*Embracing the Christmas spirit, **Martin Weller (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/blog-contributors/#Martin_Weller)** looks to some Dickensian inspiration and finds that the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future look a little too familiar…*

In keeping with the festive season, I'm going to frame some thoughts on stages of academic publishing with a Dickensian motif. I'm trying to develop an approach that covers three phases of a journal article's life, so let's go for a Christmas Carol.

The Ghost of Articles Past – Scrooge is shown his own past Christmases, and given to reflect and reinterpret them. The Ghost says he is there for Scrooge's 'reclamation'. For articles, they are usually published in a journal, where they may receive an initial flurry of interest, and unless they become a standard text they fall into obscurity (indeed most never emerge from obscurity). As I mentioned in my last post, I'm interested in the possibilities that open access allows for a new life for articles, for them to be taken, republished in different collections or reused in different contexts. This can happen with existing, proprietary articles but it's a closed process, it is open access that allows for the generative, innovative reuse that will allow articles to be reclaimed.

This idea is somewhat in its infancy in terms of meta-journals (http://metaedtech.com/)and having a critical mass of open access content, but in other ways one of the oldest practices online with bookmarking, linking and blogging. So it indeed resembles the first of Dickens' spirits in being "like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium".

The Ghost of Articles Present – This is the easiest one, as it represents the norm. I've written about academic publishing a lot, especially in this chapter of my book

(http://www.bloomsburyacademic.com/view/DigitalScholar_9781849666275/chapter-ba-9781849666275-chapter-012.xml), so I won't repeat it all here. But despite the many criticisms we may have of it, the carefully researched, well-written and peer-reviewed article has a strong place in academia and is in many ways the core practice that allows it to distance itself from commercial or marketing influence. But it's also a bloated industry in its own right and one that is both bountiful and undergoing change, just as Scrooge is in the midst of change as he views the different interpretations of present Christmas. So we can both see the current publishing model as akin to the Ghost who was "a jolly Giant, glorious to see" and also one who

like the Ghost of Christmas Present is destined to fade soon.

The Ghost of Articles Yet To Come – one of the most interesting developments over recent years has been the rise of the physics pre-print repository arXiv. Articles that are 'published' here are not peer-reviewed, so can be pre-publication, or unpublished. An initial filter is applied, which is that the article is of reviewable quality. To quote the arXiv founders (http://people.ccmr.cornell.edu/%7Eginsparg/blurb/pg02pr.html): "that they would not be peremptorily rejected by any competent journal editor as nutty, offensive, or otherwise manifestly inappropriate, and would instead at least in principle be suitable for review."

ArXiv has become the *de facto* distribution medium for scholarly articles in Physics, with Sir Martin Rees (http://edge.org/q2010/q10_2.html) commenting that it has "transformed the literature of physics, establishing a new model for communication over the whole of science. Far fewer people today read traditional journals. These have so far survived as guarantors of quality. But even this role may soon be trumped by a more informal system of quality control, signalled by the approbation of discerning readers".

The Last of the Spirits.

These are articles that have not yet been published, but could be. They are thus akin to the Christmases of the future that Scrooge sees – they are shadows, possibilities, but not definite. In the removal of the heavy peer-review process this approach strikes fear into many academics, like the Ghost who "was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form… the Spirit neither spoke nor moved"

My plan is to try and cover all three of these aspects. I have the Meta EdTech Journal, am an editor on JIME (http://nogoodreason.typepad.co.uk/jime.open.ac.uk), and am trying to set up an arXiv type pre-print for ed tech. I think people often see new technological approaches supplanting old ones, but it's the complementary nature I find interesting. It is the advent of alternatives to previously monolithic systems that is exciting.

So, join with me and Scrooge in saying:

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!"

This blog (http://nogoodreason.typepad.co.uk/no_good_reason/2011/12/the-three-ghosts-of-open-access-articles.html) was originally posted on Martin Weller's own blog, the Ed Techie (http://nogoodreason.typepad.co.uk/).

Related posts:

1. By championing open access publishing, the academic community can bring us closer to making research available to all. (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/10/28/championing-open-access/)

2. There is a pathetic lack of functionality in scholarly publishing. We must end for-profit publishing and allow libraries to make available the works of their scholars for all (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/11/09/functionality-academic-publishing/)

3. Continual publishing across journals, blogs and social media maximises impact by increasing the size of the 'academic footprint'. (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/10/26/academic-footprint/)

4. Universities are increasingly moving towards recognising digital scholarship despite conflicting messages that favour traditional publishing in journals

(http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/10/14/universities-digital-scholarship/)

5. As scholars undertake a great migration to online publishing, altmetrics stands to provide an academic measurement of twitter and other online activity (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/11/21/altmetrics-twitter/)