

CHARLES DICKENS IN CONTEXT

Charles Dickens, a man so representative of his age as to have become considered synonymous with it, demands to be read in context. This book illuminates the worlds – social, political, economic and artistic – in which Dickens worked. Dickens's professional life encompassed work as novelist, journalist, editor, public reader and passionate advocate of social reform. This volume offers a detailed treatment of Dickens in each of these roles, exploring the central features of Dickens's age, work and legacy, and uncovering sometimes surprising faces of the man and of the range of Dickens industries. Through forty-five digestible short chapters written by a leading expert on each topic, a rounded picture emerges of Dickens's engagement with his time, the influence of his works, and the ways he has been read, adapted and reimagined from the nineteenth century to the present.

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CHARLES DICKENS IN CONTEXT

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for Sally Ledger in loving memory





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Preface

Dickens, a man so imbricated in his age as to be synonymous with it, demands to be read in context. As John Gardiner points out in The Victorians: Age in Retrospect (2002), Dickens 'is crucial to our sense of the Victorians. Indeed it may even be felt that Dickens in some way is the key to the Victorian age; "Dickensian" often illuminates "Victorian", rather than vice-versa' (161). This book seeks to illuminate the contexts – social, political, economic and artistic - in which Dickens worked, as well as the ways he has been read and rewritten from the nineteenth century to the present. Described by James Eli Adams in A History of Victorian Literature (2009) as 'the single most important literary career of the Victorian era' (23), Dickens's professional life encompassed work as novelist, journalist, editor, public reader and passionate advocate of social reform. This volume offers a detailed treatment of Dickens in each of these roles, exploring the central features of Dickens's age, work and legacy, and uncovering sometimes surprising faces of the man and of the range of Dickens industries.

Dickens felt himself to be incomplete without the context of his audience, what in a letter to F. M. Evans dated 16 March 1858 he famously called 'the personal (I may almost say affectionate) relations which subsist between me and the public' (*Letters*, VIII, 533). He aspired through a career of nearly forty years 'to live', as he put it in the manifesto to *Household Words*, 'in the Household affections, and to be numbered among the Household thoughts, of our readers. We hope to be the comrade and friend of many thousands of people, of both sexes, and of all ages and conditions, on whose faces we may never look' (30 March 1850). This public life continues as readers, adaptors and a lively heritage industry continue to remake Dickens, with an energy undiminished as we approach the bicentenary of his birth.



xx Preface

The first section of this book addresses Dickens's 'Life and Afterlife', whilst a second section is devoted to 'Social and Cultural Contexts'. Each chapter is accompanied by a short list of recommended further reading.

This book was conceived and shaped by the late Sally Ledger, whose own important work on Dickens informs much of the scholarship herewith. I share with many of the contributors a sense of the painful honour it has been to be involved in the completion of this book as one small testament to Sally's special ability to draw people together and to inspire our best work. This one's for Sally!

HOLLY FURNEAUX
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Notes on references

Quotations from Charles Dickens's novels are sourced, where applicable, to volume or book and chapter, and are given in brackets, e.g., *The Pickwick Papers* (ch. I) or *Oliver Twist* (book I, ch. I). References to Dickens's letters are, unless otherwise stated, to the twelve-volume Pilgrim Edition detailed below, and are denoted by volume and page, e.g. *Letters*, IV, 30.

- The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. 1, 1820–1839, ed. Madeline House and Graham Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).
- The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. 11, 1840–1841, ed. Madeline House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).
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- The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. IV, 1844–1846, ed. Kathleen Tillotson and Nina Burgis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).
- The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. v, 1847–1849, ed. Graham Storey, K. J. Fielding and Anthony Laude (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).
- The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. v1, 1850–1852, ed. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Nina Burgis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
- The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. VII, 1853–1855, ed. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Angus Easson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
- The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. VIII, 1856–1858, ed. Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
- The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. 1X, 1859–1861, ed. Madeline House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
- The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. x, 1862–1864, ed. Graham Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
- The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. XI, 1865–1867, ed. Graham Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).
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Other references are supplied in Further Reading, at the end of the book, or in the endnotes to individual chapters.

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