At the age of forty-six – a time of life when many choose or are forced to plateau – Dickens embarked on two demanding new ventures, as a public reader of his own works, and as a publisher. Neither is strictly the province of a study of his work as a journalist, but in so far as both departures impacted on *All the Year Round* and all three pursuits were facets of the same media phenomenon, they deserve some attention. The working patterns Dickens and Wills had established for making up the weekly numbers of *Household Words* were stretched to the limit by his reading tours, which would take him to venues across mainland Britain, Ireland, France and the United States. A new creative rhythm was needed for writing journalism no less than fiction, for as he told his old friend De Cerjat in 1867, ‘When I read I don’t write. I only edit, and have the proof sheets sent to me for that purpose.’ He relied more than ever on Wills to manage all aspects of the Commercial Department and much of the Literary work from London, but the increased correspondence his absences brought on shows no slacking of vigorous and detailed interest in editorial matters – he had not won outright control of his journal in order to hand it over to a subsidiary. The incessant travel which the tours involved – symptomatic of Dickens’s inner restlessness – contributed to various self-projections as a traveller, ‘the British Wanderer’ as he styled himself, or, more significantly, ‘The Uncommercial Traveller,’ under which polyvalent guise he wrote the thirty-six articles for *All the Year Round* which mark the climax of his career as a journal essayist. His actual or reported circulation through hundreds of towns and cities where his periodical and books were on sale, actively boosted their circulation. Articulate working-class characters, first created for the Extra Christmas Numbers of *All the Year Round*, were converted into some of Dickens’s most popular readings, and their voices shared the platform with him, at a time when franchise reform and increased voting rights for British artisans were topics of national debate. The readings, too, carried a political charge.
As his own publisher in a boom decade for the industry, when the last of the remaining ‘Taxes on Knowledge’ was repealed and competition grew cut-throat amongst the magazines, Dickens made several policy changes which affected the contents, preparation and distribution of *All the Year Round*. The most far-reaching of these was the decision to permanently ‘reserv[e] the first place in these pages for a continuous original work of fiction’ – a change announced as *A Tale of Two Cities* finished its run, and Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* began. Dickens’s synoptic leading articles, the cutting edge of *Household Words* and its reforming agenda, made way for historical and ‘sensation’ fiction. *All the Year Round*, no less than the *Examiner* or *Punch*, indexed the wider decline of radicalism in the 1860s. In any case, the new overseas readerships which Dickens was securing for the magazine, and the associated stress in its pages on international affairs and outlooks, meant perhaps that leaders on the ins-and-outs of domestic politics (which Dickens had always likened to the workings of ‘Our Parish’) were inappropriately parochial. Innovative arrangements for simultaneous publication in New York meant – for a time, at least – bedding each issue down much earlier, to allow time to ship the plates across the Atlantic, and a corresponding loss of topicality.

The changes of direction and emphasis in *All the Year Round* which resulted from these new ventures were thus not always planned or desired. At times, indeed, it seems that Dickens's desire for omni-presence across a range of media, leads instead to a series of unpredictable disappearances and reappearances from view from individual platforms. It is certainly true that after 1863, the frequency of Dickens’s contributions to *All the Year Round* declines dramatically. All this was complicated by his need to genuinely ‘vanish into space,’ in order to spend time with the now invisible Ellen Ternan, living discreetly with her mother and sisters in the house in Ampthill Square which Dickens had (almost certainly) leased on their behalf. Nevertheless, after eighteen months in the field, J. M. Emerson, the authorized American publisher of *All the Year Round*, was able to announce to readers that the magazine they were reading ‘has now the largest circulation of any similar publication in the world.’ His numerical estimate that, including authorized and unauthorized excerptions from the journal, its serialisation of *Great Expectations* ‘will find in this country alone more than three million readers’ reads more like a 20th-century TV rating than a mid-Victorian circulation figure. Individual readers, too, registered its sensational popularity. The actress Ellen Terry recorded in her autobiography that during her Paris engagement of 1866, *All the Year Round* was ‘the thing that made me homesick for London’ –

The excitement in the ‘sixties’ over each new Dickens can be understood only by people who experienced it at that time. Boys used to sell [it] in the streets, and they were often pursued by an eager crowd, for all the world as if they were carrying news of the ‘latest winner.’