzeno identifies Kent’s account as the first of the “specialty studies” of Dickens (32). Kent contributed to *Household Words* and *All The Year Round* and knew Dickens well, having met him in 1848 following Dickens’s favourable response to his review of *Dombey and Son* for the *Sun* (14 April 1848, Pilgrim 5.280, also discussed in Kitton, *Dickensiana*, 255). However, this biographical offering lacked the popularity of Forster’s, or even Hotten’s, work, and received harsher criticism: a review in the *Examiner* (31 August 1872) said that:

we like and respect Mr Kent for his enthusiastic devotion to his gifted and valued friend, but ... we should hardly say that Mr Dickens’s readings were of quite the transcendent importance which our author assigns to them. But this criticism only applies to the air of importance and, if we may say so, of “fussiness” which Mr Kent feels it necessary to assume. ... (863)

This dismissal of the readings as less important than the novels may be unsurprising, but Hotten and Forster both blamed overwork for Dickens’s death. The decision to

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<sup>13</sup> In 1879 Kent would publish a follow-up in the form of “Charles Dickens as a Journalist”. This article appeared, in shorthand, in *The Journalist* (Kitton 255).

perform for the public in this way was a monumental one, that set him apart from other authors of the time: William Makepeace Thackeray lectured but did not read his own works although Wilkie Collins, emulating his friend, would undertake his own American reading tour 1873-74. For Forster, at least, the reading tours represented an exchange of higher for lower values.<sup>14</sup> Kent's admiration for Dickens as a reader and defence of the undertaking mark his book out from the others: even while acknowledging the "enormous strain" of the readings, he insisted that Dickens "never once, for a single instance ... overstepp[ed] the boundaries of nature" (87). However, the connections between his death and the stress of the readings are alluded to, and the close of the memorial aligns Dickens's parting from the stage with his demise (270).

Kent not only had to defend the reading tours against the charges of insignificance and causing the author's early death, but to defend Dickens against claims of 'feminine susceptibility'. While describing the pathos and skill with which he read, he made clear that he expressed "nothing but the manliest emotion" (29) and "The manly, cordial voice only faltered once at the very last" (270). For Kent, Dickens's manliness and emotional expression were evident in his skill as a reader of his own works. Forster also described 'feminine' aspects of Dickens's character (39), using the author's difficult childhood as an excuse for this perceived 'feminine weakness' in response to the criticisms of Lewes and Taine. There is a complicated alignment of Dickens's early childhood experience with the impulse to perform that led to his death, and it was negotiated by Forster in response to specific criticisms of Dickens, as I will show.

As discussed in the introduction, Forster attacked the claims made by Taine in his *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* that Dickens was feminine (2.349). Taine, an influential French philosopher and historian, incorporated his earlier essay, "Charles Dickens: son talent et ses oeuvres" (published in 1856 in *Revue des deux mondes* and included in his *Essais de critique littéraire et d'histoire* in 1858) into this work which was translated into English in 1871. The work sought to examine the moral character of the nation through its literature (1.ix), and Taine seemed particularly concerned with the inner life of the artist. He suggested that historians should:

lay bare, under every detail of architecture, every stroke in a picture, every phrase in a writing, the special sensation which was enacted in the soul of artist

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<sup>14</sup> Forster writes "My own part of that steady discussion was that of steady dissuasion throughout: though this might perhaps have been less persistent if I could have reconciled myself to the belief, which I never at any time did, that Public Readings were a worthy employment for a man of his genius" (709).

or writer. ... everything is a symbol to him; while his eyes read the text, his soul and mind pursue the continuous development and everchanging succession of the emotions and conceptions out of which the text has sprung: in short, he unveils psychology. (1.5)

He described Dickens, Thackeray and Thomas Macaulay as “the most original minds, the most consistent, and the most contrasted” of their age (2.337). So far there is seemingly nothing to rile Forster. His *Life* agreed with this view of the historian: his tendency to relate the author to his characters, and specifically the role of the autobiographical fragment, was an exercise in psychology characterised by Robert L. Patten as “The most triumphant, most lasting achievement of all” (328). Patten has written that Dickens was able to:

so suture his writing to his own corporeal identity that he supplied the template for Freud and Edmund Wilson: the writer, whose wounded body and psyche never heal, writes out of that injury recuperative narratives moving readers to believe ... that it is possible under most circumstances to assemble a loving community bound by trust, our mutual friends if not relations. Dickens shapes that author backwards. (*Charles Dickens and “Boz”*: *The Birth of the Industrial-Age Author* 328)

This is not purely Dickens’s shaping influence however; it is a movement only possible in conjunction with Forster, and we will most likely never know the extent to which the words we have been given have been edited, reordered or censored – most strikingly with regard to the autobiographical fragment. The ‘community’ is also a community of two, as Forster’s authority was predicated on the fact that only he knew the full story.<sup>15</sup> The ‘backwards-shaping’ of the author is also a Forsterian move that speaks well to the shape of the three-volume *Life*: the parries in the final volume encourage the reader to revisit the formative experiences laid out in the first few chapters, particularly the autobiographical fragment.

Taine’s nuanced approach to criticism puts the emphasis on the author. The work was only translated into English in 1871, and so Forster suggested that Dickens would

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<sup>15</sup> As will be discussed in chapter 3, it is likely that Catherine also knew about Warren’s Blacking (see Charley’s preface to *David Copperfield*, xx).

have been unaware of it in spite of his ability to read French (324). He found it “pleasant to think that he never saw the description” (324) and we can see why Forster felt compelled to respond to Taine as he does to no other critic in the biography (his name is mentioned twenty-eight times, and the only other critic who receives extended treatment is George Henry Lewes – in this same chapter). Taine’s chapter discussing Dickens’s works opens in a way that uniquely affects Forster:

Were Dickens dead, his biography might be written. On the day after the burial of a celebrated man, his friends and enemies apply themselves to the work; his schoolfellows relate in the newspapers his boyish pranks; another man recalls exactly, and word for word, the conversations he had with him a score of years ago. (2.339)

Forster was both the friend applying himself to the work and the man recalling the conversations. In the first volume of the biography, Forster related stories from Dickens’s schoolfellows (43-45). The passage continues:

The lawyer, who manages the affairs of the deceased, draws up a list of the different offices he has filled, his titles, dates and figures, and reveals to the matter-of-fact readers how the money left has been invested, and how the fortune has been made; the grandnephews and second cousins publish an account of his acts of humanity, and the catalogue of his domestic virtues. If there is no literary genius in the family, they select an Oxford man, conscientious, learned, who ... comes ten years later, some fine Christmas morning ... to present the assembled family three quartos, of eight hundred pages, the easy style of which would send a German from Berlin to sleep. (2.339)

Forster, while not an Oxford man, had abandoned the University of Cambridge for law at University College (and later abandoned a legal career) (Davies, *John Forster: A Literary Life*, 8). Taine was satirising a biographical process with similarities to the one Forster was undertaking, making light of the death of Dickens: the next sentence begins “Unfortunately Dickens is still alive” (2.339). Taine went on to discuss the author’s reticence when it came to revealing biographical information. He concluded that his

books “show of him all that it is important to know” (2.339), an idea that resonates with Forster’s claim that the books demonstrate Dickens’s inner life.

Taine then began the perceived assault on Dickens’s imagination that Forster addressed in his biography. Taine began by describing the author’s imagination as “lucid and energetic” (2.340) and “pure” (2.341); it was so lively that “it carries everything with it in the path it chooses” (2.342), infusing inanimate objects with impressive energy. This is the turning point, for “it is all but an enchantment” (2.343); “His excessive imagination is like a string too tightly stretched; it produces of itself, without any violent shock, sounds not otherwise heard” (2.343). Dickens’s imagination was obsessive, like “that of monomaniacs” (2.344). This allowed him to create mad characters and enter “into their madness” (2.344). His imagination is viewed as “irregular, excessive, capable of fixed ideas ... [able to] exhibit the derangements of reason” (2.346). His imagination meant that he “does not perceive great things” and “does not attain beauty” (2.346): Taine denied him sublimity (2.348) and emphasised an exaggerated passion (2.349) that made Dickens popular, but excluded him from being a great author. The analysis closes on a more positive note: “when a talented writer, often a writer of genius, reaches the sensibility which is bruised or buried by education and national institutions, he moves his reader in the most inner depths, and becomes the master of all hearts” (2.366). So Dickens was a writer of genius, one ennobled and limited by an overly passionate imagination. The word ‘imagination’ thus became a loaded one for Forster. He attacked Taine for failing to appreciate Dickens’s humour (324) and began to reshape what imagination means: for him, it was the author’s “highest faculty” (721) and it is through his humour and imagination combined that he produced his “greatest results” (421). Through an exploration of what imagination means for the reader, Forster was also able to draw out what he had touched on in his first volume: what Dickens might have been. The young Charles is described by Forster as having “an amount of experience as well as fancy unusual in such a child, and with a dangerous kind of wandering intelligence” (7):<sup>16</sup> thus his vivid imaginative faculties and intelligence enhanced his suffering in the blacking factory, but were also enhanced *by* that suffering.

The episode was picked up on by contemporaries as one of the most shocking and exciting parts of the biography, and remains singularly influential today. At the time, contemporaries like the poet and novelist Robert Buchanan in his article “The ‘Good

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<sup>16</sup> This has been rephrased from the first edition, in which Forster calls it “an unusual sort of knowledge and fancy for such a child, and with a dangerous kind of wandering intelligence” (1.12).

Genie' of Fiction: Thoughts while reading Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*" for *St Paul's Magazine* (February 1872) took the incident and turned it into the shaping influence of the author's life. He suggested Dickens's "odd" view of life was a result of his childhood experience: "It may seem putting the case too strongly, but Charles Dickens, having crushed into his childish experience a whole world of sorrow and humorous insight, so loaded his soul that he never grew any older" (579). Forster did not couch it in this way, giving emphasis to Dickens's formative years prior to and following the incident. Before he recounted his subject's experiences in the blacking factory, he described the idyllic life the young Charles felt he had led at Chatham. When taken to London, "all the wonderful romance together, including a red-cheeked baby he had been wildly in love with, were to vanish like a dream" (9).<sup>17</sup> Forster's biography goes on to tell us that, in London, "neglected and miserable as he was, he managed gradually to transfer to London all the dreaminess and all the romance with which he had invested Chatham" (11). Forster also described this as a kind of unconscious education, suggesting that the education Dickens needed – and received – was one that enabled him to imbue his surroundings with romance, imagination and a sense of unreality ("dreaminess"). Buchanan read Forster's description of Dickens's occasional "stern and even cold isolation" (39) and ability to be "hard and aggressive" or fierce (38) as the consequence of his immature nature: "Child-like he had fits of cold reserve, stubborn and crueler than the reserve of any perfectly cultured man" (579). Buchanan went so far as to say this child-likeness meant Dickens was "out of place in the cold, worldly circle of literature, in the bald bare academy of English culture, where his queer stories and quaint ways were simply astonishing, until even that hard circle began to love" him (579). While Forster seems to allow Dickens to tell the story of his childhood in his own words, he uses the telling marginal note "Facilis Descensus" when the autobiographical narrative tells of the relative who intended to teach young Charles during his breaks at the factory, but did not make it work. The phrase "facilis descensus Averno", is from Virgil's *Aeneid* (6.126) and refers to Aeneas's easy descent into the underworld – the crux being that it is easier to go down than to come back up.<sup>18</sup>

The young Charles lacked a teacher and was at risk of taking the wrong path, and the threat of this haunted the older man: the Dickens of the autobiographical fragment tells

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<sup>17</sup> Slater identifies the "red-cheeked baby" as Lucy Stroughill, a neighbour in Chatham (*Dickens and Women* 40).

<sup>18</sup> A marginal subtitle (1.32). The marginal subtitles, present in the first edition, are not used in Ley's annotated edition of the revised 1876 edition.

us that “My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life” (26). Simon James has argued that “what is being dramatized in the fragment is not only the factual details of the child-Dickens’s fall in life, but, alongside it, the effect of the recall of those details on the mature novelist” (45). Bowen takes this further, highlighting the parallels that Forster draws between Dickens and Little Nell in this chapter (“A Garland for *The Old Curiosity Shop*” 9), particularly in the choice of ‘wandering’ and the ways in which Dickens’s memory is bound up with the idea of walking in this passage (11). Bowen argues that Dickens’s forgetting that he is a man raises the astounding possibility that he is “A woman? A boy? A girl?” (11). It is unsurprising that Forster did not explore the possibility of this moment of gender dysphoria, instead showing the implications of this memory for Dickens’s critical reception and the shaping of the narrative of his life; as I discuss in the next section, he was keen to defend Dickens against charges of ‘feminine’ susceptibility. Instead, the possibility of an intelligence prone to misery without proper guidance was realised in Forster’s account: he described Dickens’s experience as “tragical” multiple times, and presented the story as “unsurpassed in even the wonders of his published writings” (24). Patten takes issue with Forster’s use of ‘tragical’, arguing that the fragment “has more emotional turns and nuances in it than Forster’s characterization of it” (“Whitewashing the Blacking Factory” 6), but it is significant that in the first telling of Dickens’s childhood it *is* characterised as a tragic event. Patten contextualises the fragment within Dickens’s writings in the 1840s, but what I am concerned with is how Forster’s *Life* laid the foundations for understanding Dickens’s life in the 1870s.

The child that emerged from the blacking factory was untainted in his gentility, but not only had he been made “uneasy, shrinking, and over-sensitive” he also had: “A too great confidence in himself, a sense that everything was possible to the will that would make it so, laid occasionally upon him self-imposed burdens greater than might be borne by any one with safety” (38). As one unsigned review in *Atlantic Monthly* put it, Forster’s account gave the impression that “His whole existence was a prolonged storm and stress, and the wonder is, not that he died so young, but that he lived to be so old” (February 1873, 239). Forster returned to the idea that Dickens could have ended up with “something of a vagabond existence” in the third volume:

Anything more completely opposed to the Micawber type could hardly be conceived, and yet there were moments (really and truly only moments) when the fancy would arise that if the conditions of his life had been reversed, something of a vagabond existence (using the word in Goldsmith's meaning) might have supervened. It would have been an unspeakable misery to him, but it might have come nevertheless. (636)

As I show in the following section, the choice of 'fancy' here is in deliberate contrast to 'imagination', and draws a line between a possible reality and a dangerous daydream.

Forster's account also invokes Goldsmith's series of articles, *Letters from a Citizen of the World to His Friends in the East*. There were many links between the two authors: Dickens's early nickname 'Boz' was derived from Moses of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and when writing for the *Evening Chronicle* he called himself 'Tibbs', a character from *Citizen of the World*. Dickens's early teacher, William Giles, gave him *The Bee*, a book of Goldsmith's writings. In *Citizen of the World*, Goldsmith wrote: "Men may be very learned, and yet very miserable ... I esteem, therefore, the traveller who instructs the heart, but despise him who only indulges the imagination ... he who goes from country to country, guided by the blind impulse of curiosity, is only a vagabond" (36-37). The idea of 'misery' is present in both extracts, and Dickens's imagination is reclaimed as that of the good man in opposition to the vagabond. Forster gives us a man whose imagination helped him to achieve a higher purpose, rather than having free rein. Dickens's success as a writer is suggested by Forster to be part of this early lesson in control. Strikingly, a reference to Forster's biography of Goldsmith also appears in Gaskell's biography of Brontë (456); she is inspired to mention Charlotte's simple mourners in Haworth in contrast with the eminent literary men described mourning Goldsmith (*Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith* 690). In Gaskell's narrative, a clear contrast is drawn between the domestic, rural woman writer and the esteemed man. While Forster did not draw this kind of comparison, he too used Goldsmith as a reference point to quantify literary success, but in financial terms rather than social ones. What Forster gives is a nuanced story that unites Dickens's childhood, his personality, his works and even his death.

### 2.3. Explaining Dickens

Exactly how to characterise Dickens's imagination has long been debated. Taylor Stoehr synthesises several approaches, drawing a distinction between any possible understanding of Dickens's own perception and the ways in which he narrated the world. Harry Stone has written that "By the time Dickens emerged from the blacking warehouse, he could no more extract the magical from his vision of the world than he could divorce his eyes from seeing or his ears from hearing" (69); he adds that "Everything he wrote filtered through that fanciful vision" (70). That he credits the blacking warehouse with forming Dickens's imaginative faculties is exactly as Forster intended. The word 'fancy', however, is a complexly inflected one for both men, and their use of it owes much to Romantic ideas of imagination. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* created a distinction between 'fancy' and 'imagination', "extricat[ing] ... the Romantic imagination from the clutches of *phantasia* [fancy]" (Theresa M. Kelley 218). Coleridge did not see fancy as merely an inferior version of imagination, but as a "mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE" (*Biographia Literaria* 202). Imagination, for Coleridge, was "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception" (202). The difference between Dickens's imagination and 'fancy' has also been widely discussed, and is summarised by Mildred Newcomb. She sees the figurative image as key to imagination for Dickens: "The image creates a subjective interpretation of phenomena, which becomes a 'felt experience' resulting from some kind of momentary fusion, synthesis, or other accommodation of the two worlds of outer and inner perception" (xi-xii). Newcomb ultimately argues that the "recurring images in Dickens's work" recur "simply because they existed whole in their creator's consciousness from the moment of their inception" (6), which gives his work an "artlessness" (xi). In contrast, she highlights "Dickens's deep belief in the need to reverse the process from fancy back to fact again" (233), which suggests a more self-aware use of 'fancy' in contrast to understanding imagination as like 'automatic writing' for Dickens: a natural, unforced way of perceiving the world. This view fits well with Forster's representation of Dickens's imagination, because it aligns imagination with an innate perceptiveness and makes fancy a more dangerous, more contrived kind of imaginative faculty.

Dickens did not treat ‘fancy’ negatively in his own works,<sup>19</sup> but in the *Life* the possibility is there. In a similar vein, Nader views Forster’s text as adopting “the Romantic mode of biography, characterized as the commitment to image rather than fact, with imagination more dominant than record” (89). This would seem to fit with Newcomb’s argument, suggesting that, in addition to Dickens’s own sense of the image, the biography itself privileges image above fact; together, Newcomb and Nader paint a picture of subjective perception in both biographer and subject. This is difficult to reconcile with the tenor of Forster’s narrative, including its use of circulation figures, and important dates and events. In fact, I argue that Forster seems keen to remove the possibility of subjective interpretation and position his account as the authoritative reading of Dickens. This also moves Forster away from Dickens’s journalism in presenting the writer at work: Slater has argued that some of Dickens’s *Uncommercial Traveller* pieces “seem to be a way of letting the public see the artist-Dickens at work, immersing himself in his raw material” (“How many nurses had Charles Dickens? *The Uncommercial Traveller* and Dickensian Biography” 254), while Forster’s *Life* makes the biographer appear to be the only one who can correctly explain the link between the writings and the life.

In contrast to the “imagination approaching so closely to hallucination” (144) that Lewes described in “Dickens in Relation to Criticism” (1872), published after the first volume of the *Life*, Forster suggested that the basis of Dickens’s imagination in his own experience and life is what got him into trouble (720). This also contrasts with Taine’s suggestion that Dickens had a too-passionate imagination, because Taine’s characterisation of Dickens’s imagination as hallucinatory suggests detachment from life, rather than a basis in reality. Forster’s account gives us two instances where the author had offended by copying characters too closely from life (unsurprisingly the biographer dealt with Miss Mowcher and Harold Skimpole, rather than his own caricatured figure).<sup>20</sup> Forster’s decision to address the offence Dickens had given in copying from life may well have been spurred on by an indignant letter he received from the husband of Mrs. Ellen Roylance’s daughter. Mrs. Roylance was described as the original of *Dombey*’s Mrs. Pipchin in the first volume of Forster’s biography (33), and

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Thomas Gradgrind’s rejection of “Fancy” in *Hard Times*, which must be discarded for “Fact, fact, fact!” (46), and Gradgrind’s daughter, Louisa, who “first coming upon Reason through the tender light of Fancy, ... had seen in it a beneficent god” (150).

<sup>20</sup> See James A. Davies’s article “Forster and Dickens: The Making of Podsnap” for a discussion of Dickens’s caricature of Forster.

her son-in-law wrote of the “large amount of ingratitude” shown by Dickens, whom he refers to as the “late eminent Caricaturist” (National Art Library, Forster Collection, “Letters to John Forster About His *Life of Dickens* 1871-75”, F.D 18 33).

Forster’s own views on writing and its purpose, and the impact of the authors he counted among his friends, can also be seen in his 1869 biography of Walter Savage Landor, another long-time friend, undertaken only one year before Forster would embark on the difficult and wearying task of writing Dickens’s biography. Though this would perhaps suggest to the reader that there would be similarities between the *Life* and *Walter Savage Landor: A Biography*, there are key differences. On the one hand, Landor’s biography provided Forster with the first opportunity to include Forster’s own letters in a work, and presented the problem of censoring these letters in the interest of his friend’s reputation. On the other, in *Landor* the biographer’s purpose is immediately clear: while accepting that “The writer whom crowds of readers wait upon has deserved his following, be it for good or ill” (1), he writes scathingly of the public’s “desire to read without the trouble of thinking, which railways have largely encouraged, and to which many modern reputations are due” (1). Forster defended Landor’s lack of popularity, placing him with those who:

have been too wise for the foolish, and too difficult for the idle. They have left unsatisfied the eager wish for the sensational or merely pleasurable on whose gratification popularity so much depends; and they have never had for their audiences those multitudes of readers who cannot wait to consider and enjoy.  
(2)

The cadence of the passage, balanced by the ‘too’, and the lengthy prose and double negative of ‘never had for their audiences those multitudes of readers who cannot wait’ makes the tone feel rather pompous. Landor is elevated while other popular writers are denigrated – and specifically the writers of sensation fiction, perhaps giving Forster the chance to dig at the friend who in some ways supplanted his friendship with Dickens in the 1860s, Wilkie Collins.

While suggesting the author had been overlooked, Forster did throw in a warning:

Landor wrote without any other aim than to please himself, or satisfy the impulse as it rose. ... If merely a thing pleased him it was preëminent and

excellent above all things ... and though a certain counterpoise to this was in his own nature, his opinions generally being wise and true, and his sympathies almost always generous and noble, it led him frequently into contradictions and extravagance that have deprived him of a portion of his fame. (3)

Within this passage Forster has tried to reconcile Landor's failures in his writing with an innate virtue,<sup>21</sup> Dickens's writing, by contrast, is shown to be infused with a "higher purpose" (*Life* 723) and Forster attempted to demonstrate this through the development of his subject's career and through refutations of critics. Critics picked up on the markedly different tone of the two biographies, writing that the Landor biography was "one of the most merciless pieces of biography ever written" (*American Bibliopolist* 126). James A. Davies has argued that there is "a fundamental change of emphasis" in the Landor biography compared to Forster's previous work, which is "intensified in the *Life*" ("Striving for Honesty: An Approach to Forster's *Life*" 42). The difference in Forster's approach can best be explained through the debate around the dignity of literature in which he engaged in the 1850s. The 'Dignity of Literature' debate, introduced in chapter 1, was born out of discussions about Thackeray's satire *Pendennis*; it has largely been written about as a debate between Thackeray on one side, and Dickens and Forster on the other. As Michael J. Flynn has argued, Thackeray felt challenged by Dickens's success. Forster also confirmed many of Thackeray's feelings about his literary contemporaries (154). Clare Pettitt suggests that "At the centre of the debate about the dignity of literature were anxieties about public display and performance, and the preservation of privacy and propriety" (27): for Forster, Landor's very public scandals needed mediating while Dickens's successes needed to be emphasised.

Davies describes Forster as having been "Literature's Friend. His fierce concern for its well-being, which of course included his own, made him give himself freely. In return he expected, from all *literati*, sound principles and a shared professional love" (*John Forster: A Literary Life* 84). This 'giving' image is quite at odds with the self-serving, self-promoting Forster which many reviewers felt that they recognised (and subsequently attacked). At the beginning this "friendship for literature" came "above

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<sup>21</sup> Forster had persuaded Landor to sign a retraction for his pamphlet *Walter Savage Landor and the Honourable Mrs Yescombe*, in which he attacked a clergyman's wife, accusing her of exploiting his relationship to Geraldine Hooper, a young woman Landor was attracted to. Nevertheless, Landor's *Dry Sticks, Fagoted* (1858) contained further claims and Mary Jane Yescombe took Landor to court for libel, winning £1000 in damages (ODNB).

that for any individual writer” (89), but Davies suggests there was a cooling off of the friendship between Dickens and Forster during the late 1850s and early 1860s because of a “sense of literature having failed him [Forster] socially and materially” (113), as well as Forster’s changes in circumstances, going from a confirmed bachelor focused on literary work to a married man and a busy secretary to the Lunacy Commission. This leaves the *Life* more open to interpretation: Holly Furneaux, whose article “Inscribing Friendship: John Forster’s *Life of Charles Dickens* and the Writing of Male Intimacy in the Victorian Period” is a very positive view of the friendship between Forster and Dickens, suggests that many of Forster’s exclusions were about maintaining a “lifelong commitment to raising the dignity of the literary profession” (248), but Davies would seem to suggest that this commitment had already waned somewhat.

In contrast, some of the more derogatory contemporary reviews would seem to see the biography as lowering the profession rather than raising it. In the *Examiner*, one reviewer wrote:

Each succeeding volume of Mr Forster’s *Life of Dickens* is now looked forward to chiefly out of curiosity to see how the biographer will treat of this or that particular quarrel which the course of events will bring under his pen. ... nothing delights some people so much as to gloat over the littlenesses of great men. (“The Shilling Magazines”, 10 May 1873, 482)

The reviewer is both disapproving and tantalising in his condemnation of Forster’s revelations. He suggests that Forster was cashing in on the gossip surrounding parts of Dickens’s life, in contrast to the idea of biographical reticence protecting any domestic disputes, but the revelations were undeniably one of the *Life*’s key selling points. However, more recent critical scholarship has taken a kinder view of Forster. Ian Hamilton goes so far as to suggest that Forster was in fact too ill to develop the biography in the traditional way: he did not “hunt” for living witnesses but used almost exclusively the letters written to him (155). Forster addressed this himself near the close of the final volume, arguing that, had he used other sources as the basis for the biography, “Gathered from various and differing sources, their interest could not have been as the interest of these”, they could not have been “unblurred by vagueness or reserve” (271) as his letters were, due to the nature of his relationship with Dickens. By the end he was “bereaved, ill, tired, and has a book to finish” (Hamilton 156) balancing

a sense of duty with his own desire for a literary reputation, and this is reinforced by Forster's own letter to C. E. Norton: "The duties of life remain while life remains, but for me the joy of it is gone for ever more" (Harvard, Houghton Library, MS, 22 June 1870). In the biography of Landor, it was perhaps more necessary for Forster to be Boswellian: where the writings were lacking, he could argue that the personal qualities of Landor himself made up for them. With Dickens, we are told that he best expressed himself through his writing, whether letters or published works.

The charge of gossip-mongering was also applied to Hotten, who attempted to defend himself by arguing that "there is nothing necessarily indelicate or improper in the desire of the public to obtain some personal knowledge of the great and good who have just passed away" (ix), insisting that "the writer is not conscious of having written a line which could give pain to others" (x). He spent only a paragraph discussing Dickens's domestic troubles, putting the rumours down to "the usual gossip out of doors" and saying that "The simple explanation was" (244):

a misunderstanding had arisen betwixt Mr. and Mrs. Dickens, of a purely domestic character – so domestic – almost trivial, indeed – that neither law nor friendly arbitration could define or fix the difficulty sufficiently clear to adjudicate upon it. All we can say is, that it was a very great pity that a purely family dispute should have been brought before the public, and ... we trust the reader will think we act wisely in dropping any further mention of it. (244)

Hotten's description of the 'misunderstanding' as 'almost trivial' is perhaps one of the most plainly wrong references to the ordeal to be found in biographies of Dickens. He then carefully directs the reader to the author's dispute with Thackeray over Edmund Yates's expulsion from the Garrick Club (245), substituting this as a sufficiently scandalous tale. The disputes have some similarities: both revolve around the publication of pieces that were deemed unfit to be shared with the public, but in the incident with Thackeray and Yates Dickens is an intermediary, rather than an instigator.<sup>22</sup>

Bound up with the idea of Dickens's imagination and "higher purpose" were his "animal spirits", a phrase employed by Forster twelve times, more than Dickens

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<sup>22</sup> For an exploration of the reasons for Dickens and Thackeray's dispute, see Gordon N. Ray's "Dickens versus Thackeray: The Garrick Club Affair" and chapter 4 of Patrick Leary's *The Punch Brotherhood: Table Talk and Print Culture in Mid-Victorian London*.

employed the word in his own works. Forster used this phrase as a precursor to imagination in discussing Dickens: it is applied to *Picknick* (39), *Drood* and to the author himself, especially as a younger man (twice on 91, 162, 469). The *OED* defines “animal spirit” as “The (supposed) agent responsible for sensation and movement, originating in the brain and passing to and from the periphery of the body through the nerves; nervous action or force”. Its second definition includes a sense of courage and “nerve”, appearing in the eighteenth century; George S. Rousseau has described it as having “three cognitive meanings from the start: (1) sources of sensation; (2) seats of temperament, i.e., especially courage and masculinity; (3) sources of human inclinations, i.e., especially vivacity and gayety of disposition” (20). According to Forster, Dickens’s animal spirits were responsible for his writing and also animate his own actions. The third *OED* definition seems to fit best with Forster’s use here: “Nervous vivacity, natural liveliness of disposition; healthy physicality”. Rousseau’s analysis of its meanings all enlighten our understanding of Forster’s use: the binding of the phrase with masculinity and courage is especially relevant. Dickens’s “animal spirits” survived his childhood misery and are an excuse for Forster’s perceived sense of the lower art of *Picknick* and *Nickleby* (91): “There are faults of occasional exaggeration in the writing, but none that do not spring from animal spirits and good humor, or a pardonable excess, here and there, on the side of earnestness” (123). It is at this time, according to Forster, that Dickens found his higher purpose: *Picknick*, “in teaching him what his power was, had made him more conscious of what would be expected from its use; and this never afterwards quitted him” (88). The idea of Dickens’s animal spirits infusing his work forms part of the ongoing conversations surrounding what is ‘characteristic’. More than once in the biography the ‘characteristic’ is used to justify the inclusion of certain anecdotes (528-29, 548), but more often the repetition of ideas, like ‘animal spirits’ or like Dickens’s restlessness, create the kind of picture of Dickens that Forster wanted to promote in his attempt to explain the breakdown of Dickens’s marriage and the perceived faults in his work.

## 2.4. Remembering Dickens

An extreme example of the kind of selective shaping that Forster used can be found in *A Christmas Memorial of Charles Dickens* published in December 1870. The short memorial volume only seems to exist in physical form at the British Library, and information about the text is limited. The author, Alexander Hume, claimed to be the

friend of a man who received one of Dickens's last letters.<sup>23</sup> Hume claims it, in this memorial, to be *the* last letter the author wrote before his death. The letter itself concerns a Biblical reference in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*: Dickens avows that he has “always striven in my writings to express veneration for the life and lessons of Our Saviour; because I feel it; and because I re-wrote that history for my children” (8 June 1870, Pilgrim 12.548). A facsimile of this letter appeared in the memorial. Hume writes that Makeham’s letter, which has been lost, “called the attention of the great writer to the danger he would rest under of being misconstrued by the illiterate, through the introduction of a reference, in a humorous sense, to a scriptural figure of speech, ‘led like a lamb to the slaughter’” (26-27) in the final instalment of *Edwin Drood*:

Prompted by this impulse to defend a master, he delicately pointed out what he conceived to be an opening in his captain’s armour of proof; but only just in time – only just in time to call forth this beautiful climax of his glorious earthly existence; ... this last letter, which comes to us as a message from the threshold of the other world – this beautiful memorial of a departed Soul. (27)

The hyperbolic reverence of the tone demonstrates Hume’s attempt to lionise Dickens as a Christian figure. He calls the letter, itself a kind of ‘memorial’, “the most beautiful and conclusive evidence of his Christian faith, penned the very eve before his soul was called away” (preface) and describes Dickens as “the very ideal hero of my life” (26). His adoration culminates in imagining the author as a Jesus figure calling the children unto him (Luke 18:16): “Like ONE whose spirit he sought to spread about upon the earth, his great and tender heart ‘called little children unto him,’ and as he ‘blessed them’ by his labours, so surely he is blest” (30). A letter written by Hume on 6 January 1894 suggests that he was in fact aware that Dickens’s response to Makeham was “reproachful” (Dickens Museum, B281), but he claims the honour of being “the only *English* tribute referred to in the ‘Life’”.<sup>24</sup> Hume’s memorial opens with a lengthy “Ode to the Memory of Charles Dickens”, in which Hume aligns the author with Christmas (“Whose spirit was itself a Christmas chime” [4]). While other biographies and accounts

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<sup>23</sup> Letter 8 June 1870 (Pilgrim 12.547-48), believed to be one of the last three letters Dickens ever wrote (12.xix). The letter’s recipient is John Makeham, and there is as little known about his life and occupation as Hume’s.

<sup>24</sup> In the first edition of the third volume, Hume is referenced in a footnote, and his ode is damned with faint praise as “written with feeling and spirit” (3.448).

during the 1870s emphasised different aspects of Dickens's life, this was a much cruder version: an unknown reader coming to "place a Christmas wreath upon his tomb" (preface), but showing the same impulse to mourn, remember and put forward an interpretation of Dickens's life as the other writers discussed in this chapter.

Hume also described Dickens as having "grasped the hearts of half the land" (4) and being a "second Shakespeare" (9):

But, if I rightly judge, his after-fame  
In England's future shall in this consist,  
That he was England's chief philanthropist:  
The Great Napoleon of a glorious band,  
Who fought against the darkness of the land. (9)

The tone is more than hyperbolic, but similar sentiments were expressed by other biographers and memorialists of the time; for example, Sala and Yates, Dickens's 'young men' who are discussed in chapter 4, also compared their Chief to Napoleon Bonaparte (or vice versa).<sup>25</sup> The section that follows the ode is titled "An Assize in Poets' Corner Briefly Reported", and it imagines a trial of Dickens, headed by the "Presiding Genius" (14), where the author's place in literary history is judged on the evidence given by his characters. It is worth noting that he is not judged on his works' literary merits, but only on questions of social justice, in a way that resonates with Forster's sense of Dickens's higher purpose. Biographies and articles in the 1870s sought to deepen the connection between Dickens's literary interests and his political and ideological motivations, discussed from the perspective of a personal friend by Forster, by collating material from other articles, Dickens's novels, and his journalism and speeches. While Hume does reproduce articles and anecdotes that have been published elsewhere, and without attribution, the trial of the author at the hands of those in Poets' Corner is unique.

The characters speak about Dickens's treatment of them and the impact he has had on *their* lives, rather than on the lives of others. At this trial, set in a dream, or in the afterlife, Pecksniff (14), Mrs Gamp (16), Mr Bumble (16), Oliver Twist (21), Little Em'ly (22), Tiny Tim (22) and Florence Dombey (22), among others, are called to present evidence. This trial, at which Mrs Gamp is carried out in hysterics, culminates in

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<sup>25</sup> See Sala's pamphlet *Charles Dickens*, an extended version of his obituary in the *Daily Telegraph* (*Charles Dickens* 6, 13, 70). This is further discussed in chapter 4.

an earnest assertion by Little Nell that “She need not say how deeply she loved him; she could not say how deeply he deserved her love” (23). Finally we see Dickens’s face, “always beautiful with benevolence and lofty thought ... now adorned with a new irradiance ... as he moved amid a shining band, who did him reverence, to take his seat on the right of the Genius of the Place” (25). Dickens’s treatment of his characters seems to be what earns him the highest honour in Poets’ Corner. This short, idiosyncratic memorial encapsulates many of the issues relating to biographical forms in the 1870s. It plagiarised articles, like so many biographies before (and after), was fanatical about its subject, and sold itself on reproducing the author’s final words in an effort to compete in a market filled with unofficial biographies and memorials.

Though executed very differently, part of the creation of the characteristic in Forster’s *Life* lies in the ways in which Forster bound together the living Dickens and the novels. More specifically, the biography binds together Dickens’s physical characteristics and his literary qualities: for example describing his eyes leads to discussions about his powers of observation, which in turn becomes integral to his portrayal as an author. Those writing in the 1870s had often met the man and were writing for a readership that may have heard him give a reading. They mixed their own recollections with accounts by others, often competing with the reader’s own impressions of the author formed over a lifetime. The biographies and memoirs of the 1870s took on this issue in different ways. Kent, for example, wrote of the “inevitable revision or endorsement by the reader’s own personal remembrance” (6-7) and attempted to excuse himself from the charge of misrepresenting Dickens. Forster presented his own recollection of his first meeting with his biographical subject, and those of other influential Victorians: Jane Carlyle and Leigh Hunt, for example (84). However, Forster focused more strongly on the relationship Dickens’s life to the development of his imagination and his writing. Comparing the author to his creations also grounds the biography in familiar territory, and this is something Forster did throughout.

Davies suggests that the first physical description in Forster’s *Life* of the younger Dickens is drawn from the famous Daniel Maclise portrait, a plate of which was included in the *Life*’s early editions. Readers could then look at the face Forster describes, while the biographer addresses his reader as ‘you’ to add to this sense of recognition:

Very different was his face in those days from that which photography has made familiar to the present generation. A look of youthfulness first attracted you, and then a candour and openness of expression which made you sure of the qualities within. ... He had a capital forehead, a firm nose with full wide nostril, eyes wonderfully beaming with intellect and running over with humour and cheerfulness, and a rather prominent mouth strongly marked with sensibility. The head was altogether well-formed and symmetrical, and the air and carriage of it were extremely spirited. The hair so scant and grizzled in later days was then of a rich brown and most luxuriant abundance, and the bearded face of his last two decades had hardly a vestige of hair or whisker; but there was that in the face as I first recollect it which no time could change, and which remained implanted on it unalterably to the last. This was the quickness, keenness, and practical power, the eager, restless, energetic outlook on each several feature, that seemed to tell so little of a student or writer of books, and so much of a man of action and business in the world. Light and motion flashed from every part of it. (84)

While the physical traits can be seen in the plate, the text begins to expand on the description and builds a picture of Dickens as a ‘man of action and business’ rather than a ‘bookish’ writer, moving from the time-altered features to the unalterable personality. Forster’s text paints a full picture of his subject’s face, and he did this by bringing up the more familiar Dickens of his later years and redrawing it in prose, even while referring to it. Forster reinforced this image by adding Jane Carlyle and Hunt’s descriptions:

*It was as if made of steel*, was said of it ... by a most original and delicate observer, the late Mrs. Carlyle. “What a face is his to meet in a drawing-room!” wrote Leigh Hunt to me, the morning after I made them known to each other. “It has the life and soul in it of fifty human beings.” In such sayings are expressed not alone the restless and resistless vivacity and force of which I have spoken, but that also which lay beneath them of steadiness and hard endurance. (84-85)

At odds with the tropes of “motion” and “quickness” visible in Dickens’s face (84), the word ‘steel’ suggests a reflectiveness and hardness. Jane Carlyle and Hunt create a

picture not of attraction and openness, but of a face that was, for Jane Carlyle, impenetrable and reflective, and, for Hunt, caused a kind of shock.

Hunt's phrase also invokes Robert Browning's "One Word More" (1855), which opens:

THERE they are, my fifty men and women  
Naming me the fifty poems finished!  
Take them, Love, the book and me together:  
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also. (Lines 1-4)

The final poem in Browning's collection *Men and Women*, dedicated to his wife and beginning with the unification of the heart, the brain, the man and the works, in one sense suits Forster's purposes very well: the *Life* is built around the idea that Dickens's inner life was in fact constituted of his writings and his characters (816), and has them "always by his side" (636). On the other hand, the poem goes on to explore the distinction – and relationship – between public art and expressions of private feeling, creating an intertextual moment that adds further depth to the idea that Dickens's writings could contain such private expression. Andrew Dowling suggests that Forster's physical description of Dickens presents a "tension between abundance and unity, between frenetic activity and masculine force" (31). Dowling argues that a "metaphor of controlled energy" (7) is important to our understanding of Victorian masculinity, and he sees Forster's *Life* as moving the focus from artistic imagination to art-as-business in an effort to fit with a financially driven, business-oriented idea of masculinity, epitomised by Anthony Trollope's *Autobiography* (1883). However, it is not only Forster's description that is given in the *Life*: Forster offers a synthesis that enables Jane Carlyle and Hunt's descriptions to come together, tying the steeliness of Dickens's face to his character. The *Life* aligns them with our understanding of his childhood: Forster described the man's "stern and even cold isolation" (39) and his ability to be "hard and aggressive" (38) in a way that allows deeper understanding of the surface descriptions. As such, Forster's account not only offers a kind of controlled masculinity, but contextualises it within, or as a consequence of, Dickens's upbringing.

What the *Life* does very well is build a picture of the author's complexities: Dickens is presented as a man who was both open and closed, easy and unpretentious in society, suited to domestic life. He also seems to have been more open with Forster than with

Jane Carlyle or Hunt, in spite of his friendly relations with them. This adds to the image of the biographer as the authority on Dickens, and the most important figure in his life. Forster described how the two men seemed to have an instant connection: in his biography of Forster, Davies has suggested that his upbringing in Newcastle meant he could “express strong feeling without inhibition” (73) and had a love of family life that perhaps helps explain his insistence that Dickens’s own genius was to be found in a “domestic home-loving shape” (834). Davies also tells us that Forster “would dress as a magician’s assistant (to Dickens’s magician)” (76). While this anecdote reveals a lot about the close and easy nature of the friendship between the two men, it also seems like a good analogy for the *Life of Charles Dickens*: we can draw parallels between the magician commanding the stage while the assistant keeps the show going, and the powerful voice of the subject, both controlling and yet manipulated within the biography. However, there are also key differences.

Here the once-commanding magician is dead, and his assistant must continue the act alone: while Forster often quoted and cited his subject directly, the censorship and selective use of correspondence is very telling. The biographer was also willing to take on Dickens’s critics and has a recognisable style of his own and, while in many ways it is a generically conventional biography, at its best the *Life* is an exciting mix of powerful prose, careful censorship and startling revelations. At its worst it is an occasionally dry record of Dickens’s dealings with his publishers and his income, brought to life by insightful anecdotes. Hotten, lacking an intimate relationship with the author, relied on an unnamed “personal friend” to describe the supposedly changed, weary Dickens of the last reading tour (327). Kent, Hotten, Forster and Hume all explored the nature of Dickens’s imaginative and creative powers and their impact on his lasting fame. These biographies and memoirs also explore the contrast (and similarities) between the author’s life and his works, glossing over his separation from his wife and emphasising the author’s humour, his kindness and his happiness in the domestic sphere, separation aside. They draw on the admirable qualities of his writing both to emphasise its universal appeal and to create an image of the author bound up with his best work – though which of his works fit that classification is a point on which few of Dickens’s biographers seem to have agreed, as has been discussed at greater length by Mazzeno in *The Dickens Industry*.

Furieux has suggested that Forster was closest and most strongly bonded to Dickens, and therefore the writing is most effective, at times of sadness and loss (251).

It is after the death of Mary that we are told Dickens wrote:

“I look back with unmingled pleasure to every link which each ensuing week has added to the chain of our attachment. It shall go hard, I hope, ere anything by Death impairs the toughness of a bond now so firmly riveted.” It remained unweakened till death came. (85-86)

The image of the chain, coming in a chapter so concerned with Dickens’s “quasi-bondage” to his publishers (86), is a powerful one. In Dickens’s fiction and journalism, it appears in Jacob Marley’s chains, as a powerful metaphor in *Great Expectations*, and in the “highly agreeable chain” of the present and the past in the *Uncommercial Traveller* article “Dullborough Town” (147). In *Great Expectations*, Pip addresses the reader:

That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But, it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day. (*Great Expectations* 60)

Pip’s memorable day is his first meeting with Miss Havisham and Estella, one that will cause him great misery. Conversely, the idea of striking something out of your life also recurs in Dickens’s letters and journalism, as in a “Fly-Leaf in a Life”, or his claim in a letter to Angela Burdett-Coutts, in response to questions about reconciliation with his wife, that, “a page in my life which once had writing on it, has become absolutely blank, and it is not in my power to pretend that it has a solitary word upon it” (12 February 1864, *Pilgrim* 10.356). Forster’s claim that the chain that bound him and Dickens was unweakened was untrue, and Forster revealed this in his reliance on letters to other people in the later years of Dickens’s life and his disapproval of the public reading tours.

It was not only Dickens’s losses that bonded the men, however: when Forster lost his own brother, Dickens wrote “you have a Brother left. One bound to you by ties as strong as ever Nature forged” (letter 8 January 1845, *Pilgrim* 4.246). Early in the biography we are given the idea of a fated meeting and told that Dickens was able to

unburden himself to Forster in a way he could not with anyone else (11); through the course of one chapter, Dickens and Forster go from acquaintances to being in “perfect agreement” about Dickens’s work, with the author claiming he could have no higher praise than Forster’s understanding of his “intent and meaning” (89). Forster was, he claimed, the only person to whom Dickens revealed his childhood. Gitter suggests that the “persona that Forster creates for himself – life-long companion, chosen biographer, family protector – allows him to control and contain the information about Dickens’s life that he cannot suppress” (102). We have Dickens’s attachment to his biographer voiced in his own words, however; this is not just a persona Forster had created for himself. Similarly, Bodenheimer argues that Forster “implicitly told an important truth of Dickens’s life: that he lived most fully in what we might call a homosocial world of men” (“Dickens and the Writing of a Life” 55). The status of this as a ‘truth’ is a clear point of difference for the Dickens women, as I show in chapter 3, but the description is a useful characterisation of Forster’s work. It is, on the one hand, not strictly true: as reviews showed, the *Life* was felt to be more focused on Forster’s specific friendship with Dickens, even to the detriment of his other male friendships, than on a ‘homosocial world of men’. On the other hand, that thread would be further developed by Dickens’s other friends and family from the 1880s onwards. Forster’s biography is particularly effective when it allows both biographer and subject to speak for themselves, the latter through his autobiographical fragment and the former through his direct experiences. Forster pieced together and gave shape to a complex, fragmented, sometimes contradictory picture in a way that no one else could, and his *Life* would continue to shape and challenge accounts as they were published in the 1880s, 1890s and early twentieth century, as chapter 3 will show.

### CHAPTER 3. FAMILY REPRESENTATIONS, 1880-1939

[H]istory is that which transforms *documents* into *monuments*.

Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

Charles Dickens's famous stipulation in his will that his friends, "on no account ... make me the subject of any monument, memorial or testimonial whatsoever" (John Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 859) has made commemoration difficult. Each category (monument, memorial, testimonial) is distinct, but each can be interpreted in different ways. Monuments can be commemorative effigies, but also tombs: Dickens's instruction to have only 'Charles Dickens', without any title, on his gravestone would suggest that he intended both senses. Later his son, Henry Dickens, would refer to the will in discussing the Dickens Fellowship, arguing his father "neither desired, nor does he need, material monuments", but that the Fellowship was somehow a different, more acceptable kind of monument (speech on the ninety-second anniversary 367). A memorial can be a festival, observance or commemorative event; something to assist memory; a charitable donation; or even a memoir or reminiscence. In Dickens's fiction, *David Copperfield's* Mr Dick is writing a memorial into which Charles the First keeps intruding, but it is comically unclear which kind of memorial it is. David asks,

"Is it a Memorial about his own history that he is writing, aunt?"

"Yes, child," said my aunt, rubbing her nose again. "He is memorialising the Lord Chancellor, or the Lord Somebody or other – one of those people, at all events, who are paid to *be* memorialized – about his affairs. I suppose it will go in, one of these days. He hasn't been able to draw it up yet, without introducing that mode of expressing himself; but it don't signify; it keeps him employed." (175)

Betsey Trotwood's answer plays on the sense of a memorial as a petition, as a personal record of a life, and as an object to be given. Gladys Storey recorded that Katey Dickens insisted her father "put no value on possessions" so was going to throw away his desk; nevertheless, he was "pleased that she had asked for it and wanted to possess it" (Dickens Museum, Storey Papers, Milkman's Account Book, entry 8 February 1925). A testimonial can be an account given by way of evidence, a will or an attestation of

qualifications and character. With such a wide range of possible interpretations, it is unsurprising that this request has often been ignored, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: in 1912, the *Daily News* reported that Madame Tussaud's were creating a Dickens waxwork ("Charles Dickens – An Unconventional Portrait", 7 February 1912) while two hundred and two years after his birth, a statue was erected in his birthplace, Portsmouth (Claire Wood 166). Within little over a month of his death in 1870 his friends – and others – were publishing accounts of his life.<sup>1</sup> Over the decades that followed, many of Dickens's family members would follow suit.

Complementing these memoirs and anecdotes, Dickens's family and friends also sought to honour the author's convivial legacy by feasting together: Henry was one of the founding members of the Boz Club, the aim of which was to meet once a year on Dickens's birthday and remember him through a meal, speeches and debates about his legacy. The Club, largely made up of Dickens's surviving friends and collaborators, predates the much more influential and lasting Dickens Fellowship. The former boasted over two hundred subscriptions at its peak, but could not have the global reach of the Fellowship. The latter, founded shortly after, took up the annual Dickens dinners and the convivial remembrances of Dickens in the 1920s after the Boz Club folded during the First World War. The early years, in which the two ran concurrently, saw some friction as Henry resented not being involved in the establishment of the Fellowship and initially resisted joining. For him, remembering Dickens was a duty that should be led by him as Dickens's last surviving son.

Records of the early years of the Boz Club and the Dickens Fellowship, and the letters of the wider Dickens family, are often frustratingly difficult to access first-hand, as they are scattered around archives worldwide. I have used the Dickens Museum's extensive archive, as well as the Fitzgerald Collection in the Medway Archives, Rochester, and the Gimbel-Dickens Collection held by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, but the collections of the *Boz Club Papers*, which include annual membership lists, committee members' names and an account of all speeches and events of the Club, are incomplete. Some of the letters and newspaper clippings I have referenced are by necessity referenced secondarily, while others are drawn directly from scrapbooks and minute books held in those archives. The Fellowship's own history is recorded in detail in the pages of the *Dickensian*, with

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 2 and chapter 4 offer further discussion of examples including Hotten's *Charles Dickens: The Story of His Life* and Sala's *Charles Dickens*, both published in July 1870.

retrospectives written by prominent members beginning with J. W. T. Ley's "The Dickens Fellowship, 1902-1923. A Retrospect" published in 1923.<sup>2</sup>

More attention has been paid to the Fellowship's various centenary celebrations, and the trial of *Edwin Drood's* John Jasper staged in 1914, than its earlier history.<sup>3</sup> Catherine Malcolmson's PhD thesis, "Constructing Charles Dickens: 1900-1940", does discuss the Fellowship's history but does not mention the Boz Club, or the early friction with the family. Robert Gottlieb mentions the Boz Club once in saying that Henry was a founding member (which is not quite true), and that he was also active in founding the Dickens Fellowship (which, as I will show, is not true either [214]). The Dickens collectors' market on eBay has yielded a letter concerning the Dickens Fellowship from Henry, which I possess in photograph form – the original is now in unknown hands. Perhaps archival issues have led to the relative paucity of work on the Boz Club: Laurence Mazzeno's *The Dickens Industry* mentions it briefly, in telling the story of Percy Fitzgerald (47), but does not consider it as part of Dickens's afterlife, and there is rarely more than a cursory mention elsewhere. I have also consulted Arthur A. Adrian's *Georgina Hogarth and the Dickens Circle* and Lillian Nayder's *The Other Dickens: A Life of Catherine Hogarth*, which have shed light on the Dickens women and shown their role in shaping the author's image, and Michael Slater's *The Great Charles Dickens Scandal* with its wide-ranging study of Dickens's posthumous reputation.

This chapter explores the early efforts to mould Dickens's reputation, exposing shifting attitudes to what was important to remember (and forget), and the problematic role of families in shaping biography. *The Letters of Charles Dickens 1833-1870* (1880), Georgina Hogarth's early attempt to protect Dickens's image, contrasts with Katey's ambiguously revealing role in *Dickens and Daughter* (1939). Dickens's children published several accounts of their father. Mamie Dickens assisted with the *Letters* (1880-82), wrote several articles including "Charles Dickens at Home" (1885) and "Dickens with his Children" (1885), produced a *Charles Dickens Birthday Book* illustrated by Katey (1886), and wrote *Charles Dickens by His Eldest Daughter* (1889) and *My Father as I Recall Him* (1896). In addition to the *Letters*, Georgina selected the *Letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins* (1892). Katey wrote a couple of articles on her father, including "Charles

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<sup>2</sup> See also Leo Mason's "The Dickensian, A Tale of Fifty Years" and Michael Slater's "The Dickensian at 90: A Celebration of the First Three Editors 1905-1968".

<sup>3</sup> See Juliet John's *Dickens and Mass Culture*, which mentions the Dickens Centenary Testimonial Committee commemorative stamps (249), her article "Stardust, Modernity and the Dickensian Brand" which summarises some of the centenary tributes (par. 2) and Steven Connor's "Dead? Or Alive?: *Edwin Drood* and the Work of Mourning" for discussion of the Drood trial.

Dickens as a Lover of Art and Artists” (1905) and “*Edwin Drood* and the Last Days of Charles Dickens” (1906), the latter of which is a defence of Forster’s suggestions about the resolution of that novel. Alfred Dickens lectured in England and America (Gottlieb 194-95) while Charley Dickens did public readings of his “Personal Reminiscences of My Father”, as well as writing new prefaces to Dickens’s novels as a reader for Macmillan (147-48). His 1892 preface for *David Copperfield* both acknowledges Forster’s authority and undermines it, referring the reader to his *Life* but disputing that he was the only one who knew that Dickens had worked in Warren’s Blacking (xx). Charley tells the reader that:

the story was eventually read to her [Catherine] in strict confidence by my father, who at the same time intimated his intention of publishing it by and by as a portion of his autobiography. From this purpose she endeavoured to dissuade him; on the ground that he had spoken with undue harshness of his father, and, especially, of his mother: and with so much success that he eventually decided that he would be satisfied with working it into *David Copperfield*, and would give up the idea of publishing it as it stood. How, after this, the story came to be given to the public I do not know, but I have always thought it a pity that Mr. Forster did not exercise some of that discretion which is always supposed to be left to biographers, but which, unfortunately, they do not always think fit to employ, by omitting the half-dozen or so lines which cannot but have come as a shock to most people, and the deletion of which would not have affected the interest or value of the story in the slightest degree. That Mr. Forster did not know what had passed between my father and mother as to this matter I think most probable. That he did not take any steps to find out I know to be a fact. (xx-xxi)

This whole preface revises several of Forster’s claims, including many of his biographical readings of the novel, and reinserts Catherine into the narrative (between Dickens and Forster, in fact). It explicitly sets family knowledge above that of the closest friend and biographer, and it encapsulates many of the issues at stake in the family representations. Charley is particularly blunt, but the gesture towards a hierarchy, the suggestion that Forster was limited, and the way in which Charley attempts to offer a more complete picture speak well to the other family writings.

Not because they are homogeneous, however. Critics have largely treated these writings as one body, consistent in tone: Slater writes that,

Many reminiscences of Dickens by his children appeared during the forty years following his death, all building up an image of him as a wonderful, kind and loving father, a splendid and generous host, the life and soul of social occasions, a phenomenally hard worker, a great and good man. (*Scandal* 53)

I intend to show the ways in which the approaches taken by Dickens's family differed in creating a picture of Dickens, and the added complexity that institutional forms of commemoration and remembrance brought. Gottlieb gestures at some of the family conflicts, calling Mamie's memoir "short and unrevealing" (48); "a re-telling of Forster with pretense of objectivity", the reality of the text being "an unmediated burst of hero-worship and glorification" (161). He suggests *My Father As I Recall Him* made Katey "wild with fury": "she went through her copy of the book more than once, violently inking out passages that offended her and correcting others" (153). Rather than repeating the work done in these studies, and in work on Dickens and Ellen Ternan – particularly *The Great Charles Dickens Scandal*, which has revealed the extent to which the family knew about the affair – I will discuss the beginnings of a family disagreement and demonstrate the impact that it has had on commemoration of Dickens in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Boz Club and Dickens Fellowship moved towards a very differently convivial appreciation of Dickens in a context removed from family control. The differences between the various family representations and commemorations reveal complex motivations in how best to remember Dickens – as an author, as a father, as a man, or perhaps even as Boz, his early pen name. Things changed when Dickens's immediate family was gone and the author's life was being remembered by the members of the Dickens Fellowship, as a society that was founded with the aim of "knit[ing] together in a common bond of friendship lovers of the great master of humour and pathos, Charles Dickens" ("History of the Fellowship").

To understand the desire of the family to control Dickens's posthumous image, it is necessary to examine the relationship between Forster's *Life* and the subsequent family writings. Forster filled many gaps in the biographical archive: until the *Life*, even Dickens's children seemed to have been ignorant of their father's childhood. As shown in chapter 2, the picture of Dickens painted by Forster is one of overcoming early

adversity, of hard work and almost unparalleled success. Forster's motivations, as Richard Salmon has argued, were tied to the importance of the literary profession, and Dickens's literary – and financial – success: "From the perspective of the early 1870s, Dickens's professional career marks a triumphant realization of the note of unfulfilled promise with which Forster had ended his biography of Goldsmith over twenty years earlier" (122). Oliver Goldsmith, among other influential eighteenth-century writers, had ended his life destitute, so it was important for Forster (and for Dickens) that Dickens did not, and this is reinforced throughout the biography with circulation figures and markers of Dickens's success.<sup>4</sup> Goldsmith's financial troubles and the morality tale that Forster weaves in his biography, ending with a condemnation of the social conditions that allowed authors like Goldsmith to die penniless (*The Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith* 2.485), were a strong argument for the recognition of a literary profession. Forster's meticulous accounts of Dickens's earnings and income contrast starkly with Goldsmith's poverty. Forster's final word on the subject is Dickens's will, appended at the end of the biography, showing exactly what he had left to his family (857-61). The will, as I will show, also gestures at the relationship between Forster and Dickens's remaining family.

Forster had been the family-sanctioned biographer of Dickens (Adrian 183). He was also joint executor of Dickens's will with Georgina, so it would seem fair to assume that their interests largely aligned: it is particularly interesting to note that while Forster was left all of Dickens's published manuscripts in the will, Georgina was left all of his other papers "whatsoever and wheresoever" (Forster 857).<sup>5</sup> For Forster to use Dickens's letters and possibly even the autobiographical fragment would, presumably, have necessitated Georgina's permission.<sup>6</sup> Forster's death in 1876, then, was a turning point. While Forster was chosen by the author's family, Helena Langford argues that his biography failed to satisfy them: she says this was "implicit in their endorsement of other biographies, and the publication of their own memories of their father" (205). After Forster's death, although they had supported Forster's biography during his life, Georgina and Dickens's daughter Mamie began to collect and edit letters for their own

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<sup>4</sup> See Margot Finn's *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914*, and chapter 2 for further discussion of Forster's focus and tone.

<sup>5</sup> The manuscripts of *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend* were not included, as they had been given away during Dickens's lifetime.

<sup>6</sup> Bookseller Walter T. Spencer recorded a conversation with Georgina in his book *Forty Years in my Bookshop* in which she tells him she had received the manuscript of *The Cricket on the Hearth* from Forster in exchange for one of Dickens's notebooks (100).

volumes of *Letters*. One major purpose of the *Letters* was to revise the literary, public life presented by Forster to create a more personal, family-oriented Dickens who was interested in ‘trivial’ household matters as well as literary success. The first sign that the *Letters* were trying to do something different came in the preface, which describes the work as a ‘supplement’ to Forster’s biography (*Letters* vii). The wording was quite restrained compared to Georgina’s letters; she wrote that Forster’s *Life* “fails entirely in giving a picture of my dear Brother-in-law; at any rate, it gives only one view of him” (qtd. in Adrian 215). The word ‘supplement’ may seem innocuous enough, but as well as its connection with literary periodicals as an extension or completion, it also has connotations of deficiency and inadequacy – at the very least, to need to ‘complete’ Forster’s *Life* suggests that it is *incomplete*. In the Derridean sense, “It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills to the brim [*comble*], it is as if one fills [*comble*] a void” (*Of Grammatology* 157).

The *Letters* are problematic in their own way, with radical selectivity, omissions and censorship, but many reviewers received them exactly as intended, as I will show. The main criticisms of Forster’s biography had centred on his reliance on his own relationship with Dickens, and his own letters, as mentioned in the preface. The *Letters* rectified this to a degree. Fielding has suggested that their publication “had much less effect” than Forster’s biography (98) and depicted Dickens merely as “a charming eccentric who passed most of his time at the seaside with his family at Broadstairs and Boulogne, or in getting up private theatricals” (qtd. in Slater, *Scandal*, 42), while Duane DeVries argued that it “corroborated what critics of *Forster* asserted – namely, that Dickens had a far more extensive group of close friends and acquaintances than Forster acknowledged” (74), concluding that “One thus gets a more rounded picture of Dickens than one finds in *Forster*” (76). These views, while disagreeing about the success and value of the volumes, demonstrate that the *Letters* had effectively changed the focus from Dickens’s public career, as in Forster, to Dickens’s relationship with his family and friends. As shown in chapter 2, Forster had been deliberately reticent about Dickens’s home life, and the *Letters* also avoided mention of his separation from his wife, but through them we see him as a warm and generous correspondent, with a good sense of humour and deeply invested in his family. From the nicknames he had for them – and for himself – to his letters from America inquiring after his children, the Dickens presented was rooted in humour and kindness. The following sections of this chapter contextualise the family writings, exploring the reminiscences of Dickens’s children and

their attempts to preserve – and capitalise on – their father’s memory.

### 3.1. Georgina Hogarth: Guardian of the Beloved’s Family

In spite of Georgina’s long and close relationship with her brother-in-law, from companion to her sister Catherine and helper with the Dickens children at just fifteen, to her relationship with the Dickens Fellowship in the early twentieth century as a woman of almost ninety, her contribution to Dickens’s life, and the tenor of her life after his death, is often reduced to ‘Guardian of the Beloved Memory’. This title focuses only on her protectiveness towards Dickens’s legacy and her adoration and idolisation of her brother-in-law. Her role in Dickens’s (after-)life was first explored in detail in Adrian’s *Georgina Hogarth and The Dickens Circle* (1957) and, consequently, Adrian has long been treated as an authority on the subject. The book is quoted for the entry on Georgina in Paul Schlicke’s *Oxford Companion to Charles Dickens*, and is used as the basis for Slater’s chapter on Georgina in *Dickens and Women*, in which Slater describes Georgina as working to keep ‘the Beloved Memory’ “properly venerated and untarnished before the world” (164). The first significant challenge to this representation appears more than fifty years after *Georgina Hogarth and the Dickens Circle* was published, in Nayder’s biography of Catherine. Nayder accuses Adrian of using Catherine’s “physicality to disparage and dismiss her” in reinforcing the idea that she was an unfit wife, while “valorizing” Georgina (11-12). However, as Catherine is the book’s subject, Nayder does not spend long refuting Adrian’s judgement. Gottlieb has reinforced the image of Georgina as “devoted mother/sister” (8) in comparison to Catherine, who for Dickens (as for Dickens’s biographers) “represented all the messy business of life – sex, childbirth, ill health” (8). George Curry’s article summarises the Huntington Library’s Annie Fields letters, but is mainly concerned with her relationship with Dickens rather than Georgina. Consequently, I have had to rely on Adrian quite heavily in citing from these letters. I revisit Adrian’s work to argue that rather than simply deifying Dickens or suppressing aspects of his life to preserve his reputation, Georgina played a more deliberate role in emphasising the role of family in Dickens’s life in a way that built on Dickens’s self-representation in the 1860s. This approach, most clearly seen in the *Letters*, differed from Forster’s *Life* in presenting a man concerned with even the smallest of domestic affairs, invested in his family, and with a wide circle of friends. I show that the way in which Georgina acted changed

substantially over the forty-seven years between Dickens's death and her own, as the woman who was initially concerned with keeping mementoes and letters within the family and a close circle of friends began selling off her own Dickensian treasures.<sup>7</sup> Georgina's letters and manoeuvrings with the remaining Dickens children also show the disagreements between members of the family about how Dickens should be remembered.

The seeds of Georgina as 'Guardian of the Beloved Memory' are evident in Dickens's will, in which she and Forster were appointed executors and "guardians of the persons of my children during their respective minorities" (appendix to Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* 859). Georgina acted as guardian of all of Dickens's remaining children, as well as receiving the impressive sum of eight thousand pounds and:

all my personal jewellery not hereinafter mentioned, and all the little familiar objects from my writing-table and my room, and she will know what to do with those things. I also give to the said Georgina Hogarth all my private papers whatsoever and wheresoever, and I leave her my grateful blessing as the best and truest friend man ever had. (857)

The will is striking in many ways. Ellen is the first named beneficiary, but Georgina is the only named person that Dickens wrote of in affectionate terms, rather than purely legal ones. As is discussed in chapter 4, accounts by Dickens's friends and colleagues create their own hierarchies of friendship and degrees of closeness in order to place their own particular relationship with Dickens above others. Dickens did that work on Georgina's behalf, giving her a foundation on which to build. Slater writes, for example, that Georgina was "one of the few people who could keep up with his [Dickens's] pace on his formidable daily walks" (*Dickens and Women* 163); as I will show, Edmund Yates too used his ability to keep up with Dickens to show that he could 'keep up' with Dickens in other ways too. In the will, however, Georgina's place is incontestable. Dickens placed a lot of faith in Georgina: to raise his children, dispose of his possessions, look after his papers, and deal with his estate. The stipulation that she had the right to all of his personal papers 'wheresoever' may explain why Georgina fought so hard against the publication of letters by others without her consent or editorial

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<sup>7</sup> Bookseller Spencer writes of buying from Georgina, among other things, "a precious lock of his [Dickens's] hair, ... [and] his writing sloop" (99).

control.<sup>8</sup>

He goes on,

I solemnly enjoin my dear children always to remember how much they owe to the said Georgina Hogarth, and never to be wanting in a grateful and affectionate attachment to her for they know well that she has been, through all the stages of their growth and progress, their ever useful self-denying and devoted friend. (859)

That Dickens included this appeal in his will is striking: legally the words have no weight, but again her friendship and relationship to the family is emphasised. The loving language indicates a stark contrast with Catherine, who is mentioned only briefly, and only in financial terms (859). It did not go unnoticed. Adrian speculates that the will may have renewed gossip about the nature of Dickens's relationship with Georgina, following rumours that Dickens's separation from Catherine was due to an affair with her (147). He cites the diary of Annie Fields, a regular correspondent of Georgina's following Dickens's death, who wrote that actor and friend of Dickens, Charles Fechter, had also expressed his shock about the wording of the will (qtd. in Adrian 147). According to American diplomat John Bigelow, Wilkie Collins "intimated too that Dickens's sister-in-law, to whom he leaves all his private papers and whom he pronounces the best friend man ever had, was very fond of him. The impression seems to be that they were too intimate" (*Restrospections* 4.383). While the wording of the will may have risked igniting gossip about Georgina, it also unequivocally established her controlling role in Dickens's financial – and literary – legacy.

Placing all of his papers at her disposal, rather than Forster's, meant that Dickens's biographer would be unable to make use of them without Georgina's permission. While Forster was gifted Dickens's manuscripts (858), the two executors were jointly given power of the "real and personal estate (including my copyrights)" with the injunction to "proceed to an immediate sale or conversion into money" of them, or "defer and

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<sup>8</sup> Whether the papers referred to legally include Dickens's letters is unclear, but the actions of the family suggest that they thought they were included. As late as 1906, Henry wrote a letter published in the *Tribune* protesting its publication of letters, arguing "No authority for such publication was ever given by my father's executrix, nor was she or any member of the family consulted. ... You had no right whatever to publish them without the consent of his executrix" (Rochester, Medway Archives, Fitzgerald Collection 296, [p] 3 February 1906). Katey expressed a similar sentiment to an unknown correspondent: "She is my Father's literary executrix – and I believe you cannot publish any writing of his – without first obtaining her permission" (New York, Morgan Library, "Collection of Letters to Charles and Catherine Dickens" MA 104, letter 78).

postpone any sale or conversion into money, till such time or times as they, he, or she shall think fit” (858). This is mediated by the command to do so “in such manner in all respects as I myself could do, if I were living and acting therein” (858), which was perhaps a way to try to circumvent any disagreement between the two executors. Legally, neither could overrule the other: the praise of Georgina in the will might have given her a certain authority, but Forster’s legal experience also gave him a possible upper hand, while Georgina had to rely quite heavily on Frederic Ouvry, a family friend and the solicitor who would advise Georgina on her own will and financial matters.<sup>9</sup> Dickens did not prohibit the sale of his copyrights and, in fact, the will encourages it, but the stipulation to dispose of them “as I myself could do” not only gave Georgina and Forster the legal power to act but also retained a need to respect Dickens’s wishes – or what he would have done – in doing so. This power was exercised by Georgina several times during the years that followed.

Under the terms of Dickens’s will, Georgina superintended the selling of Gad’s Hill and its furniture. However, as discussed in the introduction, she could not prevent Charley from buying the house and later attempting to exhibit the Swiss chalet which had been installed in the garden and in which Dickens had been writing on the day of his death, in an effort to raise money for his struggling family. Her outrage was not out of fear for Dickens’s reputation but that the public – and the press – would perceive the display of ‘sacred’ objects and condemn the family. This echoes the issues faced by literary biographers in striking a balance between revelation and concealment: Georgina’s negotiations, suppressions and revelations recall – and anticipate – Forster’s. There is also an evident conflict as to who holds authority within the family. Dickens’s will established a necessary debt of gratitude to Georgina, but her role as head of the family would be contested again and again. She also did not always have the happiest relationships with the Dickens children. This was evident even before Dickens’s death.<sup>10</sup> In a letter to Edward (affectionately nicknamed Plorn), for example, she apologised for any disagreements between them and if she had been “harsh to you” (Beinecke, Gimbel-Dickens H1340-46, “Dickens Family Letters 1868-1879”); in her early letters she called him “my dear Boy!” and signed the letters “Aunty G”, but by 1 December

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<sup>9</sup> See Georgina’s letters held in the Ouvry Papers in the Suzannet Research Library at the Dickens Museum, London.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Walter Dexter, who met with Storey concerning her relationship with Katey and the book *Dickens and Daughter*, wrote that “Georgina was responsible for so many of the boys being shipped abroad at tender ages” (Dickens Museum, C59, letter to Comte de Suzannet, 22 February 1939).

1870 she signed the letter more formally as “Georgina Hogarth”.

This concern with having been seen to have acted correctly and not seeming to endorse the ‘wrong’ kind of publicity recurred during Georgina’s life, the most significant of these incidents being her movement to prevent the publication in Britain of Dickens’s letters to Maria Beadnell Winter, with whom he had been in love as a young man, which had been published in America by the Boston Bibliophile Society in 1908. An English edition would not appear until 1934, after the last of Dickens’s children had died, and was followed in 1935 by a three act play, *The Master of Gadshill: Dickens Returns to Youth*, which used the letters as inspiration. Adrian describes a range of incidents in the same vein, including Georgina writing to Thomas Wright to ask him not to publish what he had learned about Dickens’s relationship with Ellen (239), and her publication of a newspaper statement saying that Dickens had never known the Duke of Portland in response to the notorious Druce trial (239-40), in which Mary Ann Robinson claimed to have known Dickens and to have been introduced to the Duke by him. Georgina made the same move when Ouvry’s letters were published by J. W. Bouton following his death (notice in the *Times* 27 October 1883), and used Frederic George Kitton as an intermediary in the publication of further letters in 1888, requesting that the names of the correspondents be suppressed (Rochester, Medway Archives, Fitzgerald Collection J). Adrian describes Georgina as standing “guard like a dragon over the treasure of Dickens’s honour” (237), assisting with works such as Kitton’s *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil, including Anecdotes and Reminiscences Collected from his Friends and Contemporaries* but expressing her displeasure when not able to prevent the publication of things she perceived as damaging to Dickens or his family. When Kitton published a supplement without consulting her, she wrote to his publisher Dexter Sabin that “personalities which you consider interesting and which are, I suppose, found interesting to the Public are painful to Mr. Dickens’ family, because – on the whole – they give an entirely false impression of him!” (qtd. in Adrian 238) Georgina’s ambivalence about these various representations of Dickens, and the question of the ‘impression’ they gave, would surface again in the twentieth century. In 1908 she wrote to B. W. Matz,

Mrs Perugini and I were always much annoyed by her Father’s being represented as being in “restless spirits”!! which he never was – ! and even his so called “joviality” was confined entirely to his own home! His playful

exaggeration or boasting to his friends has led to great misunderstanding of his character, I think, and also gives an idea of himself of being very fond of eating and drinking! There never was a more abstemious man! in both these particulars, and I often think now, how grieved he would be to know that he had given such a wrong impression of himself, from his own letters. (Dickens Museum, B79, letter 14 May 1908)

That she credits Dickens's letters with this new 'false' impression is very telling, as at this time the primary source of Dickens's letters was the volumes she herself had edited.

Georgina generally thought Kitton did try to "show all reverence" but was "too ready to accept contributions from *everybody!* Whether they really knew anything of Mr. Dickens – or whether they did *not!*" (qtd. in Adrian 238) The focus on the sacred and the need for reverence characterised Georgina's responses. She clearly believed in the right of a select few to comment on Dickens. Later, she wrote to an unknown correspondent,

I have no objections to your making a Photograph from the Sketch of my sister Mary's Portrait. ... But I hope you will remember that I and the other surviving members of Charles Dickens' family have a very great objection to personal details of his private life being made public. (Dickens Museum, B84, letter 31 December 1902)

What is particularly striking is her claim that what will pain the family is that these 'personalities' of Dickens, though interesting, are somehow false – and that Kitton, rather than consulting Georgina, accepted contributions from anyone. Georgina seems to suggest that there are some Dickenses who are better worth showing than others, acknowledging the plurality of representations, but asserting her own hierarchy within them. She was also consistently ambivalent about whether aspects of Dickens's character should be revealed or concealed – although, interestingly, seemed to desire that more should be said about Catherine. Her dismissal of accounts from '*everybody*' contrasts with her words in 1874, when describing her own feelings about the publication of the first volume of Forster's *Life*, that everybody was "entitled to speak of him as they please" (qtd. in Adrian 183), because "he belonged to the whole world, as well as to us" (183). By the 1890s, generations were rising that did not have the same

familiarity with Dickens as the public of twenty years earlier. Georgina's particular complaint also seems to stem from a lack of control: her writing is reactive, passing judgement on the representations of others. The problem is not only one of revealing too much, but also of giving a false impression by foregrounding the wrong kind of representation.

By 1906, however, with Dickens's bequest to her dwindling, Georgina started selling off her Dickensian possessions and engaging in the kind of behaviour that she had censured in others in the preceding decades. In Dickens's will, he had said she would know what to do with his 'familiar objects'. At first they were divided up among family and friends,<sup>11</sup> but in the 1900s they began appearing in collections around the world, with certificates of authentication written by Georgina.<sup>12</sup> At this point Georgina was old, with little money. The *Cricket on the Hearth* manuscript was sold for £1000 (Adrian 263); she also sold her own letters from Dickens to the American Charles Sessler, who promptly published them (264). This loosening of the reins followed another kind of letting go: by Christmas 1899, Annie Fields and Georgina, who wrote to one another about Dickens for every one of his birthdays, Christmases and anniversaries of his death for nearly thirty years, did not talk of visiting Dickens's grave for his birthday, death day or Christmas (252). What had changed? Fewer of Dickens's friends and family remained; in the twentieth century, Georgina was no longer needed as the family guardian, although the memory of Dickens still lived on in the Dickens Fellowship and in innumerable other ways, as I will show.

Georgina's key contribution to Dickens's legacy came in the form of the *Letters*. Unlike Dickens's children, she did not publish her own reminiscences. Her approach contrasted starkly with Forster's. As early as July 1870, Georgina showed some reluctance to rely on Forster and a desire to understand and execute her part of the will independently. Georgina wrote to Ouvry asking for him to explain "the nature of my duties", because "I would rather have an explanation from you than Mr. Forster – good

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<sup>11</sup> The Dickens Museum holds many examples of Georgina's letters to Dickens's friends about these gifts, for example to F. C. Beard concerning a cigar case and a medicine chest (Dickens Museum, B91, letter 22 June 1870) and a later letter to Beard asking if any of his patients would like a pair of Dickens's elastic silk stockings (Dickens Museum, B29).

<sup>12</sup> One such example, a lock of hair bound into a leather book, with a certificate of authenticity signed by Georgina, can be found in the Gimbel-Dickens Collection at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (Gimbel-Dickens H1866). Charley expressed his dissatisfaction with the trade in Dickens souvenirs, writing to an unknown correspondent that things "which are said to have been found in my father's desk after his death are purely mythical" (Beinecke, Gimbel-Dickens H Box, letter 1 December 1886).

and kind as he is” (qtd. in Adrian 147-48). Just a month later, she wrote that Forster “sometimes forgets that any one ought to have a voice in any of the business [of the estate], except himself” (qtd. in Adrian 194). The difference is most clear in the contrasting approaches of Forster’s *Life* and the collected letters Georgina published, together with Mamie, in the 1880s. When Forster’s *Life* began to appear, Georgina also had mixed feelings. She described feeling the “skin of the old wound... perpetually torn off” (qtd. in Adrian 183), and disliked the limitations Forster faced because so many of Dickens’s family and close friends were still living. Because of Dickens’s relatively young age, “so many people are living to whom all these private details of his life, which must be told, are so sacred, and so painful to have made public property” (183). Again, as explored in the introduction, we have the ‘sacredness’ of family life (and certain aspects of Dickens) set against the needs of the public. By the time Forster’s third and final volume had appeared, Georgina was bemoaning that “proper justice cannot be done to Charles” as:

it is imperative (as, of course it is in her life time) to give no picture of his wife, and to make no comment on the peculiarities of her character, which, if they could be fairly set against *his* would I think require no comment, and would be an explanation for a great deal. But alas! every body – except Him – is living, and therefore this is impossible – and as little must be said as possible, and that is all. (qtd. in Adrian 183-84)

For Georgina, the problem is not of showing Dickens’s faults but of embarrassing the living. She calls for discretion, but not about Catherine – whom she rather callously refers to as ‘his wife’ rather than ‘my sister’. Georgina seems to have been undecided on whether to obliterate Catherine from the record entirely or give an unfiltered record of all of her (perceived) faults. She also admitted that Forster took “the wisest course... and indeed the only course possible to him while my sister lives”, and had said “just as much *and as little* as must be said” (qtd. in Adrian 184). By 1876 Forster was dead, leaving Georgina as the only guardian and executor of Dickens’s legacy. However, Catherine was still alive, and the *Letters* were still unable to reveal her supposed unfitness as Dickens’s wife.

### 3.2. Supplementing Forster: The *Letters of Charles Dickens*, Edited by His Sister-in-Law and His Eldest Daughter

The *Letters of Charles Dickens* 'edited by his sister-in-law and his eldest daughter' (1880-82) holds a complicated place in Dickensiana. It is difficult to measure its effect quantitatively: the records for the sales of the volumes by Chapman and Hall have been lost, but there were several editions of the letters, including a supplement which was then incorporated into the existing volumes in 1882. While Fielding claims that Dickens appears only as an eccentric, suggesting that his literary life is ignored in favour of his family life, the *Fortnightly Review* argued, as DeVries did later, that "No formal portrait could be half so vivid. In this book, which was never intended to be a book, we come nearer to the man as he was than a biographer would have brought us" (1 December 1879, 845). Inevitably, reviewers compared the volumes to Forster's biography. Perhaps more surprisingly, they often seem to have favoured the *Letters* above the *Life*. *Scribner's Monthly* suggests that "If the late John Forster was, as many think, a skilful biographer, his skill deserted him when he sat down to write his *Life of Dickens*" (January 1880, 470). This thread was taken up by many reviewers of the time, including the *Westminster Review* and the *Times* who praised the *Letters* as a "virtually new biography" to supplement the "strangely incomplete" *Life* (27 December 1879, 9). Another suggested that if a person had to discard either Forster's *Life* or the *Letters*, "we should feel no hesitation in advising him to retain the correspondence, as presenting on the whole a fairer, more adequate, more trustworthy, and more pleasing picture of Dickens's character and life" (*Appleton's Journal*, January 1880, 72). Reviews were not universally positive, however. The *Contemporary Review* was not as taken with the volumes, writing that "published collections of private letters are usually disappointing things, and these two large volumes ... constitute no exception" (77-85), and complaining that the *Letters* gave the reader nothing new. In spite of the mixed response, the references in these reviews show both that Forster's *Life* had already established itself as the benchmark for life writing about Dickens, and also that there was a public hunger for more Dickens material.

Dickens scholars have also been split in their response to the *Letters*. Adrian calls the production of the volumes Georgina's effort at "canonization" (225), while Slater's *The Great Charles Dickens Scandal* draws attention to the inclusion of details about the Staplehurst railway accident of 1865, suggesting that it is surprising that Georgina

allowed the reference to Dickens's female companions in the carriage – thought to be Ellen and her mother – to remain, although this reference was cut out of the 1882 edition (43). Adrian, ever focused on vindicating Georgina, tells us that the editing done by Georgina and Mamie was fairly usual for the period (217), while Slater argues that they were “pretty cavalier” even by the standards of the day (42). Humphry House describes it as a “family selection, edited by family methods, showing all possible faults of editing in a bewildering variety of forms and countless instances” (66), and details how, in the shortened 1893 edition, bits of three letters were put together when in previous editions they had been separate.<sup>13</sup> The dismissive use of ‘family’ here is very telling: what exactly do ‘family methods’ entail? House does not elaborate. Much of the criticism of the *Letters*, as indicated in these examples, focuses on what has been excluded rather than what is present; Dickens's separation from his wife, for example, is not mentioned in the *Letters*, but letters addressed to her are included. House's damning description ties up the failure of the *Letters* with the role of family specifically, tacitly suggesting that the involvement of the latter is inseparable from the failures of the *Letters*.

The letters to Catherine that are included are another point of contention. Slater suggests that the reconciliation of Georgina and Catherine after Dickens's death accounts for the inclusion of her letters (42), while Nayder argues that Georgina was trying to minimise Catherine's role in Dickens's life while emphasising her own by not including *more* letters (334); this is in direct opposition to Adrian's argument that Georgina tried to deflect attention away from herself and Dickens's dependence on her in the volumes (219). How is it possible to come to such disparate conclusions? Can Georgina have made herself feature “prominently” (Nayder 334) while trying to efface her presence?<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to see the volumes as structured “according to her entrance into – and Catherine's departure from – the household” (334) as Nayder argues, when the first volume binds together Dickens's literary life and marriage, beginning “From

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<sup>13</sup> Dexter, in compiling the Nonesuch edition of Dickens's letters, wrote that ““We have had at least three editors before us ... the result has been a sad jumble” (Dickens Museum C58, letter to Suzannet, 28 April 1938). He added, “I see in the Forster-Hogarth letters from America 1868 that most serious editing has been going on; Forster using parts of his own letters, with parts of those to G. indiscriminately; or perhaps he did not get many letters at all during this period, and used those to G. H. and M.A.D. [Georgina and Mamie]; then these wise editors when doing the Letters in 1880 omitted some of the parts of those quoted by F”.

<sup>14</sup> Adrian also writes that there are twenty-three letters to Catherine (221), while Nayder suggests that there are only nineteen (333). In the two-volume first edition and supplementary third volume, there are twenty-three letters to Catherine. Nayder's number might be based on letters having been edited and incorrectly attributed to different dates, or the later condensed editions.

the commencement of ‘The Pickwick Papers,’ and of Charles Dickens’ married life, dates the commencement of his literary life and his sudden world-wide fame” (*Letters* 1.3). Nayder argues that we should also read the fact that the first volume is the shortest and the final the longest as evidence of Georgina’s attempt to highlight her own role (334), suggesting that Catherine’s letters have been cut to make “the marital relationship seem distant” (334). Adrian, conversely, argues that proportionally this number of letters to Catherine is a fair representation, although he concedes that the letters are “seldom indicative of a young man in love” (222). Fifty-seven letters to Mamie are included while seventy-seven to Georgina are present, equal to around a sixth of the volumes in total. It is indisputable that the *Letters* attempt to avoid the subject of Dickens’s marriage, while simultaneously presenting Dickens as a loving family man. However, suggesting that the letters are not romantic seems to be more a criticism of Dickens’s style of courtship, and perhaps his own feelings towards Catherine, rather than a criticism of the volumes: the letters to his wife appear to be affectionate, addressing her as “My dearest” (1.12, 1.130, 1.223, 1.244). That the volumes would omit references to the break-up of Dickens’s marriage is unsurprising: this topic had also been lightly handled in Forster’s *Life* and, as discussed in chapter 2, there was a trend within Victorian biography to close the “sacred doors of home ... upon ... married life” (Elizabeth Gaskell, *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 450). In a letter to her brother Edward, informing him of Catherine’s death, Mamie wrote:

She died the day after our book was published. And it is the greatest comfort to Auntie and to me, to *have heard over and over again* from her own lips how pleased she was with it, how deeply she was interested in it, and how thoroughly she approved of the manner in which we had put it together. (Beinecke, Gimbel-Dickens H1340-46, “Dickens Family Letters 1868-1879”)

Whether or not Mamie’s claims are true, the letter shows the importance of Catherine’s approval of the *Letters* to the family – both to those compiling the letters, and to the other family members.

The volumes keep the focus on Dickens’s relationship to his family in a way that Forster’s *Life* does not. Members of the family are given thanks in the preface, give their gratitude at the end (2.449), and appear regularly as recipients of Dickens’s letters and features within them. House uses the idea of ‘family’ to dismiss the volumes, but family

is in fact central to understanding the role of the *Letters* in representations of Dickens in the 1880s and 1890s. For example, in a letter to Mary Talfourd about his impending voyage to America, Dickens writes that he “shall not see any of my children for six long months” and consequently describes it as a “dreary voyage” (1.51). We hear how Dickens misses his children (1.12); we see letters about his dogs (2.203, 3.255); we read the last letter he sends to his son (3.299). The picture we are given is of a man who has interests in his life outside of writing, primarily to do with family and home life. Dickens’s family pervades this volume both in the letters and also in an editorial role. While this admittedly causes the problems House identifies, it also gives us a lens with which to view the letters in the context of Dickens’s posthumous reputation.

That Mamie was involved in the editing also undermines the idea that Georgina could be so determinedly structuring the volume around herself, as Nayder suggests, although it is not clear how the work was divided between the two women. That the first volume is the smallest is also the case for the Pilgrim edition of Dickens’s letters, in which the years 1820-39 are given in one volume and every volume after contains the letters of only two years. As Dickens’s fame grew, so too did his correspondence and its survival, and Forster had made revelations about Dickens’s early life that could not be matched through extracts taken purely from correspondence. The *Letters* largely did not repeat Forster’s work. Rather than exploring what has been excluded, I will explore the role of the *Letters* as a ‘supplement’ to Forster, demonstrating that the volumes represent a pivotal moment in representations of Dickens by his family, presenting his domestic life in a way that Mamie and his other children would elaborate on, and at times challenge, in their own reminiscences. The aim of the volumes is not always clear, seemingly even to its editors: the question of ‘public interest’, which seems to have been a guiding principle for Georgina, pertains to events, correspondents and language at different times. This fits with Georgina’s idea of the *Letters* as a portrait of Dickens rather than a biography.

Georgina began to write about her plans for the *Letters* in 1878, suggesting to Annie Fields and other correspondents that it would be “a sort of supplement to Mr. Forster’s ‘Life’” (qtd. in Adrian 207),<sup>15</sup> an idea that is repeated in the preface (1.vii). Georgina defends the need for such a publication, arguing that Forster’s *Life*:

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<sup>15</sup> See also the letter of 22 June 1878 (New York, Morgan Library, MA104, letter 81), discussing a “supplement to Mr. Forster’s ‘Life’” and asking for letters of “sufficiently general interest” to include.

was exhaustive as a *Biography*, leaving nothing to be said ever more, in my opinion. But I believe it was universally felt to be incomplete as a *Portrait*, because the scheme of the Book, as Mr. Forster wrote it, prevented his making use of any letters – or scarcely any, besides those addressed to himself. (qtd. in Adrian 207)

There are several important ideas here. Firstly, that of a ‘supplement’: the *Letters* formed a traditional literary supplement in that they were bound to be “uniform with those of the first edition of the *Life*” (Slater, *Scandal*, 42), appearing therefore as a part of that set. Only three letters to Forster were included, again reinforcing the idea that the volumes are an addition to the tight focus of the *Life* rather than a replacement: there is no need to repeat Forster’s work. However, the need to supplement something also suggests that there is a deficiency and a need to “compensate for inadequacies” (*OED*). Georgina addresses this in her distinction between the biography and the portrait, and the implicit denigration of the former. Georgina’s conception of ‘portrait’ seems to come somewhere between the idea of a portrait as “Something which represents, typifies, or resembles the object described or implied; a type; a likeness”, and a portrait as “A representation in speech or writing; esp. a vivid or graphic description” (*OED*). The new preface to the two-volumes-in-one edition echoes this latter definition: in it, the editors describe how the deaths of contributors give “a new interest to the letters, which are so fresh and life-like that they seem to give graphic portraits both of the writer himself and of the friends to whom he wrote” (ix). The focus on the ‘graphic’ image, with its roots in pen and pencil drawing, connects the idea of a portrait with the idea that this is contingent on the use of letters to make a ‘complete’ portrait.<sup>16</sup> By using largely his own correspondence, Forster could not show how Dickens represented himself in speech or writing to others to the same extent as the *Letters*.

What seems to come through strongly is an ambivalent approach to the letters, both from critics and from Georgina herself: is it possible for them to reveal Georgina’s “reverence for his words” if it also shows “her willingness to rework them to protect his image” (Nayder 273)? The paradox is evident in Georgina’s own approach to the project: Nayder compares her to a spirit medium (334), responding to Georgina’s own

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<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, there were no images included in the first edition of the letters or the *Life*, bar the frontispieces; several grangerised copies exist, in which collectors have added their own images, newspaper clippings, signatures and other material (see for example Beinecke, Gimbel-Dickens H187 and New York, Morgan Library, MA7800). Perhaps this is why Georgina was supportive of Kitton’s *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil* (1890).

claim that the book is “like a new one from the dear dead Hand!” (qtd. in Adrian 207-208), but Georgina also calls it, when nearly ready for publication, “*our very own*” (qtd. in Adrian 212). This is compounded by the heavy editing, cutting and censoring of the letters, which, we are rather ominously told in the preface to the popular edition, have been “revised and corrected” (vii). That Dickens’s letters should need to be revised or corrected by Georgina and Mamie undermines the claim that the book is like one from his own hand, but also highlights the importance of the Dickens family in posthumous representations of Dickens. Georgina and Mamie seem to reduce their own identities to those of family members rather than named individuals, publishing the letters as by Dickens’s “sister-in-law and eldest daughter” to emphasise the importance of family. Their authority is in their relationship to him. The preface adds to this: the book is dedicated to Dickens’s other daughter, Kate Perugini, and friends and family are thanked for their contributions. We enter into a book that has the stamp of Dickens’s family on it in a way that no preceding book could.

The *Letters* claim to be “supplying a want which has been universally felt” (1.vii) since Forster’s biography, which we are told “is only incomplete as regards correspondence; the scheme of the book having made it impossible to include in its space any letters, or hardly any, besides those addressed to Mr. Forster.... no man ever expressed *himself* more in his letters than Charles Dickens” (1.vii). The *Letters* reference Forster, and the preface draws almost verbatim from the letter discussed above. It is clear that Georgina conceived of the *Letters* as a portrait rather than an attempt at biography: “a portrait of himself by himself” (1.ix). This language echoes Dickens’s diary of January 1838, given to us in the *Letters*, though he is here trying *not* to paint:

henceforth I make a steadfast resolution not to neglect, or *paint*. I have not done it yet, nor will I; but say what rises to my lips – my mental lips at least – without reserve. No other eyes will see it, while mine are open in life, and although I daresay I shall be ashamed of a good deal in it, I should like to look over it at the year’s end. (*Letters* 3.10-11, *Pilgrim* 1.631)

The poignancy of this passage lies not only in Dickens’s failure to maintain the diary but also in Dickens’s death, invoked here. The use of the diary gives the reader a sense of greater intimacy with the author, suggesting that what is related to them is truthful and unmediated. That the diary ends here in the *Letters* is one example of the many

omissions and changes the editors made. The diary continued sporadically for the whole of the year of 1838, rather than ending with the evocative claim from Dickens that he cannot keep it up (3.12). The pathos of Dickens's resolution to stop writing is carefully crafted by the editors.

Dickens's diary discusses the death of his other sister-in-law Mary Hogarth, though we are told in the editors' narrative that "We give only those paragraphs which are likely to be of any public interest" (3.8). What can this mean for Dickens's personal grief, which culminates in the diary with him ending "this brief attempt at a diary. I grow sad over this checking off of days, and can't do it" (3.12)? 'Public interest' is also discussed in Georgina's letters (qtd. in Adrian 207), a standard reiterated in letters to Annie Fields on the subject, in which she says that they are attempting to give "a new *and right* idea of his great heart and mind", to supplement Forster's "faithful" and "very acceptable" work which "fails entirely in giving a picture of my dear Brother-in-law; at any rate, it gives only one view of him" (qtd. in Adrian 215). The question of 'public interest' builds on Georgina's actions, outlined in the last section. The *Letters* seem to bind Dickens's personal life to 'public interest': the editors are keen to show the author's domestic side and so believe that every letter contains this kind of interest. Georgina wrote to Annie that it would be "heart-breaking" to reject letters (qtd. in Adrian 207), telling her that:

There is hardly a little note from him in answer to an invitation or something of the slightest possible consequence, that has not some little graceful turn or pretty compliment – or little joke that makes it unlike all other people's notes – and marks it with his own original stamp. Then the *letters* to various people are so different in style – bright, earnest, serious, playful – really wonderful! (qtd. in Adrian 207-208)

Georgina saw the letters as valuable in themselves, understanding how revealing the everyday correspondence could be, while Forster believed the letters to him were of special quality. Georgina's letter reveals her criteria for inclusion: style is more important than subject matter. Therefore, what is of public interest becomes bound up not only with the daily matter of Dickens's life – more the subject of biography, perhaps – but also his writing style. What is of 'public interest' is increasingly unclear, then (it is hard to separate style from substance), and Georgina's own ambivalence is highlighted, both in her letters and in the final published volumes. She wanted to

protect domestic privacy on the one hand, but clearly saw domestic life as more truly revealing than Forster did. It is a gendered revision of history, focusing on the intimate, close details rather than the public story and the big picture.

In contrast to Forster's *Life*, criticised for its reliance almost entirely on letters to himself, the *Letters* show a more complete picture of Dickens's correspondence, not only with his family but also friends, fans and acquaintances. Those selected were heavily pruned: ellipses marking the absence of sections are used unevenly throughout, and in many places there is no indication that anything has been cut or reworded. Adrian argues that the insertions and rejections were "chiefly to enhance Dickens's own reputation" (218), noting for example that references to meals are omitted to combat Dickens's reputation for over-eating and drinking. Of course, a contemporary reader could not know what was cut – aside from guessing at the letters that may have passed between Dickens and his wife, and others, over their separation.

Although Forster also censored and excluded parts of Dickens's life in his biography and, in that sense, the *Life* and *Letters* are not very different in what they exclude, the *Letters* are strikingly different in what they choose to show. There are some particularly significant 'supplements' to, and revisions of, Forster. One of these is the account of Dickens giving up the cemetery plot next to Mary Hogarth so that her brother could be buried next to her. In Forster we are given a Dickens desperate to keep the plot for himself:

It is a great trial to me to give up Mary's grave; greater than I can possibly express. I thought of moving her to the catacombs, and saying nothing about it; but then I remembered that the poor old lady is buried next her (sic) at her own desire, and could not find it in my heart, directly she is laid in the earth, to take her grandchild away. The desire to be buried next her is as strong upon me now, as it was five years ago; and I *know* (for I don't think there ever was love like that I bear her) that it will never diminish. I fear I can do nothing. Do you think I can? They would move her on Wednesday, if I resolved to have it done. I cannot bear the thought of being excluded from her dust; and yet I feel that her brothers and sisters, and her mother, have a better right than I to be placed beside her. (198-99)

This contrasts strongly with the letter to Mrs Hogarth included in the *Letters*. The letter

Forster quotes above is not included; instead, Dickens writes that he “had always intended to keep poor Mary’s grave for us and our dear children, and for you. But if it will be any comfort to you to have poor George buried there, I will cheerfully arrange to place the ground at your entire disposal” (3.20). Although Forster’s Dickens concedes that her family has a greater right to the ground, the letter emphasises his loss and a selfish sense of grief. The letter to Mrs Hogarth, however, is full of concern for her. The *Letters* serve to reframe Dickens as a caring and considerate correspondent rather than an introspective, selfish figure. This is reflected throughout the volumes because of the nature of the letters chosen; Dickens’s selfish desires, expressed to one close friend, contrast strongly with the Dickens correspondent of the *Letters*.

Another significant moment is the Staplehurst railway accident of 1865, which is given short shrift in Forster: Forster’s Dickens tells him that “No words can describe the scene” (742), and its impact on Dickens’s health is mentioned rather than further information about the event (742-43). In the *Letters* we are given more detail, including the hint at Ellen’s presence that Slater has discussed (*Scandal* 32, *Letters* 2.229-30), culminating with Dickens’s assertion that “No imagination can conceive the ruin of the carriages” (2.231). He told Thomas Kitton that “I don’t want to write about it” (2.231), and Forster would seem to be honouring this: by including Dickens’s graphic description, the *Letters* show that he *had* written about it. However, the *Letters* permit readers to understand the horrors of the event without being able to accuse Dickens of having capitalised on the incident in his published writings.

Dickens’s death is another moment that the *Letters* elaborate upon and ‘supplement’. In Forster, Dickens’s final hours are introduced by his writing: we see Dickens’s isolation while writing in the Swiss chalet, and Forster hints at the final words that Dickens wrote of *Edwin Drood* before his death.<sup>17</sup> In the *Letters*, we see Dickens through the eyes of his family: he was “exceedingly cheerful and hopeful” and his tiredness “caused no alarm or surprise” as he was often tired after working (2.447). We are told that his family “saw a shudder pass over him, heard him give a deep sigh, saw one tear roll down his cheek, and he was gone from them” (2.448). No such detail is given by Forster. The description of his final moments is emotive and sentimental, and while Forster closes with Dickens’s place in Poets’ Corner and literary history (856), the *Letters*

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<sup>17</sup> “Of the sentences he was then writing, the last of his long life of literature, a portion has been given in facsimile on the previous page; and the reader will observe with a painful interest, not alone its evidence of minute labour at this fast-closing hour of time with him, but the direction his thoughts had taken” (Forster 851).

close with Dickens's conservatory (2.449): a home space for the domestic man as concerned with trivial household matters as with his literary life. It is an interesting moment to compare, because it is one instance where Georgina knew more: she was present, and Forster had to rely on her account in giving his. Georgina and Mamie did not use letters to relate Dickens's death, but included his last few letters and ended with a quotation from *Dombey and Son*, set apart in a different font that emulates an epitaph on a grave ("Oh, thank God, all who see it, for that older fashion yet, of immortality!" [2.449, *Dombey* 225]). It is also a subtle moment that demonstrates the fuller picture the *Letters* are supposed to give. Forster relates Dickens's last words as "On the ground" (852), while Georgina and Mamie's account is "Yes, on the ground" (2.447). With this small difference, a revision is made. It does not contradict Forster, but adds something that only the family could add.

The *Letters* provide a complex beginning to representations of Dickens by his family. The supposed focus on 'public interest' is bound up with a focus on Dickens as he was to his family, enabling Georgina and his children to establish themselves as the primary authority against a proliferation of material about Dickens from friends, acquaintances, critics and others. The *Letters* 'supplement' Forster but also revise him, sometimes significantly, by claiming that Forster's portrayal of Dickens is incomplete, and that it is necessary to show Dickens as he was to (other) friends and family in order to understand him. This is also demonstrated in the later reminiscences published by the family, and in the lectures and public readings given by Dickens's sons in the early twentieth century.

### 3.3. From the Family to the Fellowship

Although references to Dickens's novels are present in the *Letters*, they are secondary to painting a picture of a domestic Dickens. Dickens's daughter Mamie continued this picture in her child's life of Dickens, aimed at "making any boys and girls love and venerate the Man – before they can know and love and venerate the Author" (*Charles Dickens by His Eldest Daughter* 3); she did not tackle the perplexing question of why readers would want to venerate Dickens as a man without knowing him as an author. She also wrote *My Father As I Recall Him*, a devotional piece of life writing that once again centres on Dickens at home. The Dickens that Mamie promoted was a domestic figure, a father first and writer second; she writes that "No man was so inclined

naturally to derive his happiness from home affairs. He was full of the kind of interest in a house which is commonly confined to women” (12). Trezise argues that Mamie hints “at a complex character with a dark and potentially frightening side to his nature” (27), but this is surely a paranoid reading, influenced by what we might have learned about Dickens since the publication of the memoir. The way that Mamie describes Dickens’s love of animals and their love of him, including the deaf kitten that follows him around (81) and the “peculiar voice” he had for Mrs Bouncer, Mamie’s Pomeranian, “to which she would respond at once” (83) has echoes of Wilkie Collins’s Count Fosco from *The Woman in White*, who has trained white mice and birds and “smiles at them, and kisses them, and calls them by all sorts of endearing names” (223). Fosco’s sinister ability to tame and control animals mirrors his control of his wife, and his desire to possess Marian Halcombe: his ability to speak soothingly to animals is mirrored in the “secret gentleness in his voice, in speaking to a woman, which, say what we may, we can none of us resist” (221). A reader of Victorian fiction might find something unsettling about Dickens’s domestic habits, but it is difficult to separate this from what we have learned since about his treatment of Catherine.

Nevertheless, it was particularly important to emphasise Dickens’s domestic role because of his accusations against Catherine: Georgina and Mamie preemptively defended Dickens against charges of cruelty to her in their separation and in keeping her children from her that would come to a head in the twentieth century following revelations about Dickens’s relationship with Ellen. They did this by highlighting his loving nature as a father, and his interest in the life of the house. Dickens’s sons, Charley, Alfred and Henry, on the other hand, used anecdotes about Dickens in lectures on his novels, gave public readings as their father had done late in his career, and published new editions of his works. Charley, in continuing as editor of Dickens’s periodical *All The Year Round*, saw himself as continuing Dickens’s literary legacy and this contrasted with the domestic emphasis of the Dickens women. These memorial acts are also quite different to other Victorian and Edwardian examples of family biography. Edmund Gosse’s *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments* is presented as a “record of educational and religious conditions” in the preface. It is a memorial of record that is, in fact, rather hostile. It is also, as suggested by the subtitle, “a study of the development of moral and intellectual ideas during the progress of infancy”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kathy Rees has written on the different editions of *Father and Son*, including its different subtitles in England and America and its relationship to Gosse’s earlier biography of his father (“Edmund Gosse’s *Father and Son*: Renegotiating Biography Through Illustration”).

Where Gosse's text revises and attacks the idea of the Victorian father, the Dickens family writings cling to it. J. E. Austen-Leigh's memoir is also central to our understanding of family biography, in creating an image of Jane Austen as a writer that would later be contradicted by drafts and manuscripts as they came to light. Austen's own siblings had thought that the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* in 1818 would be the end of the story (Claire Harman 1); unlike Dickens's family, Austen's was not a central part of her legacy, and it is Austen-Leigh's position outside the immediate family circle that causes some of the misinterpretations he perpetuated in his biography of his aunt (10).

By 1900, Charley and Mamie Dickens had died, and Georgina was in her seventies, old enough for Henry to keep from her the newspaper accounts of a man in Australia claiming to be her illegitimate son by Dickens (Adrian 256). Edward and Alfred, encouraged to migrate to Australia in the 1860s, lived until 1902 and 1912 respectively, but Edward remained in Australia while Alfred toured Europe and America in the early twentieth century to lecture on his father (260). Henry and Katey Dickens, then, are the most influential family members in the twentieth century; Katey died in 1929 while Henry would live on until 1933, the last of Dickens's children. He was also one of the founding members of the Boz Club in 1900. The Club was primarily founded by Fitzgerald, one of Dickens's collaborators, at the Athenaeum in London. Fitzgerald took great pride in being its founder: the penultimate chapter of his two-volume *Life of Charles Dickens* is titled "The Boz Club", and in it he boasts of "carr[ying] the scheme out without taking counsel with anyone" (2.306). The chapter, dedicated to the Boz Club's achievements, ends with Fitzgerald asserting his role in the Fellowship, too, as "its first President, while the great writer's son is the second" (2.309). The biography was dedicated to fellow Boz Club member and former Dickens illustrator Marcus Stone, and described the Club in personal, intimate terms:

You and I were of the old Gadshill times, and heard the chimes at midnight in its cosy chambers. Did not these ring back to us on that night in the early time of the Boz Club, at its first meeting, when each stood up and rehearsed his recollections? – A strangely interesting meeting it was: it seemed to bring back the spirit of the amiable Boz himself. (v)

This quotation draws on the connection of William Shakespeare's Falstaff to Gad's Hill

that Dickens himself appreciated (it being the site of Falstaff's robbery in *Henry IV Part 1*): in *Henry IV Part 2*; Falstaff reminisces with Justice Shallow that, "We have heard the chimes at midnight" (3.2.211). The phrase, too, has an echo of the bells that Scrooge hears in *A Christmas Carol*, transporting him to the past, present and future, and both connotations emphasise that the Club's success lay in its personal connection to Dickens: only those who had visited Gad's Hill could recognise the spirit of Boz and have the sense of shared camaraderie invoked by Shakespeare's words.<sup>19</sup>

These two societies, which not only met for their own communal acts of remembrance but also engaged in public events and literary debates about Dickens, shaped his early posthumous reputation. In a 1919 review of *The Secret of Dickens* by W. Walter Crotch (a founding member of the Dickens Fellowship) for the *Times Literary Supplement*, Virginia Woolf commented, "Perhaps no one has suffered more than Dickens from the enthusiasm of his admirers, by which he has been made to appear not so much a great writer as an intolerable institution" (163). This act of institutionalising Dickens started as an act of commemoration. 'Boz' was the name adopted by Dickens in his early career and one he continued to use with friends long after he ceased to publish under that name. The Boz Club, then, was essentially a collection of Dickens's remaining friends, family and collaborators. The connections with the name 'Boz' are quite different from 'Dickens', invoking the early narrative persona of *Sketches by Boz* or *Picknick*, and the emphasis on satirical humour in the former, and homosocial bonding in the latter. It was also used in Dickens's letters, so its use creates a familiarity with Dickens rooted in knowing the man, but was favoured by Forster more often than in Georgina and Mamie's *Letters*. Robert L. Patten in *Charles Dickens and Boz: The Birth of the Industrial-Age Author* discusses in detail the associations and problems of 'Boz' for Dickens, chosen "in order to keep Charles Dickens separate from his authorial personification – separate and under control" but taking on his own identity that contemporary readers in the 1830s read as ever a bachelor, and a vulgar one at that (44). As discussed in chapter 2, Forster describes these years in his *Life* as Dickens before he had his higher purpose in social reform (88). For Forster, 'Boz', then, was seen as lacking in the kind of literary social conscience that would characterise Dickens's later novels – and, certainly, would become the focal point of Dickens's reputation following Forster's biography.

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<sup>19</sup> Ironically, Fitzgerald had already left the Club, declining to serve as Secretary in 1903 and not even attending the dinner in 1904 (Beinecke, Gimbel-Dickens H59, *Boz Club Papers 1904*, 4). Fitzgerald's relationship with Boz Club will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

The Boz Club, while selective in its membership, was widely publicised: their literary pilgrimage to Kent in 1901 was documented in the *Daily News* and the *Daily Mail*, with the latter present to take photographs, establishing these men – as women were not allowed to join, although Dickens’s daughter Kate and sister-in-law Georgina were made honorary members in 1907 – as the authorities on Dickens.<sup>20</sup> Another outing was proposed in 1902 by Sir Francis Burnard, editor of *Punch*; Slater’s *Great Charles Dickens Scandal* tells us that Burnard had found evidence that Dickens had spent time in Condette, near Boulogne (142-43). Burnard suggested the outing in a column, which was then enthusiastically supported by Fitzgerald in the *Boz Club Papers*, but it was quashed – perhaps by Henry, aware of Dickens’s connection to Condette through Ellen.<sup>21</sup> The Club made remembering Dickens an activity primarily rooted in homosocial bonding and shared memories rather than values: Fitzgerald later described it as a club for everyone “who had been known to or was connected in some way with Dickens” (*An Output* 35). Its existence demonstrated a resistance to the very domestic Dickens shown by his daughters and sister-in-law, and the publicly minded Dickens shown by Forster. However, as the ranks of surviving Victorians thinned and the records of the meetings began to contain lists of those who passed away since the last, the Boz Club began to change and a conflict arose between those who wanted to remember the ‘Boz’ they knew, and those who wanted to debate Dickens’s legacy. Following the annual meal, there would be an after-dinner debate relating to Dickens which concluded with a statement by Henry, who included personal anecdotes about his father. Dickens’s best novel was discussed, for example, though “It was generally understood that ‘Pickwick’ and ‘David Copperfield’ were not to be included in the list, as they would limit the scope of the Discussion” (Beinecke, *Boz Club Papers 1904*, 8). Henry would have the final word on the topic as Dickens’s son, legitimising the Boz Club meeting in his role as family representative.

Increasingly, however, members disliked the critical aspect of the proceedings: in 1906, following a discussion of Dickens’s illustrators, Stone, as one of them, responded,

I think we talk too analytically about the genius of the illustrious “Boz.” ...  
This is not a place and not an occasion when we wish to make demonstrations

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<sup>20</sup> See “The Cult of Dickens is Flourishing Still” (*Daily News*, 10 June 1901) and “In the Footsteps of Charles Dickens: How the Boz Club Celebrates the Memory of the Great Novelist” (*Daily Mail*, 11 June 1901) (Dickens Museum, Kitton Papers, “Dickensiana” 4, 41).

<sup>21</sup> The full story is given by W. J. Carlton in “Dickens’s Forgotten Retreat in France”.

about our great master. ... At times I think there have been imported into these meetings a little too much of the grave and ponderous element instead of the genial and living one, and feeling, as all his old friends do, and as I think all the whole world does, a specially convinced regard for him, I think we ought to limit ourselves more to that. (Hear, hear.) (Beinecke, H61, *Boz Club Papers 1906*, 25)

Once again, there is an appeal to the 'living element' of Boz, whatever that may be. The Chair that evening, a Lord Robertson (1845-1909), who seems to have been offended by the reiteration of the importance of the intimacy of the Club's members with Dickens, remarked in closing that:

I am afraid that this Club rightly understood is so esoteric and intimate and restricted a body that I am a mere outsider. I gather from your remarks that anyone who speaks of Charles Dickens from the point of view of one who has no relation to him at all except that of an admiring reader, is rather out of place. (Beinecke H61, *Boz Club Papers 1906*, 32)

Although this was met with 'No, no', it makes clear that to remember Dickens for many of the Boz Club members was to put him above all criticism – to worship him – and focus on the convivial remembrance of its key members. The Dickens they chose to remember was shared through personal anecdote, and was therefore not accessible to anyone who did not know the man – in spite of claims, like Stone's above, that they speak for the whole world. This air of elite exclusivity was reiterated by illustrator Henry Furniss, who spoke of the Boz Club as:

the House of Lords as compared with the House of Commons of the Dickens Fellowship, which brought forth a remonstrance from the President, Henry F Dickens, who said that the Boz Club, of which he was also a member, could afford to exist without boasting of a superiority over the Fellowship! (Dexter, "The Fellowship in Retrospect", 26)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Dexter himself seemed keenly aware of the class difference between members of the Boz Club and the Dickens Fellowship. He wrote on more than one occasion to Suzannet that the Fellowship's initial low subscription fee had got the Fellowship started on the wrong foot: "it got the wrong class of people from the start. There are twenty branches which are no good at all to us, except that they send twenty guineas

For Henry, the Boz Club meant remembering Dickens in a very specific way: as a social being, rather than a family man, and perhaps specifically remembering him in a way that differed from the feminised domestic figure shown by Georgina and Mamie. Although Henry was dismissive of the above comparison, it is clear that the Boz Club established itself as an elite group in possession of the greatest knowledge of Dickens the man.

Dickens's own conceptions of knowledge and understanding are useful here. Rosemarie Bodenheimer has discussed in detail the different kinds of knowledge Dickens uses in his works, particularly highlighting the use of anecdotal versus scientific knowledge (9), as in Dickens's response to criticisms about Mr. Krook's spontaneous combustion in *Bleak House*. In that example, Dickens provides a list of anecdotal accounts to support its inclusion (*Bleak House* 4). The Boz Club can be understood as a group that privileged anecdote and memory over analytical knowledge, while the Fellowship had no such expectations of their members. As I show in chapter 4, different hierarchies of memory and understanding are created by Dickens's friends and colleagues in representing their relationships with Dickens. The family and the Boz Club did something similar, tying together memory and knowledge inextricably, albeit in different ways. There begins to be a conflict between 'monumental' memory, typified by Forster's *Life*, supplementary memory, and ritualised commemoration.

The Boz Club's approach contrasted with the Dickens Fellowship, founded in 1902 with the very deliberate choice of being a 'Fellowship' rather than a 'society', with meetings, conferences and fundraising events. For an ageing generation of Victorians, clubs and society had connotations of a kind of club culture "heavily reliant on ... the manoeuvrings of exclusion and inclusion, on a keen sense of social distinction that keeps the socially ineligible at bay" (Barbara Black 2). While this suited Fitzgerald and the Boz Club, the Fellowship was a rejection of this. Their fellowship was with Dickens and his works, and the name shows the kind of 'personal' relationship its members felt with the author in contrast to the intimacy of the Boz Club: the word has connotations of spiritual connection (*OED*). In 1905, the Dickens Fellowship launched the *Dickensian: A Magazine for Dickens Lovers and Monthly Record of the Dickens Fellowship*. The magazine became a forum for the kind of discussion that the Boz Club had begun to balk at. However, the Fellowship did not originally have the support of the Dickens

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to Headquarters each year. The best way is to ignore them; and we do our best to do so!" (Dickens Museum, C52, letter 7 February 1934); "One half of the D. F. is a delightful society; but the other half has no right to call itself a Dickens society; they are purely social societies which make use of the name of Dickens as an attraction" (Dickens Museum, C58, letter 11 September 1938).

family. Henry, offended at not being invited to be a Vice-President of the Fellowship before it began advertising itself, resisted joining, and several members of the Boz Club, including Samuel Luke Fildes, when approached, declared themselves too busy to take it on.<sup>23</sup>

Henry was unhappy that he had not been approached before the rules of the club were drawn up (Dickens Museum, B139, letter to Kitton, 6 January 1903), and claimed that no one in the family had been spoken to. He saw the Fellowship as an advertisement for the revived *Household Words* journal and was quite insistent that he “did not care to be a party to it”.<sup>24</sup> In a letter for sale on eBay in March 2015 from Henry to B. W. Matz, one of the Fellowship’s founders, Henry writes, “Had there been any real desire to have my name added to the list of the Club I thought fondly that some communication would have been sent to me as the only surviving son of Charles Dickens and the representative of the family in this country” (letter 20 October 1902).<sup>25</sup> This supports the claim made in the letter to Kitton, in which he wrote “it certainly did not strike me that there was any particular desire that the family should be represented in the Club. ... I do not see my way to altering my decision” (6 January 1903). With Georgina still alive, as well as an older sister and a surviving brother, it is striking that Henry saw himself unequivocally as the representative of the family. In this role, Henry had thrown his support behind the Boz Club rather than the Fellowship.

Although Henry initially resisted, other members of his family did not: Georgina and Katey were made honorary Vice Presidents, and Katey would go on to serve as President for three consecutive years. Georgina became a kind of matriarch of the society, as the one with the longest memory of Dickens. Henry did resolve these differences with the Fellowship and take up the honorary position of Life President (also awarded to Katey *after* her three years of presidency), but his resistance and his claim to be the family representative show an underlying tension not only between Henry on the one side and Georgina and Katey on the other, but between the family and the Dickens-loving public. This is also evident in an anecdote from Dexter, told to Suzannet, that Katey “much annoyed her brother Henry by placing the letters

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<sup>23</sup> See letter from Fildes to Kitton 27 January 1903 (Dickens Museum, Kitton Papers, B141).

<sup>24</sup> Charley had revived *Household Words* initially in 1881. It was incorporated into *All The Year Round* in 1895, and appeared sporadically until 1906. Between 1901 and 1903 it was owned by Hall Caine, and it worked together with the Dickens Fellowship until 1906 (see Ley’s endnote 516, the *Life of Charles Dickens* 861).

<sup>25</sup> The claim to be ‘the only surviving son’ is difficult to understand; Henry can only mean that he is the only surviving son in the country, as his brother Alfred was still living in Melbourne, Australia.

[Catherine's] in the Museum without consulting him" (Dickens Museum, C54, letter 8 September 1936). This tension between members of the family was not limited to the siblings or immediate family. In the 1930s, Henry asked Dexter not to let other members of the family know exactly what he had gifted to the Dickens House, "afraid that the family will begin to grumble if anything of value is 'given' away" (recounted in a letter from Dexter to Suzannet, 27 May 1935, Dickens Museum, C53). By this point, he was the only immediate family member remaining, but several cousins were also laying claim to the Dickens legacy.

While there were early points of disagreement between the Boz Club and the Dickens Fellowship, by the end of the First World War only the Fellowship remained. Its focus on those who had known Dickens gave the Boz Club a short life: by 1918, few of its founding members were alive. Fitzgerald, writing in 1912, also suggested that there were early problems that caused him to leave the club: he writes, "I managed, controlled, and took all the trouble and expense off everybody's hands, when of a sudden certain members conceived the idea that they also ought to control and manage" (*An Output* 36). In the 1920s and 30s, the project to protect Dickens's image became a more serious one for the Fellowship in the face of revelations about his 'affair' with Ellen. By this time, Dickens's immediate family was dwindling; by 1933, none of his children would still be alive. What it meant to commemorate Dickens changed. Although Dickens's novels were not above discussion at the Fellowship's events or in the *Dickensian*, his novels and life, first recounted by Forster, became intertwined in the act of remembrance, and several Dickensian scholars sought to protect the author's own reputation as part of their reverence for his work. The Storey Papers held by the Dickens Museum contain several letters from Marie Dickens, Henry Dickens's widow, showing the continued commitment of both the extended Dickens family and also the Fellowship's leading members in maintaining Dickens's reputation. For example, Marie wrote to J. W. T. Ley (who published an edition of Forster's *Life* in 1928 and acted as Honorary General Secretary of the Dickens Fellowship in its early years, as well as contributing regularly to the *Dickensian*) asking him to block the publication of Wright's *Life of Charles Dickens* (Dickens Museum, C10), as well as later writing to Gladys Storey bemoaning the fact that Marie was not shown a manuscript of *Dickens and Daughter* before publication so that she could prevent certain details being published (Dickens Museum, Storey Papers, Envelope P, letter 18 July 1939). Of Wright, she even suggested to Ley that "if in your review in 'The Dickensian' you point

out the inaccuracies and treat the book with the contempt it deserves, such treatment of it will be all the notice it requires” (Dickens Museum, Wright Papers, letter 2, 3 October 1935).<sup>26</sup>

The *Dickensian* and the Fellowship were clearly trying to shape the field of Dickens scholarship at this point, unable to prevent controversial books from being published but able to influence their reception. Following the publication of Wright’s biography, Ley chased him through the newspapers over a period of several months by responding caustically to reviews of Wright in newspapers as diverse as the *Liverpool Post*, the *Nottingham Guardian*, the *Spectator*, the *London Mercury* and the *Methodist Times and Leader*, all rather masochistically kept by Wright in a scrapbook of reviews (Dickens Museum, Wright Papers). During a lengthy exchange in the *Liverpool Post*, C. E. Bechhofer Roberts, the author, under the pseudonym ‘Ephesian’, of the 1928 Mills and Boon novel about Dickens, *This Side Idolatry*, entered the fray, demanding that both sides produce their evidence or end their dispute (*Liverpool Daily Post*, 10 December 1935). That such a call for common sense could come from the author of a Dickensian biofictional novel that itself presented Dickens as a canting, hypocritical figure, obsessed with his reputation and dismissive of his wife speaks volumes about the nature of the debate, but the commitment to suppressing and discounting Wright was a serious undertaking for Ley and the *Dickensian*.<sup>27</sup>

For almost the first four decades of the twentieth century, the Dickens Fellowship and remaining members of the Dickens family had worked together to maintain Dickens’s image.<sup>28</sup> However, when *Dickens and Daughter* was published in 1939, six years

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<sup>26</sup> Although there are several examples of Marie appealing to Ley and the *Dickensian*, there was also some friction here: in planning the Nonesuch edition of Dickens’s letters, Dexter wrote to Suzannet that he did not want to publish a public call for letters because he had not consulted the family, and did not yet want them to know (Dickens Museum, C54, letter 3 November 1936); unfortunately one of the archives to which he appealed for letters sent copies of the letters requested directly to Marie, “asking her to hand them on to me if she so wishes!!”.

<sup>27</sup> Dexter, in his letters to Suzannet, wrote of Wright that he “hope[d] to flay him completely very soon” (Dickens Museum, C54, letter 19 February 1936); he felt that “if I ignored it in the *Dickensian*, as the book will be more permanent than a mere Newspaper article, if we did not take some notice of it, future historians might suppose we accepted what Wright had to say” (Dickens Museum, C54, 18 November 1936).

<sup>28</sup> This was often an uneasy alliance. Dexter wrote to Suzannet often about the family, viewing them as very mercenary and uninterested in the Fellowship:

They are still a funny family, you must know. Didn’t invite the Dickens Fellowship to attend the Memorial service at the Temple Church [...] although only a few days before Mr. Edwards, in replying to a communication of Lady D. had mentioned that he wanted as early advice as possible of the Memorial Service, as several (sic) important members were anxious to attend. Well. Well. ....  
.... (Dickens Museum, C58, letter to Suzannet 18 January 1938)

after the last of Dickens's children had died, it confirmed Dickens's affair with Ellen – for some, but not all, as the evidence could be dismissed as unsubstantiated gossip – through recounted conversations with daughter Katey. The *Dickensian*, faced with a scandal that undid decades of Dickensian image-making, denied even Katey's authority at this point, claiming that the account “d[id] not ring true” (“Father and Daughter” 253). Tasked with choosing from among different accounts presented by different family members, a decision was made to privilege the accounts of Katey's siblings over hers.<sup>29</sup> Katey claimed to have written a reminiscence of her father years before and destroyed it, instead extracting a promise from Storey, repeated in the book, to tell the ‘truth’ after her death (*Dickens and Daughter* 91).<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, she seems to be the only one who saw ‘truth’ as any kind of priority, although this simple promise has a more complicated history: her publisher, Frederick Muller, encouraged her to put the promise in the preface because, “You must remember that reviewers are very busy people and if you can give them something like this in a preface it draws their immediate attention to the book” (Dickens Museum, Storey Papers, Envelope Z, letter dated 2 May 1939). Katey also seemed afraid of what Henry might publish, telling Storey “I do pray God that I die before Harry for I could not stand anything that will come out – all wrong” (Dickens Museum, Storey Papers, Milkman's Account Book, entry 9 December 1928). Perhaps her fears were that he would reinforce the worst of the hagiographic accounts already published.

Storey's motivations for publishing when she did were also questioned by Dexter; he asked her why she waited and she claimed she had waited until after Henry's death, which had taken place several years earlier, then that she was waiting for the centenary of Katey's birth (related by Dexter in a letter to Suzannet, 22 February 1939, Dickens Museum, C59). Dexter did not appear to be fully satisfied by either answer. While Slater has suggested that the Storey Papers support Storey's claim “that she wasn't muck-raking” (Dickens Museum, Storey Papers, Grey Box), the evidence appears much more ambivalent. For example, one title Storey considered was “The Truth Is Told” (Dickens Museum, Storey Papers, “Dickens and Daughter” MS). The Storey Papers also show

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<sup>29</sup> The account in the *Dickensian* was written by Ley, whereas Dexter was more sympathetic. After meeting Storey, he wrote to Suzannet that “I feel a little sore, and so will Ley I am sure, that after our first condemnation of Thomas Wright she did not take the opportunity of seeing one or other of us” (Dickens Museum, C59, letter 22 February 1939).

<sup>30</sup> Storey attempted to trace Katey's earlier plans, writing to Maggs Bros Ltd. (Dickens Museum, Storey Papers, Envelope O) about a letter Katey had written to Mr. Moy Thomas, one of Dickens's ‘young men’, asking about the “early days” of *Household Words* (letter 6 June 1903).

that Storey did consider Muller's suggestion. A draft dated 4 May 1939 states that "This volume is the outcome of a promise made by the author to Mrs. Kate Perugini, to tell the 'Truth' about the cause of the separation between her father and mother". Next to it, in pencil, it says "I do not wish to have a preface or pre-note to my book, G. S.". The quotation ultimately used, "... for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. St Matthew X.26", perhaps represents a compromise, intended to tantalise the reader without focusing on the promise explicitly. In any case, the promise subverted the image created by the Dickens family and positioned the book as the first 'honest' picture of Dickens. The book still conveys Katey's love for her father, but also a desire to defend her mother and tear down the image the family had worked so hard to create, perhaps best summed up in her famous letter to George Bernard Shaw many years before the book was even conceived of: "If you could make the public understand that my father was not a joyous, jocose gentleman walking about the world with a plum pudding and a bowl of punch, you would greatly oblige me" (Katey to George Bernard Shaw, December 1897 qtd. in Slater, *Charles Dickens*, 201). The suppression of Katey's account was largely successful at the time, perhaps partly due to the outbreak of the Second World War shortly after its publication; *Dickens and Daughter* is no longer in print and remains a marginal text.<sup>31</sup>

The Fellowship, in contrast to the Boz Club, gave commemoration of Dickens to a wider group of people, and its influence has been felt throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and is still felt today. This chapter has not touched on the other aims of the Fellowship from its inception, namely its pledge to "spread the love of humanity", its commitment to "campaign against those 'social evils' that most concerned Dickens" and the pledge to "assist in the preservation and purchase of buildings and objects associated with his name or mentioned in his works" ("History of the Fellowship"). Nevertheless, some aspects of Dickensian biography can still be traced back to the early efforts of Dickens's friends and family, and the process of selective commemoration that characterised Dickens's afterlife in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whether Dickens is a family man with a bowl of punch or somehow tainted by his connection with Ellen, at the heart of these attempts at image-

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<sup>31</sup> It was originally intended for publication in June 1939; this was pushed back to August and war broke out in September. One reason for the delay of the book may have been that the printer was concerned about the book's contents: in a letter from the publisher, Frederick Muller, to Storey, he writes, "I am sorry to say that there has been a delay with the book, for the printer after a good deal of time, has now said that he prefers not to print it, as he thinks it may be dangerous" (Dickens Museum, Storey Papers, Envelope Z, 24 April 1939). Dexter had received advanced notice of the book, and discussed it at length with Suzanet (see the Dexter letters held by the Dickens Museum).

making are questions about biographical legacy and acts of remembrance that are still of interest today – particularly in light of the bicentennial celebrations of 2012, with their renewed public interest in Dickens’s life and the new kinds of memorial acts that took place around the world.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For the London celebrations of Dickens in 2012, see Peter Kirwan and Charlotte Mathieson, “A Tale of Two Londons: Locating Shakespeare and Dickens in 2012”.

## CHAPTER 4. DICKENS'S OLD MEN

Charles Dickens's 'young men' were a diverse group of writers he employed from the 1850s onwards, first at *Household Words* and later at *All The Year Round*, including James Payn, Blanchard Jerrold, George Augustus Sala, Percy Fitzgerald and Edmund Yates.<sup>1</sup> Despite the patronage and support of their 'Chief', few of them went on to have particularly successful careers in writing fiction, and none of them could hope to approach the achievement of Dickens himself. P. D. Edwards, in his book *Dickens's Young Men: George Augustus Sala, Edmund Yates and the World of Victorian Journalism*, focuses on Sala and Yates, arguing that "In their maturity, Sala and Yates were less strongly influenced by Dickens than critics, biographers and literary historians have often assumed", and asserting that "both achieved their greatest success in styles and modes that Dickens never attempted at all" (1). However, by the time Dickens's young men were no longer young, and were engaged in looking back on their own reputations and literary careers in their autobiographies in the 1880s and 1890s, allusions to Dickens were a useful way of narrating a particular life story, one that had been guided by one of the most influential figures of the century. This chapter argues that the move away from a particular cultural construction of influence that Edwards identifies was a self-conscious one: in order to establish a narrative of their lives that highlighted their own individual successes, Dickens's legacy was invoked and manipulated. Added to this, both writers attempted to claim some new kind of authority about Dickens: Sala produced one of the first book-length accounts after his death, ahead both of John Forster's biography and even the quick and rough account produced by John Camden Hotten (as discussed in chapter 2), while Yates sought to dethrone Forster himself, setting his own friendship with, and understanding of, Dickens above that mapped in Forster's *Life*. This chapter further contextualises these accounts against others from Dickens's circle, showing how Wilkie Collins conceived of his own formative years and how Dickens was used to frame that account by an American journalist, George Makepeace Towle. It will compare the life writing of Sala and Yates with that of Fitzgerald and Marcus Stone, who offered new accounts and ways of remembering

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<sup>1</sup> Sala himself uses the term: "All of the young men who gathered round him [Dickens] – Blanchard Jerrold, Sydney Blanchard, W. Moy Thomas, Walter Thornbury, and, later, John Hollingshead and James Payn – were, to a greater or smaller extent, imitators of the style of their Chief. ..." (*Things I Have Seen and People I Have Known* 1.77). Edwards also includes Percy Fitzgerald and Andrew Halliday and adds that "Wilkie Collins, who rapidly acquired an independent reputation, was never one of them" (*Dickens's Young Men* 1).

Dickens into the twentieth century. Although Stone was not one of the ‘young men’, he was also offered opportunities by Dickens and engaged in acts to commemorate and celebrate Dickens after his death.

Dickens’s young men remain marginal figures in Victorian Studies. For a discussion of all of these figures together, it is necessary to go as far back as J. W. T. Ley’s *The Dickens Circle: A Narrative of the Novelist’s Friendships* (1918). Ley suggests that looking at the wider Dickens circle provides an “auxiliary to Forster” (viii) – much as the *Letters* discussed in chapter 3 were framed as a ‘supplement’ to his work.<sup>2</sup> Ley uses some of the autobiographies and biographical pieces discussed in this chapter, and positions the members of the circle in distinct ways. He writes of Stone as “older than his years” and therefore “a real companion to the novelist” (148). As I will show, this is in direct contrast to the image Stone created, because he instead aligned himself with the Dickens children. Ley’s characterisation is in fact closer to what Yates does to diminish the age gap between himself and Dickens. Of Fitzgerald, Ley mentions that “a certain class of critics” has sneered at “his enthusiastic hero-worship” (300). I would largely agree with the suggestion that Fitzgerald’s career must be read as hero-worship: certainly in his writing about Dickens he does not claim any importance for himself beyond his knowledge of, and work with, Dickens (unlike Sala and Yates), although his wide range of publications, statues, lectures and exhibitions shows that he was eager to set himself up as a literary figure of some importance. Ley establishes each writer’s connection to Dickens very diplomatically: while Sala is the “Most famous and most brilliant” of the Young Men (310), Yates is the “Greatest favourite” (297) and Fitzgerald “A very special favourite” (300). There is little to choose between these classifications. Ley draws one further distinction, telling us that Sala “was never *persona grata* as Yates, Fitzgerald, and Kent were, and he was not a frequent visitor at the novelist’s house, but he was well liked” (315).

Several of the other ‘young men’ also published life writing about Dickens. Payn, for example, reviewed Forster’s *Life*. In “The Youth and Middle Age of Charles Dickens” (*Chamber’s Journal* January 1872, February 1873, March 1874), he wrote of Forster as Dickens’s “best biographer”. Though he writes that Forster dwells too much on “what this and that critic has said of Dickens’ works” and asks “Who cares for these criticisms, or even for glowing eulogies of his writings with which the world has long ago made up

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<sup>2</sup> The language is strikingly similar: Ley writes “In my desire to gain a true notion as to what manner of man Dickens really was, I found Forster’s book disappointing” (vii).

its mind?”, Payn offered little challenge to Forster, and as such will not be further discussed here. Other of Dickens’s young men fall somewhere in between: John Hollingshead, for example, published work on Dickens as a reader, while Blanchard Jerrold wrote a recollection of Dickens that highlighted his “pure” sentiment and “emotional opinion[s]”, emphasising his femininity (5). Other accounts by George Dolby, William Powell Frith and James T. Fields offer contrasting perspectives. This chapter contrasts Dickens’s favourite and most successful ‘young men’ with Collins, as someone who did not capitalise on his connection with Dickens in the same way, and with Stone, who did not need to distance his career from Dickens’s because he was an artist, not a writer. Sala and Yates on the one side, and Fitzgerald on the other, represent two extremes: Sala and Yates made successful careers as journalists, while Fitzgerald made a successful career as a ‘Dickensian’. Edwards discusses Fitzgerald briefly, highlighting the differences between the three men. He writes that Fitzgerald:

devoted a whole book to his memories of Dickens. Sala dealt with his mainly in two chapters of his book *Things I Remember and People I Have Known* (sic) and Yates with his in a single chapter of his *Recollections*. Sala ... apparently took some liberties with the facts in order to make himself look more important, and closer, to Dickens than he actually had been, and Yates did the same in at least one instance. But Yates was the only one of the three young men Dickens called by his first name, and almost certainly the one whose company he enjoyed the most, and the most often. (124)

Fitzgerald certainly wrote the most prolifically about Dickens, reusing articles in his books. I will focus primarily on his biography of Dickens and his *Memories of Charles Dickens*.

Harold Bloom’s dichotomy that “Weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves” (5) is useful in understanding the relationship between these writers and Dickens. Bloom would view all three as ‘weaker talents’, but Sala and Yates made efforts to turn this idealisation into appropriation, thereby moving beyond Dickens. In *Memory and Memorials: From the French Revolution to World War One*, Matthew Campbell, Jacqueline M. Labbe, and Sally Shuttleworth write that “Memory became a necessary tool” for the Victorians, “allowing the collective act of memorializing, encouraging and bolstering social progression and the transformation of

the past into the future” (1). On a more individual level, Sala and Yates ‘transform’ their memories of Dickens into a foundation (and endorsement) of their journalistic careers. This chapter explores Sala’s 1870 pamphlet, his later reminiscences, and his autobiography, to argue that both Sala and Yates went on to present Dickens as an autocratic but childish editor and Chief, limiting their own literary output and development but patronising (in the good sense) their work and validating their career choices. Sala in particular acknowledges his guiding influence, from meeting him first when Sala was just ten years old (as his mother was understudying a role in Dickens’s play *The Village Coquettes*), to his death in 1870. Dickens is a legitimising presence within Sala’s two-volume reminiscences, but only one year later, his autobiography almost eliminated that thread of influence.

Peter Blake has published the most recent, thorough work on Sala: his 2009 article traces the relationship between him and Dickens, discussing the resonances between their work and the cooling of their relationship in the late 1850s and 1860s. *George Augustus Sala and the Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press* offers a new theoretical understanding of Sala’s work and re-evaluates his style, arguing that his early work as an engraver and illustrator has been undervalued in terms of its influence on his writing. Blake uses Sala’s autobiographical writings as evidence, but does not analyse the texts *as* texts. He writes that “the tensions that had been evident throughout their [Sala and Dickens’s] relationship lived on into the 1890s” (Blake, “Charles Dickens, George Augustus Sala and *Household Words*” 38), but does not explore the peculiar differences in the accounts Sala provided. Catherine Waters has written on Sala as a special correspondent, focusing on “A Journey Due North”, and on his series “Phases of ‘Public’ Life”.<sup>3</sup> Ralph Straus’s 1942 biography of Sala uses a wide range of sources but offers a very generous view of the author’s life and career. What this chapter intends to do is provide an analysis of the relationships between the life writing of these five men, demonstrating not a single linear connection but a plural, reciprocal one, taking into account questions of influence, homosociality and commemoration and demonstrating how Dickens’s ‘legacy’ gets constructed in the different accounts.

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<sup>3</sup> See “‘Much of Sala, and but Little of Russia’: ‘A Journey Due North’, *Household Words*, and the Birth of a Special Correspondent”; “Sketches of the Metropolis: Pub-Crawling with George Augustus Sala in *Household Words*”; “The *Household Words* Journalist as Ethnographer: G. A. Sala’s ‘Phases of “Public” Life””.

## 4.1. Devotional Writing in the 1870s

Sala's extended obituary was the first stand-alone posthumous biography of Dickens: as noted in chapter 2, although Hotten's preface is dated June 1870, it appeared later in July. Based on the obituary Sala had provided for the *Daily Telegraph* (10 June 1870), it was padded with more information about Dickens's life, though what was presented was still lacking in detail and bolstered by Sala's typically verbose style. The essay opens: "He is gone, then! – the gifted writer, the prince of story-tellers, the most genial of essayists, the master of humour and pathos, the compeller of laughter and of tears, the wisest and kindest of moralists" (5). The style throughout the pamphlet is hyperbolic, lengthy and filled with relentless sub clauses, adverbs and adjectives.<sup>4</sup> We are told that Dickens writes "continuously, earnestly, sedulously, unflinchingly" (90); when providing examples from the novels, one will not do where fourteen might be listed (24). From the heightened sentimentality of the opening sentence to its closing remarks, Dickens's life is given in confessedly 'fanatical' terms (98). The purposes of this style are manifold. Firstly, the text opens with Dickens as a gifted writer, but goes on to credit him as "the master" and "the compeller" (5); as the adjectives become more forceful, the pleonastic style maintained throughout takes the Inimitable from being merely a gifted writer to an "essential part of the nineteenth century and of the Victorian era" (7) and having a career that "kings and conquerors might envy" (19). He is compared to, among others: William Shakespeare, Homer, John Milton in terms of genius and legacy (6-7); to David Garrick and Robert Peel in death (7-8); to William Makepeace Thackeray, as more a man of the people (10); to Raphael and Martin Luther as a leader of his disciples (13); Oliver Goldsmith, Richard Savage, Joseph Baretti, Voltaire, Miguel de Cervantes and John Dryden (48); while Daniel Maclise's portrait of Dickens is like "Guido's Beatrice" in its beauty and the way the eyes capture the viewer (16). The sheer number of comparisons adds to the overwhelming verbosity of Sala's style and the sense that Dickens has permeated the world of literature and art while also rising above his contemporaries. It is hard to summarise Sala and at times even to find paraphraseable content, but for him Dickens seems to form part of a pantheon, and dominates his

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<sup>4</sup> In a letter to Yates (27 June 1870), Sala claimed to have written the original article in Italian "in the hope of avoiding the conventionalities of mortuary notices", suggesting that this might account for its "odd kind of 'ring'" (131). He had learned Italian before he had learned English, and would later write that, in writing for Dickens, he "had to subdue my tendency to use words derived from the Latin instead of the Anglo-Saxon"; in writing for the *Daily Telegraph*, he reverted back to Latinate words (*Life and Adventures* 1.363).

contemporaries. While Forster sought to explain Dickens's life through extracts from his novels, Sala instead more often compared him to his contemporaries and predecessors. At times, Dickens is an allegorical figure harassed by "Envy", "Hatred", "Malice", "Uncharitableness", "Lying Slander" and "Domestic Espionage" calling for money (74). Dickens is presented as both individual and representative: he is above his peers but also symbolic. For Sala, the trajectory of Dickens's career represented the innumerable possibilities of the Victorian period, as well as its downsides. This perhaps anticipates the binding of the 'Dickensian' with the 'Victorian' discussed in the introduction.

Secondly, Sala compared the Inimitable not only to literary greats of the past and present but also to figures such as Robert Peel and, most strikingly, Napoleon Bonaparte (6, 13, 70). For Sala, Dickens was an essential part of the age because he typified it: "The roaring looms cannot for one instant be arrested; the whirling and clanking of the machine cannot for one moment be hushed. Charles Dickens himself died at his post, in full and earnest and active pursuit of his vocation" (8). The description is echoed in Christine Huguet and Paul Vita's introduction to *Unsettling Dickens: Process, Progress and Change* in which they write of Dickens as a steam engine, suggesting his work parallels the speed of a train in its "rich, breathless rhetoric" (21). For Sala, Dickens was also an important part of the age of industrialisation, except that he had now been hushed while the machines continue indefatigably. However, while Sala mourned his subject's passing, he also emphasised his fame and place in history by describing his "ubiquitous" presence (10) in life (compared to the more select and selective Thackeray, Thomas Carlyle and Alfred Tennyson). Dickens's fame is at once quantifiable and intangible: he is measured against his rivals and through sales, but "appealed not only to the intellect, but to the heart of the entire civilized community" (6) and is known by all (11). While Thackeray is described as "as distinctly original and as distinctly unapproachable as Dickens", his success was slower as he "only appealed to a cultivated and a somewhat cynical section of the world, and ... Dickens appealed to all humanity" (21-22). Sala's strategy seems to have been dual here: by repeatedly returning to these comparisons with contemporaries, he framed the author in terms that his readers would understand. By comparing him with 'Great Men' of the past and describing him as ubiquitous, read by all and loved by all, he created a picture of a hero whose influence could not die: "The most carping of his critics ... will scarcely now deny that his memory is one which posterity will not let die" (6). He also established a

lineage that he himself descended from, as a writer who benefited from Dickens's patronage. This reverent tone, as I will show, changed drastically in the 1890s.

Thirdly, following the references to Napoleon and the rise of the industrial age in the pamphlet, the representation of Dickens's life and career becomes infused with a sense of literary revolution:

His genius was bound to "pierce." It was the Hour for him – the hour when the schoolmaster began to be abroad; when a young generation was rising, determined to be kept no longer in ignorance; when the presence of a young and blameless Queen on the throne made thoughtful men reflect with horror on the scurrility and the ribaldry of bygone literature. ... (25)

"The schoolmaster is abroad" refers to the spread of education. The phrase, a common one in the nineteenth century, is drawn from a speech by Lord Brougham delivered in 1828 which also brought together education and the military. It was recorded in E. Cobham Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, first published in 1870: "Let the soldier be abroad, if he will; he can do nothing in this age. There is another personage abroad ... the schoolmaster is abroad; and I trust to him, armed with his primer, against the soldier in full military array" (1230). The emotive language used by Sala places Dickens as the leader of this literary revolution, warlike, but also an inheritor. This passage follows a discussion of the superiority of Dickens's humour when compared to his immediate predecessors; Dickens is compared to the comic literature that came before and describes it as "simply deplorable in its dull idiocy" (23-24).

The passage gestures only vaguely at the spread of literacy and educational improvement, but the image of an uprising and a leader, one with Dickens's education rather than that of writers like Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley (68), would have particularly resonated with Sala. Edwards suggests that he, like Dickens, was troubled by his family's social status and his own limited education (*Dickens's Young Men* 2), which was perhaps why he went to such great lengths to mark this success as progressive. If Dickens could do it, so Sala could hope to have this kind of lasting impact too. This language returns later: "Still the uprising of Napoleon was as sudden and startling as that of Dickens" (70). This is an anachronistic way to phrase it: it was, significantly, not Dickens's rise that was comparable to Napoleon's but the other way around. His success is no longer just personal but an 'uprising', and the language of revolution,

which until this point had been mixed with the literary, is now foregrounded in no uncertain terms: “It was in contravention of established rules. It was revolutionary” (70). Dickens is couched as a “young conqueror” and a “Radical of the most pronounced description” (70) who “waged uncompromising war” against the New Poor Law (71). By the end of the biography his fame, which we have already seen described as ubiquitous and undying, is progressive. “I maintain that his renown will be progressive, and that he will March” (99): “He will march until not only this pin’s head England, not only the great American Republic, not only the vast empire which is to be in Australia, but the extremest limits of a new civilized China, the farthest borders of a re-civilised Hindustan shall be full of the sound of the footsteps of his fame” (99). The literary revolution is now to a degree bound up with both British imperialism and the American Republic: Dickens has revolutionised the world of literature but is also emblematic of his country. Again, Dickens is presented in war-like terms. Sala suggested that “There is no longer a Charles Dickens – *our* Charles Dickens, at least” (96); instead, the living man had been replaced with the conquering, marching figure who was not “*our* Charles Dickens,” but has a life bound to his books and reputation. This body is in stark contrast to the extensive physical descriptions given by Sala:

his thought-lined face, his grizzled beard, his wondrous searching eyes, his bluff presence and swinging gait as, head aloft, he strode now through crowded streets, looking seemingly neither to the right nor the left, but of a surety looking at and into everything – now at the myriad aspects of London life, the ever-changing raree-show, the endless round-about. ... (9)

The attention here is to the face and movement. Sala’s biography also alludes to criticisms about Dickens’s imagination that are discussed in much more depth in Forster’s biography (see chapter 2): “The pictures he drew were clearly not imaginary, for no sooner were they drawn than all the world recognized their amazing vividness and veracity, and only wondered that such scenes had not occurred to them before: and herein his greatness as an artist was conspicuous” (30). Sala was also keen to emphasise Dickens’s sense of discipline, describing him living “by line and rule” (13), and as a man who was not prone to excess, except in walking (13). He described his nature as “strongly impulsive” but argued that it “seemed to have been brought under an inexorable discipline” (13): “it is certain that he had so brought his powers under

mastery, that he had so disciplined his capacity, that he had so trained and developed the direction of his genius as to be able to ensure and to command a certain amount of success in every one of his endeavours” (20). However, it is also this discipline that Sala held partly culpable for Dickens’s early death. He described him as tired of “having to keep with rigid punctuality appointments at five hundred miles’ distance from each other; tired of discounting the future. ... He wanted rest” (92-93). In Sala’s later reminiscences, this punctuality and discipline is described as autocratic, again invoking Napoleon, moving from a tragic cause of Dickens’s death to something imposed on those around him.

Sala did not mention the state of Dickens’s marriage until the end of the pamphlet, self-precluded from the need to comment on it by his focus on the public life. He did, however, say that “it would be an act of cowardly dishonesty to suppress” the “great shadow [that] fell across his hearth” (96) in the form of his domestic troubles. Without passing judgement, he repeated the popular opinion that Dickens had no need to publish a defence (96-97) but the pamphlet ends with the claim that “Those who have a right to speak, have not spoken; and the world has no right to inquire into the mystery – if any mystery there be – nor will have, any time these fifty years” (97). Sala wanted it both ways. The refutation is a weak one, leaving the tantalising possibility of an unspoken secret, merely advocating respect for the privacy of those alive who would not be injured if the ‘mystery’ were to come out in fifty years. Once again, Sala had framed himself as a figure with special knowledge of Dickens.<sup>5</sup>

Sala’s and Hotten’s rushed pieces seem have to fulfilled a similar purpose, providing, in the absence of any authorised biography, a more thorough account of Dickens’s life than the articles that had appeared so far. Hotten’s 1870 biography was described in the *Graphic* as a “sort of biographical stopgap” (23 July 1870) and he himself described it as “filling an intermediate place between the newspaper or review article and the more elaborate biography” (ix). Sala explained that his was an “amplified” pamphlet of his original article in the *Daily Telegraph* and that he was requested to “consent to the republication” of the essay (v). It was reprinted several times (Edwards, *Dickens’s Young Men*, 122): the public was eager for more information about Dickens. Later he added that he hoped a ‘Life’ would be written by Forster or Collins, and speaks of future

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<sup>5</sup> Later, he would reiterate this: “I say now, as I said after Dickens’s death, the secret was no affair of mine, and that so long as I lived it would never be revealed by me. I should say that beyond the members of Dickens’s own family there are, now that Wilkie Collins and Edmund Yates are gone, scarcely any custodians of the secret besides myself” (*Life and Adventures* 1.318).

biographers who “may retail his minutest words and deeds; who will make public his private correspondence with his friends, and who will do justice to the integrity of his character, to the cordiality of his manner, to the charms of his conversation” (95). One of his self-confessed aims was to suppress his own connection to his subject; he did not set out any particular purpose or motive behind his work. Sala’s aim did not appear to be to do justice to Dickens’s character, or describe his actions in detail, but simply to eulogise. This becomes apparent in comparing the text to Sala’s later accounts, but reviews of the pamphlet treated it as biography.

In spite of this professed attempt at self-suppression, a review of his pamphlet in the *Examiner* (9 July 1870) opened, “The public are familiar with Mr Sala’s style, and we need therefore say little about it. The memoir, however, has admitted value, as coming from one in personal and almost daily intercourse with the deceased novelist” (438). The “however” used here suggests that the memoir is worth reading in spite of Sala’s style, rather than because of the skill of the writer; the review goes on, “Under these circumstances the glowing colours in which the picture of the deceased author’s life is painted are excusable, nay, we might even say acceptable; but the egotism of the preface has no such qualification” (438). The review complained of Sala’s vague allusions to his own “Gentlemanly treatment” and wages, “which only whet the reader’s curiosity” (438). Sala went to great lengths to assert that his “constant aim” was “to suppress ... all mention of my personal dealings with him – dealings which have governed almost exclusively the tenor of my life” (vi). Even in this sentence Sala would seem to fail at his aim: he seems unable to discuss Dickens without explaining the author’s importance to his own life, even when claiming to suppress this. This double-bind echoes Georgina’s ambivalence, as discussed in chapter 3.

Later criticism has borne out the contemporary judgement of Sala’s egotistical writing style: Black suggests that “Sala’s journalism is drawn time and again to the irresistibility of autobiography” (140) while Edwards has suggested that “Whatever the ostensible subject, most of his writing is about himself” (*ODNB*) though he also argues that in this particular instance Sala “did largely succeed in keeping himself in the background” (*Dickens’s Young Men* 122). While his presence does become less obtrusive during the body of the essay, there are moments where this egotism resurfaces, and the relentless prolixity makes it difficult to forget the author’s presence. Later in the biography, there is the suggestion that Dickens could not have been a lead article writer, not accounting for his role at the *Daily News*: Sala claims to have written more than

three thousand leading articles, but did not know “whether he [Dickens] could have written one had he attempted the task. I am inclined to think that he felt too strongly” (37). While the accusation of “feeling too strongly” is not necessarily a negative one, it is striking that Sala boasted of his own success in an area in which he felt Dickens could not have been successful. This is a tentative move in the direction of the reminiscences Sala would later publish, as I will show.

Near the pamphlet’s close, Sala speaks of his first experience of Dickens. He writes, “when he first came before the world as an author I was an illiterate child, gifted with a strongly retentive memory, but Blind; ... the chief solace in my blindness was to hear my sister read the ‘Sketches by Boz’” (98). Like Dickens he was gifted, and like the literary greats he compares him to, Sala was blind.<sup>6</sup> This is another instance of piquing the reader’s curiosity, and while Sala wrongly insisted Dickens had a purely middle-class upbringing and none of the adventures of Goldsmith (45-50), Sala himself emerges from the text as an enigmatic figure of interest. While these intrusions into the biography itself are few, the fact that the preface puts Dickens’s ‘young man’ front and centre to the detriment of his “master” (vi) and that we are reminded of Sala at the close, means that the account is bookended by autobiographical anecdotes. Edwards argues that, in the pamphlet, Sala succeeded in keeping himself in the background “for once” (122), but the ways in which Sala talks about himself are more revelatory than the narrative he gives us of Dickens’s life: we hear about his blindness as a child, though not why or when it was cured, and his fears about his health. He begins self-deprecatingly, saying that “but for his [Dickens’s] friendship and encouragement, I should never have been a journalist or a writer of books” (vi). He credits Dickens with his first publication and his first income (vi), but the older man is relegated to kindly observer when his protégé’s career at the *Daily Telegraph* takes off. We are told that he:

watched with interest my progress in the newspaper with which I have been connected for thirteen years, in which I have written nearly three thousand leading articles, and by whose proprietors I have been despatched to almost every part of the world – with the treatment of a gentleman, and the wages of an ambassador. (vi-vii)

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<sup>6</sup> See Sala’s references to Homer and Milton (6-7). Sala went temporarily blind at the age of six due to encephalomyelitis (Blake, *George Augustus Sala and the Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press*, 17). His sight was restored nearly two years later, but not fully in one eye (18).

Dickens may have helped with his first publication, but Sala seems to have drawn strong distinctions between those small, assisted steps and the independent success he achieved after this. He claimed that Dickens sought his co-operation with every one of his Christmas numbers “With the single exception of ‘No Thoroughfare,’” (vii) and writes of the “vast number of letters I have of his” (viii), emphasising the younger man’s importance to his ‘master’ whilst implying Dickens’s influence on him was merely assistance provided at the beginning of his career.

Sala’s approach to biography provides a strong contrast with that of Forster. He confides:

I would not talk about him in his private aspect without talking about myself, and I have consequently striven, with all my heart, and with all my strength, to avoid the intrusion of my paltry personality on the reader. Those who look for reminiscences of personal intercourse, or for entertaining private anecdotes in this book will be disappointed. Out of the vast number of letters I have of his – letters on all kinds of topics and on all kinds of occasions – I venture only ... to publish one; and I publish it simply to show how ... ready he was to ... clap the desponding on the back, and to cry, “*Sursum corde!*” (Lift up your heart!) to the hypochondriac. (viii)

While Sala claims to have had a “vast” number of letters from Dickens, fewer than ten appear in the Pilgrim letters: his work for Dickens’s journals would suggest that a greater number did exist, but the personal relationship and correspondence he claims to have had with Dickens is no longer traceable. The letter that follows the passage above, from 19 September 1856, saw Dickens attempting to reassure Sala about his health and a financial misunderstanding between the two men (ix-x).<sup>7</sup> This is a strong contrast to Forster’s biography, in which letters between the two men and firsthand anecdotes form the basis of the work. The decision to include this particular letter seems a slightly strange one. There are several possible explanations. As the reviewer in the *Examiner* suggested about Sala’s earlier, enigmatic references, the letter generates more questions about Sala than about Dickens, both with regard to the falling out it alludes to and the

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<sup>7</sup> Dickens wrote, “May you be as much mistaken in your despondent view of your health! Encouraged by your being wrong in the one case, I hope you may be wrong in the other, and that I may add you, twenty years hence, to the prosperous list I have of men who were going to die between twenty-five and thirty-five, and are strong and happy, fifteen years afterwards, this day” (xi-x; Pilgrim 8.190).

state of Sala's health. However, it does show the older author's affection for his friend, his concern for his health, and a hope that their friendship will last. Perhaps the point is, following Sala's announcement that he will not include their "personal intercourse" (xiii), to demonstrate that doing so only encourages further questions and does not give us better insight into the subject. It also shows Sala's conflicted desire to conceal and reveal, as also shown in his suggestion that there are secrets that could be revealed after fifty years had passed.

Sala's account of Dickens's life and birth does not begin until halfway through the book; at which point, Sala's words become punctuated with qualifying phrases: "(I should say)" (49), "I think", "if I mistake not" (52). The text claims Sala had "neither the means, the power, nor the inclination to attempt an elaborate biography of the man whose death I am merely lamenting" (49) but instead offers the dates and facts of Dickens's "public career" (49). Sala used the novels for what we could optimistically call some biographical detective work, making assumptions about Dickens's education: "he exhibits in his works a very thorough aversion to middle-class schools and middle-class schoolmasters" (50). While being careful to expose the limits of his knowledge, he was also surprisingly forceful (and comically mistaken) when asserting that it is "absurdly" claimed that *David Copperfield* contained "strongly autobiographical features" (61-62). In contrast to Forster's exploration of the 'originals' of some of Dickens's characters in the author's life, Sala used the characters to argue against any identification between the author and his creations. Sala instead suggests that his subject did not have a childhood like David's, and "was never employed to wash bottles in a wine merchant's cellar", claiming *Oliver Twist* as Dickens's favourite novel instead (62). This strong claim is notable in its contradiction of Dickens's own claims to *David Copperfield* as his "favourite child" in the preface to the Charles Dickens Edition of 1869 (751). The decisive language of Sala's attempted refutation, in comparison to his more carefully qualified assertions about Dickens's life, adds to the text's uneasy status: the mention of a full biography to be written (by someone else) at a later date distances the pamphlet from biography, but Sala's personal relationship with Dickens makes his text stand out. It is a text positioned somewhere between the authorised biography and the unauthorised, 'stop-gap' account and it troubles any easy division that keeps Forster on one side and groups all other texts on the other.

Sala made the case for *Oliver Twist* by mentioning Dickens's desire to add Nancy's murder to his public readings (65). Like Forster, Sala questioned "the taste and the

usefulness of the display” (65) and argued that the readings lost him “many years of the life which he might have reasonably hoped to attain” (92). He was dismissive of the staging of Nancy’s murder specifically, saying that the test reading that approved it “would, I take it, have been unanimous in favourable opinion had the lecturer recited, ‘My name is Norval,’ or stood upon his head” (64-65) and that “no healthy feelings could possibly be awakened by the simulation” (65).<sup>8</sup> Sala opposed sycophantic support of Dickens’s readings, as Forster also did. However Forster, in contrast to Sala’s dismissal of *David Copperfield*’s importance and strong claims about Dickens’s childhood and education, placed himself in the unique position of being able to “separate the fact from the fiction” (24) with regard to *David Copperfield*. As shown in chapter 2, Forster went even further than this, describing *David Copperfield* as Dickens taking “all the world into his confidence” (23), though they did not know it. Forster’s death shortly after the publication of his *Life* left the field open for Sala and Yates, as Dickens’s friends, to retell the story in light of Forster’s revelations. Sala was also able to revise the account he had given in 1870, and revise his life story again between publishing *Things I Have Seen and People I Have Known* and the *Life and Adventures of George Augustus Sala*, effectively consigning Dickens to merely a person Sala had known rather than a part of Sala’s own life’s adventures. Edwards argues that in these texts Sala and Yates “make it clear that other mentors and models influenced them at least as strongly in their early years” (*Dickens’s Young Men* 1), but I would argue that Dickens is the one influence that they cannot quite fully assimilate, reject or embrace.

## 4.2. Twenty Years After

Two decades after publishing his superficial pamphlet on the death of Dickens, Sala would revisit the topic in his two-volume *Things I Have Seen and People I Have Known* (1894). In its preface, Sala insisted that it was not “in any sense, my Autobiography” (1.v), and he published a two-volume autobiography the following year, the *Life and Adventures of George Augustus Sala*. In the autobiography, Sala decided to minimise references to other people: his preface justifies the necessity of using ‘I’ (1.vii), and in it he expresses a regret that the “limitation of space has not permitted me to descant even

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<sup>8</sup> The opening lines of *Douglas* by John Home (1756): Dickens refers to Norval in a letter to Samuel Cartwright (29 January 1868, Pilgrim 12.25), as well as mentioning it in *Nickleby*, *Dombey* and *Boots at the Holly Tree Inn*. It was also a standard recitation piece (see Harry Stone’s *Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Novel-Making*).

briefly on scores of eminent people of both sexes whom I have known, or who have been endeared to me by the sacred ties of friendship” (1.x). Nevertheless, the autobiography implicitly establishes Sala in opposition to Dickens. In the 1870 pamphlet, Sala had written that Forster was right to entitle his biography of Goldsmith the *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith* but, he added, “There are very few ‘adventures’ to record in the life of Charles Dickens” (48). Sala’s own choice of title, then, is striking, even though the account excludes references that had been highlighted and emphasised in 1870, or in *Things I Have Seen and People I Have Known*. Edwards argues, “In most of their writing, whether journalistic or confessedly fictional, Sala and Yates both tend to be intensely ‘personal’, often seeming to shed more light on themselves than on their ostensible subjects” (*Dickens’s Young Men* 4). This merges the two autobiographical texts which Sala published in a way I want to argue does not account for their differences, and even the parts of Sala’s life that they tell differently. In *Things I Have Seen*, Sala’s life is often filtered through the lens of Dickens’s influence. There is a marked absence of these moments in the *Life and Adventures*. Blake has described the *Things I Have Seen* as Sala’s “memoirs” (*George Augustus Sala and the Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press* 75), but Sala showed an ambivalence about life writing in eschewing that label, too. Zwerdling describes memoirs as connecting to “a secular confessional tradition” rather than “more public kinds of autobiographical writing” (3), and Sala’s use of the more novelistic term ‘adventures’, as well as the pragmatic label of *Things I Have Seen and People I Have Known*, avoids those connotations. The books are decidedly ‘public’ kinds of autobiography. The reliance on “I imagine” and “I should say”, seen in the earlier pamphlet, recurs in *Things I Have Seen* and is addressed in the preface: Sala writes that “I have never kept a systematic diary of what I have seen, what I have done, or what I have thought” (1.vi), and the books take the form of “confidences” rather than “Confessions” in what he calls the Augustinian sense (1.vi) – presumably, rather than in the more controversial Rousseau sense. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions*, first published in 1789, very deliberately did not provide an account of the author’s career. So we have Augustinian ‘confessions’, memoirs, autobiography, life, and adventures to choose from as potential generic descriptors. Sala’s own choice of ‘confessions’ and ‘adventures’ are the most useful categories. Augustine’s *Confessions*, as Gary Wills has pointed out, were always ‘public’ (2-3) – and, of course, religious – in Zwerdling’s sense, from the way the volumes were written (dictated to scribes, who would turn shorthand into scroll with a team of assistants) to their dissemination (with multiple copies of the same letter being

sent to different readers). In the section that follows, while contrasting Sala and Yates I also draw attention to the key differences in Sala's two accounts of his own life.

While Sala had in 1870 referred to his sister reading Dickens aloud to him when he was a blind child, the *Life and Adventures* does not mention this (1.14). References to Dickens are generally short rather than discursive, which is unusual for Sala.<sup>9</sup> He calls St James's Theatre "the keystone of the arch of my life" because it is where he met Dickens (1.74), but talks somewhat dismissively of the 'Bozomania' caused by *Pickwick*, telling the reader that "Dogs and cats used to be named Sam and Jingle and Mrs. Wardell and Job Trotter" (1.75). While Sala had, in 1870, questioned Dickens's performances of Sikes's murder of Nancy, in 1895 he admitted to taking the role of Sikes in theatricals he put on with his siblings (1.75). The tongue-in-cheek subtitle of "Playing at Dickens" surely invokes Sala's concern that his work had been viewed that way: later in the autobiography, he writes that Dickens's young men used the same ink as their Chief did (1.332), and adds that "Dickens's young men were, to a certain extent, constrained to imitate the diction of their chief, and I fell in with the trick as deftly as perhaps my colleagues did" (1.363). By bringing together the accusation of imitation with childish games, Sala established his admiration of Dickens, but placed it as a childish desire that he later distanced himself from.<sup>10</sup> His work after Dickens is not presented as clearly superior, however. We are told that

when I joined the staff of the *Daily Telegraph* ... I soon relapsed into that style which so roused the ire of the *Saturday*. Out came, or, rather, streamed, the long-tailed words, the hyperboles, the rhodomontade, the similes, and the quotations dragged in by the head or by the heels. ... I was impatient, dogmatical, illogical, and could be myself from time to time aggressive and abusive. (1.363)

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<sup>9</sup> See for example *Life and Adventures*, 1.65. The references in the second volume, which is quite heavily (and perhaps unsurprisingly, for a special correspondent) focused on international politics, are even fewer, possibly because they largely deal with the years following Dickens's death, but that event itself is not referred to at all. Sala writes, "I have nothing to record that would be of interest to my readers touching the winter and spring of 1870; but in the third week of July a series of very momentous things began to occur. ..." (2.151).

<sup>10</sup> Sala was advised by Douglas Jerrold, and repeated the advice to Yates, to "Imitate as many old writers as you can, until you find that somebody is imitating you. By that time you will find that you have got a style of your own" (letter to Edmund Yates, 25 March 1879, 239).

One piece in the *Saturday Review* had suggested that Sala poorly imitated Dickens, claiming “Mr Dickens is out-Dickensed by this imitator of his overwrought style of word-painting” (qtd. in Blake, “Charles Dickens, George Augustus Sala and *Household Words*” 35). The passage shows a surprising amount of self-awareness: Sala clearly captures the weaknesses of his Dickens pamphlet. However, it is less clear which style he is referring to. The *Saturday Review* seems to have been criticising the more restrained style he adopted with Dickens’s encouragement, while Sala focuses on his tone *before* and *after* his association with Dickens’s journals. After Dickens’s death, the ‘Dickensy’ style could be abandoned. That Sala in the 1890s distances himself from his earlier style is significant: he made excuses for his younger self that have the added effect of diminishing his earlier tribute to Dickens. The justification is not one of feeling, but of style: by suggesting that everything he wrote was hyperbolic and dogmatic, doubt is thrown on the sincerity of the pamphlet.

This is not Sala’s only revision. Chapter 27, “A Misunderstanding with Dickens”, refers to the pamphlet directly. Sala had written that he and Dickens had fallen out, and that Sala himself was in the wrong (*Charles Dickens* vi); in his autobiography he writes, “I revered the writer and I loved the man. But at a time when the grave had scarcely closed over him I disdained to say that he had been as much in the wrong as I” (309-10). He explains the falling out over his desire to republish “A Journey Due North”, a series of essays that had been published in *Household Words*; Dickens maintained the copyright for several years, refusing to grant permission.<sup>11</sup> In the text Sala admits that Dickens “was for five years exceptionally kind to me” but, he adds, “confound it! I gave him malt for his meal” (310). The metaphor is unusual: ‘in meal or in malt’, found in Brewer’s *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, means that payment must be made (i.e. ‘one way or another’), but Sala splits the metaphor, suggesting both received equal profits. One of the key ways in which the *Life and Adventures* differs from Sala’s other accounts is how he writes about his working relationship with Dickens. On the one hand he includes external validation of his writing, telling the reader that “The estimation in which the conductor of the journal was kind enough to hold my services has been more than once, and most generously alluded to by the late Mr. John Forster, in his ‘Life of Charles Dickens’” (1.251). On the other, rather than expressing his gratitude for Dickens’s patronage, he positions it as a burden and suggests that Dickens owed him a

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<sup>11</sup> For an account of the disagreement, and of Dickens and Sala’s working relationship, see Blake’s “Charles Dickens, George Augustus Sala and *Household Words*”.

greater debt than vice versa:

I had always *Household Words* as a stand-by. ... Was this tolerably certain income of between three and four hundred a year a blessing or a bane to me? I have not quite made up my mind on the subject; but of this I am altogether satisfied, that the knowledge I had only to work four hours to earn five guineas, made me a thoroughly idle dog. (1.261)

This tone, not directly boastful but rather dismissive of Dickens's journal, continues later in the text. Sala writes that he chose journalism because "I knew perfectly well that I was altogether destitute of a particle of that genius without which I could never excel or become renowned in pure letters; but, on the other hand, I was fully cognisant of the fact that I had learned my trade as a journalist" (1.364). This echoes Dickens's own view of Sala: Blake writes that Dickens "craved" a sense of "fancy and imagination" and wished Sala to also reflect it ("Charles Dickens, George Augustus Sala and *Household Words*", 26). However, it also puts Dickens in a different realm from the journalism that Sala had become famous for. Accepting that he lacked his Chief's genius, Sala followed an alternative career in which he could excel and, more importantly, in which he could surpass Dickens.

The autobiography is different in tone to the 1870 pamphlet or even the 1894 *Things I Have Seen and People I Have Known*. Although, unlike the 1870 pamphlet, there is no comparison of Dickens and Napoleon in *Things I Have Seen*, Sala writes of Dickens having "captured and bound to the wheels of his chariot of triumph the entire people of the United Kingdom and of the United States", calling his success a "victory" (52), and the autobiographical anecdotes and events gestured at become much more developed. In the second chapter of the first volume, titled "Charles Dickens as I Knew Him", Sala bemoans the myth-making process that surrounds "all famous men and women" (1.45), in spite of his earlier contribution to it: he writes that "Charles Dickens has been dead barely twenty-four years; yet the myths are steadily accumulating on his life-story as thickly as dust on a statue in an unswept studio" (1.46). He describes the "many descriptions of a perfectly unreal Dickens" as the impetus for telling "what I know from actual personal acquaintance and parley with" the man (1.47). It is striking that the first chapter is titled "The Real Thackeray", in contrast to "Charles Dickens as I Knew Him": Sala positions himself as one of the few to know the 'real' Thackeray but

acknowledged he is only one of many presenting a view of Dickens. Edwards has argued that both Sala and Yates “as struggling young writers ... identified more with Pendennis than David Copperfield” (*Dickens’s Young Men* 1), and so it is perhaps unsurprising that Dickens comes second to Thackeray, and this preference is continued throughout: Sala compares Dickens unfavourably to Thackeray, arguing that the former:

seldom talked at length on literature, either of the present or the past. He very rarely said anything about art. ... What he liked to talk about was the latest new piece at the theatres, the latest exciting trial or police case, the latest social craze or social swindle, and especially the latest murder and the newest thing in ghosts. (1.76)

Leonée Ormond has outlined Dickens’s relationship to contemporary art, suggesting that his attitude to art was largely formed in the 1840s (36); however his personal relationships with several artists including Daniel Maclise, Sir David Wilkie and Clarkson Stanfield would suggest that Dickens did, in fact, talk about art. Peter Ackroyd has argued that Sala’s description says more about Sala than Dickens, and that Dickens had a tendency to adjust his conversation to his audience (625-26); Edwards disagrees (5). It is one way to account for the difference in accounts of Dickens’s conversation, but what is more interesting is the grumble from Sala. The primacy of Thackeray may partly be due to the cache of Thackerayan biographical material in this period: Annie Thackeray Ritchie kept her father’s letters and prevented biographies being published (Ian Hamilton 144-45). However, Sala adds that Dickens “did not rise above the amusing commonplaces of a very shrewd, clever man of the world, with the heartiest of hatred for shams and humbugs” (1.77). While Sala’s *Charles Dickens* was a eulogistic piece of writing that emphasised the older author’s importance, both in the life of his protégé and more broadly, the reminiscences centre on Sala’s own importance in Dickens’s life and highlights the latter’s weaknesses in comparison with the former’s strengths. For example, Sala writes that Dickens had “not the slightest knowledge, or love, or even respectful appreciation, of what is called ‘High Art’” (1.105) and wrongly said that he had “a good-humoured contempt for foreigners” (1.104), setting him implicitly against the younger man’s career as a journalist on the continent. This paves the way for the *Life and Adventures*, which focus on this journalistic career and relegate Dickens to passing references.

In the *Life and Adventures*, Sala's connection with Dickens predates their working relationship: he relates seeing Dickens in 1836, when Sala was only ten years old, on the very same night that Dickens first met Forster, thus aligning himself with, and implicitly rivalling, the author's most famous and recognisable friend. It is striking that Sala does not give another physical description of Dickens here, writing that "His facial characteristics have been dilated upon – and exhaustively so – over and over again by those who personally knew him" (1.51); he had done so himself in his earlier account. Sala credits Dickens with advancing his career as an illustrator in the 1840s, as well as launching his literary career in 1851. However, he also addresses criticism of himself as a "servile imitator of Dickens" (1.77), blaming his Chief for his own delayed success as a writer.<sup>12</sup> He details the editorial process of *Household Words*, claiming that he did not get to see proofs, and that Dickens "very often surprised me by the alterations – always for the better – which he made, now in the title, and now in the matter, of my 'copy'" (1.78). Although the interjection at least superficially exonerates Dickens, Sala talks of his "autocratic will", invoking the Napoleonic image of his 1870 *Charles Dickens*, which meant that "the frequency of Dickensian tropes, illustrations, and metaphors" led to his writing staff being accused of imitating him (1.79). Criticisms of Dickens are thus carefully managed, presented with a qualifying statement that removes the blame from Sala's Chief but creates an impression of a wrong done to the younger author.<sup>13</sup>

As well as the accusation of Dickens being autocratic, Sala describes two "evil" consequences of the anonymity of the journal: all good articles were attributed to Dickens, and he "unwittingly retarded, not only the literary, but also the commercial prospects of his staff" (1.81). This commercial consideration comes to a head at the chapter's close, which ends with a comparison of his pay for an article about Russia for Dickens with his pay for an article for the *Daily Telegraph* thirty years later. Although the tone is again carefully judged, with reinforcement of Dickens's skill, the impression given is one of bitterness on Sala's part, and unknowing damage on Dickens's: Sala writes that Dickens did not have "the remotest notion that he was putting a bushel over the lights of his staff" (1.81), but "was attaining, and properly attaining, every year greater fame and greater fortune" for himself (1.82). Perhaps this is a class-based

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<sup>12</sup> In 1858, Thackeray had said Sala's style was like "Dickens and water" (from Henry Silver's diary, 15 December 1858, qtd. in Patrick Leary, *The Punch Brotherhood: Table Talk and Print Culture in Mid-Victorian London*, 76). Dickens himself wrote, when asked if he had written Sala's article "Twenty Miles", that "It is very well done by a close Imitator" (Pilgrim 7.453).

<sup>13</sup> Sala said his work on *Household Words* was that of "a raw novice, unlicked, untrained, and with no style save one based on a slavish imitation of Dickens" (letter to Yates, 25 March 1879, 239).

critique that accuses Dickens of lacking the self-awareness to assist others to climb in the way that he had: Dickens's identity as an author was constructed in opposition to the 'gentlemanly' kind of authorship favoured by Thackeray, and the 'Dignity of Literature' debate, as discussed in chapter 1 and chapter 2, centred on literature as a profession – one by which Dickens was able to rise. As such, implicit in contrasting Dickens with Thackeray is a comment on the class background of the two. As Michael J. Flynn has argued, the actions of the two authors in the 'Dignity of Literature' debate “served to formalize the gap between gentlemanly and bourgeois writers and to publicize their mutual hostility; it thereby gave the Victorian instinct to class-code the age's literature an urgency it had not possessed in the years leading up to 1850” (155). In addition, Thackeray's attack was partly a reaction against the kind of literary circle Dickens, Forster and even the 'young men' represented. Sala seems to be suggesting that Dickens had been selfishly promoting himself at the expense of others, and this implicitly critiques Dickens's own views about authorship.

Sala, although he did not give a detailed physical description of Dickens, drew attention to the ways in which Dickens had aged between their meetings. Sala states that, in 1851, “He was then, I should say, barely forty; yet to my eyes he seemed to be rapidly approaching fifty” (1.74). While Yates, as I will show, was keen to emphasise the closeness of himself and Dickens even in perceived age, Sala emphasised the difference: “I had last seen him when I was a raw boy, and I was still a raw young man” (1.74). The characterisation of an ageing Dickens contrasts strongly with the youthful vigour described by Forster, Yates, and others. Sala places Dickens as man past his best, inflicting damage on the next generation of writers without intending to. Where Yates presents Dickens's childishness, Sala's Dickens seems to be limited – and ageing – because he is part of the older generation.

Yates's account of Dickens, published in 1884, was very different in tone from Sala's. Edwards has described the autobiography as “perhaps his best book” and suggests he was trying to emulate Anthony Trollope's *Autobiography*, published the year before (“Edmund Yates” par. 12). Certainly the title, *Edmund Yates: His Recollections and Experiences*, is more conventional for autobiography than Sala's *Life and Adventures*.<sup>14</sup> Whereas Sala addressed Thackeray's and Dickens's influence in the first two chapters of the first volume of his autobiography, Yates's first volume contained only passing references to Dickens. His second volume, however, contained “A Dickens Chapter”.

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<sup>14</sup> In America, the *Recollections* were published as *Fifty Years of London Life: Memoirs of a Man of the World*.

While Sala suggested damage done by Dickens to his early career, Yates built Dickens into his life. In a chapter ostensibly concerned with his early married life, for example, he talks of a ‘slumming’ expedition with Dickens in almost romantic terms: “I was in the company of the man whose genius I had worshipped so long and so ardently. ... I wondered whether Fate could have in store for me greater distinction or delight” (2.284). Just as Sala related meeting Dickens at the age of ten to inscribe their connection with a sense of fatedness, Yates recounts Dickens’s approval of his father’s acting as a way of establishing an antecedent history (1.18). Edwards has also noted this romantic language, suggesting that their closeness with Dickens “made their attraction into his orbit appear almost predestined, in their own eyes at least” (*Dickens’s Young Men* 1). However, Edwards does not fully recognise the performative nature of these texts, which, I argue, are often as much concerned with self-presentation as self-understanding.

While Sala emphasises Dickens’s age and the changes in him over the years of their acquaintance, Yates acknowledges the age difference but strives to minimise the gap between them in sympathies and even in appearance of age – despite Sala being closer in age to Dickens.<sup>15</sup> Yates writes that “the intimacy into which, notwithstanding his nineteen years of seniority, he admitted me was so great, in our views and sympathies there was ... so much in common, that I was always proud to think he ... permitted me an exceptional insight into his inner life” (2.91-92). Edwards’s account of Sala and Yates often positions their influences as father figures, and the writers themselves as in search of fathers: he writes of Henry Vizetelly as their “new ‘father’” in the late 1850s (*Dickens’s Young Men* 41), in opposition to Dickens.<sup>16</sup> However that does not quite capture the posturing present in the passages above, which move from romantic partnership to fellowship, and prioritise both these kinds of connection above paternal influence. As I will show, Dickens as a father figure was far more important to Marcus Stone’s “Autograph Reminiscences”. Yates’s access to Dickens’s ‘inner life’ was particularly enabled by his joining Dickens on his walks. Yates details the “ordeal” of Dickens’s walking habits, literally keeping pace with his friend and mentor in contrast to the “portly American gentleman ... who started with us full of courage, but whom (sic)

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<sup>15</sup> “‘Fancy my being nineteen years older than this fellow!’ said he one day to his eldest daughter, putting his hand on my shoulder. The young lady promptly declared there was a mistake somewhere, and that I was rather the elder of the two” (2.92).

<sup>16</sup> Vizetelly was one of the founders of the *Illustrated London News* in 1842, and became editor of *Illustrated Times* in 1855. He began his own weekly, *The Welcome Guest*, in 1858; Sala and Yates were both on the staff.

was left panting by the wayside” (104). Yates establishes the walks as difficult for others, but to him “they never seemed long or fatiguing, beguiled as the time was by his most charming talk” (2.105). He writes, in contrast to Sala’s claim that Dickens did not talk about literature and art, that “With small difficulty, if the subject were deftly introduced, he could be induced to talk about his books, to tell how and why certain ideas occurred to him, and how he got such and such a scene or character” (2.105). This places Yates in a position akin to Forster: that of having access to some of the secrets of Dickens’s working habits. This ‘inner life’ is also continued in the outer life as he tells the reader that he writes his reminiscences on the very writing slope that Dickens was using on the day of his death (2.103).

Yates’s comments about Forster are particularly striking. In the first volume he calls him “that worthy but very prejudiced gentleman” (1.15), and in the second dedicates a subheading to “Dickens’s regard for Forster as friend rather than companion” (2.92), claiming that “though the communion between them was never for a moment weakened, it was not as a companion ‘in his lighter hour’ that Dickens in his latter days looked on Forster” (2.93). He talks of Forster’s “natural temperament” combined with “ill-health” making him “almost as much over, as Dickens was under, their respective years” (2.92). Anecdotes he relates about Forster, given as if from Dickens himself, present him as rude and conceited (2.162). Even in speaking of Forster’s friendliness to himself, Yates damns with faint praise: he writes that, “he thus made me an exception to his general rule” (2.161). Forster is contrasted with Dickens, which reinforces Yates’s own fitness as a companion for Dickens. Yates aligned himself with Dickens’s youthful vigour that “is to be gleaned from the *Letters* [collected by Georgina Hogarth and Mamie Dickens], but is not to be found in Forster’s *Life*” (2.92). Mamie Dickens, he claimed, asserted that Yates “was rather the elder of the two” (2.92). Sala, then, presented Dickens as a member of a pantheon, a figure simultaneously to admire and resent, while Yates asserted camaraderie.

By placing Dickens on his level, Yates elevates himself and lowers Dickens. This contrasts with Sala’s clearer narrative of patronage. For example, he describes Dickens’s temperament:

I have heard Dickens described by those who knew him as aggressive, imperious and intolerant, and I can comprehend the accusation; but to me his temper was always of the sweetest and kindest. ... He was imperious in the

sense that his life was conducted on the *sic volo sic jubeo* (thus I will, thus I command) principle, and that everything gave way before him. ... Yet he was never regarded as a tyrant: ... that he should lead and govern seemed perfectly natural to us. (2.94)

Just as Sala compared Dickens to Napoleon and an autocrat, Yates established Dickens as an imperious, controlling figure. The passage above is followed by an excerpt from Robert Browning's poem "The Lost Leader" (1845). While the lines quoted ("We who had loved him so, followed him. ... Made him our pattern to live and to die" (sic) [2.94]) might seem to paint a positive picture of the relationship between Dickens's young men and their chief, the poem, not quoted fully in the text, goes on nine lines later to give the imperative "Blot out his name, then" (line 21), decrying the lost leader (Wordsworth). This intertextual moment, on the surface one of honour and respect, suggests Dickens has let his followers down, a possible echo of Sala's complaint about the anonymity of the articles in *Household Words*. Yates ends the paragraph with this extract, passing no further comment, but, together with the assertion of Dickens's youth, it complicates the image that was created in the 1870s.

This is continued in the sections related to Dickens's separation. Yates asserts that Dickens "was full of the irritability, the sensitiveness, and the intolerance of dulness (sic) which might have been expected" of such a celebrated writer (2.97). He adds that:

If he had been wholly devoid of a certain bias in the direction of theatrical ostentation – if, in a word, his temperament had been more rigid, more severe; if he had not given such prominence in his thoughts to the link which bound him to the public whom he served so splendidly, he would not, in this particular affair, have acted as he did. (2.97-98)

Yates channels Sala here: it is a markedly roundabout way of *not* saying that Dickens was immature and histrionic, while suggesting it, even as it affirms his strong connection with the public. The word 'acted' is nicely equivocal. Coming so soon after the charge of "theatrical ostentation", it is necessarily coloured by it. It suggests an immaturity which is also found when Yates describes him having a "mania" over public reference to his health (2.118). He attributes Dickens's foot troubles to gout, but claims that Dickens "in his old autocratic way, refused to have it, and declared he could not have

it” (2.119). The ‘autocrat’ appears once again. The language in these pages, of self-deception and Dickens as a man falling “dead on the roadside” (2.123-24), culminates with him being described as “not only a genius”, but having “volcanic activity, the perturbed restlessness, the feverish excitability of genius” (2.126). Dickens’s genius is denied self-awareness, and is described by Yates: Yates, as an equal and even occasionally a superior, is able to understand and interpret his mentor.

Yates’s autobiography ends with a chapter titled “The World”, suggesting that his life story culminates in his role as co-founder and editor of *The World* newspaper. The final pages insist on its “continued, increasing, and confirmed prosperity” as “an institution” (2.334). Yates describes it as “a Journal as necessary to society in the capital and in the provinces, in town and country, at home and abroad, within and outside the four seas, as those vast broadsheets which are the contemporary chroniclers of humanity and its doings from day to day” (2.334). Encompassing the home (and going beyond it), perhaps an homage to *Household Words*, and echoing *All The Year Round*’s tagline of “The story of our lives from year to year” in the final phrase, *The World*’s popularity trumpets Yates’s success against a backdrop of Dickens’s limitations. While Yates and Sala in many ways present Dickens as a similar kind of influence, establishing their own successes in journalism with anecdotes about his support, the two autobiographies diverge quite significantly.

Edwards suggests that Yates’s account “rings truer than Sala’s hyperbolic expressions of affection” (*Dickens’s Young Men* 123) and highlights the fragile friendship between the two men: Sala at no time recognised the *Recollections* in print, and did not “even acknowledg[e] the copy Yates had sent him” (183). It is difficult to judge which account ‘rings truer’, because Edwards’s assessment reads them as only two versions, rather than four separate texts, of which Sala’s three differ in significant ways. *Things I Have Seen and People I Have Known* offers a more reflective, critical (and self-critical) account than the 1870 pamphlet, while Sala’s autobiography offers very little account of Dickens at all. The four texts demonstrate the complex constructions and reconstructions of Dickens during this period. Sala is different each time, and our awareness of the rich context makes these slightly dull books revealing. It is not a simple task for any of these writers to remember Dickens: each is complexly mourning, keeping hold of, and letting go of Dickens. Even small passages from these multi-volume texts can be quite revealing in how they seek to remember, appropriate and revise the life of Dickens, inflected by age, social bonding, and working relationships.

All are selective, supplementary and self-aggrandising, highlighting the difficult balance of speaking and being forbidden to speak against a background of Victorian restraint. There is no Oedipal killing of Dickens the father, but instead a picture of revision, self-positioning and resentment.

### 4.3. A ‘Lost’ Autobiographical Sketch by Wilkie Collins<sup>17</sup>

Each of the biographies and memoirs discussed so far has attempted to create a sense of the characteristic Dickens and assert his role in the lives of his ‘young men’: Sala was able to suggest a perceived wrong Dickens had done, while Yates presented himself as a fitting equal to his Chief. While Forster was able to shape the idea of a ‘characteristic’ Dickens through his revelations about Dickens’s childhood, permanently changing the tenor of Dickensian biography, Sala and Yates showed the beginning of a process of incorporating Dickens into other literary forms and lives. My discovery of a ‘lost’ Collins autobiographical manuscript (see appendix) serves to illuminate that Sala and Yates did this to an unusual extent.

Collins did not write a complete autobiography, but did correct an account for the series ‘Men of This Time’. When asked if he had any intention of writing a full autobiography, he responded:

The notice of my life in the volume called (I think) “Men of this Time” was corrected by myself. It is very short reading – the ‘events’ in my life being not of a nature to interest the public. Circumstances have spared me the “picturesque” obstacles which had stood in the way of many literary men. And the best part of my life is in my work. (Beinecke, Gimbel-Dickens H Box 2-3, letter 28 June 1880)

The comment about ‘picturesque’ obstacles resonates with Sala’s choice of ‘adventures’ for his autobiography: Sala clearly had no such concerns. Nevertheless, I have found a ‘lost’ autobiographical sketch held in the Gimbel-Dickens Collection at the Beinecke

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<sup>17</sup> I have published an article based on this section, “A Lost Autobiographical Sketch”, in the *Wilkie Collins Journal* 14 (2017).

Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University,<sup>18</sup> dictated by Collins and sent to George Makepeace Towle to serve as the basis for an article on the author in *Appleton's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art* (3 September 1870). Towle was an American journalist with whom Collins corresponded, and who had visited him in London in 1868.<sup>19</sup> The sketch is here described as 'lost' because no biography, study or article seems to have been aware that it is there. The sketch is somewhat vaguely listed in the catalogue as "An autograph manuscript of 3 pages, on 3 leaves, being an autobiographical sketch of Collins. In the bibliography that closes this piece (which goes up to 1870), Collins writes that the play *No Thoroughfare* was "written in collaboration with Dickens and Fechter" (478). William Clarke makes use of Towle's article for which the sketch was furnished, but notes "The article is clearly based on an interview with Collins" (46). Clarke considers the manuscript lost, but the interview claim does not tally with a letter to Towle in which Collins speaks of an enclosed 'Memoir' (Princeton, Princeton University Library, Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists, Box 4/12, letter 21 May 1870). A comparison of the article and the manuscript shows that this is indisputably the 'lost' Memoir that Collins dictated.

Unlike Dickens, whose troubled childhood and time spent working in Warren's Blacking Factory were not known until Forster's *Life*, Collins did not feel the need to conceal the conditions of his early years and education. The particular challenge for Collins biographers has been in uncovering his private life later on in his career and the women in it.<sup>20</sup> The author had provided biographical accounts to more than one journalist when requested: one such sketch was written for Baron Alfred-Auguste Ernouf on 1 March 1862 for his series on English novelists in *La Revue Contemporaine* (28 August 1862). Graham Law and Andrew Maunder's *Wilkie Collins: A Literary Life* opens by introducing a brief passage from this 'little autobiography' about his childhood. They write, "Contemporary sources both public and private confirm that ...

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<sup>18</sup> The collection of Dickensiana Gimbel gifted to Yale was described by John B. Podeschi, who catalogued the collection, as "probably the largest accumulation anywhere of Dickensian material" (ix). Cataloguing began in 1971, and completed in 1980. Gimbel collected Dickens-related materials including first editions, letters and manuscripts from 1925 onwards. Podeschi's catalogue provides some background to the collection, but there is no clear indication of how the autobiographical sketch came into Gimbel's hands.

<sup>19</sup> Like Gimbel, Towle was a Yale man, who graduated in 1861, and contributed to *All The Year Round*. He also worked for the *Boston Post* from 1871-76. See Susan R. Hanes's *Wilkie Collins's American Tour, 1873-4*.

<sup>20</sup> See William M. Clarke's *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins* and Catherine Peters, *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins*.

this represents a more or less reliable account of the education of the author” (2). The ‘little autobiography’ is a sparse account, characteristic of Collins’s other descriptions of his early life. He touches on his early formal education in one sentence (“I was educated at a private school”), while the time he spent in Italy receives slightly more attention (“I learnt more which has been of use to me, among the pictures, the scenery, and the people, than I ever learnt at school” [qtd. in Law and Maunder 2]). Like Collins, Law and Maunder are eager to move on: their focus is his literary career, and Collins’s brevity and dismissal of his formal education directs the focus towards his writing and away from his formative years. The autobiographical sketch written for Towle is also very brief, prepared in “great haste” – Collins claims in a letter to have dictated it at the breakfast table (letter to Towle, 21 May 1870) – but Collins’s childhood is more fleshed out than in the Ernouf account. It is only three pages long in total, from his birth to the success of *Antonina, or The Fall of Rome* (1850), after which the author suggests “The rest of the story of my life is simply the story of the books which I have written”. Resembling Dickens’s wish, as expressed in his will, to “rest my claims to the remembrance of my country upon my published works” (Forster 859), Collins recounts the moments that led to his first published novel, leaving the subsequent twenty years to be told by his books.

Towle’s piece, however, goes further in describing his subject’s later life. He seems to have been determined to weave Collins’s life together with Dickens’s. This may reflect the time at which it was published: the memoir was dictated in May 1870 and was published in September: on the 9 June 1870, the day that Collins finished his latest novel, *Man and Wife*, Dickens died (Baker and Clarke 317). The short memoir does not reference Dickens at all, while Towle’s article mentions him within four sentences in writing of Collins’s brother’s marriage to Dickens’s daughter Kate (Towle 279). In fact, he is wrong in saying that Charles Collins married Dickens’s eldest daughter. This is something Collins would, no doubt, have been able to correct had he checked the article; in fact, his relationship with Dickens had cooled significantly by 1870 (Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners* 1-2).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Although Collins did not publish a biography of Dickens, what we know of his marked copy of Forster’s *Life*, sold at auction and lost to private hands, shows that he would have most likely been more critical than Forster: where Forster had written that Dickens was “the most popular novelist of the century”, Collins added “after Walter Scott” (“Wilkie Collins About Charles Dickens. (From a Marked Copy of Forster’s ‘Dickens’)” *Pall Mall Gazette* 20 January 1890, 3). He disagreed with Forster’s judgement in several places, including its description of Dickens’s personal characteristics. He also clearly agreed with Georgina and Mamie about the letters, adding “The assertion (quite sincerely made) that no letters addressed by Dickens to other old friends revealed his character so frankly and completely as his

Nevertheless, Towle dedicates a long paragraph to their relationship, comparing Collins not altogether favourably:

Wilkie Collins was for many years one of Dickens's closest and most cherished friends. They might often be seen walking together in the London streets, especially in the neighborhood of Covent Garden and the Strand; Collins, short and rather thick-set, with bold forehead, long black beard, large bright-blue eyes, and gold spectacles, forming a decided contrast with the airiness and "sailor-like aspect" of his great friend. (280)

The comparisons continue, with Collins described as "wanting in that peculiarly happy brilliancy and apt oratorical force, which, on festive, as well as serious occasions, distinguished Charles Dickens above all Englishmen" (280). Towle also takes the time to praise Dickens's acting, but suggests scandalously (and erroneously) that "the association of Miss Hogarth with Dickens in this play was the occasion of the separation from his wife" (280).<sup>22</sup> Collins's acting, incidentally, is not mentioned at all. Later we are told he has a "plain house" compared to Dickens's "famous old house" (280), and of his novels Towle writes, "His works rather give evidences of a possibility of greatness in him, than declare him already great. He lacks ... the surpassing tenderness and unapproachable humor of Dickens" (281). The article does, however, grant him superiority in "the invention of a plot, and in that alone" (280). Collins seems to be a more relatable figure than the almost mythic Dickens, and the former is presented as a writer of skill, but with scope for development and improvement. Towle surrounds him with literary greatness, but gives him the capacity to adapt in a way that he does not when discussing Dickens or Charles Reade.

In light of the health troubles that plagued him, particularly in the 1850s and 60s,<sup>23</sup> Collins might also have enjoyed reading of himself as "an excellent representative and type of a modern class of English literary men, who mingle freely and happily with the world and are of it; ... who have a kind of robustness, physical as well as moral and mental, and a generous vigor, which identify them with Young England in its best

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letters to Forster, it is not necessary to contradict. Dickens's letters published by his sister-in-law and his eldest daughter may be left to settle that question" (3).

<sup>22</sup> The American press had been much more vocal about the separation. For more on the Dickens scandal in America, see Patrick Leary's "How the Dickens Scandal Went Viral".

<sup>23</sup> See Clarke's *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins*.

phase” (280). The association with the aristocratic Romantic Conservatism of Benjamin Disraeli’s ‘Young England’ is very different from the ways in which Sala and Yates align Dickens with Napoleon and revolution. In addition, Towle compares Collins to his more famous friend, and discusses Collins’s public speaking and long walks in terms more reminiscent of Dickens. Unlike in Collins’s manuscript, Dickens haunts Towle’s piece: in the three-page article (with a large image of Collins on one), Dickens’s name crops up nineteen times. Collins is inextricably bound to Dickens as mentor, collaborator, friend and even family member (through the marriage of Charles Collins and Katey Dickens). Towle infuses his subject’s life with literary importance through his connections, in ways markedly different from Collins’s own brisk, humble account.

Unfortunately this ‘lost’ manuscript cannot yield much by way of new information about Collins’s life, as the article that came from it makes liberal use of its phrasing, even when not quoting it directly. The “wholesome discipline and restraint of an English school” is Collins’s phrase, for example, and is repeated verbatim by Towle without attribution, while a more cynical comment about the reviews of *Antonina* (“Such a chorus of praise was sung over me by the critics, as has never been sung over me since”) is omitted. Scissors-and-paste journalism is a topic that has seen exciting new scholarly developments recently,<sup>24</sup> with repetitions and copying becoming more traceable thanks to technology that makes it possible to search large datasets quickly and easily, but the relationship between Collins’s sketch and Towle’s article shows a new perspective that raises questions about the use of autobiographical accounts in creating broader biographical narratives. Dickens’s autobiographical fragment is another lost text that must be pieced together from Forster’s direct quotations and his possible scissors-and-paste use of other of Dickens’s phrases. Although the ‘fragment’ would not be published until 1872, and there is no evidence that Dickens had confided in Collins about his childhood, there are revealing comparisons to be drawn between this and Collins’s attitude to his education in the sketch, which are encouraged by Towle’s repeated bringing together of the two authors. In the sketch, we get a child who claims to deliberately learn “as little as possible”, and that his informal education in Italy was more use to him than schooling. Collins calls “remarkable” those who are “capable of seeing possibilities of education in other systems than the system conventionally recognized about them”. Dickens, on the other hand, was desperate for formal

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Stephan Pigeon’s “Steal it, Change it, Print it: Transatlantic Scissors-and-Paste Journalism in the Ladies’ Treasury, 1857-1895”.

schooling and was contemptuous of his parents, who “were quite satisfied. They could hardly have been more so if I had been twenty years of age, distinguished at a grammar-school, and going to Cambridge” (25). Dickens’s ‘singular abilities’ also resonate with Towle’s description of the relative positions of the two writers: Dickens’s singularity is emphasised, while Collins is caught up in comparisons. Dickens consumed books voraciously, desperate to learn, while Collins instead received an artistically-inflected education from Italy and from his father, avoiding Cambridge in favour of commerce. The trajectory of both writers as young men – an education interrupted by a defining experience, in Dickens’s case by blacking factory and in Collins’s his time in Italy, followed by a return to schooling and then office-based work – has similarities as well as the obvious differences.

The relation of these two authors to their experiences is very different, as are ways in which they are recalled and reused in their fiction. Narratives of Dickens’s literary success (like Forster’s) tended to focus on the reception and popularity of his novels rather than his earlier experiments. For example, an anecdote recounted by his sister-in-law Georgina tells of his meeting a lady who had got hold of the manuscript of one of his early plays. He offered her the manuscript of a Christmas book he had recently finished in exchange for it, as he was embarrassed. He then destroyed it (J. B. Van Amerongen 116). Collins’s discussion of his first, unsuccessful, novel, *Ioláni; or, Tahíti as It Was: A Romance* which was itself thought lost, and not published until 1999, shows a more publicly self-critical and self-aware relationship with his early work. Of it, he says:

They all declined it [*Ioláni*]; and, they were quite right. The scene was laid in the Island of Tahiti, before the period of its discovery by European navigators! My youthful imagination ran riot among the noble savages, in scenes which caused the respectable British publisher to declare that it was impossible to put his name on the title page of such a novel as this.

Uncovering documents like the autobiographical sketch sheds light on the possible relationship between such published accounts and the manuscript on which they are based, at a time when scissors-and-paste could mean that writers literally cut up manuscripts and letters for inclusion in life writing, as Forster did, and as Georgina and Mamie would later do (as discussed in chapter 3). The effect of Towle’s further examination of Collins’s later career and the omissions of the author’s own touches

mean that the manuscript is a very different reading experience from that of the article. Collins's conception of how his work was shaped contrasts with the rather forced insertion of Dickens into Towle's piece.

William Collins's influence is shown throughout his son's decision-making. Just as his father "decided to go to Italy to find fresh subjects", the son gains an education there that inflects his work: the manuscript ends with the success of *Antonina*, set in Rome. Collins's assertion that his father, although eager for him to go into the Church, did not force him into a career belies their relationship: Baker talks of the "oppressive personality" of Collins's father (9), and there is a hint of the conflict between the artist and his son in the manuscript. Collins's literary career is both interrupted and furthered by taking up the task of editing the memoirs of his father: he says "I saw my name on the title-page of a printed and published book, for the first time". Although Collins tells us that he had written and published articles and stories, it is the story of his father, "which lay far nearer to my heart", that signals the beginning of his literary career. The list of published works with which he ends the sketch begins with *The Life of William Collins, R. A.* (1848), once again asserting the primacy of his father's influence.

Collins's description contrasts with Dickens's account of seeing his own story in print for the first time: he instead presents the publication of the biography as the pivotal moment. Dickens, in the preface to the Cheap Edition of *Pickwick* (1847), wrote how on seeing his first sketch in print "my eyes were so dimmed with joy and pride, that they could not bear the street" (884). This characteristic effusion embodies the "surpassing tenderness" that Towle identifies in Dickens (281) that is absent from Collins's account (even if it is emotion directed at himself, rather than others), but also raises the stakes: the point here is not simply one of publication, but one bound up with family and acts of remembering. Dickens's anecdote centres on his own pride and a desire to escape public scrutiny in enjoying the newfound role of author (as well as concealing his emotional reaction), while Collins's shows him putting fiction aside for a task that is both personal and public. His joy at authorship is deferred for his father. Where Dickens gives us a story of personal pride, the moment at which Collins achieves the status of author is contingent on his father's death. Considerations about the nature of authorship linger at the door, but are not invited to enter; the sketch ends, rather abruptly, with a short paragraph on the success of *Antonina* and a list of Collins's works to date, ending with the nearly completed *Man and Wife*.

Although brief, the manuscript of Collins's autobiographical sketch is an intriguing

find. It adds to the author's auto/biographical archive, enabling the reader to move past Towle's interpretation and revision of the text. The author's comments about *Ioláni* have been noted elsewhere, as unique to Towle's article before this discovery, but the shaping of the narrative of Collins's life in the original sketch, even in so few words, is suggestive. The differences between its tone and that of the article show the interpretative power of life writing, if only on a small scale, and draw attention to nineteenth-century journalistic practices, particularly in creating short biographical articles of this kind, which proliferated in the period. It also contrasts with Sala and Yates's deliberate use of Dickens in telling the stories of their lives and careers, providing a revealing contrast between the unpublished manuscript and published accounts.

#### **4.4. "There is only one Dickens, and Mr. Fitzgerald is his prophet": Dickensian Accounts of the Twentieth Century**

Fitzgerald stands out among Dickens's young men simply because he made such a successful career of being a Dickensian; he remains very little known in any other capacity.<sup>25</sup> He wrote several books on Dickens, delivered lectures,<sup>26</sup> founded the Boz Club and was the Dickens Fellowship's first President. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, he established himself as the leading authority on *Pickwick* to the extent that even Dickens's son Henry asked him to "offer a discussion" on the novel "as you know it as I believe no one alive knows it" (Rochester, Medway Archives, Fitzgerald Collection 331, letter 28 January 1904), and he was involved in several Dickens exhibitions (Rochester, Medway Archives, Fitzgerald Collection 171). In 1912 he published a catalogue of all of his lectures, busts and printed materials to date. He also wrote a very short biography of Forster (1903), a remarkably damning book that remained the only biography until James A. Davies's *John Forster: A Literary Life* (1983). His view of Forster was also presented in Arthur Waugh's biography of Chapman and Hall, *A Hundred Years of Publishing: Being the Story of Chapman and Hall, Ltd*, in which he writes, "As I look back I can never call up the image of Dickens without seeing Forster

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<sup>25</sup> A review of his book on 'Boz-land' concluded "We have no more thorough Dickensian" (*S Gazette*, 7 October 1902). It was this same article that described Fitzgerald as Dickens's "prophet".

<sup>26</sup> Fitzgerald's lecturing was not only limited to Dickens (see Rochester, Medway Archives, Fitzgerald Collection 297). His books on Dickens include a *History of Pickwick* (1891), *Bardell v Pickwick* (1902) and a *Pickwickian Dictionary and Cyclopaedia* (1903).

beside him; Forster always seems to interpose his bulky form. He was ever bustling about his friend, interpreting him and explaining him” (35). This is perhaps also a criticism of Forster’s biography, that it made it very difficult to ‘see’ Dickens without seeing through Forster’s interpretation first. This section will explore Fitzgerald’s writings about Dickens in the twentieth century, comparing his approach both to those that came before and also to Marcus Stone’s unpublished “Autograph Reminiscences”.

Several critics have drawn attention to the carelessness of Fitzgerald’s writing. Waugh, reviewing Fitzgerald’s *Life of Charles Dickens: As Revealed in His Writings*, wrote that “Accuracy, indeed, is not Mr. Fitzgerald’s strong point”, and points out that Fitzgerald made ten errors in transcribing twenty-five lines (Dickens Museum, Wright Papers, Folder 9), while Ley wrote he was “careless to a degree” but was “by no means one of the least considerable figures and influences in the literary life of England” (“In Memoriam: Percy Fitzgerald” 23).<sup>27</sup> Ley’s double negative obscures the point somewhat, and is symptomatic of reviews of Fitzgerald: while his influence was (grudgingly) accepted, it was never enthusiastically embraced. His approach contrasts with that of Sala, Yates and Collins, who all in their own ways sought to distance themselves from Dickens: when Kitton appealed to Yates for a contribution for his *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil*, he responded: “I fear it is impossible by reason of sheer inability to do what you ask. I naturally put the best I could in my ‘Reminiscence’ book” (Dickens Museum, B158, letter 1 August 1886). Yates had said all that he wanted to say, and did so in the context of his own life. Fitzgerald, however, seemed keen to establish his authority in a variety of ways, whether in writing or in the establishment of institutions like the Boz Club or the Fellowship.

Fitzgerald was invested both in Dickens the man and Dickens the author, and established himself as able to interpret both in a way that Sala and Yates did not, in incorporating Dickens into their own lives. One of the ways in which Fitzgerald did this was by writing an account of Forster that emphasised his faults and painted a picture of his personality as one incompatible with Dickens. He called Forster “One of the most robust, striking, and many-sided characters of his time. ... a rough, uncompromising personage, who, from small and obscure beginnings, shouldered his way to the front until he came to be looked on by all as a guide, friend and arbiter” (1). He stressed his “social intolerance”, “loud voice, attuned to a mellifluous softness on occasion, especially with ladies or persons of rank” and “contemptuous scorn”, even if justified

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<sup>27</sup> Ley reiterated this in *The Dickens Circle: A Narrative of the Novelist’s Friendships* (301).

by “admirable training and full knowledge” (2). For Fitzgerald, who established the Boz Club precisely because it allowed social remembrance of Dickens, it could not have been accidental that he represented Forster as an unsuccessful social being. Fitzgerald acknowledges that he was a “fine critic” (2), but such praise is drowned out by mention of his “arrogance, despotism, and rough ‘ways’” (2). We are told that “He seized on people he wished to know and made them his own at once” (3), and that he “certainly precipitated his death by his greed” (65). He did, however, commend Forster’s *Life* (if only briefly), writing that “here is the proper lightness of touch” (13). Fitzgerald often relied upon Forster’s *Life*: while one reviewer wrote that his biography “may, no doubt, be regarded as a final word on the novelist, his friend and master” (*The Book Monthly*, October 1905 17), Waugh was more reserved, in light of Fitzgerald’s inaccuracies, writing in a review that the biography “must be tested rather carefully before it can be accepted as a guide or an authority” (Dickens Museum, Wright Papers, Folder 9). Waugh also felt that the biography was reliant on Forster’s *Life* to make sense, arguing that it was not “generally intelligible to anyone who is not already familiar with Forster’s biography, or at least with some of the many abbreviations of that goodly work which have appeared during the last quarter of a century” (Dickens Museum, Wright Papers, Folder 9). Fitzgerald, then, rather than seeking to revise existing accounts, sought to amalgamate – or supplement – them. The Boz Club allowed him to literally bring together different remembrances of Dickens through the members who had known Dickens.

For the third Dickens Exhibition at New Dudley Galleries in London (1909), Fitzgerald provided a foreword in which he denigrated critics who ignored “Dickens the man as compared with Dickens the writer. ... As I have shown elsewhere, we could almost reconstruct his life from the innumerable passages of what he wrote” (Rochester, Medway Archives, Fitzgerald Collection 171, 9). This calls attention to, and helps to explain, Fitzgerald’s dual interest. He did not set himself up as a critic of Dickens’s work, *per se*, in lecturing and writing about him. Instead, he established himself as the last man living who was able to see Dickens the man through the work, and trace the influence of the life on the beloved novels. This is very much the method Fitzgerald applied in the biography, writing “Everything that he [Dickens] felt, suffered, did, or observed, is there” in the fiction (1.viii). Fitzgerald also took great pains to set himself above even those members of the Dickens circle remaining in 1903:

There are survivors who have known him as well; but not having the training ... in which all of his “school” were disciplined, they might naturally fail to convey what they saw and felt. Therefore it is that I come to this grateful task well equipped as a ‘literary man’ and observer, and also as one who enjoyed rare opportunities of intimacy with him. (1.ix)

In spite of the dedication to Stone at the beginning of the volume (discussed in chapter 3), this would seem to indirectly diminish Stone’s authority as he was not one of the ‘young men’. It also sets Fitzgerald above the remaining family, as intimate with Dickens but not ‘schooled’ in interpreting him. This sentiment is repeated in the preface of Fitzgerald’s *Memories of Dickens* (1913), in which he writes:

It may seem a bold thing to say, and a self-delusion, but I doubt if among all the existing records of Dickens’s domestic life ... there will be found any that give such a picture of his character and manners in private life as is to be found in the sketches that follow. They are “intimate” as well as observant. Forster wrote officially, and in his stately way “put behind him” all mere domestic details as highly trivial. Others, such as my friend Marcus Stone, have not been “trained to the pen,” to the difficulties of noting traits of character. ... Mine, I say unaffectedly, is the truest picture existing of the man. (1.v)

This assertion of his authority is repeated on the first page of the *Memories* themselves, in which he calls himself a “trained scholar” of Dickens’s (1). It is also striking that he distances himself from an ‘official’ narrative of Dickens’s life, while correctly noting Forster’s focus on the author’s public life that Georgina and Mamie had sought to redress in 1880. The passage moves from a somewhat apologetic tone to presenting “the truest picture existing of the man”; this latter statement moves beyond purely the living, and puts Fitzgerald in competition with all existing ‘pictures’ and accounts.

While the jostling for position is quite self-deprecating and respectful, Fitzgerald more directly criticises Forster in his biography of Dickens, calling him “scared by criticism” in the third volume of the *Life* (and therefore changing the style and not focusing so directly on Dickens’s letters to Forster), and describes himself as “Forster’s friend and protégé, perhaps the only one of the junior writers whom he admitted to his

confidence, [which] gives me yet another advantage” (1.x).<sup>28</sup> If this was not clear enough, he adds “So thus the reader and lover of Dickens may come to the conclusion that there is no one of his surviving friends who, at this moment, could supply so full and intimate an account of his life and character” (1.x-xi). Fitzgerald’s claims are very often qualified (‘surviving’ friends; ‘at this moment’), but it is a clear challenge to other possible accounts, though there were, admittedly, very few people who had known Dickens still living at that time. He is also not only Dickens’s ‘young man’, but Forster’s too – a claim that no other biographer could make.

In the second volume, Fitzgerald talks specifically about the founding of the Boz Club and the Dickens Fellowship, once again dedicating a significant amount of space to establishing his own primacy. Of the Boz Club, he writes:

I myself had the gratification of being its founder in the strict and most exclusive sense, for I conceived the idea and the name, and carried the scheme out without taking counsel with anyone. ... I admitted all on my own responsibility and without ballot, until I had recruited some sixty members. (2.306)

Fitzgerald’s account of the Fellowship has been discussed in chapter 3. He took great pride in the Boz Club, writing that “friends of Dickens with those who have written on him are members – with also the leading ‘literary men’ of the day” (Dickens Museum, B164). From the breadth of his activities, it is clear that he saw himself as uniting these groups. The friction between the Fellowship and the remaining members of the Dickens family has also been discussed in chapter 3. In addition, there was tension between Fitzgerald and the family. The Fitzgerald Collection contains several letters between Fitzgerald, Henry and Katey concerning an article he had written for *Harper’s Monthly*, “Dickens in His Books” (1902), in which he had suggested that Dickens wanted to marry Mary Hogarth. Katey wrote:

My poor father; – that so many misrepresentations should be made about him does not even surprise me now ... but that you who profess to venerate him ... should take so little trouble to search into the facts of his life before giving

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<sup>28</sup> In *An Output* Fitzgerald highlights Forster’s role in introducing him to Dickens, writing that Forster “all but propelled me into *Household Words*, and the paper so pleased that I was at once received as one of the foremost contributors” (33).

them to the public, I confess surprises me very much indeed. (Rochester, Medway Archives, Fitzgerald Collection 260, letter 26 March 1902)

Fitzgerald's response was to say that he could not retract the claims, suggesting that it was "a mere trifling speculation – not a statement" (Rochester, Medway Archives, Fitzgerald Collection 260). Henry published a letter in the newspapers regarding Fitzgerald's comments about Dickens's attachment to Mary (*Manchester Guardian* 1.V.1902), and also wrote to him. Fitzgerald, again, was not as apologetic as either Henry or Katey would have liked. The Fitzgerald Collection contains three drafts of a response to Henry that show he was also contacted by Georgina; at any rate, he felt that he was "sufficiently chastised by being assaulted by a whole family at once";<sup>29</sup> "I think I am rather good humoured to accept it" (Rochester, Medway Archives, Fitzgerald Collection 260, letter 30 May 1902). Katey's response shows that the matter was not fully resolved. She writes, "Had you offended me personally, my forgiveness would have been easy to obtain; but I confess that for what you did, I find it rather difficult to say truthfully that I entirely forgive you" (Rochester, Medway Archives, Fitzgerald Collection 260, letter 12 June 1902). This uneasy acceptance represents the lack of control the family was feeling in the early twentieth century, and the beginnings of a new biographical criticism that would remove the final word from the family.

Fitzgerald's most obvious competitor in writing about and representing Dickens at this time was Marcus Stone, who had contributed illustrations to *Our Mutual Friend* and several of the library editions of Dickens's novels. He never published his reminiscences, though he published a short article of recollections in the *Dickensian* in 1910. Like Fitzgerald, he was heavily involved in the Boz Club, but more nominally involved in the Fellowship: Ley writes that, though he was one of its earliest Vice-Presidents, "He never took an active part in its work – never, I believe, attended one of its meetings" ("Marcus Stone, R. A." 131). The two chapters of autobiography that Stone wrote are held by the Dickens Museum (Dickens Museum, C2, "Autograph Reminiscences" MS). Leon Litvack has written a reappraisal of Stone which introduces the unpublished memoirs, but focuses primarily on Stone's working relationship with

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<sup>29</sup> This is the sentence that Fitzgerald seems to have been most keen to redraft. In version one it is "If I have offended admit that I am sufficiently chastised by being assaulted by a whole family at once"; version two reads "... I think I am sufficiently chastised by being put on trial by a whole family"; and version three phrases it as "... I think I am sufficiently chastised by having to bear the attack of a whole family at once" (Rochester, Medway Archives, Fitzgerald Collection 260). It is unclear which, if any, of these responses was actually sent.

Dickens rather than going into detail about the manuscript itself. Litvack writes that Dickens acted “*in loco parentis* to the four Stone children – particularly Arthur, to whom he taught shorthand” (215) and points out that the Pilgrim letters “give a clear impression of patronage” (220). What the unpublished autobiography shows, however, is a radically different conception of influence from that of Sala, Yates, Fitzgerald or Collins. Stone’s account is also likely to have been written much later, in anticipation of a speech for the Boz Club dinner in 1910. Dickens was a father figure for Stone, and this was recognised on both sides: for example, along with Dickens’s children he was given a copy of *A Child’s History of England* in 1853, before its publication in 1854. Stone also describes Dickens in painterly terms, which contrasts with the literary legacy that Sala and Yates establish; for example, he writes that he had “the characteristic flexibility of thumb which is usually found amongst painters and sculptors” (“C.D.’s Appearance” 1). Like Forster, and like Sala, Stone highlights Dickens’s eyes: he writes that “such keen perception and observation ... I have never seen in any other eyes” (1). This discussion of Dickens’s appearance is continued in the autobiography proper, in which Dickens is not only painterly, but also a perfect artistic subject with an “almost Grecian” nose and a “nostril finely curved, well formed and sensitive” (51). The picture created by Stone is one of inimitable beauty and generosity, without the need to compare Stone’s career to Dickens’s because of the different forms in which they worked.

Stone also presents his own view of influence: he opens his autobiography “I have little belief in the handing down by heredity. ... I was the son of a painter, but environment could have had very little effect at first” (1). This sentiment seems somewhat contradictory, and it is unclear how Stone conceived of the difference between heredity and environment. However, his friendship with Dickens was essentially inherited from his father, and throughout the manuscript Dickens and Frank Stone are entwined together, particularly through shared physical space. As discussed in the introduction, the writer’s home is a central facet of nineteenth-century biography and Julian North has discussed this in relation to Lord Byron (“the ideal biographer was one who had cohabited with his subject” [83]), while Ira Nadel’s biography of Virginia Woolf structures each chapter around the houses the Woolfs lived in. As such, the shared houses and close physical proximity that Stone emphasise are key to creating a sense of authority. Both Sala and Yates had also become acquainted with Dickens through their parents, but neither could claim the same kind of physical closeness.

A large chunk of the manuscript is dedicated to giving an overview of Frank Stone’s

life, culminating in Marcus Stone's disappointment that his father started his artistic career late in life and so was kept "away from work of a higher aim" (Dickens Museum, C2, "Autograph Reminiscences" MS, 31). Frank had been a close friend of Dickens, first meeting him when both men were members of the Shakespeare Club (1838-39). He performed in Dickens's theatricals and provided designs for *The Haunted Man* and the cheap edition of *Nickleby* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*. He also produced portraits of several of the Dickens children (ODNB). Marcus Stone's comments about his father invoke Forster's sense of Dickens's "higher purpose" (Forster 723). For Forster, this sense of purpose was something that the young author needed to develop, while Frank Stone's late entry onto the London scene and his comparatively brief career did not give him the chance to develop a similar sense of purpose. A shared holiday at Boulogne is related ("Two Visits to Boulogne"), and we are told that the Dickens family moved into the Stones' house, Tavistock House (43). There are two pages listing people that Marcus Stone met while visiting Dickens at home, and their first meeting takes place in the Stone house (49). Stone's governess was also giving lessons to Mamie and Katey, and she tells Stone of the death of baby Dora Dickens (54). While this cannot compare to Forster's knowledge of the child's death before Dickens himself, it does complicate the boundary between friends and family in a way that is not seen in any other account; while Yates can talk about keeping up with Dickens on his walks, only Stone shares these peculiarly personal bonds with the family. The Dickenses and the Stones were neighbours for nine years, and Marcus Stone was a regular visitor at Gad's Hill after Frank's death in 1859 (56). Stone's descriptions of the interior are, in the context of the various accounts discussed in this thesis, most similar to Mamie's account: Stone writes of the "influence of the master" being "visible all over the house" (58), "even in details which are frequently not considered at all" (58).

Like Sala and Yates, Stone discusses his relationship with Thackeray. In contrast to the fatherly Dickens, Thackeray is set up in opposition to Stone's father, who had "impressed upon my brother and myself that we must never accept money from anyone" (7). However, Thackeray gives the young boy a silver coin and "before I could collect myself to utter the usual 'No thank you,' he was gone" (7).<sup>30</sup> Stone tells us that "The coin seemed to weigh me down" (7). In addition, even in this short manuscript, there is a comparison to Napoleon Bonaparte: Stone calls Dickens "A Napoleonic

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<sup>30</sup> This seems to have been characteristic of Thackeray: in Dickens's obituary of Thackeray for *Cornhill*, he tells us that Thackeray asked if "I felt as he did in regard of never seeing a boy without wanting instantly to give him a sovereign?" (328).

commander-in-chief [who] found able and active officers in his sister in law and eldest daughter who were geniuses (sic) in carrying out his ideas” (58). This domestic, familial Napoleon contrasts strongly with the more autocratic one identified by Sala and Yates. A Napoleon of home as well as work brings them together: while Stone is able to align himself with the Dickens children, he also identifies characteristics that suggest the ‘young men’ are also privileged in seeing this side of Dickens.

Stone’s account also makes familiar comments about Dickens’s eyes, a feature frequently discussed in the accounts I have explored so far. What Stone is able to uniquely offer is an artist’s understanding of Dickens, and for him this translates to a greater knowledge. In recollections published in the *Dickensian*, he argued that “There is no good portrait of Dickens” (63), thus making personal accounts from those who knew him more valuable than existing portraiture in creating a picture of the man. Stone’s knowledge of Dickens means that “With me he has been during all the later years. I seem to ask his views; I know what he would say; and I can hear him as he looks at a picture or reads a book which was not in existence when he was here” (64). Fitzgerald says something similar in his biography, but it is striking that Stone, the artist, *bears* Dickens, while Fitzgerald *sees* him: “During the past thirty years or so, Charles Dickens’s image has been so vividly and so uninterruptedly in my memory that at this moment I see him as clearly, and hear the cadences of his flexible voice as distinctly, as though he were standing before me ‘in his habit as he lived’” (1.ix). The suggestive reference to *Hamlet* 3.4.126 positions Dickens as the lost father guiding his son’s actions. Both passages create a sense of knowledge of, and authority about, Dickens that goes beyond what can be gleaned from the fiction or from a painting.

While Stone claimed that “none of us has lost him” (64), the fact that portraits are insufficient means that this closeness is derived from a personal understanding of Dickens. This is elaborated in the autobiography, in which Stone describes Dickens’s eyes as “speaking eyes” (50):

They were not only seeing, they were also speaking eyes. ... He moved his eyes without moving his head more than is the habit of most people. Wonderful eyes, how they could laugh, how they could cry. I have been embarrassed by my intimate understanding of this ocular telegraphy on occasions, when it would have been indiscreet to laugh. (50)

Like Forster's accounts of the "motion" and "quickness" visible in Dickens's face (84), there is something about Dickens's eyes that cannot be conveyed by art. The moment of 'embarrassment' is also a moment of intimacy that further cements Stone's authority. As in Dickens's accounts of Thackeray and Landor in chapter 1, they are also here tied to personality rather than biography.

The most notable point of difference is in Stone's relationship with Dickens. Ley, who interviewed Stone, quotes him as saying:

I saw him as nobody else saw him. I was, so to speak, nobody in the house. ...  
I was a nobody – that is, just a young man that did not count as a guest at all. I was one of the family. Thus I saw Charles Dickens as nobody else saw him. ...  
I just "walked in," and was as much at home as one of his sons. ("Marcus Stone, R.A." 148)

This is a very different relationship with Dickens. While Sala and Yates build their accounts on offering something individual and meaningful to Dickens, and even Fitzgerald seeks to place himself as the only one alive able to interpret Dickens correctly, Stone presents himself as a nobody (at the same time as being like his son). It is wonderfully self-aggrandising and self-effacing. It effaces Stone while not lowering his importance to Dickens. We are told Dickens was as at home with Stone as he was with his own children, or himself, and this remarkable self-effacement encapsulates many of the problems concerning intimacy, self-fashioning and memory that have played out across the various memoirs, manuscripts, biographies and social acts of remembrance discussed in this chapter. Each account has sought to present its writer as a true Dickensian: Sala discusses Dickens as a revolutionary, breaking with the literary norms of the generation before, before showing that he too has done this; Yates ends with his editorship of *The World*, taking on the role of 'Chief' for himself; Fitzgerald and Stone created the Boz Club, as a homosocial forum for remembering Dickens, while Fitzgerald sought to bring together love for Dickens the man, biographical interest and the novels in his many publications and activities; and finally Stone's position as 'nobody' is a culmination of the positioning that I have shown in the other examples of life writing, because the last authority that he can invoke is that of Dickens himself. Stone has gone beyond personal fame, individual significance, and the specificities of his relationship with Dickens. He is attempting to remove the barrier between Dickens

and the reader by removing himself, where others have attempted to do this by aligning themselves with Dickens or jostling for authority with Forster or other accounts. The review that proclaimed “There is only one Dickens, and Mr. Fitzgerald is his prophet” (*S Gazette* 7 October 1902), also hit on a central issue: each account is trying to present ‘one’ Dickens as the ‘true’ Dickens, and its author as the prophet. For that reviewer, Fitzgerald had succeeded; but there could never be a ‘final word’ on the subject.

## CONCLUSION

[T]he problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations.

Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

This thesis has challenged the idea of a monolithic, monumental Charles Dickens. Seeing the development of Dickens's reputation as a teleological movement (from Dickens to John Forster, Thomas Wright, Edgar Johnson, and beyond) does not account for the multiplicity of representations in biographical discourse during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In considering such a range of texts, archival materials and memorial acts, it is difficult to draw strong conclusions. However, this thesis has made clear that representations of Dickens were more varied than previously recognised. The oft-cited appeal made by Dickens in his will for no "monument, memorial or testimonial whatsoever" (Forster 859) is useful in theorising the representations of Dickens I have discussed: K. J. Fielding has called Forster's *Life* "a monument" ("1870-1900: Forster and Reaction" 85), while Henry Dickens referred to the Dickens Fellowship as a "monument" (367). These two ways of remembering Dickens have indeed become different kinds of monuments, in ways that the author's exhortation did not anticipate. Memoirs act as testimonials to Dickens's character. All are ways of memorialising Dickens. The texts I have discussed are often treated as homogeneous: arguing, for example, that Dickens's journalism of the 1860s showed a particular attitude towards money (Wilfred P. Dvorak 90); that Forster's *Life* is interesting mainly for the autobiographical fragment and its own auto/biographical tone; that the family writings were all homogeneously reverent (Michael Slater, *Scandal*, 53); that Edmund Yates and George Augustus Sala wrote about Dickens in the same terms (P. D. Edwards, *Dickens's Young Men*, 124); and even that the loss of Dickens can be expressed through a single image, such as *The Empty Chair*. What this thesis has done is to complicate that kind of analysis, and to paint a more complex picture of difference that challenges our understanding of how Dickens was represented during this time.

There has been no full-length study of Dickens biography to date. The sheer volume of material published on him makes this particularly difficult, though there is important work that identifies peaks and troughs in his reputation (considering, for example,

Forster's importance; the establishment of a literary canon in the early twentieth that prized Victorian realist fiction, leaving Dickens behind; G. K. Chesterton's work on Dickens; Wright's biography). Nonetheless, there has not been sustained analysis of Dickensian life writing; nor has there been detailed analysis of the period of Dickens's afterlife covered in this thesis, which has shown the interrelationships and connections between different accounts, from the author's own account of his childhood and his ambivalence about how he would be remembered to interpretations of those wishes by Forster and the family, followed by a more deliberate move away from the dominant narrative of his life by writers such as Sala and Yates. I argue that Dickens biography and criticism, in future, must navigate these different accounts and resist referring to critical moves in Dickens biography as if they merely overwrite one another.

In the first chapter, I drew together the various biographical (and quasi-biographical) moments from Dickens's speeches that have been treated as 'hints' dropped by the author, to argue that his craft at speech-making complemented his writing and public reading in hitherto unrecognised ways. I showed how the late 1850s and 1860s should loom larger in analysing Dickens's approach to biographical discourse, particularly the ways in which he wrote about childhood and death. Dickens's relationship with William Makepeace Thackeray has been written about in the context of the 'Dignity of Literature' debate,<sup>1</sup> but I have brought his eulogistic writing together with other articles of the period that explore questions of authorship, biography, and ways of remembering personality. Future work could extend this to further analyse how the author's approach to speech-making developed over the decades, bringing together studies that have discussed the most significant of Dickens's early speeches (such as the 1841 Edinburgh speech, discussed by John Bowen in "A Garland for *The Old Curiosity Shop*" [2] and Robert L. Patten in *Charles Dickens and "Boz": The Birth of the Industrial-Age Author* [301]) with the speech-making that can be found in the novels. Jeremy Parrott's discovery of an annotated copy of *All The Year Round* paves the way for fuller understanding of other authors' development throughout the journal, and a comparative study of their treatment of death, legacy, childhood and commemoration in a way that has not previously been possible. Percy Fitzgerald, who has been revealed as one of the eight most prolific contributors to the journal, would be a particularly

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Richard Salmon's "Professions of Labour: *David Copperfield* and the Dignity of Literature", Craig Howes's "*Pendennis* and the Controversy on the 'Dignity of Literature'" and Mark Cronin's "Henry Gowan, William Makepeace Thackeray, and 'The Dignity of Literature' Controversy".

suitable candidate.<sup>2</sup>

My discussion of Forster's *Life* in chapter 2 has exposed the ways in which Forster set his biography apart, but also how it interacted with other accounts of Dickens's life and work. Comparison with John Camden Hotten's biography, one of the "most important pre-Forster biographies" (James A. Davies, "Striving for Honesty: An Approach to Forster's *Life*", 43) (and, in chapter 4, to the other [Sala's *Charles Dickens*]), to one of the first "specialty studies" (Laurence Mazzeno 32), Charles Kent's *Charles Dickens as a Reader*, and to a minor biographical text (Alexander Hume's *Christmas Memorial of Charles Dickens*), creates a clearer picture of the biography's distinctiveness. I have argued that the *Life* attempted to justify Dickens not necessarily by disproving George Henry Lewes's or H. A. Taine's claims, but by providing a foundation to the reader's understanding of Dickens's way of viewing the world and the creation of his fiction that would set the tone of Dickens scholarship. F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis have claimed that Forster was not concerned with "interpreting" Dickens (x), but I have shown that he carefully guided how Dickens *should* be interpreted. The writing of Forster's biography was also an act of mourning, which we see in his own proof copy of the text.

Chapter 3 demonstrated that the Dickens family writings diverged in their feelings about Forster. Georgina's actions were characterised by ambivalence: she both wanted Dickens to be vindicated in his treatment of Catherine, but also did not want to reveal too much about his personal life. The editing of the *Letters* (1880-82) was guided by the idea of 'public' interest, but Georgina found such interest in nearly every "little note" (qtd. in Adrian 207). The *Letters* matter not simply for their many omissions but also for the way in which they shape an account of Dickens that shows the 'supplementary' impulse in practice. The dialogue between the published writings and the public commemorative acts of the Boz Club and the Dickens Fellowship demonstrate that different modes of commemoration asserted competing hierarchies of authority and memory which moved away from the control of family and friends in the early twentieth century. These foundations were attempts to build new monuments, rather than additional stones laid on top of the *Life*.

Chapter 4 demonstrated how the revelatory impulse that characterised biographies

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<sup>2</sup> Parrott has discovered that there were three hundred and twelve named contributors to *All The Year Round* between 1859 and 1868, but eight of these authors wrote thirty-five percent of all contributions: Dickens himself; Wilkie Collins; Henry Morley; Walter Thornbury; Charles Collins; Eliza Lynn Linton; Edmund Saul Dixon; and Percy Fitzgerald (Dickens Fellowship Conference, University of Aberdeen, 20-24 July 2016. Paper presentation).

of the 1870s became a competition about who had the most intimacy with Dickens, and how this could be justified. This chapter developed the discussion of the Boz Club and the Dickens Fellowship begun in chapter 3. The desire to establish authority, the ways in which Dickens is described as patronising or validating his ‘young men’ (and even how they remembered him), fed into Fitzgerald’s founding of, and approach to, the Boz Club. Fitzgerald’s later writings were explicitly based on his claims to be the most authoritative source of knowledge about Dickens, and how he made this claim was contrasted with Stone’s unpublished “Autograph Reminiscences” in chapter 4, which bound together patronage, collaborative work and a family intimacy.

All of the chapters encountered questions of how to remember Dickens the man and what representations of the ‘characteristic’ Dickens should look like. The Dickens of the speeches and journalism suggested that an author should be remembered primarily for his or her personality, rather than his or her biography. As such, the ‘characteristic’ Dickens was hard-working and committed to literature. Memory was treated by Dickens in the journalism discussed as reparative, and death as surprisingly lacking in ‘absence’. In Forster’s *Life*, the characteristic Dickens was revealed to his closest friend, created in the text through accounts of those who knew him, and understood through biographical interpretations of his early years. For the Dickens family, reacting against Forster, the characteristic Dickens was domestically inclined and homosocial, but was best expressed and understood by his family. *How* he should be remembered changed to include not only anecdotes and reminiscences but also club culture and feasting. The Dickens Fellowship, and prominent Dickens scholars, moved away from family authority and began more decidedly to solidify a particular image of Dickens, refuting evidence about Ellen Ternan and rejecting it from the biographical archive. As such, in chapter 3, we first saw how “control of the archive” (Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 4), and hierarchies of memory, could be used to wield power over Dickens’s reputation in the press.

The characteristic Dickens became an autocratic Chief in the hands of Sala and Yates. The language of Sala’s account in 1870 was revised to reflect changing approaches to their patron, and their own careers, by Dickens’s ‘young men’ in the 1880s and 1890s. Questions of relative importance were at the heart of these accounts. The example of Wilkie Collins’s autobiographical sketch showed that George M. Towle made Dickens distinct by denigrating Collins, and this contrasted with Sala and Yates’s attempts to elevate themselves in relation to their Chief. This positioning was brought

into sharp relief by the writings of Fitzgerald and Stone, neither of whom sought to ‘bury’ Dickens or set themselves apart from him but instead moved the conversation to who could best remember Dickens. Implicit in this movement was a sense that the characteristic Dickens could only be understood and represented by a particular person – in Fitzgerald’s case, a “trained scholar” (*Memories of Charles Dickens* 1), and in Stone’s, someone who was a family member, or even a “nobody in the house” to Dickens (Ley, “Marcus Stone, R.A.”, 148). Stone’s dual position echoes Forster’s image of Dickens as most himself to closest friends. These attempts at self-fashioning and positioning were not linear: there is no straightforward movement from ‘monumental’ Dickens to domestic Dickens, but often a circling back and a reaction to other images and accounts of Dickens.

Literary circles and how those around Dickens saw their role are also important because the circle mediated between the author and his public, making ‘true’ understanding of Dickens something limited to a specific set of people. The literary circle protected a particular kind of image, explained Dickens to the public, and held a privileged knowledge about the author, but could not always exercise control over Dickens’s wider reputation. As such, there is also a particular anxiety about literary circles and influence: as discussed in chapter 4, the ‘Dignity of Literature’ debate had partly arisen from Thackeray taking issue with Dickens, Forster and their circle.<sup>3</sup> The nature, composition, and roles played in this circle, could be further illuminated with research into Dickens’s lesser-known young men such as James Payn or Blanchard Jerrold, particularly in light of possible ‘new’ articles to attribute to Dickens’s already wide range of contributors. Raymond Williams, in writing about “The Significance of ‘Bloomsbury’ as a Social and Cultural Group”, has drawn attention to “serious problems of method in the analysis of cultural groups” (40). He argues that:

The group, the movement, the circle, the tendency seem too marginal or too small or too ephemeral to require historical and social analysis. Yet their importance, as a general social and cultural fact, especially in the last two centuries, is great: in what they achieved, and in what their modes of achievement can tell us about the larger societies to which they stand in such uncertain relations. (41)

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<sup>3</sup> See Michael J. Flynn’s “*Pendennis, Copperfield*, and the Debate on the ‘Dignity of Literature’”.

This call for closer attention to groups and circles reinforces the importance of looking more closely at Dickens's young men and groups like the Boz Club. Dickens's influences and spheres of influence were many, but study of such groups can show the contrast between esoteric and exoteric representations of Dickens and how these interact with his legacy and reputation. There is also potential in comparing representations of Dickens by artists, such as William Powell Frith and Marcus Stone autobiography, in order to widen our understanding of Dickens's spheres of influence beyond his family and 'young men' to his impact on Victorian art and artists, working in a different medium and therefore not competing with Dickens, as Yates and Sala were.

The texts and themes I have discussed relate to the bigger picture of Victorian celebrity culture in the formation of national identity. Alexis Easley has identified an increased "obsess[ion] with literary celebrities in the second half of the nineteenth century" (11) and ties this to questions of Englishness, and particularly a desire to have a strong and stable national history. This has been brilliantly explored by Juliet John in *Dickens and Mass Culture*, and analysed by others who have read Dickens's reception against a background of ageing Victorianism, rising Modernism and two world wars.<sup>4</sup> It is true that Dickens was a popular author, and an uncontrollable, mass literary phenomenon, but he was also a biographical figure with family and friendship networks. Those with intimate knowledge of Dickens had high stakes in sharing that knowledge and shaping his reputation. His reputation did not need bolstering, but the desire to focus public attention on certain aspects over others is evident. The way that Easley ties the interest in celebrities to a wider desire to gain new knowledge (and how this drives new publications) is useful here (12): the relentless stream of new publications about Dickens that continues to this day shows a drive to reveal *more*, and a sense that no account is truly satisfying by itself. There are no true Dickensian 'prophets', but instead a choice of mediators and mouthpieces. Nonetheless, a kind of revelation is central to representations of Dickens. As demonstrated in chapter 1, Dickens was aware that anything he said in a speech might become part of the biographical archive. As such, he was able to 'reveal' biographical details but also suggest, imply, and build up a 'soft' image of what his childhood had been like. Forster's biography is most famous for its revelations about Dickens's childhood, but it was also a careful act of interpretation. The writings by family and friends added to the

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<sup>4</sup> See John Gardiner (165), Gerard Curtis (164) and the 1970 special issue of the *Dickensian*, 'Dickens and Fame 1870-1970: Essays on the Author's Reputation'.

biographical discourse in small ways each time, no longer ‘prophets’ but inheritors, turning their relationship with Dickens into an endorsement of their commemorative acts or their own writing and careers. What I hope to have demonstrated here is that representations of Dickens between 1857 and 1939 are “creative” and “fertile” biographical representations (Virginia Woolf, “The Art of Biography”, 187) rather than texts we should read as simply hagiographic, limited and homogeneous. The wide range of texts that compete within the author’s biographical archive are suggestive, ambivalent, and add to a complex multiplicity of representations of Dickens.

At the centre of literary celebrity is a myth-making process, as many of Dickens’s biographers, including friends and family, have recognised. When closer attention is paid to the period from 1857 to the end of Dickens’s life, and the period between his death and Wright’s biography, it takes on new importance. Wright’s revelation about Ellen Ternan in 1935 galvanised a new phase, both of defensive biography and also of radical revision of public understanding of Dickens’s character, but this has its parallel in the machinations of the Dickens family and other early biographers following Forster’s 1870 biography. This thesis has addressed a significant gap in Dickens Studies by showing the centrality of gender, domesticity, public interest, childhood and hierarchies of knowledge and memory in the texts of the 1857-1939 period, delineating the relationships between Forster’s monumental text and Dickens’s experimentations with autobiography, as well as the life writing that came after. It has challenged existing interpretations of nineteenth-century life writing, using Dickensian biography to test their categorisations: my analysis revisits and revises understanding of nineteenth-century life writing that identifies a move from Boswell to hagiography to irreverence, showing instead devotional life writing going on well into the twentieth century, and a desire to depict the flawed Dickens present in the 1870s. Each account discussed has different, often conflicting objectives, sometimes even internally. Similarly close analysis of other Victorian writers and their biographers during this period, and particularly the role of wider circles in the management of posthumous reputation, could further alter critical understanding of the shifts and shades of life writing and its role in literary afterlives, bringing added nuance to existing scholarly understanding of our changing relationship with the literary past.

## APPENDIX. “WILKIE COLLINS”, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I was born on the 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1824, at No. 11, New Cavendish Street, Portland Place, London. I am the eldest of two sons (and two only children) of the late William Collins (Royal Academician), the celebrated painter of the Coast scenery and cottage life of England.

For the first twelve years of my life, I was taught in the usual way at a well reputed private school. I learnt as little as possible; and that little (consisting mainly of the rudiments of Latin and Greek) has not been of the slightest use to me in my after-life.

In the year 1837, my father decided to go to Italy to find fresh subjects for his brush among the people and the scenery of that country. My mother was to accompany him, and the question was, whether his two boys were to go too.

With two exceptions, all my fathers' friends declared that it would be madness on his part to interrupt the education of two boys, one 13 years old and one 9, by taking them to a foreign country and exposing them to foreign influences, at a time when they ought to be subjected to the wholesome discipline and restraint of an English school. The two exceptions already mentioned happened, however, to be two very remarkable people, capable of seeing possibilities of education in other systems than the system conventionally recognized about them. They were, my godfather, Sir David Wilkie, (the great Scotch painter); and the famous Mrs. Somerville, the authoress of “Physical Geography.” These two reminded my father that what his boys might lose in Latin and Greek, they might gain in knowledge of modern languages, and in acquiring habits of observation among people and scenes entirely new to them.

Wilkie was my father's dearest friend; and, for Mrs. Somerville's powers, he felt the highest respect. He took us to Italy with him. We remained abroad for two years; and there, and in that way, I picked up the only education which I can sincerely say has been of some real use to me.

Returning from Italy, I went back to school (a private school), and the classics. In due time, it became a question next of Oxford and the classics, or of Cambridge and the Mathematics. My good father left me free to choose my own profession; only telling me that, if I liked it too, he would like to see me in the Church. I hardly know which prospect I most disliked – going to a University or going into the Church. To escape

both, I declared for Commerce, and at seventeen or eighteen years old, I was placed in a merchant's office.

Here I remained – I think for four years. I should probably not have remained four days, if I had not had a pursuit of my own to follow which really engaged my interest. In plain English, I was already an author in secret. There is hardly any form of audacious literary enterprise proper to my age, which I did not perpetrate in secret, while I was supposed to be in a fair way of becoming one of the solid commercial props of my native country. Towards the end of the four years, I had grown wise enough to descend from epic poems and tragedies into blank verse, to unassuming little articles and stories, some of which found their way modestly into the small periodicals of the time. Thus self-betrayed as unfit for mercantile pursuits, I abandoned commerce, and tried reading for the Bar. My reading lasted, as well as I can remember, six weeks – and then I began a novel by way of importing a little variety into my legal studies. I continued, however, to be a member of the Inn of Court (Lincoln's Inn) at which I had been entered as a student; and (no examination being obligatory, in my time) I was five years afterwards called to the Bar. I am now a Barrister of some fifteen years standing, without having ever put on a wig and gown.

To return for a moment to the novel mentioned above, and to the time when I was a student at Lincoln's Inn. I have to report that this work of fiction was actually offered for sale among the London publishers. They all declined it; and, they were quite right. The scene was laid in the Island of Tahiti, before the period of its discovery by European navigators! My youthful imagination ran riot among the noble savages, in scenes which caused the respectable British publisher to declare that it was impossible to put his name on the title page of such a novel as this. For the moment, I was a little discouraged. I got over it and began another novel. This time, the scene was Rome; the period the fifth century; and the central historical event, the siege of the Eternal City by the Goth. All day, I read my authorities at the British Museum. In the evenings I wrote my book in the quiet and seclusion of my father's painting room. The first volume and part of the second had been completed, when my employment was suspended by my father's death. I put the novel aside, and addressed myself to the writing of another story, which lay far nearer to my heart – the story of my father's life. In the "Memoirs of William Collins, R.A." I saw my name on the title-page of a printed and published book, for the first time.

After the publication of the biography (in the year 1848) I returned to my romance. The third volume was finished in Paris; and after a preliminary refusal of the manuscript by the late Mr. Colburn, the book was published in 1850 by Mr. Beatty, under the title of “Antonina, or The Fall of Rome.” I instantly stepped into a certain place as a novelist. Such a chorus of praise was sung over me by the critics, as has never been sung over me since. The favourable verdict of the reviews (whether merited or not) was endorsed in time by the readers, many of my literary elders and betters kindly adding their special tribute of encouragement and approval. In short “Antonina” opened to me the career as a novelist which I have continued to follow to the present time.

The rest of the story of my life is simply the story of the books which I have written. Here is a list of them in chronological order.

1. The life of William Collins, R. A. (1848)
2. Antonina or The Fall of Rome, (1850)
3. Basil. (1852)
4. Rambles beyond Railways. (1852)  
(The narrative of a walking tour in Cornwall.)
5. Hide and Seek. (1854)
6. After Dark (1856)  
(Collection of short stories)
7. The Dead Secret. (1857)
8. The Queen of Hearts. (1858)  
(Collection of short stories)
9. The Woman in White. (1860)
10. No Name. (1862)
11. My Miscellanies (1863)  
(Collected sketches and essays.)
12. Armadale (1866)
13. The Moonstone. (1868)
14. Man and Wife. (1870.)

#### Dramatic Works

1. The Lighthouse

2. The Frozen Deep, Both acted in private at the house of Charles Dickens, And in public at the Olympic Theatre, London
3. The Red Vial
4. No Thoroughfare Dramatic version of the Christmas Story. Written in collaboration with Dickens & Fechter. (Adelphi Theatre. London.)
5. Black and White. In collaboration with Fechter. Adelphi Theatre.

(Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Gimbel-Dickens H1239, "Wilkie Collins")

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