Dickens, Death, and Afterlives: Introduction

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How do you commemorate the anniversary of an author’s death? What is and is not appropriate? While natal anniversaries are by nature upbeat, with greater scope for playful celebration, death anniversaries negotiate a need for reverence, reassessment, and an engaging cultural campaign. A 150th anniversary further has to contend with its status as a less impressive mid-point: not yet a bicentenary and still somehow less of a milestone than a centenary. In our introduction to this special issue on ‘Dickens, Death, and Afterlives’ we explore a range of responses to Charles Dickens’s sesquicentenary in 2020. Coming just eight years after wide-ranging international celebrations for the bicentennial of Dickens’s birth, plans for Dickens150 were noticeably smaller in scale. While face-to-face activities have been understandably curtailed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ingenuity of the Dickens community has come to the fore in creating alternative opportunities to mark the anniversary. Within academia, the pandemic context combined with worldwide demonstrations for Black Lives Matter has given a new urgency to questions typically prompted by author anniversaries: how is Dickens relevant now? Why do we continue to read and study his works? What is his legacy 150 years on? It would be premature to proffer comprehensive answers at this stage, before the far-reaching impacts on arts organisations, cultural institutions, and universities can be assessed. Nonetheless, we note several emerging trends.

In what follows, we provide a selective overview of anniversary celebrations for Dickens in 1970 and 2012, identifying themes and issues that continue to resonate in 2020, including who ‘owns’ Dickens, what it means to celebrate him ‘authentically’, and the importance of place. Thereafter, two case studies focalise these issues in a sesquicentenary context: the successful fundraising campaign to bring the ‘Lost Portrait’ by Margaret Gillies to the Dickens Museum in 2019 and a controversial line of luxury handbags advertised in late 2019, which incorporate part of a genuine Dickens letter. Finally, we introduce the contributions made by this issue to an understanding of Dickens’s literary representation of death, Dickens’s own death, and Dickensian afterlives.

**1970**

The centenary of Dickens’s death in 1970 was a watershed moment for Dickens studies, when, as Stephen Wall puts it in his review of centenary publications, ‘Dickens’s reputation […] finally caught up with his popularity’ (261). The centenary calendar included the customary Birthday Dinner, annual conference, service at Westminster Abbey, and Broadstairs Dickens Festival, scaled up to reflect the anniversary, as well as inspiring many one-off events at places associated with the author (see Slater and ‘Broadstairs and other Festivals’). Relatedly, objects possessing what Walter Benjamin terms ‘aura’ – a ‘unique existence at the place where it happens to be’ (214) – such as documents in Dickens’s handwriting, former possessions, first editions, and original illustrations, played a central role in centenary exhibitions (see Blount).

 In terms of the global reach of centennial celebrations, accounts in *The* *Dickensian* and the *Dickens Studies* *Newsletter* (now *Dickens Quarterly*) focus on UK-based and North American activities, although *The* *Dickensian* does note branch events in Christchurch New Zealand, Buenos Aires, and Haarlem (Beatley 68; Anon, ‘When Found’ 66–7). Perhaps the best indication of Dickens’s global presence in 1970 is the commemorative stamps issued by thirteen different countries, many of these members of the British Commonwealth. Dickens’s appearance on the centenary stamps replicates some aspects of what Juliet John (2010) has seen as a feature of his decade-long appearance on the ten-pound note, chiefly ‘the posthumous tendency both to exploit and repress Dickens’s complicity with the process of commodification’ (240). The version of Dickens reflected by the centenary stamps is, for the most part, a familiar one. All of the stamps bearing his portrait favour the older, bearded author, even though the scenes and characters depicted tend to be from the early novels. In marking the centenary of Dickens’s death, it seems appropriate to draw upon a portrait from his later life; this creative choice also reflects the nature of the medium – because stamps are intended for mass circulation, it makes sense to use an image that more people are likely to recognise. Through these centenary stamps, Dickens emerges primarily as the creator of iconic characters. This is evident from one of the more unusual designs, issued by the Cayman Islands. The four stamps in this collection are designed to look like metal street signs, in which characters from the novels – Barnaby Rudge, Sairey Gamp, Micawber and David, and the ‘Marchioness’ – appear in silhouette against a brightly coloured background. This device suggests that Dickens’s characters are so well known that they can be recognised by outline (although the inclusion of captions implies that they are unlikely to be familiar to all). At the same time, in imagining Dickens’s characters as signs, they come to signify broader aspects of the author’s enduring appeal.[[1]](#endnote-1) Controlled by the government, stamp design is less a reflection of popular interest than it is part of a cultural and political project by the state. Nonetheless, the centenary stamps prompted images of Dickens and his characters to proliferate and circulate during the anniversary year, attesting to his enduring cultural portability.

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*Figure 1* Stamps Commemorating the Centenary of the Death of Charles Dickens from the Cayman Islands (1970). Author’s own collection.

**2012**

Forty-two years later, the bicentenary celebration of Dickens’s birth generated an unprecedented global response, coordinated by the Charles Dickens Museum and Film London in association with the Dickens Fellowship. Key partnerships with organisations such as the British Council provided the resource and infrastructure to facilitate an internationally joined-up campaign, exemplified best by a Global Read-a-thon on Dickens’s birthday, when an extract from a different text was read aloud in twenty-four different countries across a twenty-four hour period with the results shared via social media.[[2]](#endnote-2) Whereas the centenary stamps enabled people to participate in the anniversary in a way that was discrete and purchase-driven, the Global Read-a-thon made visible an international range of participants.

Alongside this well-resourced and internationally connected campaign, the affiliation model adopted by Dickens 2012 encouraged grassroots activity to flourish: any credible event could apply for listing via the dickens2012.org portal, resulting in major exhibitions and professional productions being promoted alongside school plays and local reading groups.[[3]](#endnote-3) A fuller account of this diverse range of activities is beyond the scope of the present essay (see Schlicke and Schweizer for useful overviews). Instead, we want to reflect upon one of the key differences between 1970 and 2012: the shift towards an exploration of what Dickens might mean in different parts of the world and to different communities and interest groups, through programming that valued creative engagement and personal response. Ian Higgins notes the foregrounding of ‘personal, emotional response[s]’ to Dickens across various media during the bicentenary year, including the *Telegraph*’s ‘My favourite Charles Dickens character’ series and Armando Iannucci’s *Armando’s Tale of Charles Dickens* (Furneaux et al. 3). Elsewhere, as part of the year-long ‘Dickens in Lowell’ festival in Massachusetts, the Nigerian Association of Merrimack Valley presented the premiere of *Asking for More: Dickens in Nigeria*, drawing upon the cast’s memories of studying Dickens while attending high school in 1970s Nigeria.

Taking a similarly international view, the British Council’s ‘Sketching the City’ project invited young artists and writers to draw inspiration from *Sketches by Boz* in capturing the cities in which they lived, including Beijing, Shanghai, Karachi, Buenos Aires, Baku, and New York. Charlotte Mathieson argues that ‘rather than simply dis-place or export Dickens into new national spaces’, this initiative ‘instead re-localised Dickens through creating narratives that pertained to each specific locality’. She argues that during the bicentenary ‘“placing Dickens” becomes rethought *as* a concept […] it becomes a mode of observation, a way of perceiving and narrating locality that seeks to capture a “Dickensian” sense of writing place; […] yet is not about Dickens’s “original” places themselves’ (original emphasis).

**2020**

Planned sesquicentenary celebrations were similarly rooted in creative, locally meaningful responses. While London led organisation in 2012, Gravesham and Medway in Kent have been among the principal organisers of Dickens150, planning a year-long programme of activities that celebrates Dickens’s local connections. As part of this line-up, the literary arts organisation, Wordsmithery, was commissioned to host a range of writing workshops and curate a poetry trail in the Medway area. Titled ‘The Empty Chair’, this creative project ‘invit[es] Medway residents to fill the spaces left by Charles Dickens with their own writing’ (Wordsmithery). In 1970 and even 2012, the idea of amateur contributors taking Dickens’s place might have seemed hubristic. In 2020, however, the valorisation of personal and creative responses as a means to make meaning helps to ensure Dickens’s continuing relevance. The *ortsegebunden*, or location-boundedness, of many of these celebrations is most evident in the centrepiece of the 2020 celebrations: a theatrical production with performances held in Gad’s Hill Place itself, in the dining room in which Dickens collapsed on the evening of 8 June 1870 before his death on 9 June. The decision to stage the production here treads a fine line between affective commemoration and irreverence, particularly given that the house has been a site of ‘pilgrimage’ for Dickensians since at least the early twentieth century (‘Pilgrimage to Gad’s Hill and Rochester’). The production, which takes its title from the unfinished *Dickens’ Dream* painting by Robert William Buss (1875), grew explicitly from a desire to create something site-specific for the anniversary: authenticity is thus tied to location. Unfortunately, (or perhaps fittingly, given the unfinished novel that Dickens left behind and the unfinished nature of the painting from which this play derives its name), the pandemic has delayed performance of this play indefinitely.

 While circumstances have forced the cancellation or postponement of many sesquicentenary activities, digital technology has permitted the adaptation of some activities, and the introduction of new events. Emily Bell and Lydia Craig organised a digital #Dickens150 conference on the anniversary of Dickens’s death, which brought together a virtual global community across multiple time zones for a lively range of talks, video exhibitions, and roundtables (see ‘#Dickens150’). In light of the move to online teaching, the organisers curated sessions on teaching Dickens digitally and the future of Dickens studies. Together with another roundtable on ‘Dickens and Contagion’, this allowed for reflection on what Dickens means to readers and researchers today. This online event was the first of several to take place in 2020; Dickens Universe had put on hold plans for a weeklong paired exploration of Dickens’s *David Copperfield* and *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* by the African-American novelist Frances E. W. Harper. However, this residential programme was replaced by a Virtual Dickens Universe, which dedicated several free lectures to the urgent questions raised by the events of 2020, such as ‘Foundations in Black Victorian Studies’ and ‘Toppling Statues: Teaching Victorian Literature in 2020’ (see ‘Schedule’).

Commemorative activities in 2020 show continuities and interesting discontinuities with 1970 and 2012, in part because these anniversaries were predicated on different assumptions. In 1970, popular public celebrations – such as the Broadstairs Dickens Festival – were already long-established; the focus of the anniversary was, in many ways, to affirm Dickens’s academic relevance and secure the future of Dickens studies. By 2012 academic study of Dickens had flourished, and it was Dickens’s value to wider publics that needed to be articulated; anniversary events thus drew attention to his global relevance and achieved this partly by centring what Dickens meant to individuals round the world on a personal level. To characterise the tone of the 2020 anniversary is more challenging; originally events also prioritised local connections, aligning this anniversary year more closely with 1970 than 2012, but it is ultimately Dickens’s adaptability that has come to the fore. This is present in creative responses to his works, rendered all the more visible by the quick changes necessitated by the developing pandemic during the first half of 2020. Wordsmithery, for example, has adapted its ‘Empty Chair’ campaign to provide creative writing prompts online, extending its reach far beyond Medway (Wordsmithery). It is also evident in the renewed call to situate Dickens in relation to contemporary debates about gender, race, and social inequality (for example, see Waters’s ‘Charles Dickens’). Moving now from the broader picture of anniversary celebrations, we explore two case studies that highlight different ways to connect with Dickens in 2020.

**The Lost Portrait**

There have been few major discoveries about Dickens in the interval between the bicentenary and the sesquicentenary. Consequently, news of a lost portrait miniature by Margaret Gillies, found among a lot of miscellaneous items in South Africa, generated intense excitement. Following painstaking restoration by Philip Mould & Company, the Charles Dickens Museum secured the portrait for their permanent collections by raising £180,000 between November 2018 and July 2019. This included grants from the Art Fund and the Arts Council England/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, as well as substantial donations from members of the public. The portrait was displayed at Doughty Street for the first time in October 2019 and plays an important role in ‘Technicolour Dickens’, a sesquicentenary exhibition exploring the author’s public image.

 In articulating the value and importance of the Gillies portrait, three main threads emerged. The first was the aesthetic appeal of the miniature in its own right. The second stressed that the miniature captured the thirty-one year old Dickens at a ‘pivotal moment in his career’, when he was writing *A Christmas Carol* (Rutherford 228). This informed the third thread, which highlighted the miniature’s contribution to understanding Dickens’s work as a social reformer. Intriguingly, this was a result of bringing Margaret Gillies’s career into focus, particularly her poignant, uncredited illustrations for Southwood Smith’s Children’s Employment Commission report, which partially inspired the *Carol*. Thus the portrait accommodated a narrative of Dickens’s enduring genius (the young author depicted in the process of conceiving his ‘greatest’ work) and a less Dickens-centric narrative, which celebrated the author within his social milieu and appreciated the ways in which his thinking was informed by many others, including, in this case, an ‘exceptional woman of the Victorian era’ who was a professional artist and an early supporter of women’s suffrage (Rutherford 230).[[4]](#endnote-4)

 One of the interesting things about the way in which this story captured the public imagination is that this likeness was never entirely ‘lost’. Despite the disappearance of the original, an 1844 engraving was used as the frontispiece for R. H. Horne’s *A New Spirit of the Age*. Given the image’s widespread reproduction, it was even more important for the campaign to extol the aura of the original. Benjamin suggests that ‘the whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical – and, of course, not only technical – reproducibility’ (214) and much was made of the painting’s irreproducible aspects. The promotional video evokes the quasi-magical qualities conferred by aura through repeated close-ups of Dickens’s eyes, which mimic the intimacy of handling the miniature in person and draw the viewer’s attention to Gillies’s individual brushstrokes, irreproducible in the engraving. The symbolic and practical aptness of ‘bringing the “lost portrait” home’ (Museum Director Cindy Sughrue, qtd in Brown) also resonated powerfully: by displaying the portrait in an authentically Dickensian space (albeit not the home in which Dickens lived when it was painted), it could be fully appreciated and contextualised.[[5]](#endnote-5)

 Purchase of the Lost Portrait was less about the new research avenues opened by its rediscovery (given the existence of the engraving), than the affective restoration of a compelling, auratic object to the Dickens collection. In recovering a lost Dickens artefact, the miniature evokes ideas of reanimating the author and restoring a lost intimacy with him (‘it is an extraordinary thing to see this portrait after one hundred and seventy-five years, and to catch the gaze of this man’ [Price 47]). However, while the appeal’s success was in some ways predicated on the idea of adding to the completeness of the Dickens collection, it also shows the fallacy of thinking that this collection could ever be complete. Recovery of the lost portrait thus extends the hope that there are still new things to discover about the author.

**The Sekrè Bag**

At first glance, the Sekrè Mystery Bag is innocuous. What sets this accessory apart, however, is its incorporation of what Sekrè dubs a ‘genuine piece of world history’ (Anon, ‘Luxury handbags with a secret’ n. pag.). Sekrè purchases handwritten letters, penned by historical figures and twentieth-century icons, and cuts them into 1cm by 3cm sections. Individual fragments are then sealed in acrylic and sewn into a panel, concealed beneath a flap. For those in the know, a colour-coded tassel identifies whether the bag contains part of a love letter by Frederick William III of Prussia or the handwriting of Brigitte Bardot. But a central part of the bag’s appeal is the owner’s ability to withhold this information: ‘Only the owner knows the secret and only she decides with whom she wants to share it’ (Anon, ‘Luxury handbags with a secret’ n. pag.). Like the portrait, the Sekrè bag depends upon the thrill of contact with an authentic, unique artefact. However, here the pleasure is private and individual, rather than public and communal.

Sekrè handbag ‘editions’ tend to focus upon women that other women would like to emulate (Katharine Hepburn; Marlene Dietrich; Grace Kelly); royal women, including Queen Victoria; and men whose lives or works associate them with romance or adventure, such as the American aviator, Charles Lindbergh, and *Camille* author Alexandre Dumas *fils* (Anon, ‘Handbags with handwritings of famous persons’ n. pag.). How does Dickens fit into this distinguished, if eclectic, line-up? He has the instant name recognition of Bardot and Hepburn, as well as the literary cachet of Dumas; the accompanying blurb emphasises Dickens’s enduring popularity and the ‘numerous autobiographical references’ in his work (Anon, ‘Handbags with handwritings’ n. pag.). Cannily, the €2750 handbag edition is titled ‘Christmas Dream No. 1’, foregrounding Dickens’s association with the festive season. Using the *Carol*, which so powerfully reflects upon the divide between rich and poor, to sell a luxury handbag is an audacious move. However, it is the controversy surrounding the dismemberment of a unique work by the author’s hand that makes the Sekrè handbag such a compelling case study.

Promotional material indicates a tension at the heart of the Sekrè concept. Several edition blurbs hint at the specialness of the letters used; Frederic William III’s missive to his wife, for instance, is said to have an ‘unusually warm-hearted tone’ (Anon, ‘Handbags with handwritings’ n. pag.). Yet, in response to charges of cultural vandalism, Sekrè’s Chief Executive Thomas Huber stated, ‘We focus on everyday topics such as thank-you letters, private appointments, chats, or other mainly private aspects that do not involve any creative or artistic input’ (qtd in O’Neill n. pag.). As a result, the content of the letters used is often prosaic. In Dickens’s case, the letter declines an invitation to address the Young Men’s Early Closing Association, which campaigned for reduced working hours, thus introducing an unintended irony given the *Carol*’s message about improved employment conditions (‘To Hugh Evans, 3 March 1851’ n. pag.). For Sekrè, the aura attached to a handwritten letter is more important than what it actually says, which makes sense given that it is cut into pieces.

While the Lost Portrait consolidated Dickens’s legacy through a two-fold restoration (to its original condition and to its ‘proper’ home), the Sekrè bag diminishes it. Notary-supervised dismemberment transforms Dickens’s letter into a different type of object: a text that no longer makes sense. At the same time, fragmentation enables Dickens’s letter to take on new meanings and values. For Deborah Lutz, holographic letters are ‘relics of a special kind’, because they ‘embody specificity’ (due to the convention of recording the date and place of writing) and express personality, in the sense that ‘handwriting has come to be connected inextricably with the character of the “hand” and the identity of the writer’ (5–6). Furthermore, as contact relics, letters provide a tangible link to the writer: ‘the actual skin swept the paper’ (Lutz 6). The letter functions as a secular relic before and after dismemberment, but in pieces its potency is enhanced. Liberated from the archive or collection in which it might be appropriately contextualised, the letter fragments serve as a metonym for ‘Dickens’ based upon the possessor’s knowledge of the author. Huber states that following their purchase customers have been ‘motivated […] to buy literature on the related historical person/time or to visit libraries and museums for more detailed information’, suggesting that a tangible connection to the person through the artefact is conducive to an intellectual connection with the material (qtd in Flood n. pag.). Importantly, Sekrè handbags are also framed as sound financial investments, suggesting a more pragmatic approach that coincides with the emphasis on affective value.

Dickens’s inclusion in the Sekrè bags line-up is unquestionably controversial. Nonetheless, it is revealing in terms of his cultural standing 150 years after his death. The sense of Dickens’s material legacy being ‘carnivalised’ (Leon Litvack, qtd in O’Neill n. pag.) and commodified has continuities with the public sale of effects that followed Dickens’s death (John, *Dickens and Mass Culture* 247–9), and ‘Christmas Dream No. 1’ speaks to the continuing marketability of the Dickens ‘brand’. The backlash against Sekrè handbags also raises questions about whom Dickens belongs to. While critics argue that this type of material should be preserved intact in archives, Huber suggests that the handbags have a democratising function in bringing ‘original handwritings to a broader audience’ (qtd in Flood n. pag.). Of course, one needs a sizable disposable income to consider spending €2750 on a handbag, so there are limits to how broad this audience might be. However, in our opinion, it is worth taking Huber’s arguments seriously. In personal correspondence, he expanded upon the appeal of these handbags, contrasting the typical private buyer of historical documents (for whom ‘these exhibits are bought as pure capital investment’) with people who ‘simply want to own a real relic of a person they admire and worship’. For this group, ‘this small piece of artifact […] becomes a valuable relic and a status symbol that you can proudly carry around with you. This means: You own “a part” of your idol’ (Huber, personal communication, 11 June 2020). Perhaps the real issue is that ownership is privatised – wilfully so, in that the bag allows its owner to conceal its ‘secret’ from others. While the Lost Portrait was embedded in the values that Dickens himself extolled – a bringing together in communal celebration (through crowdsourced fundraising efforts) – the handbag is about hoarding, atomised enjoyment. Nonetheless, Huber’s statement challenges us to think about what Dickens might mean to publics beyond the academic and enthusiast communities.

**Dickens, Death, and Afterlives at 150**

This special issue uses the sesquicentenary anniversary as an opportunity to explore death in Dickens’s work, Dickens’s own death, and his afterlives. Several of our contributors revisit established lines of thinking in order to provide more nuanced perspectives. Thus David McAllister rethinks Dickens’s oft-maligned deathbed scenes with reference to associationism, positioning the deaths of Little Nell and Smike as sites of literary experiment, in which textual effects are harnessed for the purposes of social and aesthetic transformation. Claire Wood is similarly concerned with the powerful textual effects produced by writing about death, examining the art of epitaph in Dickens’s work through close study of the actual inscriptions that Dickens wrote for friends and family and the creative possibilities of epitaph in his fiction. Both essays are in dialogue with a longer critical tradition exploring Dickens’s representation of death. Among the most fruitful approaches, Garrett Stewart’s seminal *Death Sentences* (1984) probes the relation between death, content, and form through sensitive stylistic analysis. In a complementary vein, Jolene Zigarovich (2012) examines the ‘paradoxical nature of representing death’ (17) by studying Victorian novels in which the dead body is absent. Drawing upon psychoanalytic and formalist perspectives, Elisabeth Bronfen (1992) highlights the powerful conjunction between death, femininity, and aesthetics present in deathbed scenes like Little Nell’s. Elsewhere, Carolyn Dever (1998) also draws upon a psychoanalytic framework in examining the Victorian dead-mother plot, numbering *Bleak House* among her examples. In a historicist mode, Mary Elizabeth Hotz (2009) positions Dickens’s treatment of death in relation to contemporary socio-political developments. Reassessment of the sentimental and affective dimensions of Dickens’s work by Nicola Bown (2007) and Valerie Purton (2012), among others, has also played an important role in rehabilitating his deathbed scenes. Finally, following the material turn in Victorian Studies, Catherine Waters (2003; 2011), Claire Wood (2015), and Deborah Lutz (2015) bring to light the role of death commodities and secular relics in Dickens’s work.

Moving from Dickens’s representation of death to the representation of Dickens’s death, Emily Bell shows how competing accounts of Dickens’s final moments illuminate broader questions about authors’ legacies, the development of celebrity culture, and shifts in literary and cultural values. New research from Leon Litvack (2019), which unveils the machinations behind the scenes that led to Dickens being buried in Westminster Abbey, has shown the need to challenge accepted narratives surrounding Dickens’s demise. Through a methodical and revelatory exploration of letters and archival material, Litvack delineates the role of the Dean of Westminster, Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, and Dickens’s friend (and, later, biographer) John Forster, demonstrating how they manufactured public calls for Dickens to be buried in Poets’ Corner (17). How Dickens’s death itself has been represented by biographers is discussed at more length in Bell’s article, which considers the nuances of reports of Dickens’s death, particularly early accounts, and how each sought to revise and reinterpret his final moments. The idea that Dickens collapsed not at home but in the arms of Ellen Ternan, first posited in a speculative final chapter by Claire Tomalin in *The Invisible Woman* (1990), has recently resurfaced in A. N. Wilson’s sensationalised new biography, *The Mystery of Charles Dickens* (2020), fitting as it does with the portrayal of Dickens as a hypersexual being (‘It does not require too much imagination to realise what had brought on his seizure’, Wilson quips in a summary for the *Daily Mail* [n. pag.]), which shows that this story is still being rewritten.

Our other contributors widen understanding of Dickens’s influence in the twentieth century and the twenty-first: Michael Hollington rehabilitates Dickens’s reputation within the Bloomsbury circle, whereas Maureen England tracks multimedia manifestations of Dickens on cinema, television, and computer screens. Together, these essays mark the sesquicentenary of Dickens’s death in a way that brings new life to our subject. The Dickens industry itself has been catalogued by scholars including Laurence W. Mazzeno (2008), who has followed in the footsteps of the early Dickensians who sought to record and narrativise the many and varied publications that have made up Dickens’s literary and cultural afterlife (see, for example, Kitton and Miller). Juliet John has also conducted leading research in this area: *Dickens and Mass Culture* (2010) is an impressive study of the author’s cultural resonance while ‘Crowdsourced Dickens’ (2018) discusses what it means to adapt Dickens in the internet age. Other recent publications include *Dickens After Dickens* (2020) which combines micro and macro approaches in chapters on biofictional Dickens, Dickens in new national contexts, neo-Victorian reimaginings, and Dickens’s influence on urban planning. As Hollington does here, several chapters trace Dickens’s influence on specific writers and texts. *Reading Dickens Differently* (2019) offers new ways of approaching Dickens, including analysis of his presence in apps and video games, while *Dickens & Women ReObserved* (2020) offers a wide-ranging approach to Dickens’s relationships with women, inside and outside his fiction. What characterises these three most recent volumes is, firstly, that all three volumes gesture to something that has come before. The latter does this most directly, but *Dickens After Dickens* also positions itself as a successor in its title, as does *Reading Dickens Differently* (which implies the possibility of reading Dickens ‘conventionally’). Secondly, there is a more self-aware inclusion of a range of critical voices: *Dickens & Women ReObserved*, in particular, responds to a single-author work, Michael Slater’s *Dickens and Women* (1983). There seems to be an implicit recognition that, at this point in Dickens studies, there is a need to cast a wider net in order to shed new light on a popular author; this critical move works in tandem with the tenor of the 2020 celebrations and their focus on Dickens as a figure who is adaptable in many senses of the word. As the following articles show, it is our ability to conceive of the ‘different’ Dickens and the ‘after’ Dickens that enables his popular and critical legacy to thrive.

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1. **Notes**

 John notes that the ‘portability’ of Dickens’s characters is key to the conception of ‘Heritage Dickens’ (*Dickens and Mass Culture* 251). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Each participating country recorded a video around five minutes in length, with the results shared via the British Council’s Twitter account every hour. ‘Dickens 2012 Read-a-thon in 24 Countries’ presents the highlights. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. John rightly urges caution in adopting a utopian view of grassroots activity, noting a tendency to erase the planning, resource, and infrastructure required in press coverage of events (‘Crowdsourced Dickens’ 765). Our intention, however, is to underline the way in which the dickens2012.org portal facilitated a democratic listing of activities – in date order, rather than by perceived prestige. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Bell has discussed this ‘panning left and right to a wider circle of friends and family, both fictional and real’ in other representations of Dickens, particularly in fictional accounts of his life(208). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. This work is performed textually by Louisa Price’s contribution to the exhibition catalogue, which explores the portrait through a series of Dickens’s ‘personal items’ on display at Doughty Street (40). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)