

Interpreting the Labor and Legacy of the Independent Literary Typist; or, the Typing of Ethel Kate Dickens

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IN James Matthew Barrie's one-act play *The Twelve-Pound Look*, the lightly satirical, “chatty” stage directions introduce the character Kate—a typist—with the following description:¹

... presently the disturbing element is shown in. She is a mere typist, dressed in uncommonly good taste, but at contemptibly small expense, and she is carrying her typewriter in a friendly way rather than as a badge of slavery, as of course it is. Her eye is clear; and in odd contrast to Lady Sims, she is self-reliant and serene.²

Kate has been hired to produce thank-you messages for Lady Sims and her husband, Harry, in anticipation of the congratulations they expect to receive when he is elevated to the knighthood the following day. But when Lady Sims leaves the room after Kate's arrival, we learn that Kate is none other than the former wife of Harry Sims. Harry is a “comically absurd” man, as Naomi Paxton calls him, who is convinced of his own importance. Kate and Harry's ensuing conversation reveals that she left him years before because he was “obsessed with his own success,”³ and, furthermore, because he treated her as one of the trappings, and an index, of his social position. Their private conversation reveals that when Kate decided to leave him, she learned to type, saved twelve pounds to buy her own machine, and walked out; she has lived her independent life ever since.

Harry finds Kate's evident satisfaction with her new life confounding; soon-to-be-Lady Sims, although ignorant of the past relationship between Kate and Harry, seems to find Kate's “contented” look and her expert typewriting intriguing in ways that unsettle Harry's sense of self-importance. In a humane attempt to soothe her former husband's

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perturbed pride, Kate parrots back to him the opinions she has rejected but knows that he adheres to still: “Who cares what a typist thinks?” she asks.⁴ Whether scholars and the public-at-large like to believe it, our practices of reading, watching, studying, teaching, collecting, cataloging, and thinking about literature still tend to dismiss what a typist thinks and what a typist does. We are still more invested in “finished” literary products and recognizable figures of authorship than we are in the many people and ephemeral processes that enable Literature and Authors to become such dominant fixtures in the public consciousness.

By contrast, I would like to know what the actual, flesh-and-blood typist who turned this handwritten manuscript into clean copy might have thought about Kate and Harry’s debate over identity, work, and cultural value. The front page of the 1910 typescript of *The Twelve-Pound Look* tells us who was responsible for this transformation: it bears the stamp of “Miss Dickens’s Type-writing Office.” Ethel Kate Dickens (1846–1936)—the proprietor of this bureau and Barrie’s longtime collaborating typist—is a likely inspiration for the typist Barrie creates here; the fictional and the actual typist even share one of their given names: Kate.⁵ Ethel may even have “performed” the role of Kate by reading parts back and forth with her clerks as she verified the typescript’s correctness.⁶ Such collaborative readings were, after all, one proofreading practice in her bureau, which means that her offices in Wellington Street, and later Tavistock Street, might have been the sites of numerous first “public” performances-of-sorts for this and many other theatrical works of the period.⁷

The idiosyncratic, and persistently understudied, processes of interpretation and (re)production that make up the lives of literary works-in-progress, and the literary laborers who perform these processes, have intrigued me ever since I first came across the passing mention of “Miss Dickens’s Typewriting Service” in Nicholas Frankel’s *The Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray*. Ethel’s office produced the typescript of Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for *Lippincott’s Magazine* in 1890; Ethel, therefore, not only read but reproduced some of the bits of the novel that were later deemed most “daring and scandalous,”⁸ long before the rest of the world had access to them. My acquaintance with her has grown since that first encounter; indeed, I have sought her high and low, and, despite the general tendency to overlook her labor and its significance, I have managed to collect numerous traces of her life and work, thanks to the ever-increasing digitization of Victorian periodicals. Ironically (or perhaps too predictably), it was her

relationship to a celebrated author that kept her from being utterly lost to official memory: mainstream news reporting from the opening of her typewriting business in 1887 to her death in 1936 periodically circulated snippets about Ethel's literary-adjacent life, though such coverage was mainly due to (and shaped by) the fame of her grandfather, Charles Dickens.

Ethel's literary labor amounts to far more than a mere reflection of Dickens's authorial legacy, but recognizing it as such requires rethinking the way literary value is often understood. Recuperating the work of Ethel Kate Dickens as "literary" in nature means refusing to accept originality as the prime (or only) measure of literariness: valuing the activities of the independent literary typist thus confounds more orthodox answers to the question of significance. The value of Ethel's professional contributions in her own time and in ours, I argue, derives from the interpretive and transformative processes of which her labors were composed, processes that are not necessarily detectable in the typescripts and public texts (the products) they generate. The ephemerality of these labors has meant that individual historical typists and their definitionally nonoriginal contributions have been overlooked as worthwhile subjects of specifically literary study. Academic and pop-cultural interests alike still tend to reflect the dismissive rhetorical position that Barrie's (and Ethel's) Kate mimics: "Who cares what a typist thinks?"⁹

Although the literary elements of Ethel Kate Dickens's professional processes are hard to document and define, the present essay begins to recover, record, and reevaluate them. In this essay, I ask readers and scholars, somewhat as Kate challenges the audience of Barrie's play, to reconsider the value of the literary typist and her contributions to literary culture. By expanding our imaginative and analytical conception of the processes that make literature meaningful, we may more readily revise the discourses and institutions of literary history that have marginalized this and other vital figures for over a century and a half. We may even begin to see the creative landscapes of past and present with fresh appreciation for the many ways in which literature is an inherently dynamic experience.

1. REWRITING THE LITERARY

Ethel Kate Dickens played an active and integral role in the literary-theatrical world of London from 1887 until her death in 1936. Yet mentions of her work as an independent literary typist, business owner, and

playwright are primarily found in footnotes or endnotes, if at all.¹⁰ Ethel Dickens, as a historical figure in her own right, only exists on the margins of official memory.¹¹ Such a fate is not surprising since her career was cast by contemporary commentators and journalists as secondary to and faintly indexical of the accomplishments of her famous grandfather, the novelist Charles Dickens, and merely supportive of the work of her famous clients, including Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, and J. M. Barrie, among others. This fate is, however, an unwarranted one, for, as I argue, Ethel Dickens's labor consisted of meaningful, if hard-to-define, intellectual processes that contributed to the publishing and performance networks of late-Victorian and early twentieth-century London. Whether taking dictation or producing typescripts from manuscripts, the literary labors of Ethel Dickens involved serving as an interpreter as well as a copyist; as a first "public" reader as well as a possessor (and protector) of privileged artistic knowledge. Evidence from newspapers, typewriting manuals, trade periodicals, and rare personal accounts suggests that she performed significant interpretive and social work in the material creation of the literary texts that her labor made legible for the wider world.

Ethel Dickens's work required her to exercise critical reading practices and interpretive acumen in service to reproductive copying. Yet it is in part the copied nature of the literary products in which her office specialized that precludes her labor from fitting within most of the critical frameworks that attempt to explain the significance of literature in the present and as history. Bette Lynn London argues in *Writing Double* that the lack of a fittingly flexible critical model for understanding a wider variety of literary processes is due primarily to "the idea of the author," which "has probably done the most to blind us to the fact that writing is *not* generally a solitary activity."¹² Though few scholars of literature would positively defend the myth of the singular author-genius as the primary origin of textual worth, the author (or a related variation, the "great work") remains at the center of a dominant if implicit paradigm for organizing literary studies. And though attention to the material media of literature is "nothing new" (as Leah Price reminded us back in 2006), there nonetheless remains a dearth of practicable ways to think, talk, teach, and write outside of these author- and product-centered models of analysis.¹³ Rachel Sagner Buurma concisely surveys the growing intersections among book history, media studies, and literary criticism in "Publishing the Victorian Novel," noting that a disjunction persists between scholarly values and practices: "literary critics and historians of

the Victorian period have generally accepted poststructuralism's insight about the composite and socially constructed figure of the author. . . . Yet we have been slow to accept the practical, methodological ramifications of this insight."¹⁴ Despite the persistence of an author-centered paradigm in the practice of literary studies more broadly, scholarly interest in the work of editors, calligraphers, compilers, indexers, annotators, printers, correctors, publishers, and other collaborating or literary-adjacent laborers has increased substantially in the last several decades. But this expanded critical vision of the literary seems more central to scholarly practice in some fields than in others.¹⁵ To reiterate and extend Buurma's point, whether one considers current university curricula for English and literary studies programs, or whether one takes a survey of mainstream representations of literature, the theoretical acceptance of the "death of the author" seems to have had limited practical effect within the academy, and still less outside of it.¹⁶

It is unsurprising, then, that Ethel Dickens's life and legacy as an independent literary typist have been circumscribed and marginalized by "type": between her world-famous forebear and what she did in her professional life, representing Ethel Dickens, and integrating her labors into official accounts of literary history and meaning, we run into the problem of significance. Do literary-adjacent types, such as Ethel Dickens, really matter? And, if so, how might that require us to change the ways we think about, record, and express the nature of literature more broadly? To avoid the interpretive entropy of attempting to answer such questions, most discourses about Ethel Dickens published during her lifetime were shaped to coincide with certain culturally prescribed figures of identity. She was usually characterized by the press as one of various types of copying: she was a poorer copy of her grandfather, she was a copyist of the great works of others, and she was the latest copy of gendered cultural character-types (such as the "Typewriter Girl" or "The Angel in the Office").¹⁷ As someone whose personal originality would always be considered secondary to her grandfather's and whose primary professional output was, by definition, re-productive rather than generative, Ethel Kate Dickens was both publicly visible and permanently overshadowed.

Valuing Ethel's work and contributions to a more holistic vision of literary production means looking at public and published literary texts as key experiences in a broader web of diverse and ongoing literary processes; it means teaching and cataloging the public text's related material ephemera (such as the typescripts Ethel produced) as active nodes in a

dynamic network of enduring processes of meaning-making in which we, as readers and scholars, are also engaged participants. Ethel's intellectual and transformative acts of typewriting invite us, through the determined (if necessarily incomplete) materiality of history, to reimagine literary-theatrical networks of the past and their import to both the present and the future. Indeed, sustained attention to such literary-adjacent labors may enhance our ability to comprehend the range of creative activities that characterize literary experiences in the digital realm. Understanding the novel—though not “original”—types of literariness of the literary typist's contributions may even enable us to develop a vocabulary and methodology more suited to meeting the challenges of literary studies in a world of decentralized and digitally proliferating literary-artistic experiences.

2. THE SELECTIVE BIOGRAPHY OF AN INDEPENDENT LITERARY TYPIST

Ethel Dickens was a pioneer in the field of typewriting for the literary world, opening her typewriting business in 1887 in London's theater district. The professional venture is written up in the “Table Talk” feature of *The Literary World* as well as in “Dramatic Gossip” in the *Athenaeum* in February 1887.¹⁸ Both notices highlight Ethel's inherited celebrity status; she is “a granddaughter of the novelist” in the *Athenaeum*'s note, and, more subtly, Ethel is touted as “well-known in literary circles” by *The Literary World*. The *Athenaeum* also notes that this typewriting office specializes in reproducing actors' parts and promptbooks, a focus that remained part of Ethel's business plan throughout her career. The use of typewritten rather than hand-copied promptbooks and licensing copies for the Lord Chamberlain's review was just then becoming common practice, and Ethel's business grew quickly. In 1888 the anonymous writer (listed only as “A Dramatist”) of *Playwrighting: A Handbook for Would-Be Dramatic Authors* claims that typescripts are an absolute *must* for those aspiring dramatists wishing their works to be read and performed in London theaters. John Russell Stephens, in *The Profession of the Playwright*, claims that “By 1890 typescripts account for about half the texts submitted for licensing [to the Lord Chamberlain's office] and within a couple of years, certainly by 1895, the hand-written MS had all but disappeared.”¹⁹ It is little wonder that “Miss Dickens's Type-writing Office,” taking in legal, journalistic, and other types of work as well as theatrical and literary texts, boomed during this period.

By January 1888, Ethel was advertising in Walter Besant's specialty publication *The Author* (as well as the *Times*, the *Athenaeum*, and other venues) with her offices located at 26 Wellington Street. Many of the theaters in the neighborhood used her typewriting services over the years; George Alexander, actor-manager of the St. James Theatre, for instance, was a frequent customer.²⁰ Perhaps even more notably, her new establishment was above the offices of *All the Year Round*, the literary journal founded by Charles Dickens. In this way, her business address itself served as a kind of geographic and literary *bona fides* for her authority to handle the work of authors and playwrights. Since Charles (or Charley) Dickens Jr., Ethel's father, was then editor of *All the Year Round*, her choice of office locations was no doubt pragmatic as well as strategic.²¹ The advertisements that Ethel ran in *The Author* both clarify her office's location and simultaneously evoke her literary pedigree—if tastefully—by specifying in small italic type beneath the address: (*Over the Office of "All the Year Round"*).²² Even after she moved her business to a new location in Tavistock Street, her family name on the sign outside her offices attracted attention, and not just for her stenographic services. A news item that circulated in U.S. papers in 1902 and 1903 reports that curious passersby would poke their heads into her place of business to inquire whether she was “related to Charles Dickens who wrote etc. etc.”²³

Like other nearly related Dickensians, Ethel inherited a share of public recognition and a specifically secondary type of celebrity status —“inherited celebrity status,” as I call it. Periodicals of the time wrote accounts of Ethel Dickens and her extended family in which these Dickensian descendants were treated as indices of the late, great Charles Dickens himself. The Anglo-American press made no pretense about the fact that Ethel Dickens's self and career became worthwhile reading material mainly insofar as they served as pale reflections of the Inimitable's own identity and literary legacy. Consider a representative article from 1887, written by Mrs. Robert Porter of the *New York World* and reprinted in other U.S. papers, including Chicago's *Daily Inter Ocean*. Its title is enough to indicate some of the secondariness that characterizes the condition of inherited celebrity status: “Charles Dickens's Family: Of Ten Children, None Attain the Distinction of Their Father. Art, Literature, Commerce, Law, the Army, and the Navy Their Fields of Labor. Charles Dickens Jr., His Wife, and One Daughter Now Traveling in America.” Ethel Dickens's typewriting office, newly opened in 1887, merits a passing mention in this article; her venture “promises

to succeed.” But that seems faint praise indeed, especially after the article opens with the blunt claim that “It is a curious and indeed an unfortunate thing for the world that Charles Dickens, born a genius which could not be accounted for by any law of heredity, failed to transmit his great gifts to any of his ten children.” In the next lines, Ethel’s generation enters Mrs. Porter’s rhetorical crosshairs: “Whether [these gifts] will reappear in the grandchildren . . . is an interesting query to be answered in the future.”²⁴

The present essay answers the spirit of Mrs. Porter’s “query,” now that we are here in the “future.” The work of Ethel Kate Dickens matters, regardless of its relationship to “genius,” because it illuminates the diversity of valuable literary labor. Ethel’s work demonstrates that interpretive and transformative processes of (re)creation—though not original in nature—nonetheless represent essential elements of, while expanding access to, literary experience.

3. AUTHORIZING THE INDEPENDENT LITERARY TYPIST AS A NEW LITERARY TYPE

The significance of Ethel Dickens as both an interesting individual and a representative figure rests on the professional literary processes she performed in the literary-theatrical and labor networks of her time. Ethel was an independent literary typist who ran a successful typewriting establishment in London for several decades. This position enabled her to provide work at a living wage (twenty-five shillings a week in 1891, reportedly) for numerous female clerks whom she taught to be typists according to her specialized system.²⁵ The “independent” and “literary” elements of Ethel’s career of copying, as I will argue below, make her and others like her—Marian Sutton Marshall and R. V. Gill, for instance²⁶—distinct enough in production networks to merit more attention than this type of typist has previously received. Nonetheless, there already exists a substantial body of scholarship on the figure of the female typist in Anglo-American cultures in the late-Victorian period and early twentieth century. As Christopher Keep and others have documented,²⁷ typists were frequently called, along with their machines, “typewriters,” suggesting the synecdochal slippage between operator and instrument that characterizes the figure of the Typewriter Girl in so many cultural discourses of the era. Several significant points of agreement emerge among literary critics and cultural theorists working on the history of typewriting, secretarial labor, and the Typewriter Girl, and these correspondences jointly reveal a need for more refined attention to the

many forgotten independent literary typists whose work sustained the literary-theatrical world of the 1880s and beyond.

The first point of critical agreement, epitomized by Friedrich Kittler's theory in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, is that the typewriter led to the perceived "mechanization of writing";²⁸ a creative act previously associated with the embodied mind and hand of the author himself (writing) became alienated, and thus alienating (typewriting). Morag Shiach clarifies the philosophical problem intrinsic to typewriting when she explains that "the typewriter signals radical shifts in the relation between subjectivity and writing."²⁹ Whether employed for explicitly literary endeavors or not, the typewriter and its products seem to disrupt assumptions about textual authority that handwritten text—through its connection to the embodied mind of the writer—usually leaves unchallenged. Typewritten documents and their processes of creation beg the question, as articulated by Price, of whether a typed text "[owes] its value to the 'mind' that designs it or the 'hands' that produce it."³⁰ The use of the typewriter challenged the authority of the authoring consciousness of each text it reproduced by disconnecting it from its presumed origins in the self of a single determinable producer.

The second point of concurrence is that this crisis of authorship and identity was, unsurprisingly, a specifically gendered crisis. Pamela Thurschwell and Leah Price contend that "the history of the typewriter (human operator and machine) is bound to a history of the contestation and re-installation of gender roles."³¹ Women were considered the ideal typewriters: Victoria Olwell explains that the alignment of the (actual or aspirational middle-class) woman with a newfangled writing machine relies on "conceptions of essential difference—women's dexterous fingers and also their ideal passivity, which suited them to their permanently subservient post in the office."³² Female typists, after all, were primarily responsible for accurately reproducing through their embodied labor the original fruits of other (presumably male) minds: such labor fits the traditional stereotypes of respectable femininity precisely because it parallels the presumed dynamics of sexual reproduction.³³ The prevalence of women in the clerical fields that include literary typewriting may in part explain the change in census categories that Price and Thurschwell note took place in 1901. "The 1901 British census which expelled shorthand writers from the category containing 'authors and journalists' to another entitled 'mercantile occupations,'" they argue, "marked not just the social demotion of a group whose value had dropped as its numbers increased, but also the extent to which

writing had become the terrain contested in a larger battle between body and mind.”³⁴ The gendering of typewriting betrays a distinctly modern preoccupation with assigning value (whether personal or literary) based on “originality”: if typewriting is feminized, then the presumed masculine character of authorship can remain intact, and radical individual autonomy can remain the standard paradigm for personal identity. The practices and representation of typewriting illuminate fundamental intersections among questions of gender, authority, and identity as they circulate in modern Anglo-American discourses. For this reason, analyzing the role of the independent literary typist at the turn of the twentieth century directly contributes to ongoing conversations about how the academy and popular cultures recognize traditionally invisible labor.

As the hashtags #thankyoufortyping and #thanksfortyping, active on Twitter and elsewhere since at least 2017,³⁵ abundantly demonstrate, the act of typewriting with or for another person usually involves a multitude of intellectual, physical, and social types of work that more often resemble editorial and authorial collaboration than rote repetition or mindless drudgery (though the difficulty of maintaining keen attention to detail while mechanically reproducing text is no small task in itself). The multivalent and often idiosyncratic nature of literary typewriting brings us to the third commonality—a slippage of categories—in the existing scholarly work on typewriting. Simply put, critics tend to conflate the independent literary typist with all other types of typists who worked in the same period. The “office girl” or “business girl” of the corporate typing pool and the personal secretary working for a “great man” are frequently lumped together with more flexible figures like Ethel Dickens.³⁶ The following section shows, however, that the independent literary typist was considered—at least within the stenographic fields themselves—a position apart from other typewriting jobs, and that difference tended to rest upon this typist’s place of employment in a female-run copying office and upon the specifically interpretive skills required by these typists to do their work well.

By considering the independent literary typist as a *sui generis* figure, I do not wish to suggest a diminished significance for other literary-adjacent laborers of the period. Indeed, the work of the literary typist in some ways closely resembles the work of printers’ proofreaders (“readers”) and compositors. It could even be argued that the printer’s reader and compositor in generations past had enjoyed even more interpretive freedom than the copying typist: until at least the mid-nineteenth century, printing staff had been expected to correct or even insert

punctuation in authors' texts for publication. However, John Bush Jones and Allan Dooley both suggest that by the late-Victorian period, the readers and compositors of most printing houses were encouraged to defer to the whims and wishes of the authors—or to the managing editor, in the case of periodical jobs—whose works they proofed and set.³⁷ As the notion of the author-genius became more engrained in Anglo-American cultures, even matters such as punctuation were considered part of the author's ultimate meaning and thus part of the literary value of the published text.

Furthermore, by the late 1880s and early 1890s, authors and playwrights were more and more often having their work typed before submitting it to a printer's reader.³⁸ The shift toward sending typescripts rather than manuscripts to the printer for publishing, or to the theater for consideration and rehearsals, suggests that typists not only would have taken on, by default, at least some of the "correcting" work of the printers' staff, they also would have inherited the not-insubstantial challenge of deciphering difficult handwriting. The interpretive labor of reading for an author's intent, in some cases, would devolve to the literary typist. Given these broader (if unevenly realized) adjustments in the order of publishing processes, the weight of both textual interpretation and social labor—dealing with the authors themselves—would have become an integral part of the independent literary typist's required work. Further distinguishing printers' staff from independent typists is their standing in the public imagination. These two types of literary copyists were thought to differ greatly along lines of class and gender: despite the existence of women proofreaders and compositors,³⁹ typesetting and printing work was widely considered the territory of working-class tradesmen. The typist, on the other hand, at least at the start of Ethel's career, was seen as decidedly female, and almost always as privileged in education and in social status.⁴⁰ In this way, while the literary-adjacent labor of printers' staff and literary typists features some significant similarities, the precise conditions, processes, and public perceptions of their work make these figures distinct.

4. INTERPRETING TYPEWRITERS, TYPING INTERPRETERS

Differentiation between "secretarial" typists and independent literary typists enables a more in-depth examination of the varied, and idiosyncratic, intellectual and social work required of the latter position. Representations of Ethel Dickens's career, and of literary copying more

generally, show that the specific textures of the labor expected of clerical and literary typists likely differed in two main ways. First, Ethel Dickens was an independent laborer: she ran her own office, which meant handling questions of money, marketing, networking, human resources, technology, and quality control of her product (that is, clean, correct, and timely typescripts). Unlike a private or even a corporate secretary, she had no man or group of men to oversee her typewriting work or her business decisions. Further, the de facto gender segregation practiced in her offices, which hired only female clerks, would have underscored the “socially exclusive”⁴¹—and socially excluding—nature of her enterprise. Ethel Dickens was described by numerous news reports in the Anglo-American press as a “keen business woman” who occupied a “position of trust” and “responsibility.”⁴² A special report in the *Chicago Tribune* and *The Republic* (St. Louis, Missouri) in October 1902 even notes Ethel’s “original ideas which she put to use in her business,” and which enabled her to charge high prices. Her reportedly unique methods of literary reproduction also required—according to this article—that she train clerks especially for her office’s proprietary approach.⁴³ As these and other reports suggest, Ethel was the ultimate authority within her bureau: the “presiding Genius,” as one styles her.⁴⁴ Her lived experiences, particularly the types of agency she could exert in her professional life, would be quite distinct from those of, for instance, the newest stenographer on the bottom rung of a hierarchical commercial office.⁴⁵

Second, between the public recognition of “Miss Dickens’s Type-Writing Office” for its connection to Charles Dickens and its advertised focus on literary and theatrical texts, the office seems to have attracted a clientele with a variety of stenographic needs that tended strongly toward the intellectual and the creative. Unlike stenographers and typists, whom Ethel Dickens, in her writing on the subject of typewriting work, classed as “secretaries” (that is, persons who held posts in a single commercial, governmental, or legal office), Ethel and her office of clerks were charged with reproducing texts that represented many disciplines and genres.⁴⁶ For instance, four years after first establishing her office, Ethel Dickens tells the interviewer from the *London Phonographer*—a trade journal dedicated to the phonographic fields—that on the day of their conversation the clerks in her office are handling one play (prompt copies for a theater), “two novels, essays, sermons, and a botanical treatise.” “It will be seen that the typewriting work is indeed various,

and to succeed well as a typewriter, wide and thorough education is necessary," the feature's writer observes.⁴⁷

In 1902 an article by Ethel on the subject of typewriting appears in the *Weekly Scotsman* and other newspapers;⁴⁸ in it, she similarly describes "the work in a large copying office," such as her own, as being "far from uninteresting or mechanical," if also "strictly confidential in character." Successful "full speed clerks," Ethel argues, must possess "a good knowledge of the English language and general topics" in order to accurately and quickly copy documents. As she observes, while a "knowledge of spelling and punctuation" is important, such knowledge can be perfected while learning the rudiments of the machine-workings. Nonetheless, she claims, "[it] is obviously impossible to copy any kind of literature intelligently without" a thorough knowledge of syntax, grammar, and more than just "the easiest words" in the dictionary. Referring "constantly to a dictionary" to decipher the meaning of a manuscript or check the existence of an unfamiliar word, she dryly quips, "does not tend to hasten the road to the required goal," which in this article is to "Earn a Comfortable Living" as a female typist.⁴⁹

To summarize and extend Ethel's point, the typist at the helm of an independent bureau specializing in reproducing novels, plays, and journalistic writing had to be well informed and well read in order to be an effective reader, interpreter, and copyist of texts. Because such work was paid "by the piece," ease of understanding a manuscript enhanced the ease of reproducing it quickly and correctly. To do this job well, one had to be a good reader on several levels, all while keeping the often-saleable literary secrets of client-writers in strictest confidence. But while Ethel's article on the typist's financial prospects touts the varied nature of the copied content and the more "sociable" atmosphere of the copying office as inducements to many women who pursue this field of typewriting, she rather paradoxically claims that secretarial posts in commercial offices tend to be better paid because of the "somewhat higher standard of intelligence" required. A secretary in a specific business, Ethel writes, must learn the "technical terms" appropriate to the business and must, after all, "be entirely responsible for her own faults" in her final products. Speed is not so important for these typists, she claims, as are accuracy and method.⁵⁰ By contrast, as reported in the *London Phonographer's* 1891 article and as indicated in the *Weekly Scotsman* by Ethel herself, the work of clerks in a copying office was always subject to review by one another and ultimately by the head of the bureau: "In a copying office, all the work is read over, and any errors rectified before

being dispatched.”⁵¹ In this way, the only typist in Ethel’s office who seems truly to qualify as an “independent literary typist” is Ethel herself. The responsibility for the output of her office is hers alone; she reads and corrects all outgoing typescripts, and thus implicitly—in this article at least—places herself as equal to, and yet even more independent than, the better-paid secretarial typists working in commercial offices.

Ethel is far from the only expert to note differences among typewriting posts; the distinction of the independent literary typist from the clerk in a copying office, and of those typists from the secretarial typist, seems to have been generally understood, at least within the stenographic fields. For instance, in a piece titled “Typewriting as It Should Be” in the *London Phonographer* of 1894, a writer by the pen name of “Norbiton” propounds their ideas for regularizing typing and office practices. In it, they include one important caveat about which types of typists ought to submit to their suggested improvements: “I do not know anything about the copying of plays. In that branch of the work there may or may not be uniformity. As to the copying of authors’ manuscripts, where the whole of the book may be copied in one office or by one person, probably my remarks may not have much weight.”⁵² Literary and theatrical typewriting work, Norbiton suggests, operates under a different system of best practices from other sorts of typewriting; indeed, it may be idiosyncratic to the particular bureau or typist who performs it. Norbiton specifically, and, in Ethel’s case, accurately, implies that a more unified, holistic reading experience of a text goes into the production of typescripts in literary typewriting.

Even Pitman’s *Manual of the Typewriter* (1893 edition), often referenced as the prime authority in typewriting practice at this time, seems to uphold the distinction between secretarial labor in a “commercial house” and the specifically intellectual nature of typewriting for the authors and actor-managers of the world. While placing the work of a copying office as “second” in importance to that of a commercial business, Pitman’s *Manual* concedes that the qualifications to work in a copying office are “considerably more numerous” than for other types of typewriting jobs. “[A] varied acquaintance with literature, the names of authorities, classical quotations and expressions in current foreign languages; a thorough knowledge of punctuation, spelling, and composition; and a mastery of literary and legal technique” are all considered necessary to the success of the copying-office clerk—let alone for the head of the bureau—who works with literary, theatrical, and other genres of texts. Despite the explicit gender and class bias of Pitman’s *Manual*’s (and many other stenographic publications’) recommendation that only

“young ladies and gentlemen—chiefly[] young ladies” should occupy typing posts, the fundamentally intellectual nature of the reading-work that undergirds good typewriting is also made explicit.⁵³

Pitman’s *Manual* attests to the fact that typists of literary texts were expected to read the works-in-progress and to use their interpretive skills in service to more accurate acts of reproduction. Careful, critical reading was a first step in producing excellent and correct copy: “It is a good plan, if the time can be spared, to read the copy through before actually beginning work. . . . [A] sentence should never be begun until it has been read through, and its meaning, as far as possible, mastered. . . . [A]lways read and understand sentences before committing them to typewriting.”⁵⁴ The repetition of this point in the manual bears noting because it was so often contradicted by popular and even specialist discourses about typewriting of the same era. Orwell cites a sardonic piece in *The Writer*, a journal for professional authors, that insists the most valuable typists are those who understand nothing of the work they reproduce: “The speediest copyists and typists the writer has met were those who worked mechanically and did not know what a story was after it was copied.”⁵⁵ Not only was such automatized reproduction not, in fact, the practice in Ethel Dickens’s offices, but it seems unlikely that any literary typist (or perhaps any typist at all) would have considered such an approach as good or effective practice.

Such assumptions about the “merely mechanical” nature of typewriting and typists’ minds are not hard to identify,⁵⁶ however, as authorial anxieties about the privileged knowledge and intellectual capacities of the “hands” that reproduce the authors’ works. After all, to a large extent it is the typist who transforms a text from a semiprivate object into potentially public experiences; as Alexander Welsh has argued, “writing and copying are” not opposite but rather “analogous activities,” with the “second being” the “multiple extension of the first.”⁵⁷ Thinking of the literary typist’s labor as performing part of the crucial process of transformation from private to public illuminates the vital, though not “original,” types of agency inherent in the typist’s work. Recalling, too, Ethel’s description of the hierarchy of responsibility for the quality of copied texts in a copying office, the importance of not just reading but reading *well* becomes even more pressing for the independent literary typist at the head of the typewriting bureau. These women were professional readers whose labor made literary experiences accessible to audiences beyond the semiprivate spaces of the writer’s home and the copying office.

The ephemeral types of interpretive agency that the independent literary typist would have exercised in her career are myriad and yet nearly impossible to document or fully recover. While many scholars have pointed out the highly prescriptive nature of typewriting work, based on evidence from typing manuals and documents of stenographic systems in general (editions of Pitman's *Manual* especially), it seems that the niche market of copying plays and novels and other literary works was, if not excepted from the prescriptive disciplinary tendencies of typewriting, at least recognized by some authorities to be partially beyond the reach of such fixed standards. For instance, in the same edition of Pitman's *Manual* from 1893, literary and theatrical work is treated as a specialized form of typewritten production that requires in the typist not only "a good general education" and "a taste for reading the best literature" but also holds out the possibility for limited kinds of interpretive decision-making.⁵⁸ In the manual's sections on "Authors' Copy" and "Dramatic Work," along with details on technical and formatting requirements for these copies, Pitman's *Manual* emphasizes the interpretive elements of the typewriter's task without dictating the methods for undertaking such intellectual work—which, by its very nature, must be case-by-case and idiosyncratic to the typist and the text. On the task of "deciphering illegible handwriting," the manual proclaims that "*no rules upon the subject can be laid down*": my added emphasis here shows the manual's unusually casuistic approach to the interpretive work of the literary typist. While "a space should be left" where any word is wholly undecidable,⁵⁹ it seems unlikely that a successful typist could afford to return a typescript riddled with random blanks; there was incentive to figure out as best as one could through context and close reading the otherwise illegible words of an author. And while manuals of "commercial phrases" and form letters were available to assist typists with the secretarial tasks of constructing or deciphering common formats and language used in given industries, the expansive possibilities of literary content obviate the creation of such clearing-house manuals for the literary fields.⁶⁰

The creation of actors' promptbooks containing single parts relied especially on the interpretive sensibilities of the typist who undertook to produce them. Actors' parts that were used in rehearsals only contained the lines of the single character for whom the copy was created, and, as such, these copies required the typist to insert "cues" for the actor. "Cues" consisted of "a few words" that "convey[] a definite idea" in the speech of another character that directly precede the character's line. "As the insertion of cues is often left to the discretion of the copyist,"

Pitman's *Manual* offers the above guidance for how best to decide upon which "cues" to insert.⁶¹ However, the vastly varied nature of any given play's content, and of any given character's part, let alone what might be considered a "definite idea" by a specific actor portraying that specific part, suggests the extent to which the typist's own judgment could affect these important but distinctly process-oriented copies. How might Ethel's choices in selecting the content and breadth of cues have changed the tenor and the rhythm of rehearsals at the St. James's Theatre, Daly's Theatre London, the Royal Court Theatre, and other venues for which her office produced parts? The answers to this and related questions are, ultimately, unknowable precisely because the experiences they seek to understand are ephemeral and hard (if not impossible) to document. Nonetheless, such experiences could affect the production, reception, and popularity (or obscurity) of any given play; Ethel Dickens's labor—her interpretation, her choice of cues, the accuracy and timing of her typescripts—could have real if untraceable effects on the life of the literary-theatrical work.

The interpretive elements of her work also overlapped with more traditionally "creative" aspects of literary production. At least one of Ethel Dickens's clients reinforces the possibility that collaborative creation could form a part of literary dictation, if in somewhat modest terms. When Ethel gave up running a busy office later in life, she worked independently for clients, taking dictation. Journalist, theater critic, and playwright James Agate, one such client, fondly records in his memoirs his sense that his writing altered under the influence of Ethel's typewriter. He describes how her "antiquated" "machine" (by the 1920s her typewriter was already outmoded) "declined to take down any sentiment less than noble."⁶² Agate here relies on the common conflation of typist with typewriting machine to claim that Ethel's own judgment entered into *his* literary output through her acts of stenography and typewriting. Ethel's discreet—but seemingly detectable—interpretive sensibilities guided him when she served as auditor and transcriber of his dictation. How much of her contribution was conscious on her part or merely self-conscious on his, with a marked awareness of Ethel as his audience affecting his process of composition, goes unrecorded. But the fact that dictation could be, under the right conditions, a collaborative experience of intermental creativity is reinforced here by Agate's account.⁶³ Indeed, Agate's awareness of Ethel as a keen reader and connoisseur of dramatic and literary texts may explain her influence on his creative process. During their dictation sessions, Ethel would have been the

embodied and highly specific audience *with* whom and not just for whom he wrote.

And Ethel would, no doubt, have been a discerning and knowledgeable reader. Through her social and intellectual engagement with authors and texts of all kinds, Ethel would have possessed a deep knowledge of the fields of literature, journalism, and drama, especially in their contemporary manifestations. Of course, her extended family's privileged position within the wider artistic networks of the time would have guaranteed her some access to the authors with whom she worked professionally. Her family's connections likely played at least some part in the relative success and longevity of her business. For instance, a letter from Ethel to Augustin Daly, the American theater impresario who ran Daly's Theatre London in the 1890s, offers her typing services to Daly by appealing first to his acquaintance with her father, Charley Dickens. Only afterward does she gently remind him that she had typed for him previously during a run at the Lyceum, promising further that she would give "prompt and careful attention" to anything he cared to send.⁶⁴ Lucinda Hawksley indicates that Ethel's aunt, the painter Kate Dickens Perugini, encouraged her friends, such as Shaw, Barrie, and W. S. Gilbert, to patronize Ethel's typing establishment, knowing that her "favourite niece" (as Kate's first biographer, Gladys Storey, calls Ethel) needed to earn her own living.⁶⁵

But as an independent literary typist, Ethel's intimate access to and resulting knowledge of potentially saleable secrets of the literary and dramatic trade would have far exceeded what would have come to her through even firsthand social contacts with the likes of Shaw, Barrie, and others. After all, Ethel would have seen works-in-progress long before even many friends of the writers or leading actors for the productions. A letter from Shaw to the actress Ellen Terry on July 7, 1899, about *Captain Brassbound's Confession* reinforces this point, as well as highlighting the many steps and many minds engaged in the literary process: "Finished, finished, dear Ellen. . . . And yet, alas! not finished; for now I have to go over the business again. . . . And then further delay whilst Charlotte deciphers my wretched notebooks & makes a typewritten draft. . . . After that a final revision of the draft; and then Miss Dickens; and then, at last, you."⁶⁶ Ethel's advice to typists who aspired to work in copying offices such as hers is telling about how she understood the evident tension that exists between their—the typists'—privileged knowledge and their marginalized position with respect to the literary world in general: "always bear in mind that the nature of all copying work is of a strictly

confidential character, and that to the outside world [the typist] must be absolutely dumb with regard to it. Indeed, ‘Silence is golden’ might well be taken as the typists’ motto.” Ethel advances this caution just after listing the varied works a copying-office clerk gets to read, starting with “authors’ manuscripts which are sometimes most delightful; plays from the various theatres, equally absorbing.” She also lists “interesting historical letters; letters straight from the seat of war” as other types of engaging materials with which typists work; she lumps together “lawyers’, doctors’, architects’, and surveyors’ work, as well as business papers of all kinds” at the end of what is hard not to read as a distinctly ranked list—ordered, perhaps, according to her own preferences and experiences at the head of a literary-centric typing bureau.⁶⁷ But with the high level of interest that the typist—and indeed the general reader—might feel in these texts-in-process comes, she claims, a high level of needed discretion. Ethel’s choice of “silence is golden” for the “typists’ motto” is telling not only for the implication that the honorable typist would never dream of benefiting financially from divulging her insider knowledge, but also for the fact that a typewriting office that leaked elements of its literary clients’ newest creations could hardly stay “golden”—or in business—for very long.

Ethel took this position of trust, publicly overlooked though it was, very seriously, as Agate testifies in his autobiography. One day when she arrived at his rooms to take dictation, he reports, “she let out the fact that Barrie’s new play was to be in four acts, and her remorse at this breach of confidence lasted a month.”⁶⁸ Ethel Dickens’s apparent delicacy on this subject was not merely a quirk of her own, much less an inflation of her importance. Oscar Wilde similarly saw the typist as a functional early reader of his works-in-progress. As Ruth Berggren notes, he drafted *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* under the title *Lady Lancing: A Serious Comedy for Trivial People* and omitted the final line of the play (which repeats the title in classic farce style) from all drafts he sent to the office of Marian Marshall in order to avoid revealing them “publicly” before the play could be produced.⁶⁹ Although Wilde employed Mrs. Marshall while he drafted the four-act version of *Earnest*, and later requested Robbie Ross to use her office for the typing of *De Profundis*,⁷⁰ Ethel Dickens’s office was employed by George Alexander of the St. James Theatre to produce promptbooks and the Lord Chamberlain’s copy for the premiere of the now-standard three-act version of *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1895.⁷¹ Ethel Dickens’s remorseful response to her “breach”

of J. M. Barrie's confidence in her disclosure to Agate shows that she was very much in earnest about her proposed typist's motto and that she had a very clear sense of the cultural and monetary value of the knowledge to which her work as a professional reader and copyist gave her access. The combination of her discretion with the "exacting standards" of her office,⁷² as well as her readerly and technical abilities, may account for the long-term relationships she maintained with Shaw and Barrie, serving both writers as their preferred independent literary typist for many years.

Ethel was a first critical reader to many literary and theatrical productions as they transitioned from private, idiosyncratic objects into reproducible public experiences of page and stage. I have intentionally chosen the descriptor "idiosyncratic" to try to indicate the unpredictable ways in which specific material, social, and other factors intersected to make Ethel's work both interpretively dynamic and yet so hard to trace, document, or categorically define. One example of the materially and socially idiosyncratic nature of Ethel's position as an independent literary typist is given by Gladys Storey, biographer to and friend of Ethel's aunt, Kate Dickens Perugini, in *Dickens and Daughter*. To illustrate both Ethel's humor and her hardworking nature, Storey recounts the anecdote of Ethel's first meeting with Barrie:

One morning [Ethel] arrived a little late at the office, and was hurrying up the stairs, when she encountered a little man holding a number of envelopes in his hand.

"Are you Miss Dickens?" he inquired nervously.

Upon replying that she was, he asked her if she would do some typing for him. Anxious to deal expeditiously with correspondence and other matters in connection with her work, she peremptorily requested him to wait in the office, from which sounded the busy click of type-writers. As the two passed in through the door together she casually inquired his name.

"James Barrie," was the reply.

Henceforth, she did all his typewriting for him. The MS. which at that first interview he required to be copied was written upon the backs of the aforementioned envelopes.⁷³

The pacing of this anecdote, particularly the provocative gap between the revelation of the nervous "little man's" name and the exclusive business relationship that results from this encounter, suggests that Barrie was at least somewhat well known at the date of this first meeting (Storey gives no other chronological clues as to the precise year they met). The fact of his writerly reputation, of course, is part of the narrative's charm: the telling inverts the authority of the celebrated author and

places him—at least at first—as the hesitant petitioner for Ethel’s expert services. Had it been a different author altogether, however, Ethel’s “peremptory” assertion of her own legitimate professional importance—her hurry to see to her independent business concerns—might have cost her a valuable client. Happily for them both, it did not.⁷⁴

Most significantly, this account of Ethel’s first encounter with Barrie and his repurposed envelopes provides a meaningful example of the transformative effects of her processes of interpretive copying. What begins as a handful of unique, reused material objects (idiosyncratic to say the least) bearing little formal relation to a finished work of literature becomes, through her labor, an intelligible and ordered text. Ethel produces from a stack of envelopes the needed set of legible copies, which initial act of transformation enables future acts of “copying” to take place, whether through printing, performance, or both. Her reproductive interpretive processes, in this way, allow his “literary product” to take on the necessary finishes to fit such a designation. He brings her fragments; she gives him a play.

5. THE LASTING LEGACY OF AN INDEPENDENT LITERARY TYPIST?

Regardless of her role in the processes of literary transformation, Ethel’s business and abilities were publicly figured (if at all) as copies—supposedly lesser if also supplementary versions—of the creative work of others. The *Illustrated American* of March 1890 highlights her “skill” in stenography, for instance, but primarily as a reflection of “the great novelist,” her grandfather, who “was so expert with his pencil that he made his first successes as a Parliamentary reporter.” This same snippet, ostensibly about her typewriting office but clearly shaped for a Dickens-hungry audience, closes the description by inviting “any successor of the great English story-teller” to “add perhaps a certain sentimental value to his MSS by having them go through the hands of [Charles Dickens’s] descendant.”⁷⁵ Ethel is at once Dickens’s “successor” and a mere adjunct to his real literary legacy. As his granddaughter, she continues the family connection to stenography, while his later successes as a popular writer are silently set in relief by the implied contrast between his creations and her copies. In this way she is also decidedly *not* his “successor,” as she fails to be an original “story-teller”; instead, her symbolic work is to extend and distribute something of Dickens’s own literary *je ne sais quoi* to his true creative inheritors by serving as a copy of him and a copyist to them. Such was often the tone of periodical reports

about Ethel Dickens's career. In her office, "typewriting reaches a plan almost worthy to be called artistic," but she herself, the newspapers imply, is hardly an artist.⁷⁶

Despite the decided secondariness with which she was represented, Ethel Dickens's individual wit sometimes shows itself in her rare interviews with the press. When asked, "Do you think your grandfather would have approved of your going into business in this wholesale fashion?" Ethel reportedly laughed and replied: "I know he would have preferred I should earn a living rather than not have one."⁷⁷ Such frank comments as these, stressing the fact that she worked to live, considered in conjunction with her position at the margins of official literary history, suggest a way in which Ethel Dickens does, after all, fit a certain "type": her fate, at the very least, seems to reinforce Keep's claim that the "Typewriter Girl" is a figure of "becoming," one that rejects "telos."⁷⁸

The value of Ethel Dickens's labor and legacy is a value of process, not product. Barrie seems to capture something of this ambiguous, but appealing, dynamism of process in *The Twelve-Pound Look* when Lady Sims remarks about Kate, "I thought she looked so alive. It was *while* she was working the machine."⁷⁹ Ethel Dickens undertook work that was necessarily interpretive in nature and yet reproductive of the meanings of other minds; her labor was intellectual yet anti-original, in the sense that her typescripts, when well done, eschewed the introduction of anything "new" into a text-in-progress. Her contributions to the public literary product were decidedly processual in nature: they occurred at moments of transition, they enabled transformation, but they do not fit neatly into the persistently influential "model of single-author agency,"⁸⁰ nor into any originality-centered system of personal value and textual meaning.

By (re)discovering and analyzing representations of Ethel Dickens's work, and attending to what these representations demonstrate about the textures, dynamics, and popular imaginings of her five decades of literary-adjacent labor, we not only recuperate something of the life's work of a frankly fascinating historical individual—we also continue to expand what it means to make a valuable contribution to literary and cultural history. Precisely how this conceptual expansion of literary worth may be practiced more centrally in the field(s) of Victorian studies, complementing other projects of recovery that seek to enlarge the vision of our field, remains to be seen. Certainly Ethel's literary labor may be productively understood as a corollary to scholarly work itself. The labor of critical readers and teachers of literary texts forms a part of the ongoing

life of literature; such labor is always simultaneous, intersecting with the literary work, not subsequent to it. Including Ethel's typewriting in a spectrum of significant literary work challenges today's thinkers to recognize a similar dynamism inherent in our own intellectual accounts of, and effects upon, the "literariness" of any literary experience.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150320000364>.

NOTES

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1. Paxton, "Introduction," xi.
2. Barrie, *The Twelve-Pound Look*, 121 (italics in original).
3. Paxton, "Introduction," xi.
4. Barrie, *The Twelve-Pound Look*, 139.
5. Barrie, "The Twelve Pound Look," signed typescript. In the handwritten draft of this play, Barrie mostly calls the typist "Marion" and the pompous ex-husband "Sir James." During the drafting process, however, Barrie seems to have changed his mind—first about the typist, and later about the ex-husband—inserting "Kate" as the typist's name in some parts of the MS ("The Twelve Pound Look," signed manuscript, pp. 3, 12½, 16½, and 17). To clarify these alterations for future copies, Barrie also left a handwritten message at the top of the typewritten play-in-progress: "*To Typist – Note Sir James to be*

called Sir Harry throughout and Marion to be called Kate” (“The Twelve Pound Look,” signed typescript).

6. Throughout this essay I will often refer to Ethel Kate Dickens by her first name only, “Ethel.” This is to give Ethel her own distinctive textual presence by avoiding confusion with her larger-than-life grandfather, Charles Dickens. “Dickens” in these pages refers to him.
7. “Charles Dickens’s Granddaughter,” 292–93. The writer reports that she sees one clerk “intently poring over a legal document of formidable appearance, whilst her companion by her side was reading aloud from the original in order to detect any clerical errors which might have been made” (292). It seems likely that other kinds of texts were also submitted to performed methods of verifying accuracy—including the novels and plays that made up the bulk of Ethel’s business.
8. Wilde, *The Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray*, 40, 50, 21, 34.
9. As a possible exception to this tendency, see Schreiner, “Printing the Screenplay.”
10. For more on her playwrighting, see Pennington, “Ethel Kate Dickens,” <http://thelatchkey.org/Latchkey10/featured10.htm#EKD>.
11. Ethel Dickens is devilishly hard to find in any relatively recent texts of scholarship, though she receives a passing mention in a variety of sources. In all cases below, her inclusion is accounted for with reference either to her grandfather and/or to her role as typist to literary celebrities. Sources that mention Ethel include: Joseph Donohue, “Reception and Performance History of *The Importance of Being Earnest*,” in *Oscar Wilde in Context*, ed. Kerry Powell and Peter Raby (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 307; Susan Cory-Wright, *Lady Tree: A Theatrical Life in Letters*, endnote 328; Sidney P. Albert, “From Murray’s Mother-in-Law to Major Barbara,” in *Shaw* 22 (2002): 41; Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), ix; Russell Jackson and Ian Small, “Introduction,” in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1:xxxv; Richard Fotheringham and Angela Turner, *Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage, 1834–1899* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2006), fn. 23. While this is not an exhaustive list, it is close to one.

Furthermore, there is no Ethel Dickens archive; her letters and personal papers, where they still exist, often go uncataloged. Even typescripts bearing her stamp are rarely connected with her name

in the catalogs and finding aids of the archives in which they reside. Ethel Dickens thus has almost no officially detectable presence in the structures that currently exist to trace, analyze, and communicate the nature of literary history and value.

12. London, *Writing Double*, 3.
13. Price, "Introduction," 9.
14. Buurma, "Publishing the Victorian Novel," 90n11.
15. Fields that seem to be centering literary-adjacent processes include medieval and early modern studies; work on writers and communities who are systemically marginalized; and projects framed by critical theories of race, gender, sexuality, and the postcolonial. As an example, see Patricia Pender's edited collection *Gender, Authorship, and Early Modern Women's Collaboration* (2017), and particularly the lucid introduction to the collection coauthored by Pender and Alexandra Day. They suggest that, despite the expansion of conceptions of authorship in the late twentieth century, recent trends in computational models used in attribution studies are reinvigorating attention to the individual (and, I would emphasize, individualistic, essentialized) notion of the author (7–8).
Allison E. Fagan's *From the Edge: Chicana/o Border Literature and the Politics of Print* (2016) offers another example of a more complete and inclusive view of meaningful literary processes. Fagan examines how "the literal borders of the text function as a space where the interests and desires of authors, publishers, editors, reviewers, and readers contest for control over its meaning" (2).
16. Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 1322–25.
17. Keep, "The Cultural Work," 404–7. The "Angel in the Office" is a term defined by Thurschwell in *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking*, 94.
18. "Table Talk," 187; "Dramatic Gossip," 266.
19. A Dramatist, *Playwrighting*, 24; Stephens, *The Profession of the Playwright*, 188.
20. Berggren, "History of the Four-Act Play," 31. Augustin Daly used Ethel's services to produce the prompt copies for "The Orient Express" in October 1893 for Daly's Theatre, London (Autograph and typewritten letters signed from Ethel Dickens to Augustin Daly [manuscript], [2]). Ethel also produced a typescript for the unperformed Henry James play *The Outcry* in 1909 (Houghton Library, Harvard University [MS Am 1237.12, (2)], https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/24/archival_objects/342855). The stamp

of Ethel's office also appears on the front of the licensing copy of Henry Arthur Jones's 1893 play, *The Tempter* (Stephens, *Profession*, 189) and on the typescripts for Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* by the Royal Court Theatre under Harley Granville-Barker ("Hedda Gabbler: A Play in 4 Acts," typescript, between 1904 and 1907, Miss Dickens's Type-Writing Office, MS Thr 35.2. Houghton Library, Harvard University, <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/collection/data/969658691>).

21. Gottlieb, *Great Expectations*, 41–43, 135.
22. [Advertisement for Miss Dickens's Type-writing Office,] *The Author*, 88. Nonetheless, writers Beckles Willson and James Agate both declare that they remained ignorant of Ethel's connection to Charles Dickens until their intimacy with her increased. Willson, *From Quebec to Piccadilly*, 147–49; Agate, *Ego IV*, 52.
23. "Miss Ethel Dickens," *Daily Republican*, n.p.
24. Porter, "Charles Dickens's Family," 118.
25. Information about her pay rates for typists and her humane hours of work circulated in U.S. and UK papers in 1889–91, including in the snippet "Women Type-Writers," 566. These snippets about Ethel's ethical employment practices take part in the public debates of the period about the exploitation, or "sweating," of female clerks; see more in Young, *From Spinster to Career Woman*, 120–23. As the *Middlesbrough Daily Gazette's* version of this report notes, "Miss Dickens doesn't sweat her clerks" ("Chips" 4).
26. Marian Marshall opened what is thought to be the first independent typewriting bureau in London in 1884 or 1885, though she had financial help from the Society for the Employment of Women ("The New Convenience of Civilization," *Pall Mall Gazette*, n.p.; Young, *From Spinster to Career Woman*, 115). See also Young, "The Rise of the Victorian Working Lady"; Mullin, *Working Girls*, 25–26; Frankel's *Masking the Text*, 85–86; and Keep, "The Cultural Work," for more on Mrs. Marshall. Miss R. V. Gill is also mentioned in newspapers and trade journals as an independent typing office owner; her ads run adjacent to Ethel's throughout 1890 in Besant's *The Author*, and her office is the prime example of typewriting education in "Technical Teaching for Women," 361–62.
27. Keep, "The Cultural Work," 403–7.
28. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 386.
29. Shiach, *Modernism, Labour and Selfhood*, 63.
30. Price, "From Ghostwriter to Typewriter," 213.

31. Price and Thurschwell, *Literary Secretaries / Secretarial Culture*, 1. Kittler, Shiach, and many others have noted that women were widely represented as the perfect operators of the new typewriting machines.
32. Olwell, "Typewriters and the Vote," 57.
33. Keep claims there was a "retroactive gendering of the [typewriter] machine at the level of its popular representation" as middle-class women were encouraged to fill the need for cheap white-collar labor ("The Cultural Work," 404–5).
34. Price and Thurschwell, *Literary Secretaries / Secretarial Culture*, 3. As Kittler puts it, the typewriter "inverts the gender of writing" and thus the "material basis of literature," as the "Ur-author"—regardless of the sex of individual writers—has functioned symbolically as "male" since the invention of the printing press (*Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 183–84, 186).
35. Bruce Holsinger, University of Virginia, is credited with beginning the hashtag #thankfortyping by BuzzFeed News in 2017: www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ishmaeldaro/thanks-for-typing-with-your-two-aching-fingers. Thanks to Paul Fyfe for bringing these hashtags to my attention.
36. Gray, "A Policy of Procrastination."
37. Jones, "Victorian 'Readers,'" 55, 57; Dooley, *Author and Printer*, 3–6, 7–13, 54–55, 124–27, and chapter 7.
38. Stephens, *Profession*, 188; Holt, "The Art of Type-Writing," 659–60. Regarding typewriting, Holt claims: "Printers and editors appreciate its legibility, and authors save much expense in correcting proofs by availing themselves of it. Indeed, in many firms across the Atlantic manuscripts that are likely to be published are typed before they are submitted to the reader" (659–60).
39. See Marianne Van Remoortel's *Women, Work, and the Victorian Press* for more on women printers and publishers.
40. Mullin argues that the gender-segregated spaces of typewriting bureaus constructed the "aura of gentility" that characterized this career (*Working Girls*, 25–26). Despite its perceived gentility, however, typewriting became a down-going career field after 1900; see Young, *From Spinster*, 10–14.
41. Mullin, *Working Girls*, 26.
42. "Dickens's Granddaughter Is a London Stenographer," n.p.; "Charles Dickens' Granddaughters," 5; [Untitled], *Phillipsburg Herald*, n.p.; "His Granddaughter Objects," n.p.

43. "Dickens's Granddaughter," *The Republic*, n.p.; "Dickens's Granddaughter," *Chicago Tribune*, 50.
44. "Is a Typewriter," *Minneapolis Journal*, 12.
45. Early, "Technology," 322. See also n.15 on Ethel and the Dickens centenary.
46. Dickens, "The Typist," 2.
47. "Typewriting Offices—2," 26. A photograph portrait of "Miss Ethel Dickens" was embedded on page 25 of this article in *The London Phonographer* (see online supplementary figure).
48. Both the *South Wales Daily News* (March 5, 1902) and the *Weekly Post* (Yorkshire, January 31, 1902) also advertise the upcoming publication of an article by "Miss Ethel Dickens" about how a typist can "Earn a Comfortable Living." Ethel's seems to be one of a syndicated set entitled "Woman's Work: By Women Workers."
49. Dickens, "The Typist," 2.
50. Dickens, "The Typist," 2.
51. "Typewriting Offices—2," 26.
52. Norbiton [pseud.], "The National Union of Typists," 88.
53. Pitman & Sons, *Manual of the Typewriter*, 55–56.
54. Pitman & Sons, *Manual of the Typewriter*, 30–31.
55. *The Writer* (1911), 152, quoted in Olwell, "Typewriters and the Vote," 71.
56. Dickens, "The Typist," 2. Ethel objects repeatedly to the perception that typewriting is "merely" rote labor.
57. Welsh, "Writing and Copying," 30.
58. Pitman & Sons, *Manual of the Typewriter*, 58, 60–61, 55–56.
59. Pitman & Sons, *Manual of the Typewriter*, 56.
60. See F. S. Humphrey, *Humphrey's Manual of Type-Writing* (New York: Haight & Dudley, 1887).
61. Pitman & Sons, *Manual of the Typewriter*, 59, 60–61.
62. Agate, *Ego IV*, 52.
63. See London, *Writing Double*, chapter 6; and Wershler-Henry, *The Iron Whim*, chapter 8, for more on dictation and collaboration.
64. Autograph and typewritten letters, 1893, [2]. Robert Gottlieb notes that Charley was well liked in London's literary scene (*Great Expectations*, 41, 142, 235).
65. Hawksley, *Charles Dickens's Artistic Daughter*, 226; Storey, *Dickens and Daughter*, 178–79.
66. Shaw, *Collected Letters*, 2:92.
67. Dickens, "The Typist," 2.

68. Agate, *Ego IV*, 52.
69. Berggren, "History of the Four-Act Play," 27.
70. Frankel, *Masking the Text*, 85–86, 88.
71. Berggren, "History of the Four-Act Play," 29–31.
72. Stephens, *Profession*, 189.
73. Storey, *Dickens and Daughter*, 178–79.
74. John Evans, a young relative who lodged in Ethel's home, attests in his autobiography that Barrie relied on Ethel's typing through the 1920s. Evans "liked to think that Barrie had Aunt Ethel in mind when he wrote" the description of typists as "quite the nicest sort of women" in act 4 of *What Every Woman Knows* (*Insect Delight*, 6).
75. ["Miss Ethel Dickens"], 95.
76. "Charles Dickens' Granddaughters," 5.
77. "Miss Ethel Dickens," n.p.
78. Keep, "The Cultural Work," 419.
79. Barrie, *The Twelve-Pound Look*, 141 (my emphasis).
80. MLA Committee on Scholarly Editions, "Panel 612," 858. This panel sought to interrogate how "scholarly rationales" privileging individualistic types of authorial agency may contribute to continued "colonization and marginalization" in the production of scholarly editions.

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