THE AMUSEMENTS OF THE PEOPLE.

As one half of the world is said not to know how the other half lives, so it maybe affirmed that the upper half of the world neither knows nor greatly cares how the lower half amuses itself. Believing that it does not care, mainly because it does not know, we purpose occasionally recording a few facts on this subject.

The general character of the lower class of dramatic amusements is a very significant sign of a people, and a very good test of their intellectual condition. We design to make our readers acquainted in the first place with a few of our experiences under this head in the metropolis.

It is probable that nothing will ever root out from among the common people an innate love they have for dramatic entertainment in some form or other. It would be a very doubtful benefit to society, we think, if it could be rooted out. The Polytechnic Institution in Regent Street, where an infinite variety of ingenious models are exhibited and explained, and where lectures comprising a quantity of useful information on many practical subjects are delivered, is a great public benefit and a wonderful place, but we think a people formed entirely in their hours of leisure by Polytechnic Institutions would be an uncomfortable community. We would rather not have to appeal to the generous sympathies of a man of five-and-twenty, in respect of some affliction of which he had had no personal experience, who had passed all his holidays, when a boy, among cranks and cogwheels. We should be more disposed to trust him if he had been brought into occasional contact with a Maid and a Magpie; if he had made one or two diversions into the Forest of Bondy; or had even gone the length of a Christmas Pantomime. There is a range of imagination in most of us, which no amount of steam-engines will satisfy; and which The- great-exhibition-of-the-works-of-industry-of-all-nations, itself, will probably leave unappeased. The lower we go, the more natural it is that the best-relished provision for this should be found in dramatic entertainments; as at once the most obvious, the least troublesome, and the most real, of all escapes out of the literal world. Joe Whelks, of the New Cut, Lambeth, is not much of a reader, has no great store of books, no very commodious room to read in, no very decided inclination to read, and no power at all of presenting vividly before his mind's eye what he reads about. But, put Joe in the gallery of the Victoria Theatre; show him doors and windows in the scene that will open and shut, and that people can get in and out of; tell him a story with these aids, and by the help of live men and women dressed up, confiding to him their innermost secrets, in voices audible half a mile off; and Joe will unravel a story through all its entanglements, and sit there as long after midnight as you have anything left to show him. Accordingly, the Theatres to which Mr. Whelks resorts, are always full; and whatever changes of fashion the drama knows elsewhere, it is always fashionable in the New Cut.

The question, then, might not unnaturally arise, one would suppose, whether Mr. Whelks's education is at all susceptible of improvement, through the agency of his theatrical tastes. How far it is improved at present, our readers shall judge for themselves.

In affording them the means of doing so, we wish to disclaim any grave imputation on those who are concerned in ministering to the dramatic gratification of Mr. Whelks. Heavily taxed, wholly unassisted by the State, deserted by the gentry, and quite unrecognised as a means of public instruction, the higher English Drama has declined. Those who would live to please Mr. Whelks, must please Mr. Whelks to live. It is not the Manager's province to hold the Mirror up to Nature, but to Mr. Whelks—the only person who acknowledges him. If, in like manner, the actor's nature, like the dyer's hand, become subdued to what he works in, the actor can hardly be blamed for it. He grinds hard at his vocation, is often steeped in direful poverty,
and lives, at the best, in a little world of mockeries. It is bad enough to give away a great estate six nights a-week, and want a shilling; to preside at imaginary banquets, hungry for a mutton chop; to smack the lips over a tankard of toast and water, and declaim about the mellow produce of the sunny vineyard on the banks of the Rhine; to be a rattling young lover, with the measles at home; and to paint sorrow over, with burnt cork and rouge; without being called upon to despise his vocation too. If he can utter the trash to which he is condemned, with any relish, so much the better for him. Heaven knows; and peace be with him!

A few weeks ago, we went to one of Mr. Whelks's favourite Theatres, to see an attractive Melo-Drama called MAY MORNING, OR THE MYSTERY OF 1715, AND THE MURDER! We had an idea that the former of these titles might refer to the month in which either the Mystery or the Murder happened, but we found it to be the name of the heroine, the pride of Keswick Vale; who was 'called May Morning' (after a common custom among the English Peasantry) 'from her bright eyes and merry laugh.' Of this young lady, it may be observed, in passing, that she subsequently sustained every possible calamity of human existence, in a white muslin gown with blue tucks; and that she did every conceivable and inconceivable thing with a pistol, that
could anyhow be effected by that description of fire-arms.

The Theatre was extremely full. The prices of admission were, to the boxes, a shilling; to the pit, sixpence; to the gallery, threepence. The gallery was of enormous dimensions (among the company, in the front row, we observed Mr. Whelks); and overflowing with occupants. It required no close observation of the attentive faces, rising one above another, to the very door in the roof, and squeezed and jammed in, regardless of all discomforts, even there, to impress a stranger with a sense of its being highly desirable to lose no possible chance of effecting any mental improvement in that great audience.

The company in the pit were not very clean or sweet-savoured, but there were some good-humoured young mechanics among them, with their wives. These were generally accompanied by 'the baby,' insomuch that the pit was a perfect nursery. No effect made on the stage was so curious, as the looking down on the quiet faces of these babies fast asleep, after looking up at the staring sea of heads in the gallery. There were a good many cold fried soles in the pit, besides; and a variety of flat stone bottles, of all portable sizes.

The audience in the boxes was of much the same character (babies and fish excepted) as the audience in the pit. A private in the Foot Guards sat in the next box; and a personage who wore pins on his coat instead of buttons, and was in such a damp habit of living as to be quite mouldy, was our nearest neighbour. In several parts of the house we noticed some young pickpockets of our acquaintance; but as they were evidently there as private individuals, and not in their public capacity, we were little disturbed by their presence. For we consider the hours of idleness passed by this class of society as so much gain to society at large; and we do not join in a whimsical sort of lamentation that is generally made over them, when they are found to be unoccupied.

As we made these observations the curtain rose, and we were presently in possession of the following particulars.

Sir George Elmore, a melancholy Baronet with every appearance of being in that advanced stage of indigestion in which Mr. Morrison’s patients usually are, when they happen to hear, through Mr. Moat, of the surprising effects of his Vegetable Pills, was found to be living in a very large castle, in the society of one round table, two chairs, and Captain George Elmore,
"The Amusements of the People [ii]" by Charles Dickens

_Household Words_, Volume I, Magazine No. 1, 30 March 1850, Pages: 13-15

The Captain, in addition to an undutiful habit of bullying his father on all occasions, was a prey to many vices: foremost among which may be mentioned his desertion of his wife, 'Estella de Neva, a Spanish lady,' and his determination unlawfully to possess himself of May Morning; M. M. being then on the eve of marriage to Will Stanmore, a cheerful sailor, with very loose legs.

The strongest evidence, at first, of the Captain's being the Child of Mystery and the Man of Crime was deducible from his boots, which, being very high and wide, and apparently made of sticking-plaister, justified the worst theatrical suspicions to his disadvantage. And indeed he presently turned out as ill as could be desired: getting into May Morning's Cottage by the window after dark; refusing to 'unhand' May Morning when required to do so by that lady; waking May Morning's only surviving parent, a blind old gentleman with a black ribbon over his eyes, whom we shall call Mr. Stars, as his name was stated in the bill thus *****; and showing himself desperately bent on carrying off May Morning by force of arms. Even this was not the worst of the Captain; for, being foiled in his diabolical purpose—temporarily by means of knives and pistols, providentially caught up and directed at him by May Morning, and finally, for the time being, by the advent of Will Stanmore—he caused one Slink, his adherent, to denounce Will Stanmore as a rebel, and got that cheerful mariner carried off, and shut up in prison. At about the same period of the Captain's career, there suddenly appeared in his father's castle, a dark complexioned lady of the name of Manuella, 'a Zingara Woman from the Pyrenean mountains; the wild wanderer of the heath, and the pronouncer of the prophecy,' who threw the melancholy baronet, his supposed father, into the greatest confusion by asking him what he had upon his conscience, and by pronouncing mysterious rhymes concerning the Child of Mystery and the Man of Crime, to a low trembling of fiddles. Matters were in this state when the Theatre resounded with applause, and Mr. Whelks fell into a fit of unbounded enthusiasm, consequent on the entrance of 'Michael the Mendicant.'

At first we referred something of the cordiality with which Michael the Mendicant was greeted, to the fact of his being 'made up' with an excessively dirty face, which might create a bond of union between himself and a large majority of the audience. But it soon came out that Michael the Mendicant had been hired in old time by Sir George Elmore, to murder his (Sir George Elmore's) elder brother—which he had done; notwithstanding which little affair of honour, Michael was in reality a very good fellow; quite a tender-hearted man; who, on hearing of the Captain's determination to settle Will Stanmore, cried out, 'What! more bel-ool! and fell flat—overpowered by his nice sense of humanity. In like manner, in describing that small error of judgment into which he had allowed himself to be tempted by money, this gentleman exclaimed, 'I ster-ruck him down, and fel-ed in er-orror!' and further he remarked, with honest pride, 'I have livered as a beggar—a road-sider vaigeran t, but no ker-rime since then has stained these hands! ' All these sentiments of the worthy man were hailed with showers of applause; and when, in the excitement of his feelings on one occasion, after a soliloquy, he 'went off' on his back, kicking and shuffling along the ground, after the manner of bold spirits in trouble, who object to be taken to the station-house, the cheering was tremendous.

And to see how little harm he had done, after all! Sir George Elmore's elder brother was NOT dead. Not he! He recovered, after this sensitive creature had 'fel-ed in er-orror,' and, putting a black ribbon over his eyes to disguise himself, went and lived in a modest retirement.
with his only child. In short, Mr. Stars was the identical individual! When Will Stanmore turned out to be the wrongful Sir George Elmore's son, instead of the Child of Mystery and Man of Crime, who turned out to be Michael's son, (a change having been effected, in revenge, by the lady from the Pyrenean Mountains, who became the Wild Wanderer of the Heath, in consequence of the wrongful Sir George Elmore's perfidy to her and desertion of her), Mr. Stars went up to the Castle, and mentioned to his murdering brother how it was. Mr. Stars said it was all right; he bore no malice; he had kept out of the way, in order that his murdering brother (to whose numerous virtues he was no stranger) might enjoy the property; and now he would propose that they should make it up and dine together. The murdering brother immediately consented, embraced the Wild Wanderer, and it is supposed sent instructions to Doctors' Commons for a license to marry her. After which, they were all very comfortable indeed. For it is not much to try to murder your brother for the sake of his property, if you only suborn such a delicate assassin as Michael the Mendicant!

All this did not tend to the satisfaction of the Child of Mystery and Man of Crime, who was so little pleased by the general happiness, that he shot Will Stanmore, now joyfully out of prison and going to be married directly to May Morning, and carried off the body, and May Morning to boot, to a lone hut. Here, Will Stanmore, laid out for dead at fifteen minutes past twelve, P.M., arose at seventeen minutes past, infinitely fresher than most daisies, and fought two strong men single-handed. However, the Wild Wanderer, arriving with a party of male wild wanderers, who were always at her disposal—and the murdering brother arriving arm-in-arm with Mr. Stars—stopped the combat, confounded the Child of Mystery and Man of Crime, and blessed the lovers.

The adventures of 'RED RIVEN THE BANDIT' concluded the moral lesson of the evening. But, feeling by this time a little fatigued, and believing that we already discerned in the countenance of Mr. Whelks a sufficient confusion between right and wrong to last him for one night, we retired: the rather as we intended to meet him, shortly, at another place of dramatic entertainment for the people.
Dickens wrote or co-wrote three pieces for the first number of his new journal. For the co-authored piece, 'Valentine's Day at the Post-Office' [Vol. I, 30 March 1850], written with his sub-editor W. H. Wills, and another articles, 'A Bundle of Emigrants' Letters' [Vol. I, 30 March 1850], in which Dickens presented some letters home from emigrants to Australia (see Stone [1, Uncollected Writings of Charles Dickens]). 'The Amusements of the People' is the first installment of a two-part polemical report on the kind of entertainment available to working-class audiences at two well-known popular theatres. It relates directly to one aspect of the editorial project announced in Dickens's 'Preliminary Word' in that it is concerned with the cultivation of the imagination, cherishing 'that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast.' For Dickens, one of the supreme sites for imaginative experience was the theatre and here he directs his middle-class readers' attention to the kind of dramatic entertainment provided at his neighbourhood theatre for the generically named Joe Whelks (whelks, like oysters, were a favourite delicacy of the Victorian poor).

The theatre visited in this piece is the one now called the Old Vic, which is located south of the river in Lambeth, near Waterloo Station (the New Cut, now simply the Cut, connects Waterloo and Blackfriars Roads; it was cut across Lambeth Marsh around 1812). Opened as the Royal Coburg in 1818 and renamed the Royal Victoria in 1833 in compliment to the young Princess, the theatre held over 3,000 people and drew on a mainly local audience. From 1841 it had been under the management of David Osbaldiston, an actor celebrated in 'heavy' melodramatic roles, and his leading lady Eliza Vincent, who was also his mistress. The Theatre Reform Act of 1843 extended the Lord Chamberlain's licensing powers, previously restricted to the patent theatres and Westminster, to all London theatres and the play Dickens saw had been licensed under the title May Morning; or the Mendicant Heir. It was first produced on 26 January 1850 and, George Rowell notes (The Old Vic Theatre: A History [1993], p. 37), 'was withdrawn after a respectable run' at the end of February.

The 'cheerful sailor, with very loose legs, had been an immensely popular stage figure since the great success of Jerrold's Black-eyed Susan [which Dickens reviewed in the Examiner, 12 May 1849] (see article 34) [in vol. 2 of The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens' Journalism]) and invariably danced a hornpipe at some point in whatever play he appeared in. See Rowell, op. cit., for a good account of the Royal Victoria at this time (when it was described by Henry Mayhew and - very hostilely - by Charles Kingsley, as well as by Dickens). Red Riven was a stock melodrama first produced at the Coburg in 1825.

Literary allusions

The Maid and the Magpie and The Dog of Montargis; or the Forest of Bondy were stock items in the repertoire of the early nineteenth-century popular theatre; 'Those who would live to please...': Johnson's 'Prologue at the Opening of Drury Lane' [1747] - 'The drama's laws the drama's patrons give, / For we that live to please, must please to live'; 'hold the Mirror up to Nature': Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act 3, Sc. 2; 'like the dyer's hand': Shakespeare, Sonnet No. 111.

MS. Corrected proof in Forster Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.

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The Amusements of the People [i] by Charles Dickens

Household Words, Volume I, Magazine No. 1, 30 March 1850, Pages: 13-15


Author(s):
• Charles Dickens


In the partnership agreement under which H.W. was set up, Dickens was, with the publishers Bradbury & Evans, with Forster and with Wills, one of the joint proprietors; he held an interest of one-half share. On Forster's relinquishing his one-eighth share in 1856, Dickens divided that one-eighth between himself and Wills. Dickens's salary as editor was £500 a year; he was to receive payment also for what he wrote in the periodical (Lehmann, ed., Charles Dickens As Editor, pp. 19, 195-97). (In the Office Book, Wills did not record the payments made or credited to Dickens for his H.W. writings.)

Dickens set the editorial policy of H.W. and supervised its being carried out. He had, in Wills, a capable and efficient subeditor on whose judgment he came more and more to rely; yet, especially in the early years of H.W., he concerned himself with every detail of its production. Before the first number appeared, he wrote to friends and acquaintances asking them to become contributors. He read - especially during the early years of H.W. - hundreds of MSS, some submitted directly to him, others referred to him by Wills for final acceptance or rejection. When possible, he conferred weekly, sometimes more often, with Wills on editorial matters. When personal conference was not possible, he sent his instructions and suggestions by letter - instructions and suggestions ranging from matters of editorial policy to matters of typography and punctuation. He revised - sometimes almost entirely rewrote - contributed papers; he read proofs - sometimes revises of proofs that he had in the first place altered or emended. He suggested subjects for articles; he sent to the office materials to serve as the basis for articles. On occasion, he made excursions in company with a staff member to gather material for articles. He wrote much for the early volumes of H.W., comparatively little for the later volumes. Morley's writings in the periodical exceeded his by some 300 pages. Nevertheless, as he stated when he brought H.W. to a close ("A Last Household Word"), his name had been, "as his pen and himself" had been, "inseparable from the Publication" throughout its entire existence.

Most of Dickens's writings in H.W., like almost all contributions of other writers, appeared anonymously. Only Hard Times, the one of his novels that he serialized in the periodical,
carried with the title of the work in each instalment the ascription "BY CHARLES DICKENS."

Four weeks before the serialization of that book began, it was announced: "NEW TALE by Mr. CHARLES DICKENS"; thereafter, each week's H.W. number announced the portion of Hard Times by Charles Dickens that was to appear the following week; before the appearance of the final chapters, as also after the completion of the serialization, H.W. published advertisements for the novel in book form as a Bradbury & Evans publication. A Child's History of England, Dickens's only other extended work in H.W., appeared in the various instalments without Dickens's name after the title, but, during the serialization, advertisements in H.W. for the History in book form as a Bradbury & Evans publication stated Dickens's authorship.

Of various other of his H.W. writings Dickens also made his authorship known. "Personal," his statement concerning the "domestic trouble," bore his name as signature. "Curious Misprint in the Edinburgh Review," his reply to J. F. Stephen's article "The License of Modern Novelists," announced: "the hand of Mr. Dickens writes this paper." In "A Nightly Scene in London," it was "I, the Conductor of this journal," who told of coming upon the poor souls crouched before a Whitechapel workhouse. The footnote that Dickens added to "Three Graces of Christian Science" he signed "C.D." Writing in first or third person, Dickens also made clear that he was author of the introductory and closing comments in H.W. ("A Preliminary Word," "All the Year Round," "A Last Household Word"), as of "Pet Prisoners," the detective police articles, "The Guild of Literature and Art," "The Late Mr. Justice Talpround," and "To Working Men."

In bold type, the words "CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS" appeared on the H.W. masthead; in small type they spanned the verso and recto of facing pages. In the first five years of H.W.'s publication, Dickens's name appeared in more than seventy-five H.W. advertisements and announcements in connection with the periodical and one of its supplementary publications, and in connection with A Child's History and Hard Times (in some advertisements and announcements his name appeared as many as three times). In the last year of H.W.'s publication, readings by Mr. Charles Dickens were announced in forty-one H.W. numbers. Dickens was omnipresent in his periodical.

In view of this fact, as also for other obvious considerations, Dickens naturally wanted in H.W. stories and articles no laudatory references to himself - or references that might be so construed. Thus, in "Our Society at Cranford," he substituted mentions of Hood and Hood's writings for Mrs. Gaskell's mentions of Boz and Boz's Pickwick and Christmas Carol: "... with my name on every page of Household Words," he wrote to Mrs. Gaskell (Dec. 5 [4], 1851.), "there would be - or at least I should feel - an impropriety in so mentioning myself."

In a letter to Cunningham, June 24, 1853, he referred to his "usual precaution" in deleting from articles references that "unmistakably" applied to himself. An exception to this policy was the publication in H.W. of a personal letter from John Pascoe Fawkner, in which Fawkner stated that Dickens's writings had "beguiled many an hour of my life," and wished Dickens "many years of healthful employment in the highly useful manner" in which he had been so long engaged ("A Colonial Patriot").

But the observation of a reader (a reader of "a quick wit and a happy comprehension," as Dickens characterized him) that Dickens's writings had the tendency "to hold up to derision those of the higher classes" also found a place in H.W. pages ("Ready Wit").

Impersonal references to himself and to his books Dickens had no objection to. Mention of "Mr.
Dickens" appeared of necessity in Morley's "Our Wicked Mis-statements"; in occasional articles by non-staff writers mention of Dickens was appropriate and unobtrusive. References to his novels - *Pickwick, Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, Chuzzlewit, Dombey, Copperfield, Bleak House, Hard Times, Little Dorrit* - their characters, place-names, distinctive phraseology - appeared in one or more items by Stone, Dodd, Capper, Oxenford, Miss Lawrance, Payn, Morley, Costello, the Rev. James White, Samuel Sidney, Kent, Percy Fitzgerald, Wilkie Collins, Mrs. Linton, and Thornbury. (The reference to Mrs. Gamp in "Railway Waifs and Strays" could be by either of the joint authors - Wills or Hill.) Of these references, the most extended was Fitzgerald's recital, in "My Long Lost CheeryIo!", of the plot of a melodrama based on Dombey; the most amusing was White's depiction, in "Fiction Crushing," of a Dora-like wife who comes to despise her Copperfield prototype. In at least seven of his own articles, and in one by him and Wills, Dickens referred to characters in his novels. In a footnote to "Pet Prisoners" he mentioned American Notes, and in "That Other Public" he quoted from the book.

Various of Dickens's *H.W.* writings elicited praise from contemporaries. Among his articles in the early volumes, for example, "A Child's Dream of a Star" seemed to Percy Fitzgerald written with Dickens's "most delicate touch"; and nothing, thought Fitzgerald, could be "more witty or sarcastic" than "Red Tape" (*Memories of Charles Dickens*, pp. 137, 155). Crabb Robinson found one of the "Raven" articles "a witty paper," "a capital satire" (*On Books and Their Writers*, II, 704). The *Quart. Rev.* (June 1856) mentioned Dickens's "excellent papers" on the London detective police. Mrs. Cowden Clarke wrote to a friend: "The 'Christmas Tree' paper is charming, is it not?" (*Letters to an Enthusiast*, p. 32). Among Dickens's articles that antagonized certain readers were "Frauds on the Fairies," "Pet Prisoners," and "Whole Hogs." Dickens's remonstrance, in "Frauds on the Fairies," against George Cruikshank's rewriting "Hop-o'-My-Thumb" to serve propaganda purposes provoked a reply from Cruikshank, in which he justified his treatment of fairy tales and set Dickens right "upon one or two points" (*George Cruikshank's Magazine*, Feb. 1854). Dickens's comments on prison chaplains, in "Pet Prisoners," resulted in his being "severely mauled at the hands of certain Reverend Ordinaries" ("Small-Beer Chronicles," *A.Y.R.*, Dec. 6, 1862). "Whole Hogs" aroused the indignation of temperance advocates (Kitton, "Introduction" to *Old Lamps for New Ones and Other Sketches and Essays*, by Dickens; also, Dickens's *H.W.* article "Sucking Pigs"). Dickens's statement, in *H.W.*, concerning his domestic affairs was generally condemned as in poor taste.

Dickens's relationship with most of his contributors was amicable. To some who were newcomers in the field of writing he at times wrote detailed criticisms of their submitted MSS, with words of advice and encouragement. Among *H.W.* writers who, at one time or another, showed their regard for him by dedicating to him a book were Marston, the Rev. James White, Wickenden, Forster, Prince, Landor, Charles Knight, Samuel Sidney, Wilkie Collins, Margaret Power, Duthie, Spicer, Wills, Yates, Lever, Kent, Percy Fitzgerald, Payn, and Thornbury. Hans Christian Andersen, who was technically not a contributor, but one of whose stories appeared in *H.W.*, dedicated three books to Dickens.

Of the items included by Dickens in *Reprinted Pieces*, "A Plated Article," recorded in the Office Book as by Dickens and Wills, was reprinted by Wills in his *Old Leaves: Gathered from Household Words*, 1860, there indicated as written in part by Dickens. Wills's Office Book ascription of the item to Dickens and to himself is more authoritative as to its authorship than...
is Dickens's reprinting.

As Dickens's letters and as occasional comments by contributors indicate, Dickens made changes - deletions, additions, emendations - in more items than those for which the initials "C.D." appear in the Office Book jointly with the name of a contributor. Thus, it is not inconceivable that he might have written the hymn, sometimes attributed to him, that concludes "Poor Dick's Story" in the 1856 Christmas number (see identification note on Harriet Parr). The attribution, however, seems to be in error.

*Harper's* reprinted, in whole or part, seventeen of Dickens's *H.W.* articles and stories (including "A Plated Article," claimed by both Dickens and Wills), three acknowledged to *H.W.*, nine to Dickens personally, and five unacknowledged to any source. *Harper's* reprinted as by Dickens eight items not by him (see Elizabeth Gaskell, Home, Sala, Morley, the Rev. James White, Harriet Martineau, Wilkie Collins, Eliza Lynn Linton). Two of Dickens's items were included in the Putnam volumes of selections from *H.W.: Home and Social Philosophy*, 1st and 2nd ser. The collection of Dickens's *H.W.* items published in 1859 by the Philadelphia publishing firm T. B. Peterson, *Dickens' Short Stories. Containing Thirty-one Stories Never Before Published in This Country*, contained no items that Dickens had not included in *Reprinted Pieces*. D.N.B.

Author: Anne Lohrli; © University of Toronto Press, 1971.

Dickens served a full newspaper apprenticeship, beginning as a teenage penny-a-liner for The British Press (1826). Having taught himself shorthand in the late 1820s, Dickens practised the craft in the antiquated courts of Doctors' Commons before moving up to join the select band of parliamentary reporters, working first for his uncle's voluminous *Mirror of Parliament*, then for the radical *True Sun* during the stormy passage of the Reform Bill through parliament (1832), and finally securing a coveted reporter's job on the newly-reorganised *Morning Chronicle*, under veteran Benthamite editor John Black (1783-1855). There he undertook varied work - theatre reviewing, election reporting, express reporting of extra-mural political events, as well as enduring the daily grind of parliamentary debates. Given the fluctuating demands for space which the latter placed on a 7-column broadsheet like the *Chronicle*, room was soon found for Dickens's witty sketches employing, amongst a wardrobe of other styles, the rhetoric of political journalism to narrate the world of everyday Londoners. These came to be signed 'Boz', and between 1836 and 1839, together with tales from the *Monthly Magazine* and *Bell's Life in London* they were republished to extensive acclaim, overlapping with the monthly release of 'Boz's next great success, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37).

Thereafter, Dickens's writing ventures all self-consciously straddled the permeable frontier between journalism and popular literature. He left the daily press for the more genteel world of monthly magazines, with the editorship of *Bentley's Miscellany* (1837-39), but sought to reconnect with satirical weekly journalism through editing *Master Humphrey's Clock* for Chapman & Hall (1840-41). This was something of a misfire, in journalistic terms, though it bequeathed *Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* to literature. So too was Dickens's involvement with the *Daily News* (1845-46); critics point to the fact only 17 issues of the new Liberal broadsheet were published under his watch. Yet Dickens's effectiveness, as celebrity launch editor, should not be underestimated; his newsgathering and recruiting arrangements stood the test of time, and he led from the front with a series of inventive contributions on social and cultural issues.
Even while seeking to reposition himself as a serious novelist with *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), Dickens returned to newsprint, with around 30 anonymous reviews and irony-laden leaders for the *Examiner* under John Forster (1848-49). These were a prelude to his return to full-time editing and leader-writing, with *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* - hugely successful enterprises in weekly magazine journalism which, however, did not prevent Dickens from writing a further eight serial novels and undertaking punishing tours as a public reader in Britain, France, and America. Dickens is now widely recognised - and was during his lifetime - as a crucial contributor both to the popular appeal and the respectability of the mass-market newspaper and periodical press.


Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

**Genre(s):**

- Prose: Report
  A 'more or less detailed description of any event ... intended for publication'; an 'account given ... on some particular matter, esp. after investigation' (OED) involving e.g. fieldwork, first-hand experience, original research.

- Prose: Short Fiction
  Fictional narrative published in a single instalment, e.g. a short story, 'with a fully developed theme' (OED), or which is simply self-contained.

- Cross-genre
  A cross-genre or hybrid-genre article is one which is deemed to purposefully blend rhetorical and stylistic features and incorporate iconography from more than one pre-existent genres. Depending on the genres crossed, this can also be referred to as: creative non-fiction, witness literature, ' Gonzo' journalism, immersion journalism, narrative non-fiction. The blurring of boundaries is frequently defined as 'New' (hence the slightly puzzling recurrence of the term 'New Journalism' to describe approaches to periodical writing in the late 19th-century, mid-20th and early 21st centuries, as clearly it was alive and flourishing in Dickens's Wellington Street offices from 1850 onwards).

**Subject(s):**

- Family Life; Families; Domestic Relations; Sibling Relations; Kinship; Home;
- Great Britain—Social Life and Customs
- Popular Culture; Amusements
- Social classes; Class distinctions; Aristocracy (Social Class); Aristocracy (Social Class)—Fiction; Middle Class; Working Class; Servants;
- Theatre; Performing Arts; Performing; Dance; Playwriting; Circus