Urban Comparisons: Translating Paris for London in *Household Words*

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Summary: *Charles Dickens' relationship with Paris was a long and often intense affair, and a great many studies have explored how the French capital is represented in his fiction. This article instead investigates a more neglected part of Dickens's extended oeuvre, namely his magazine* Household Words *and, more specifically, its articles on Paris. These representations of Paris can be understood as standing in a more or less direct relationship to Dickens's depictions of London, one of the key concerns of his fiction. Through the exploration of a wide variety of Parisian topics, Dickens and the magazine's correspondents reveal a perhaps surprising admiration for a great many things French and Parisian, including Haussmannisation. The main exception to the positive portrayals of the French capital comes in the shape of its revolutionary past. On the whole, however, these magazine articles make up a political challenge to London and the English, as well as a commitment to internationalism.*

Keywords: *Dickens,* Household Words*, nationalism, internationalism, flâneur, Haussmannisation, revolution, reform, insularity.*

Résumé : *La relation entre Charles Dickens et Paris est une histoire longue et souvent intense, et de nombreuses études ont exploré la représentation de la capitale française dans sa fiction. Cet article investit une part plus négligée dans l'œuvre de Dickens, à savoir son magazine* Household Words *et notamment ses articles sur Paris. Ces articles peuvent être envisagés dans le rapport qu'ils entretiennent, de manière plus ou moins directe, avec la peinture de Londres, élément clef dans la fiction dickensienne. A travers l'exploration d'un large éventail de sujets parisiens, Dickens et aussi les correspondants du magazine révèlent une admiration, étonnante peut-être, pour bien des phénomènes français et parisiens, hausmannisation comprise. L'exception principale aux portraits positifs de la capitale française est son passé révolutionnaire. Dans l'ensemble, pourtant, ces articles de journal représentent un défi politique à Londres et aux Anglais et, par là, une adhésion à l'internationalisme.*

Mots-clés : *Dickens,* Household Words*, nationalisme, internationalisme, flâneur, haussmannisation, révolution, réforme, insularité.*

> Representing London – or Paris, or any other great city – in the new light of being utterly unknown to all the people in the story, and only taking the colour of their fears and fancies and opinions – *so* getting a new aspect, and being unlike itself. An odd unlikeness of itself. (Forster, 729)

So goes a brief note in Charles Dickens's "Book of Memoranda", kept for jotting down ideas for new literary projects. The entry is often associated with what will later become *A Tale of Two Cities*, the author's explicit fictional comparison of Paris and London. A number of things might be said about this evocative fragment of city writing, among them that Dickens has a clear awareness of the subjective constructions or appropriations of the city, and that any "great city", it seems, is the perfect place for feeling ignorant, for exercises in epistemology. Most importantly in this context, and more surprisingly, perhaps: the London writer par excellence seems happy to make his own city interchangeable with Paris.

The magazine *Household Words* belongs to a part of Dickens' total production which is not often acknowledged, at least by non-Dickensians, and which has also for a long time been relatively neglected by Dickensians. But from March 1850 until his death, Dickens was the editor of 1061 issues of *Household Words* and its successor *All the Year Round*, meaning that he had the editorial responsibility for well over 6000 articles, poems and instalments of serial fiction (Drew, 2003: 105; Drew, 1999: 284-89).[1] Rather than insisting on Dickens's detailed, editorial control of these magazines, which has been customary, it is more important to acknowledge what John Drew refers to as the writer's "vision of how a multi-authored journal might project a powerful single identity into the public sphere, to access and influence the minds of a mass readership" (Drew, 2003: 106, 115).[2] Also, the policy of anonymous contributions, and Dickens's encouragement of a unified style, what soon became referred to as "Dickensy" and "Dickensese", meant that in terms of reception, the best items tended to be attributed to Dickens. Each page of the journal bore the legendary words "Conducted by Charles Dickens", and it was inevitable that the Conductor would benefit most from the audience's applause.

It is worth adding that the journal begins publication within the brief spell of the Second Republic, and continues into the first seven years of the Second Empire.[3] The end of the Second Empire occurs in the year of Dickens's death (1870), and the large majority of Dickens's own visits to Paris were made during the 1850s and '60s.

What differentiated *Household Words* from other, rival journals was its literary quality, its attempts at *belles lettres*, not least in the form of whimsical urban sketches. Dickens's varied deployment of so-called "Specials" as "writers of sketches of travel, life and manners" in various countries has been seen as a "distinct innovation" (Drew, 2003: 119, 3). The more topical of these texts may belong to a hybrid genre, characterised by generic permeability, complex negotiations between what was referred to as "Literature" and other modes of writing, and, later, surely not least because of their relatively lowly publication origins, with canonic instability.

Household Words contains approximately 50 articles which in one way or another take Paris as their main subject. These articles offer a new and illuminating contextualisation of Dickens' own writing on Paris and France, fictional and non-fictional. More generally, they make up a message for London, as seen from Paris. Dickens's enormous and hugely ambitious investigation of what London *is*, should also be studied in comparison with what London *is not*, i.e., importantly, Paris. There can be little doubt that this must have been an important function of these texts in Dickens's own time. London is always implicit in these Parisian reports, stories, sketches, as well as often brought in for more direct comparison.

Household Words on Paris

The *Household Words* articles on Paris cover a wide range of topics, from the city's "carrier pigeons", educational institutions, the Latin Quarter (and particularly its student and bohemian life), to various social events, popular amusements, especially the theatre, children's hospitals, Sunday excursions to the cemetery at Montmartre, Parisian vehicles, tavern and café life, dressing, the rag fair, the wine market, the Bourse, Ste. Geneviève, a few historical portraits of Parisian individuals, as well as the rather more homely "Travels in Search of Beef".

"All roads lead to Paris", noted the first substantial, if quaint, *Household Words* article on things Parisian in August 1850, and one of the most striking things about these articles is how the centrality, and even superiority, of the French capital is so rarely disputed ("Winged Telegraphs", *HW*, August 1850).

Who is the narrator of these urban sketches, this "visitor", as he is often called, assuming that it is a he? "The visitor, if he be an arrant philosophic, a true, observant, metaphysical vagabond – which is of course to be desired": so goes a self-presentation in one of the early Parisian sketches, and a number of other pieces also refer to the narrator as "the philosopher" ("A Ball at the Barriers", *HW*, May 1851). "Chronicler and philosopher" have since become familiar terms from Walter Benjamin's descriptions of the *flâneur*, but I would not want to push this point here (Benjamin, 2006: 68). There is a sense in which the roles of the foreign traveller and the *flâneur* merge in particular ways during the decades of Hausmannisation, as the rapid change in the urban landscape make it "utterly unknown" to French and foreigner alike. This also has generic consequences, in that the urban sketch, whether foreign or not, becomes a form of travel writing. The challenges are certainly similar in regard to the "truth value of representations, inexpressibility and 'translation', and the difficulty of imagining or representing the Other" (Campbell, 2002: 267). There are nevertheless a number of references which connect this foreign visitor to the familiar character of the *flâneur*, some of which stress aimlessness and idleness. In one sketch the narrator notes that, "I was sallying forth one morning as usual to *transact* – if I may be allowed the expression – my idleness" ("My Aunt in Paris", *HW*, April 1852). The task of these *Household Words* seems to be to transact idleness or assumed idleness into writings on urban life. There is a tension between this leisurely pose and the more utilitarian purposes of the reporter.

There is another important distinction at work in these articles, however, namely that between "visitor" or "traveller" on the one hand and "tourist" on the other. The visitor's relative familiarity with the foreign city, his ambition to explore it on his own and without prejudice, can easily be connected with certain anxieties about mass tourism (Buzard, 1993: 91). The article "English Milords" expresses this tension, while also being one of many attempts at breaking with national stereotypes (*HW*, May 1853).[4] In this case the narrator brings out the absurdity of certain French perceptions of the English, while at the same time reminding the reader of the short historical distance to the forms of "Anglomania" which shaped them. But then he turns the tables, and concludes by placing most of the blame on certain types of English tourists, those who "go back to their own country more ignorant (if possible) than when they started." If they would stay at home or adopt a more receptive and respectful attitude when in France, the French portraits of Englishmen "would be somewhat more fairly drawn."

I will dwell on only one key and representative article on Paris, while referring to a number of others. "Paris Improved" is a longish sketch published in November 1855, and begins by offering a framework for comparison:

> The citizens of London and the citizens of Paris can be compared and contrasted in almost the same terms as the cities themselves: the one sombre, heavy, large, continually expanding, seldom changing; the other bright, compact, open, lively, and ever improving.

Such a contrast may seem reminiscent of William Hazlitt's aestheticising of Paris and his comparing it with London as "an ordinary town, a place of trade and business" (Buzard, 1993: 182). But what is at stake here is not simply non-utility versus utility. The point is political, and the writer goes on to compare "the pace of London improvement", or, rather, the lack thereof, to "the overgrown alderman" or "his own beloved turtle".

In short, the topic of the article is the Haussmannisation of Paris, Haussmann having been made Prefect of the Seine two years earlier and now well on his way in imposing his and Napoleon III's vision on the city (Jones, 2006: 344-95). There is little gothic mystery in this description of a rapidly changing Paris, even if the "rapid building" and the "recent transformations" may at times appear almost magical. Instead there is celebration of the change which is happening to the districts of "a great many narrow crooked streets" and the "nests" of "disquiet, disease and iniquity":

> Not only have entire neighbourhoods such as these, been swept away wholesale, but every part of the city has been more or less improved in detail. Streets of moderate width have had their narrow entrances enlarged; sharp turns have been squared, and corner houses made to form double, instead of single angles – so that these widened cross-roads are never crowded, and seldom obstructed; projecting houses have been forced back into line with the rest; convenient thoroughfares have been opened through blind blocks of buildings which separated one quarter from another.

But there is more than this overall change which deserves praise. That would be out of line with the anti-utilitarian strain of *Household Words*:

> Yet, utility was not the sole motive power which has executed these improvements. The love of ornament and a passion for display, always attributed to the French, have been brilliantly and beautifully exhibited; especially in the Rue de Rivoli and the Boulevard de Sebastopol. But above these, commonsense (the most uncommon sense known), proclaims itself from every improved street and altered house. An English architect, or a member of the City Improvements Committee with any conscience or any observation, cannot walk through Paris without feeling ashamed and humiliated.

Above the sound aesthetic judgment which informs the new buildings, comes that most English of virtues, common sense. There is a rhetorical inversion at work here, a favourite device of travel writing. This is a common sense projected on to a people who in traditional constructions of English and British identities have so often been represented as the least commonsensical of all, the French, and that in spite of, or perhaps because of, their own more theoretical and philosophical tradition of rationalism. This paradoxical point leads straight into an explicit comparison, and then into a comparative politics.

In the discussion which follows, the writer enters into an imaginary dialogue with a London city official, "the honourable Deputy for the ward of St. Vitus's Backlane", that "eminent and respected public nuisance", as he is also called. The arguments which he presents against a Hausmannisation of London are respect for private property, a democratic rather than despotic political system, and the difficulty in raising sufficient capital. "Constitutional legality" needs ten years to do what despotism can do in ten minutes, he notes. In Paris, so goes the argument, the "single will of the Emperor" has gone against "the several wills of thousands of ousted tenants and ruined landlords."

It is at this point that the narrator musters a somewhat surprising, if, when understood in its *Household Words* context, characteristic defence of Parisian improvements. "Not a jot of private right" has been invaded, every stone is "paid full value for", "every owner and occupier" has been "fairly compensated", with "juries selected from his own class" in case of disputes, it is claimed. He goes on to hail the administrative centre of the changes, the Hôtel de Ville, accounts for the extraordinarily ingenious financing of the enterprise, and notes that the "astonishingly far-seeing and comprehensive Code Napoléon" has supplied the very conditions for all these changes. It is a code for which Britons might envy France, although the latter, as the narrator caustically puts it, did not "rise out of the azure main to the singing of Guardian Angels".

Napoleon III and Hausmann are "changing some of the worst parts of the capital into palatial habitations", notes the *Household Words* correspondent. He admits that, due to the rarity of shelter, these radical changes in the city's physical layout have led to suffering for the poor, but adds that the government soon provided temporary housing, and that, with new houses now ready, these inconveniences have disappeared.

The comparison between the two cities again becomes explicit, with the narrator offering advice about the "speedy improvement" of London and other "pent-up, ill-planned, ill-governed" British cities, before "Paris Improved" concludes:

> When the stipulated five years [of Hausmannisation] shall have elapsed, and the contemplated improvements shall be completed, Paris will be a marvel of improvement. And London? London will go on talking for and against improvement, for another half-century or so, and will remain, as to its general ugliness, pretty much what it has been for the last ten or a dozen years. The Hôtel de Ville in Paris and the Guildhall in London, are mightily expressive, in their vast differences, of the intelligence and spirit of the public bodies they represent. But then the corporation of Paris really expresses Paris itself, while the corporation of London expresses nothing but obsolete pretences and abuses.

It is a strong finale to an article which without reservation has hailed the Hausmannisation of Paris as an exemplary model for urban planning and improvement. One might notice that London, the real London, the city itself, as it were, is in the end detached from its administration, while Paris has found its true self in its administrative centre.

These views of the contributors seem to be in line with the editor's private opinions at this time. In a letter to his wife Catherine from October 1853, Dickens refers to Paris as "wonderfully improving" (Storey, 1993: 163-64). He notes that "thousands of houses" are being pulled down in order to make way for the extension of Rue de Rivoli, and declares that, "It will be the finest thing in Europe". There is no sense of nostalgia for the disappearance of the old Paris, nor any expression of concern for the social implications of these grand projects. Dickens and his *Household Words* seem to have equal admiration for the "artiste *démolisseur*", the demolition artist, as Haussmann jocularly called himself, as for Hausmann as "resurrection man" (Benjamin, 2006: 43).

Seen against the more problematic aspects of the project of Hausmannisation, its authoritarian and punitive logic, the *Household Words* position borders on the naïve. But it is hardly possible to understand these descriptions of Paris, in a journal conducted by the foremost of London writers, without keeping the London context in mind. What in these many articles emerges as something of an editorial position on Paris, must have been encouraged by the dire state of city planning in Dickens's London (that is, primarily the City and the East End), its sewage system, its sanitation, its cholera epidemics. From such a perspective, there were reasons to admire contemporary Paris. Haussmann and Napoleon III's redesigning of the city in the 1850s and 1860s became a model of French efficiency and modernity, and the accompanying authoritarianism was hardly queried. As a result there is little of the ambivalence which so often plays itself out in Dickens's fiction, in the conflicts between authoritarianism and anarchic energies, and there is no distance to what historians have described as the mythologizing of Paris "as the city of modernity in the nineteenth century" (Jones, 2006: xvii).

There is surprisingly little reliance on the conventions of the urban mystery novels, the gothic repertoire of urban depiction which so often help to shape Dickens's novelistic treatments of the city (Maxwell, 1992). Of the four key metaphors explored by Richard Maxwell in his *Mysteries of Paris and Londo* - "labyrinth", "crowd", "panorama" and "paperwork" – only "crowd" is conspicuous, and to a lesser extent the notion of a "panorama" of city life. The key metaphors rather seem to spill over from the Dickensian concern with popular entertainment, "spectacle", "stage", "show", "theatre", as well as "panorama". Statistics, observation and science seem to be replacing mystery, much as Haussmann's boulevards are replacing the nooks, corners and lanes of le Vieux Paris, old Paris, the untidy but authentic site which sprang up as a counter-myth to the city of modernity (Jones, 2006: 390). It all makes for a conspicuous idealisation of a particular, Parisian modernity.

There is only one significant exception to these positive portrayals of contemporary Paris, apart from the occasional scepticism about excessive taxation and the restricted freedom of the press ("From Paris to Chelmsford", HW, 20 September 1856). It is the city's revolutionary past, a past inscribed within its present.

It is impossible for the magazine to ignore the history of Parisian revolutions during Louis Bonaparte's seizure of executive power in 1851-52, and the crushing of the worker opposition to his *coup d'État* of 10 December is duly reported (Jones, 2006: 372). In the article "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, and Musketry", the visitor arrives in a besieged city and goes on to describe the events at this dramatic time (*HW*, 27 December 1851). It means close reporting about muddy streets, shootings, cavalry charges, but also the mystery of such things going on "in the heart of the most civilised city of the world". Even if the narrator communicates familiarity, it is one which reaches its limits in the musings about "the extraordinary, inimitable, consistently inconsistent French people." The perspective is politically neutral, with the narrator refusing to support one side or the other, while at the same time rejecting "the horrible ferocity and brutality of this ruthless soldiery." When it is all over, and the Parisians are back to 'dancing and flirting at the Salle Valention, or the Prado, lounging in the *foyers* of the Italian Opera, gossiping over their *eau-sucrée*, or squabbling over their dominoes outside and inside the cafés' the next night, and the traveller sees the "last cocked hat of the last gendarme" on his way home, he slips into a familiar, nationalist discourse, in need of thanking Heaven that he is an Englishman, with his Bill of Rights and his Habeas Corpus.[5] Revolutionary violence is represented as the ultimate English other.

While history at times rears its head in these articles, and most often in the shape of a revolution, the perspective is nevertheless conspicuously contemporaneous. As travel narratives these accounts thus differ strongly from 18th and early 19th-century narratives from the Grand Tour. One of the most trusted and frequent contributors to Dickens's periodicals, George Augustus Sala, nicely summarised the change from what he called "the sanctity of historic associations" to a more "prosaic contemporaneity": 'Didn't Julius Caesar invade England? and am I then to be debarred from talking about a grocer's shop in Snargate-street, Dover, or

the table d'hôte at the Lord Warden, or the slipperiness of the Admiralty pier?" (Buzard, 1993: 211).[6]

Dickens on Paris

The editor is himself responsible for a number of central *Household Words* pieces on Paris: "A Flight" from 30 August 1851, "Insularities" from 19 January 1856, "Railway Dreaming" from 10 May 1856, and "New Year's Day" from 1 January 1859.

"A Flight" is a strongly impressionistic piece, textually mimicking the speed of the new 11-hour journey by train and boat between London and Paris. This is railway literature in the most literal and material sense. Only the last page or so concerns Paris, when, upon arrival, the traveller goes "botanising on the asphalt" (Benjamin, 2006: 68):

> The crowds in the streets, the lights in the shops and balconies, the elegance, variety, and beauty of their decorations, the number of the theatres, the brilliant cafés with their windows thrown up high and their vivacious groups at little tables on the pavement, the light and glitter of the houses turned as it were inside out, soon convince me that it is no dream; that I am in Paris, howsoever I got there. (Edmondson, 2006: 15-16)

The effect of the typical Dickensian device, 'the houses turned as it were inside out', helps represent the city of light as the opposite of London's dark and gloomy normality. But the dream-like quality, the apparent unreality, of Paris is also captured. It is a quality that Dickens will stress even more strongly nearly five years later, in a piece called 'Railway Dreaming', in which the speed of the railway and the city of Paris are connected in its dream-inducing qualities, as well as in its modernity.

But just after these descriptions of the narrator's walk, which continues "down to the sparkling Palais Royal, up the Rue de Rivoli, to the Place Vendôme", comes the direct comparison. The traveller runs into one of his English travelling companions, satirically named Monied Interest, who immediately starts criticising the "monomania" of Napoleon, the one idea which is about in Paris, he claims. "Humph!" responds the narrator, "I THINK I have seen Napoleon's match?" He clearly refers to the statues and prints of the Duke of Wellington, thus also invoking the parallel British construction of national identities through "the mass production of monuments", as Dana Arnold persuasively argues about a slightly earlier period (Arnold, 2000: 46). Paris is not the other after all.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the inevitable comparison between Paris and London is that it has clear political implications. At the close of "Railway Dreaming", Dickens becomes explicit in his objection to the British way of administration, and in embracing the French approach: "But, it is done by Centralisation! somebody shrieks to me from some vestry's topmost height. Then, my good sir, let us have Centralisation" (Edmondson, 2006: 139). This statement also connects the descriptions of Paris to certain key satirical concerns in Dickens's fiction. In a clear dichotomy, "Circumlocution", associated with the

Circumlocution Office, the central institution of *Little Dorrit* (1856-57), the novel which was being serialised just at this time, is held up as the alternative to French-style Centralisation. This latter term is later to be dismissed by that satirical epitome of Englishness, Mr. Podsnap of *Our Mutual Friend*, as "Not English." Dickens has grown impatient with British inefficiency in dealing with social problems. He has become disillusioned with the public sphere, with the chances of achieving change via the political process, and this works to Paris', or at least to Hausmann's and Napoleon III's advantage. Paris opens up an alternative space to London, not just as an urban landscape, but as a vision, albeit at a distance, of a possibility for change.

In "Railway Dreaming" Dickens chooses another rhetorical device to strengthen the traveller's detached perspective. "If I am coming from the Moon, what an extraordinary people the Moonians must be", he notes. It is an attempt at metaphorically bringing out the utter foreignness of Paris and the French, their love of sitting outdoors, of café life, of the Bourse and its speculation fever, the Parisian parks, and the dismal attractions of the Morgue. This is, by the way, not the *flâneur*'s direct observations of the city, but memories collected in tranquillity, albeit at a high speed, in the isolation of the railway carriage which takes the narrator away from Paris. The setting adds to the dreaminess and other-worldliness of the narrator's impressions of the city. And the "Moonians", Dickens claims, "are highly deserving of imitation among ourselves" (Edmondson, 2006: 134).

Dickens is drawn to the Morgue, but not simply as an image of Parisian primitiveness, as the dark corners of the City of Light. In one of his contributions, the very motto of the revolution is universalised precisely in the setting of the Morgue. Elsewhere the inscription of "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" may seem like "political pedantry", he notes; here it "becomes a solemn and mysterious truth" ("More French Revolutions", *HW*, September 1851). A longish and informative article on that same institution, in the mode of social investigation, called "Dead Reckoning at the Morgue", ends in similar fashion: "the Morgue is not a very gay place to live in, but it is a great teacher" (*HW*, October 1853).

In the sketch "Insularities", it is particularly the English prejudice against the unconventional which is under attack and unfavourably compared with attitudes on the Continent, particularly in Paris. "If a man in Paris have an idiosyncrasy on the subject of any article of attire between his hat and his boots, he gratifies it without the least idea that it can be anybody's affair but his; nor does anybody else make it his affair" (Edmondson, 2006: 300). Among other British insularities he notes their views on popular amusements, on fine art, and the behaviour of the English aristocracy, the general point being an unfavourable comparison of his own countrymen's "prevailing intolerance of the unconventional" (Edmondson, 2006: viii) with Parisian open-mindedness.

Such statements are in line with an observation Dickens makes in a letter during his first extended stay in Paris, in 1846-47: "Well! About Paris! I am charmed with the place, and have a much greater respect for the French people than I had before. The general appreciation of, and respect for, Art, in its broadest and most universal sense, in Paris, is one of the finest national signs I know" (Storey, 1981: 42).

The letter is to a Frenchman, admittedly, but it is nevertheless made by England's most famous writer in the period in which the British Empire is at its height. In a letter to his close friend John Forster at this time, Dickens jokingly signed himself "Charles Dickens, Français naturalisé, et Citoyen de Paris" (Storey, 1981: 5).

English/French

The *Household Words* articles on Paris help question dichotomies which are central to English and British self-construction. The meeting between modern Paris and London serves to strengthen Dickens's growing disillusionment with the British political system in general and with London more particularly.

Linda Colley's influential thesis about the forging of the British nation and a British national identity places importance precisely on its antagonistic relationship with France, and on a common Protestant identity. The historical period which she identifies as key to this "forging" lies between the Act of Union, joining Scotland to England and Wales, in 1707 and Queen Victoria's succession to the throne in 1837. This period also coincides with what Colley calls the "manic obsessiveness" of each country's interest in the other (Colley, 1994: 1).

This intensive period in the making of a national identity, or at least its consolidation, is only a few decades away when the Paris pieces in *Household Words* appear. The cultural logic had for a long time been that in "vilifying France", as Colley has it, one would automatically extol "Britain's virtue" (Colley, 1994: 368). It might be argued that in the meantime other factors had perhaps acquired more central roles, but this would not necessarily make the encounters with older factors easier, or more ideologically innocent.

It is also possible to take a longer view, seeing the opposition of 'English/French' as one of the key features of English empiricist discourse and as one of the constitutive dichotomies of Englishness (Easthope, 1999: 90). According to Anthony Easthope, this dichotomy complements such other oppositions as "common sense/dogma", "sincere/artificial", "truth/pleasure", "masculine/feminine" and "Protestant/Catholic". One of the striking qualities of the *Household Words* sketches on Paris is that, while they do not escape these key dichotomies entirely, they do much to deconstruct them. The overall function of the many comparisons of Paris and London in this magazine may be to refuse such stark oppositions, to warn against insularity, and to attempt, at least implicitly, to build identities from new, more realistic and self-reflective premises. The articles do not altogether do away with culturally significant difference, but they complicate them, both through a refusal to depict such difference in negative terms, and through continual comparisons, implicit and explicit, which point to relationships, contingency, proximity.

Near the end of one of his most famous pieces on France, the *Household Words* article "Our French Watering Place", Dickens offers the observation that the "long and constant fusion of the two great nations" in Boulogne "has taught each to like the other, and to learn from the other, and to rise superior to the absurd prejudices that have lingered among the weak and ignorant of both countries

equally" (Edmondson, 2006: 75-76). As a commitment to internationalism, it is an open, admirable and even radical position. Judging from the *Household Words* pieces on Paris, one might perhaps even conclude that London has more to learn from the French capital than the French capital has to learn from London.

Charles Dickens's "Preliminary Word" when *Household Words* began publication in 1850, stressed the journal's concern with modernity (*HW*, 30 March 1850). It would help its readers keep pace with "the progress of mankind" in what it referred to as "this summer dawn of time". At the same time, its declared aim was anti-utilitarian, with a marked emphasis on the liberating forces of imagination and amusement, expressed in the famous phrase, "there is Romance enough if we will find it out". Paris of the 1850s, it seems, had the potential to fulfil both these ambitions. As such it seems to have been perfectly suited to Dickens's popular journal.

This general statement of intention also expresses a more general commitment to internationalism. In noting that the journal aims, "in some degree", to report from "every nation upon earth", Dickens observes that "nothing can be a source of real interest in one of them, without concerning all the rest." The character of the "traveller" is key to the journal's fostering of greater tolerance.

The achievement of the *Household Words* visitor to Paris lies in a serious and surprisingly unprejudiced engagement with the city's otherness, with the result that he may at times border on the uncritical or naïve. At the same time, such an approach opens up an urban territory closed off to more insular reporters. It seems appropriate to end by way of a quotation from one of the *Household Words* contributors on Parisian life: "We can only see what we are prepared to look at" ("The Patron Saint of Paris", *HW*, June 1857).

London and Paris are not simply interchangeable, as this article's opening quotation, Dickens's brief note towards a future novel, might have us believe. Instead, *The Household Words* articles accentuate difference on many levels. The two cities appear as particular, historical locations which are not simply to be exchanged for one another in a general urban discourse, even if this discourse cannot be avoided. After his first visit in July 1844, Dickens reported in glowing terms to the Count D'Orsay. He had found Paris "the most extraordinary place in the world," he noted, and continued: "I was not prepared for, and really could not have believed in, its perfectly distinct and separate character. My eyes ached and my head grew giddy, as novelty, novelty, novelty; nothing but strange and striking things; came swarming before me" (Tillotson, 1977: 166-67). The writer went on to discuss the "secret character" of the city, and to reach for literary metaphors drawn from the urban mystery novel, claiming that his walks about the streets had made him feel as if each person he saw was another "leaf in the enormous book" of the city, one which "stands wide open" in the streets. "I was perpetually turning over, and never coming any nearer the end. There never was such a place for a description," Dickens exclaimed.

This sense of novelty, of an overload of new impressions, seems to have stayed with Dickens, even after numerous visits to the French capital and when he

came to show signs of disillusionment with it. Paris inspired a great quantity of description, some of it in his own writing, most of it in that of the other contributors to his journals.

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Notes

[1] 380 different writers contributed to *Household Words*, around 90 of whom were women (Drew, 1999: 4). For this brief discussion of the publishing profile of *Household Words* I am indebted to John M.L. Drew's excellent study.

[2] The conventional portrayal of Dickens's editorial policies has tended to stress the fact that every article had to bear his stamp. This emphasis on extreme editorial and artistic control has been convincingly queried by Drew. There is little doubt that Dickens had clear opinions about his journals, and his correspondence with his sub-editor, W.H. Wills, copiously documents his willingness to interfere, but the published results would often fall below his expectations.

[3] The first number of *Household Words* appeared on 27 March 1850 and the last number on 28 May 1859.

[4] The writer notices few signs as yet that modernity has changed people's perceptions, not even "an eleven hours' route from London to Paris, with railways and a submarine telegraph".

[5] The readers of the journal are also reminded of revolution in a number of other contexts, such as in a mistaken vision of the ghost of Robespierre in "A True Account of an Apparition" (*HW*, March 1852), and more innocently in "More French Revolutions" (*HW*, September 1851), in which the word is trivialised and demystified in simply referring to various aspects of rapid change.

[6] Buzard notes that the main dangers in this "'prosaicist' reaction" to the earlier focus on picturesqueness lie in idealising common people and a form of presentism (1993: 211).