

Collaborative Dickens

Contents

List of Illustrations	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	I
1 Writing Christmas with “a Bunch of People” (1850–51)	20
2 Reading in Circles: From Numbers to Rounds (1852–53)	34
3 Orderly Travels and Generic Developments (1854–55)	58
4 Collaborative Survival and Voices Abroad (1856–57)	78
5 Moving Houses and Unsettling Stories (1858–59)	102
6 Disconnected Bodies and Troubled Textuality (1860–62)	126
7 Bundling Children and Binding Legacies (1863–65)	159
8 Coming to a Stop (1866–67)	185
Conclusion	219
Appendix A. The Complete Christmas Numbers: Contents and Contributors	227
Appendix B. Authorship Percentage Charts	233
Notes	235
Bibliography	263
Index	275

Introduction

For those who think of Charles Dickens as a professional and personal bully, the phrase “collaborative Dickens” may sound like an oxymoron or an overly generous fantasy. For those who associate only *A Christmas Carol* with the phrase “Dickens and Christmas,” the phrase “Dickens’s Christmas numbers” may act as a reminder of the seemingly infinite number of *Carol* adaptations. There is, however, a whole cache of Dickens Christmas literature that has little to do with Ebenezer Scrooge and is indeed collaborative. Readers and scholars do not usually regard Dickens as a famous writer who placed his voice in conversation with and sometimes on a level with fairly unknown writers. And yet this Dickens, a significant collaborative presence in the Victorian period, is one that I have found repeatedly while editing and studying the literature he produced for Christmas.

Between 1850 and 1867, Dickens released a special annual issue, or number, of his journal shortly before Christmas. Enormously successful, these numbers eventually sold upwards of 200,000 copies: “[I]n Britain and America, the most popular single issues of *All the Year Round* remained, as with *Household Words*, the annual Extra Christmas Numbers. These . . . had the highest circulation of any of Dickens’s serial or periodical writings.”¹ The special Christmas issues contained stories written by Dickens in addition to work from friends and colleagues he invited to contribute. For each one, Dickens would work fictional prose and verse (only the first two contain some nonfiction) from other writers into a frame concept he devised. The title of one of the early numbers, *A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire* (1852), describes a basic frame: people sharing tales as they sit around a fire. Dickens soon made the structures more elaborate, as for *Somebody’s Luggage* (1862),

which features a waiter discovering manuscripts tucked away inside various pieces of travel gear.

Collaborative Dickens is the first comprehensive study of these Christmas numbers, which are some of the most fascinating works Dickens produced. Restoring links between stories from as many as nine different writers in a given year, this book shows that a respect for the Christmas numbers' plural authorship and intertextuality results in a new view of the complexities of collaboration in the Victorian periodical press and a new appreciation for some of Dickens's most popular texts. Examining the complete numbers reveals Dickens to have been an editor who, rather than ceaselessly bullying his contributors, sometimes accommodated contrary opinions and depended on multivocal narratives for his own success. As often as Dickens was defensive or controlling, he was playful and self-conscious in collaboration. Reevaluating all eighteen Christmas collections leads to an understanding of Dickens as a variable collaborator and illustrates more broadly that collaborative texts require a flexible definition of authorship. Tracing the connections among and between the stories uncovers ongoing conversations between the works of Dickens and those of his collaborators, and some Christmas collections emerge as texts that enact their own fraught origins.

Eagerly anticipated and broadly appealing, the annual numbers quickly spawned imitations from other publishers, but those texts were not emulating Dickens alone. For all issues of *Household Words*, Dickens called himself the periodical's "conductor" and, with rare exceptions for serialized novels, included no individual bylines for authors. The practice of anonymous publication was not unusual for periodicals whose editors generally saw bylines as impediments to a journal's creation of a unified voice. Some authors disliked anonymity, and Douglass Jerrold reportedly remarked that Dickens's journal was "mononymous" rather than anonymous because every page header of the regular issues announced, "Conducted by Charles Dickens."² Kelly Mays points out that anonymity or the use of pseudonyms also contributed to "the corporate character of the periodical text."³ Whether reacting to his journals as entities or to Dickens as an individual, not all authors resented anonymity. Dickens's unique conducting metaphor at once acknowledged and subordinated other creative talents. In an orchestral conducting context, without skilled musicians, a conductor's wand would fail to impress; successful conducting requires deep familiarity with each individual's aptitude and savvy coordination of styles. Other readings of the metaphor, which consider railway conducting or material objects that conduct electricity and energy, likewise reference scenarios in which interactions are crucial to achieving a

Introduction

desired effect. Alexis Easley further contends that a byline for women writers could act as “a barrier to those who relied upon anonymity as a means of separating their private and public identities” and wished to address “conventionally masculine subject matter in their work.”⁴ And Joanne Shattock notes that Dickens’s celebrity was profitable even for unnamed contributors: “None of the other eponymous journals had a ‘Conductor’ with such pulling power. . . . Writers wanted to be published in Dickens’s journal, and then to republish their essays, stories and articles, as having been ‘first published in *Household Words*.’”⁵ Thanks to the survival of the *Household Words* Office Book (see figures I.1–I.3) and other records, we can identify the nearly forty collaborators who contributed to Christmas issues, but constructing a careful methodology for the study of those collaborative relationships is a much more difficult task.

Despite the complexity of the conducting metaphor, the dominant critical tendency has been to characterize Dickens as an inflexible editorial bully. Edgar Johnson’s dated yet still frequently cited biography claims, “Dickens maintained a vigorous, a dictatorial control over every detail. . . . His hand was everywhere,” and Ruth Glancy concludes, “*Household Words* achieved its vision through Dickens’s powerful editorial control. . . . Dickens edited every item.”⁶ Lillian Nayder’s *Unequal Partners*, as its title indicates, emphasizes power struggles in the only full-length book study of

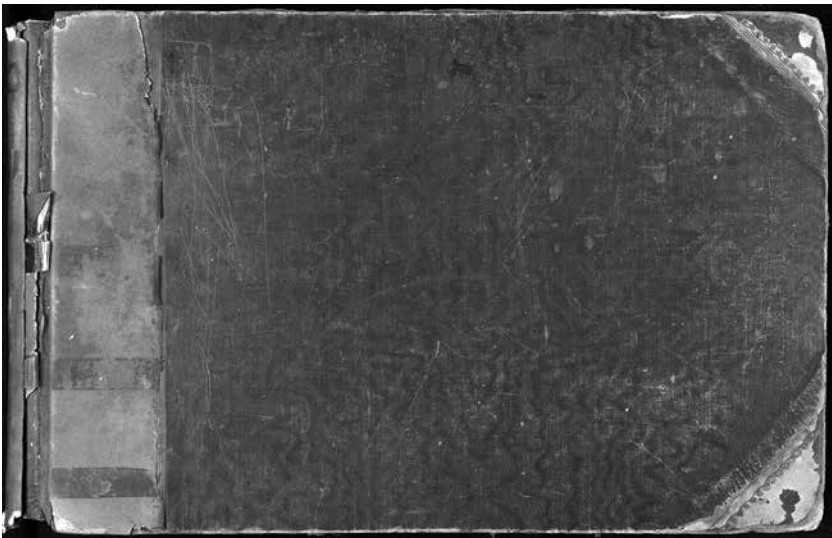


Figure I.1. *Household Words* Office Book, cover. Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists (C0171), Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.



Figure I.2. *Household Words* Office Book, side view. Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists (C0171), Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

When and where printed	Author's Name	Title of Article	Price Paid	When Paid	Remarks
	<i>Extra Christmas Number for 1854</i>				
	<i>The Seven Poor Travellers</i>				
v	<i>G. G.</i>	<i>The first</i>	<i>2s</i>	<i>8 8 0</i>	
v	<i>Sale</i>	<i>The second</i>	<i>2s</i>	<i>8 0 0</i>	<i>1st copy</i>
v	<i>Miss Eschlin (Dante)</i>	<i>The third</i>	<i>2s</i>	<i>10 0 0</i>	<i>2d copy</i>
v	<i>Miss Collins</i>	<i>The fourth</i>	<i>2s</i>	<i>5 5 0</i>	
v	<i>Sale</i>	<i>The fifth</i>	<i>2s</i>	<i>7 0 0</i>	<i>1st copy</i>
v	<i>Miss Lyman</i>	<i>The sixth</i>	<i>2s</i>	<i>5 5 0</i>	<i>1st copy</i>
v	<i>Miss Weston (London)</i>	<i>The seventh</i>	<i>2s</i>		
v	<i>G. G.</i>	<i>The eighth</i>	<i>2s</i>		

Figure I.3. Page from *Household Words* Office Book. Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists (C0171), Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Introduction

Dickens's work with Wilkie Collins. Nayder posits that contributors "were forced to submit to the editorial authority of Dickens" and goes so far as to state that Collins sometimes saw himself "as a wage slave" to Dickens.⁷ Such critical presentations of Dickens as a domineering editorial force who never actually collaborated with his contributors are not borne out by examination of the complete Christmas numbers. Nayder's work brought important attention to collaboration but has skewed critical discourse further toward hierarchy and contention as the central aspects of Dickens's joint works. Misdirection toward competition ignores the fact that the Christmas numbers repeatedly include dissonant or contradictory voices comfortably. As Melissa Valiska Gregory states, "The scholarly emphasis on Dickens's efforts to establish his supremacy over the very authors that he invited to work with him obscures some of the intriguing tonal nuances, weird internal friction, and peculiar crossbreeding effects that animate his collaborative work and make it a dynamic reading experience."⁸

Still, deep irony accompanies Dickens's desire to present a collective, unified voice in his journal given his self-donned nickname. John Drew remarks, "This from a writer who styled himself 'The Inimitable' clearly raises some complex issues for the study of literary distinction, editorial approach and collaborative authorship."⁹ As I probe such complexities, I am aware that my work pushes against a scholarly trend that has accepted the "inimitable" designation without considering other voices that were part of it. Those other voices at times provided a robust (if friendly) undermining of Dickens's inimitability. Catherine Waters demonstrates that "while Dickens exercised tight editorial control and even rewrote contributions to *Household Words*, the journal's form is nevertheless dialogic, with differing lights being cast on a given topic, and the individual voices of such writers as George Augustus Sala, Harriet Martineau, Wilkie Collins, and of course Dickens himself, readily distinguishable to the avid reader despite the policy of anonymity."¹⁰ As we shall see, the thematic and stylistic tendencies of these contributors also emerge recognizably in their fiction for the Christmas numbers, and many Christmas stories that have come to be regarded as characteristically Dickensian did not come from Dickens at all.

Perhaps the figure at *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* that has been overlooked most severely is William H. Wills. Dickens used the term *sub-editor* for Wills, but *coeditor* is a more accurate term for his duties.¹¹ Wills and Dickens were in nearly constant communication about almost every issue of the journals, and when Dickens was unable to read contributions or galley proofs, Wills made final decisions himself. Working with Wills,

Dickens was constantly functioning in a collaborative mode, and extant letters document a fluctuating relationship between the men. At least once, Dickens calls Wills “my other self in *Household Words*.”¹² Focusing strictly on Dickens’s egotism, one might at first glance categorize this statement as an example of Dickens appropriating another’s work or subsuming it into his own identity. A slower approach enables one also to see that, as a collaborator, Dickens was willing to open his “self” up to include other people and their ideas. Sometimes, Wills exercised more control over a Christmas number than did Dickens, and other times, Dickens’s ideas controlled a text to its detriment. As the chapters ahead demonstrate, reading the complete numbers exposes a plethora of such surprising details. Dickens printed endings he did not like under his own name, asked another person to co-write more than one frame story, allowed yet another person to decide the ordering of stories, and included a poem that approves of cannibalism in stark contrast to his other published work on the subject.

In most cases, with the notable exception of Wilkie Collins, the Christmas contributors did not spend time together discussing a plan for the stories. Dickens sporadically provided direction or a frame concept via letters of invitation that Wills usually distributed. Unless one belonged to Dickens’s circle of close friends or conversed with him consistently, a writer did not know who the other contributors might be or what they would write. Dickens famously (or infamously) burned his correspondence in an 1860 bonfire and subsequent smaller conflagrations, and the low number of his contributors’ surviving letters compounds the difficulty of forming definitive conclusions about the editorial process. It is also important to avoid overgeneralization. Dickens produced Christmas issues for nearly two decades, and his creative processes did not stagnate over such a long period of time. Some writers submitted work for multiple numbers and seem to have figured out what Dickens desired, while others contributed only once, and most contributors do not appear to have corresponded directly with others about Christmas content. We do not know how routinely these individuals may have crossed paths in London’s bustling literary scene or in contexts having little to do with Dickens, but the stories for the Christmas numbers were submitted in response to instructions that did not require or even encourage such contact.

Regardless of the format of the original *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* issues, dominant scholarly practice has broken the Christmas numbers apart, separating each writer’s contribution from its host compilation. Since at least 1964, when Ada Nisbet complained about critical neglect of

Introduction

Dickens's short stories, other scholars have echoed the call.¹³ Harry Stone first investigated the Christmas numbers in detail, and his *Charles Dickens's Uncollected Writings* tries to identify and reprint exactly which words Dickens wrote in his periodicals, proposing that the genius of his prose will be evident in isolation from the rest of the texts. Regularly cited as an attributive authority, Stone's work is in fact highly speculative. Taking the 1854 number as an illustrative case, Stone writes, "Dickens probably wrote the introductory passages to the stories of the Second, Fourth, Sixth, and Seventh Poor Travellers."¹⁴ Already qualifying claims with "probably," Stone further hesitates: "Dickens may also have written or modified the introduction to the story of the Fifth Poor Traveller."¹⁵ Stone's tentativeness when attributing sections to Dickens is essential; more frustrating is that Stone does not provide reasoning for attributing only some linking passages to Dickens, and the criteria are usually missing. After making a brief case for the subjective use of "internal" evidence, such as "allusions, imagery, structure, division, ideas, diction, syntax, and the like," when Stone uses "general internal evidence" to make an attribution, only conclusions appear, "not the analysis itself."¹⁶ The lack of grounding for certain choices and the lack of comment on others leads back to the initial "probably" that moderates Stone's assertions so importantly. I do not dispute that Dickens "probably" wrote some of these passages, but realizing how uncertain the attributions must remain, we learn the most by using the speculative information, perhaps paradoxically, to take emphasis off of attribution and place it onto collaboration.¹⁷

More recently, Dickens Journals Online, *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens's Journalism*, a 2011 issue of *Victorian Periodicals Review* titled "Victorian Networks and the Periodical Press," and various monographs centered on major figures testify to consistent and growing interest in journalistic work that was often collaborative.¹⁸ Even as the Christmas numbers gain notice, however, critical stress has remained on Dickens and high-profile contributors like Wilkie Collins, not on the complete versions of the collaborative texts. To explain such choices, scholars tend to note that contributors republished their pieces outside the Christmas number frames and cite the fact that Dickens himself extracted pieces from seven numbers to form the "Christmas stories" volume of the 1867 Diamond Edition of his works, which includes a prefatory statement declaring that his stories "were originally so constructed as they might express and explain themselves when republished alone."¹⁹ Evaluating Dickens's claim, we do well to keep in mind Robert L. Patten's lucid readings of several prefaces in which Dickens's statements are misleading or blatantly false: "For well over a hundred years, Dickens has

with considerable success controlled how we read him. In the manuscripts and biographical materials John Forster preserved, in the thousands of letters that the Pilgrim editors have annotated, even in the memoirs of Dickens's agents, publishers, family, and friends, he has to a rare degree fashioned his public image.²⁰ When it comes to the topic of collaboration, this type of retrospective shaping of Dickens's authorial persona has also existed because scholars have been willing to let Dickens have such control, interrogating his own statements about his co-writers less rigorously than, for instance, his statements about his wife. In the Christmas numbers, one discovers a much more varied Dickens than he himself describes.

Furthermore, when Dickens published his extractions as "Christmas stories" for the Diamond Edition, his selections make for "a sometimes bewildering collection of dislocated pieces."²¹ As Jack Stillinger points out, "The fact is that authors themselves are among the most ardent believers in the myth of single authorship."²² Dickens's perpetuation of the myth does damage to the legacy of the Christmas collections, and the existence of selective reprints does not justify anticollaborative critical stances. Such an either/or formulation unnecessarily simplifies the realities of the Victorian publishing marketplace in which texts could circulate in various forms simultaneously. Novels might be printed in volume form before the final serial installments had been issued, and stage adaptations overlapped with ongoing periodical publications. Fran Baker usefully refers to Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Ghost in the Garden Room" for the 1859 Christmas number having a "double life," as it appeared in the collaborative collection and then independently.²³ Exploration of such textual double lives has been eclipsed by interest in particularized textuality. One of the central lines of inquiry this book pursues, then, is: what happens when we reinsert all of the collaborative voices into our discussion of these numbers?

What happens when we read not only Dickens's contributions but also stories by the likes of George Sala, who also wrote pornography? To study the Christmas numbers completely, one must consider Dickens alongside writers like Wilkie Collins and Elizabeth Gaskell, whose other works were commercially successful. One must also consider Dickens alongside writers such as Eliza Griffiths and the Reverend James White, whose names have not endured or whose works never earned fame. Julia Cecilia Stretton, for instance, wrote domestic novels featuring idealized heroines with titles like *Margaret and Her Bridesmaids* (1856), which was a best seller in England and America, but few think about her as a collaborator of Dickens.²⁴ Then there is Reverend Edmund Saul Dixon, a man of the cloth who wrote

Introduction

a famous “Chicken Book,” which really is all about poultry.²⁵ Quality questions arise quickly when one stops excising such collaborators. In restoring conversation between their pieces and Dickens’s contributions, what if their voices make for an irritating conversation? No answer will please all. Just as readers might disagree over whether *Oliver Twist*’s virtues and proclivity for fainting are cloying or whether *A Tale of Two Cities* is overly sentimental, so too there are stories in the Christmas numbers that some find abysmal and others call brilliant (or at least no worse than Dickens’s other misfires). As the following chapters demonstrate, Dickens’s stories might be the weakest in a collection while writers like Charles Collins, who contributed for seven years straight, consistently share storytelling gems. Regardless of whether we like all of the stories or whether Dickens ultimately liked them, they were part of what “Dickens” signified in the 1850s and ’60s, and we are remiss if we excise them from our notion of what counts as “Dickensian” now. For most of the collections, Dickens is far outnumbered by his collaborators (see appendices), and some of their stories were misattributed to him for several decades, further justifying their inclusion in critical assessments of the Christmas canon.

I aim to persuade readers to do three overlapping things: to read collaborative texts in their complete forms, to complicate hierarchical models of collaboration, and to acknowledge the powerful polyvocal potential of periodical forms such as the Christmas number. To achieve those aims, I provide an examination of all eighteen Christmas numbers in their entirety, analyzing the textual dynamics and relationships between Dickens’s narrators and those of his collaborators in the most comprehensive treatment to date. I also illustrate how my analysis of the numbers reenvisions Dickens as a collaborator and suggests new ways of thinking about nuanced literary collaboration, particularly in Victorian periodicals. In one volume, I hope to provide a sense of grounding for all the Christmas numbers, to give readers a sense of this body of work with a critical eye that spotlights collaborative textual dynamics. Those dynamics shift, morph, repeat, and change across years as the Christmas numbers exhibit multiple modes of collaboration and reveal a complex subgenre of the Victorian periodical press.

Several methodological questions challenge studies of extended collaborative relationships, particularly when it comes to the thorny issue of how to balance biographical information (or a lack of it) with the author function. Rosemarie Bodenheimer’s pathbreaking study *Knowing Dickens* reshapes the options for how biographical inquiry and literary analysis might work in tandem. Bodenheimer investigates not only what Dickens may have known

and the various ways he knew things but also the ways in which studying his works leads to fruitful questioning of our own ways of knowing. Juxtaposing several genres, including letters, journalism, and novels, Bodenheimer's approach reminds critics that any sense of biography as "the life" is mythical if it does not acknowledge that all understandings of Dickens's life and Dickens's relationships with others stem from readings of texts: "We cannot go back and forth between life and work because we do not have a life; everything we know is on a written page. To juxtapose letters and fiction, as I am doing, is to read one kind of text alongside another. Neither has explanatory power over the other; all we can do is observe, make connections and interpretive suggestions."²⁶ In agreement with Bodenheimer, in the chapters that follow I treat letters as representations, regarding them as the performances they are. Remaining cognizant of the self-fashioning maneuvers the genre of letter writing invites, I also realize that these texts nevertheless provide us with information. Letters simultaneously serve as evidence and as textual performance requiring careful interpretation.

Dickens's friendship with his closest collaborator, Wilkie Collins, provides an ideal example of how intertwined questions of biography and collaboration become. The two men engaged in moustache-growing contests, used aliases, acted together on stage, had secret love affairs, used opium, may have suffered from sexually transmitted diseases, co-wrote in the same room and from afar, cruised London's entertainment districts, and parodied themselves in fiction. When it comes to the Collins-Dickens friendship, the foregoing list only begins to gesture toward how much biographical information might be brought to bear on the many texts that they coauthored, performed, coedited, or read and reviewed for each other. There is no other writer with whom Dickens collaborated so frequently. The two men offered to finish each other's works when one or the other fell ill, and they seem to have shared an understanding that, even as each one published successful and unique novels in his own voice, their voices might also be interchangeable. In 1862, Dickens offered to finish the novel *No Name* for an ailing Wilkie Collins. He proposed reading and talking over Collins's notes, promising to write in a style "so like you as that no one should find out the difference."²⁷ As I discuss further in chapter 4, Dickens also sought to reassure Collins by reminding him of their previous collaborations: "Think it a Xmas No., an *Idle apprentice*, a *Lighthouse*, a *Frozen Deep*."²⁸ To be sure, Dickens worried about halting the publication of a novel appearing in his own journal, but his letter is concerned primarily with calming Collins (who finished the book after all). Most interestingly, Dickens rearranges many elements of the

author function. Citing several genres across several years, he implies that collaborations create a joint voice and also enable the writers to ventriloquize each other.

Thinking of Dickens's voice as indistinguishable from Collins's voice challenges the idea that writers and their works can be separated discretely from each other, and most scholars and fans of Dickens are unaccustomed to fusing notions of "Dickens the great novelist" with "Dickens the collaborator." Jack Stillinger's *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* deals with texts quite different from the Christmas numbers but is interested in similar questions about how readers and critics dismiss or outright erase the presence of "other" authors alongside treasured, famous ones. Stillinger makes the astute point that the theoretical poles invested in killing the author or in insisting upon "the author's life holding the key to all textual meaning" share the presumption that the author is singular. Instead, Stillinger urges us to consider "how many authors are being banished from a text."²⁹ Reevaluating the complete Christmas numbers to reverse such banishment destabilizes some of the basic critical approaches that underpin scholarship on Dickens and on collaboration in the Victorian periodical press. Discussing the late nineteenth century and corporate authorship, Rachel Sagner Buurma faults critical debates following Michel Foucault's and Roland Barthes's interrogations of the concept of the author for positioning Victorians inaccurately: "[O]ver the past forty years, theorists writing specifically about authorship have developed ever more specific critical accounts of the incoherence or complexity of the author-function. Because of the way historical changes in authorship tend to be periodized, the Victorians are often unfairly blamed for their seemingly oversimplified notions of the author. . . . [L]iterary authority in Victorian England was much more contingent, variable, and contested than has previously been thought."³⁰ The critical tendency has been to view Dickens as always threatened, unsettled, or driven to autocratically control the variability Buurma describes. The Christmas numbers not only bear out Buurma's claim but also reveal that the contingencies and contestations enabled by collaboration often result in unique aesthetics.

Even within studies of collaboration, scholars tend to look at collaborative pairs rather than more pluralistic collaborative endeavors. Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth or Katherine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper (Michael Field) produced texts that raise fascinating questions about how joint imaginative productions take shape. Scholars such as Bette London, Holly Laird, and Jill Ehnenn have increased attention to women who collaborate but still favor pairs, or "author-dyads" for Ehnenn,

over less tidy groupings.³¹ For many critics, trying to advance theories of collaboration while also working with texts that extend past two or three authors introduces an unmanageable amount of complication, or the inclusion of such groupings is outside the scope of a delimited study. Laird, for example, explains that *Women Coauthors* will “only occasionally guess at what differences it makes when the number of coauthors increases” past two.³² With great respect for the studies above, I aim to fill this gap, moving into the territory of previously guessed-at excitement and attempting to advance our collective curiosity about what happens when a cluster of people produce a text. Wayne Koestenbaum notes that texts “with two authors are specimens of a relation, and show writing to be a quality of motion and exchange, not a fixed thing.”³³ Narratives with six or nine authors, then, present an even less stable set of relations whose fluid relationships merit investigation.

I do sympathize with the need to draw parameters around one’s study. In highlighting the full Christmas numbers and the neglected collaborative dynamics in that group of writers—five to nine in a given year and as many as fifteen when frame concepts carry over from one year to the next—I include a broad range of texts but must sacrifice in-depth analysis to every pairing. The vitality of all of those voices singing in chorus but also ringing out in solos shapes the unique brilliance of the collaborative text and challenges us to reconceptualize the energies of collaborative authorship. When dealing with forty writers in total across eighteen numbers, tracing the contact points between Dickens and each collaborator or between all possible combinations of the collaborators becomes unwieldy. To keep the scope of this study manageable, in most cases, textual dynamics trump biographical detective work, as I am more interested in overlapping narrators and speakers than whether Dickens ever had tea with the elusive Eliza Griffiths.³⁴ I also lack space to consider the plethora of ways in which these same writers participated in collaborative relationships in the regular issues of Dickens’s journals and in other publications. My hope is that this study will help to catalyze and motivate continued work in those directions.

The actual or possible sexual aspects of joint literary work is another focal point of much previous scholarship, as evidenced in the titles of Koestenbaum’s *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration*, Ehnenn’s *Women’s Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture*, Jeffrey Masten’s *Textual Intercourse*, and others.³⁵ Some of the Christmas numbers I examine require one to ponder the degree to which sexuality or queer intimacy arises as an important textual element. When particular stories or relationships intuitively lead in this direction (as in chapter 3), I pursue it. I also

acknowledge that there is much work left to be done on the overlapping trajectories of queer studies and studies of collaboration and that such work must recognize that experiences of collaboration are as varied as experiences of individual authorship.

As is already apparent, I use the term *collaboration* to refer to multiple ways of writers producing texts together. In practice, collaboration includes all sorts of interactions that extend past two people sitting in a room together while one of them writes ideas down on a page. Seth Whidden's work takes nineteenth-century French literature as its subject and provides useful grounding concepts. Whidden separates intertextuality from collaboration and takes care to point out that agency is associated with the latter but not the former: "Collaboration refers specifically to the relationship between two or more agents at some point during the creation of a literary text, whereas intertextuality refers to the relationship between two or more texts; the former emphasizes the process, the latter the results."³⁶ One of the most fascinating aspects of these Christmas numbers is the way in which they inconsistently interweave both collaboration and intertextuality. In a given issue, Dickens (and others) might participate in conversations affecting the text or have no direct communication at all. One contributor, for instance, might talk to Dickens about the frame narrative or the content of a particular story, while another contributor sends in a submission and hears nothing further. Or Dickens may send in stories from afar while Wills has conversations with others about the number's shape. In the analyses that follow, I show that one must allow for the operation of both models and, most importantly, read from the text outward rather than imposing a strict model a priori based on unstable biographical evidence or unquestioned critical norms. In most scenarios, a critic can expect to be able to differentiate instances of what Whidden calls "collaboration *in praesentia*," when writers are together physically during the creative act, from "collaboration *in absentia*," when the writers are physically apart.³⁷ The Christmas numbers, however, force readers to consider both modes simultaneously.

Laird's work on feminist modes of collaboration suggests new paradigms that are helpful in thinking about collaboration that happens in multi-gendered groups. Especially useful to this study is a "model of coauthorship as distinct from both solitary genius and an authorless textuality. In this model a large range of different kinds of coauthorship includes, surrounds, and renders anomalous the idea of the autonomous, original author."³⁸ To address this variation in collaborative method, we must accept both "partial collaborations, in which full mutually acknowledged coauthorship does not

occur" and "full collaborations," and we must avoid viewing full collaborations as "necessarily more balanced, more equitable, or more mutually rewarding than partial or 'approximate' . . . collaborations between authors and editors, speakers and writers."³⁹ Granting legitimacy to varying degrees and types of coauthorship means that one can no longer disqualify a text from the "collaborative" category based only on a printed byline or lack thereof. In part because I am persuaded by Laird's argument against "authorless textuality," my suggestions for how to rethink Dickens as a collaborative entity sometimes echo Marjorie Stone's and Judith Thompson's formulation of the author as heterotext without adopting their stance completely. Although Stone and Thompson intend to return "hetero" to its "older root," which includes meanings such as "mixed," I am not convinced that the prefix lends itself to the kind of intermittent blending evidenced in the Christmas numbers or that it avoids obliterating human agency.⁴⁰ In the case of an editorial authorial presence such as Dickens, the texts he published at times fit into a heterotextual model of mixture but at other times are unable to achieve narrative coherence. Therefore, rather than pursuing a theory of collaboration as heterotext, I am more compelled by extending and expanding the notion of collaboration as conversation.

To envision collaboration as conversational enables one to accommodate the fact that the Christmas numbers Dickens produced changed over the years, undulating in format, style, and number of voices in response to various factors. To converse is, in its most basic definition, "to communicate or interchange ideas (*with* any one) by speech or writing or otherwise."⁴¹ A conversational model of analysis, then, can account for and examine verbal exchanges between writers, written correspondence about a text under construction, and narrative exchanges between the fictional voices created by each collaborator. Conversation also importantly honors the verbal or written exchanges that influence a creative team regardless of which collaborator's hand puts pen to paper to create a manuscript. Yet another advantage to the conversational model is that it complements Dickens's conducting metaphor: emphasizing conversation does not elide conducting, and conducting does not drown out conversation. Conversations can be conducted, and conducting requires conversation, whether metaphorically between instrument and wand or literally between composer, conductor, and/or musician as assorted creative visions converge. A conversational model upsets the more usual mode of tracing who influenced whom with the goal of determining which author should receive "credit" for passages or ideas. Instead, it listens to the dialogue inherent in literary texts written in an atmosphere of consistent

creative exchange. This interpretive approach also enables one to see how texts communicate back and forth across space and time. My insistence is not that we abandon discussions of attribution or exploitation altogether but rather that we avoid relying on them as primary methodologies when reconstituting collaborative texts such as the Christmas numbers.

Within periodical studies, there is precedent for reading some types of Victorian literature from this more holistic position. Robert L. Patten, Laurel Brake, and others have pointed out that scholars should be aware of the conversations between part sellers and purchasers; between author, typesetter, and publisher; between writers and illustrators;⁴² and between each installment and the advertisements or other articles surrounding it. Jerome McGann includes editors, printers, publishers, and readers in his formulations and warns that approaches focusing too intensely on the individuality of authors result in literary works being “divorced from the social relationships which gave them their lives.”⁴³ Delving into the crisscrossings of major figures at the center of London’s literary marketplace on Wellington Street, Mary Shannon’s recent work importantly includes consideration of how “writers and editors represented their readers as active participants in a network” that also extended to imperial streets.⁴⁴ Such critics have illustrated that rich interpretive possibilities arise from studying advertisements, individual issues or entire runs of periodicals, logistics, geographical locations, and the simultaneous existence of a text in different forms. Examining Christmas numbers in their entirety, then, would seem to be an already common approach, but it is exceedingly rare.

By isolating Dickens’s Christmas numbers, I do not attempt a systematic study of the Victorian press. As Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff have put it, “The sheer bulk and range of the Victorian press seem to make it so unwieldy as to defy systematic and general study.”⁴⁵ What this book offers is a new view of a small section of the massive whole that might serve as a microcosm for collaborative dynamics that also appear elsewhere. If John Plunkett and Andrew King are correct that “it is more helpful to conceptualize nineteenth-century authorship in terms of the existence of a range of what Foucault called author-functions,”⁴⁶ then it is also helpful to explore the overlapping of those author functions in texts that confuse the lines between editor, author, contributor, and creator. Drew has called the Christmas collections a “remarkable fusion of occasional journalism and communal storytelling,” and we must persist in the challenging task of conceptualizing that “communal” aspect.⁴⁷

The structure of this book follows the chronological publication order of the stories in the Christmas numbers. In part, this choice is dictated by

the fact that *Collaborative Dickens* is the first study of its kind. To shift critical practice away from the arbitrary isolation of stories and toward the collaborative context in which the stories first appeared, this book must establish a foundation that values the numbers as whole texts. In the chapters that follow, each story does not receive the same amount of attention, and some I mention only briefly, but each story surfaces in its proper place as my argument about the collaborative dynamics of these texts emerges. To skip over stories whose quality I determine to be low would invalidate this book's premise that all of the stories constituting the Christmas numbers remain instructive parts of the collaborative oeuvre. Fortunately, many of the usually overlooked stories offer surprising moments of suspense or narrative complexity that exemplify the value of a comprehensive approach. Each chapter below begins with a brief forecasting section, which helps to orient readers seeking an in-depth treatment of just one year's Christmas number. This study is not organized as a casebook, and each chapter's argument relates to the others, but time-restricted readers investigating one Christmas collection should be able to use this book's introduction and conclusion alongside any of its individual chapters to understand its essential argument. The reference list of each number's contents and contributors in appendix A also enables one to place each story in context quickly and to explore additional connections between and across numbers. Readers might notice that, to avoid excessive and jarring verb tense changes in the chapters that follow, I often use the present tense to discuss not just literary texts but also Dickens's choices, authorial presence, and actions. Rather than, for instance, referring to what "Dickens wrote," I often refer to what "Dickens writes," which decreases historical distance and places emphasis on the ways in which Dickens's actions continue to influence critical assessment of his texts.

My first two chapters show how Dickens moves from producing Christmas collections that reflect upon the various ways that people around the world celebrate the holiday to crafting Christmas numbers with narrative frames that are enhanced by collaboration. Chapter 1 elucidates the ways in which the special issues for 1850 and 1851 link celebrations of Christmas to colonial ideologies that pervade the rest of the numbers. Chapter 2 argues that, drawing on oral storytelling modes in *A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire* and *Another Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire*, Dickens creates a narrative atmosphere in which collaboration exists as part of a repetitive, polyphonic form. Chapter 3 demonstrates that, in contrast to the preceding *Rounds*, the numbers for 1854 and 1855 move from circularity to more linear

structures. Limiting the type of mixing that characterizes the *Rounds*, *The Seven Poor Travellers* and *The Holly-Tree Inn* develop pacing structures that enable the stories to cohere. With Dickens's narrator organizing fictional travellers, the stories weave close male bonds and varied imperial visions into Christmas celebrations while revealing the importance of collaborative contexts to the emergence of detective fiction.

Chapter 4 argues that, as the 1856 and 1857 Christmas issues engage directly with questions of empire building and fortune seeking, collaboration is crucial to the ways in which the collections continue to explore the foundational ideologies laid out in the first two numbers. Restoring connections between the narrative parts of *The Wreck of the Golden Mary*, I recuperate the neglected dialogic aspects of the original text to assert that the interpolated stories of the middle section are essential to the success of the frame story and to one's comprehension of the links between trauma and storytelling. *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners* is the first number for which Dickens collaborates with only one other author, Wilkie Collins, and I demonstrate that their voices blend much more thoroughly than critics have been willing to acknowledge, even at the text's most racist moments. Collins's and Dickens's jointly created narrative device in *The Perils* routes their voices through an illiterate man who is unable to present his own voice in print and thus explores narrative impotence as a parallel to social inferiority in the face of colonial and racial violence. Chapter 5 reveals the range of outcomes exhibited in collaborative work as Collins and Dickens move from success to disappointment in *A House to Let*, the number that comes closest to collaborative failure. Dickens navigates personal crisis from 1858 to 1859, and collaboration enables him to experiment with representations that blur the boundaries between reality and fiction. As the frame concept unfolds in *The Haunted House*, Dickens weaves together commentary not only on the psychological dynamics of perceiving a thing, or place, to be haunted but also on storytelling, trauma, and the interpersonal dynamics of collaboration.

Three collections that revel in the chaos of collaborative storytelling form the focus of chapter 6. Spotlighting a poem in *A Message from the Sea* that depicts cannibalism and race in a manner that most scholars identify as antithetical to Dickens's usual aims, I continue to build a case for the necessity of constantly reading the numbers with attention to multivocal authorship. I also note the number's questioning of generic distinctions between pieces to excavate its ironic stance toward the storytelling its characters are trying to accomplish. *Tom Tiddler's Ground* comingles Dickens's real and fictional personas and further indulges irony by showing how storytelling can

fail to have any positive effect on an audience. An especially strong example of how collaborative texts can volunteer responses to the very questions they raise, *Somebody's Luggage* is the most playful and entertaining in its meta-textuality as its narrative framing simultaneously insists on and deconstructs textual divisions.

Chapter 7 proposes that the use of kindly adoptive parental figures in frame narratives enables *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings*, *Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy*, and *Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions* to present collaborative storytelling as an act of cross-generational love. I argue that collaboration and story gathering are crucial aspects of how these collections validate non-biological family structures and advocate for working-class characters. The figures of Mrs. Lirriper, Major Jemmy Jackman, and Doctor Marigold were extremely popular, and their collecting of texts as a legacy-making act assumes a moral weight equivalent to their rescuing of children. Chapter 8 examines the final two Christmas numbers to show that as Dickens concludes the Christmas collaborations, he introduces major changes to the format but maintains other collaborative traditions as he identifies other authors in print for the first time, then returns to crafting a narrative solely with Wilkie Collins. *Mugby Junction*, a seemingly misordered set of contributions, is disjointed but nevertheless develops hitherto overlooked themes across stories that profoundly impact attempts at biographical readings of Dickens's fictionalized responses to trauma. *No Thoroughfare* mixes authorial voices seamlessly and reverts to a reinforcement of English identity in opposition to less pure others. The final Christmas number also illustrates a further new direction in scholarship that *Collaborative Dickens* makes possible: an investigation of how the collaborative conversations of Collins and Dickens persist in their joint works from the years of the Christmas numbers through to Dickens's unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and Collins's best seller *The Moonstone*.

The range, skill, and complexity of the Christmas numbers, which have been overlooked in academic studies and popular accounts of Dickens and Christmas, illuminate an annual event in the nineteenth-century periodical press that involved readers in engaging, multivocal experiments. Evaluating the Christmas collections in their polyvocal completeness forces one to regard Dickens as a collaborator whose working methods and interactions with his colleagues shifted productively over nearly two decades and leads to a fresh awareness of Dickens as a multigendered and multimodal authorial voice. The Christmas collaborations also reveal that the idealized Englishness of what has come to be regarded as a typical Christmas is linked to

Introduction

a chorus of voices articulating sometimes conflicting racial and imperial ideologies. Accounting for the polyphonic nature of the complete Christmas numbers inspires a more comprehensive understanding of plural authorship in the nineteenth-century periodical press that prompts us to reconceptualize “Dickens.”