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Dickensian London and the Photographic Imagination

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Curated by Claude Baillargeon

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Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan

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1. Antoine Claudet, *Charles Dickens,* ca. 1849. Half-plate daguerreotype.
Courtesy The Library Company of Philadelphia.
(not in exhibition)

Dickensian London and the Photographic Imagination

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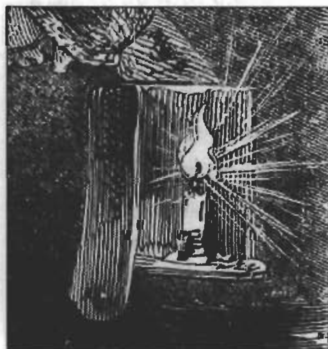


Conceived as the first survey of Victorian photography within the context of Dickensian studies, this exhibition and its catalogue feature a diversity of image-making practices, including portraiture, spirit photography, architectural representation, social documentation, photomontage, and allegorical *mises-en-scène.* The vast differences between these approaches are reflected in the organization of the exhibition, which follows three lines of inquiry, each indicative of a theme explored in visual terms. The first, "Counterfeit Presentments and Apparitions," evokes the paradoxical relationships between Dickens's experience as a daguerreotype sitter, his sustained interest in ghostly apparitions, and the dubious claims of spirit photographers. With "Icons and Relics" the focus shifts to the illusion of "having-been-there" and the evocation of Dickens in certain views of old London. The third segment, "Fiction and Artifice," explores the characterization of street types, which varies from the allegorical language of artistic expression to the ever-illusive pursuit of objective documentation.

By the time the discovery of photography was publicly revealed in early 1839, Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was already an accomplished writer. Among the titles contributing to his rising fame were *Sketches by Boz* (1836-39), *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), and *Oliver Twist* (1837-39). While the French and the English quarreled over each other's claims regarding the priority of the photographic invention, Dickens remained focused upon *Nicholas Nickleby*, a task completed by October 1839 as daguerreotypomania spread far and wide.

Of Counterfeit Presentments and Apparitions

While Dickens left no testimony concerning the advent of the medium, it is known that he experienced the trial of sitting for Richard Beard, England's first daguerreotypist, as early as spring 1841. Disgruntled by the process, he advised a friend against having her portrait taken: "If anybody should entreat you to go to the Polytechnic Institution and have a Photographic likeness done—don't be prevailed upon, on any terms. The Sun is a great fellow in his way, but portrait painting is not his line. I speak from experience, having suffered dreadfully."[1] Not atypical, this response reflects the physical and mental discomfort associated with the infancy of daguerreian portraiture. Blinded by bright sunlight and restrained by a cast-iron headrest, Dickens would have been forced to endure some thirty seconds of total silence and uncomfortable immobility. The unfamiliar, mysterious, and startling nature of the ritual left many an observer aghast.

Despite the misery of this initial encounter, the novelist agreed, though not without reluctance, to pose more frequently as the technology evolved. Around 1849, at least two plates were exposed by Antoine Claudet, Beard's main competitor in London (plate 1).[2] Then, in late December 1852, John J. E. Mayall orchestrated another of what Dickens described as an "interview between myself and the Sun," a fruitful sitting that produced five daguerreotypes.[3] While Dickens still sensed the "slight rigidity and desperate grimness" that he viewed as "some of the peculiarities inseparable from the process," this time he was enchanted with one of the plates.[4] His response was unequivocal: "I am disposed to think the portrait,

by far the best specimen of anything in that way, I have ever seen."[5] The ability to realize the promotional potential of this image was impeded, however, by the absence of a negative which precluded mass distribution. The solution was to engage a skillful engraver to reproduce the one-of-a-kind image. Not surprisingly, there exists an engraving of Dickens based upon a daguerreotype by Mayall.[6] Laterally reversed, this engraving differs from the corresponding daguerreotype in the fact that Dickens sports his famous beard, which was not present at the time of the Mayall sitting.[7] While this suggests a delay between the exposure of the plate and the printing of the engraving, it is not unlikely that this was the very same picture he lauded so enthusiastically.

As Arlene Jackson has proposed, it may even be this successful sitting that led to the well-informed account of portraiture published in the March 1853 issue of *Household Words,* Dickens's own monthly magazine.[8] While his thoughts on the subject were confined to personal letters, his role as editor-in-chief would have led him to approve, if not to oversee the articles that appeared in his magazine. In the first of these, simply entitled "Photography," staff writer Henry Morley and the journal's assistant editor William Henry Wills explored Mayall's establishment in detail.[9] "It was all wholesome latter-day magic that we went up to see practised under a London skylight."[10] Having observed the handling of the camera, the reader is taken behind the scene in "the very head quarters of spectredom" to witness the breathtaking apparition conjured by the action of mercury vapor upon the silver-coated copper plate.[11] A few months later, while reviewing the proofs for a subsequent article on Charles Wheatstone's stereoscope, Dickens complained that the text was too "dreadfully literal" and urged Wills to put "some fancy" into it.[12] One imagines that he was hoping for a more lively account given the astonishing perceptual experience produced by this simulacrum of three-dimensional space.

Three years later, in the midst of writing *Little Dorrit,* Dickens declined Mayall's request for a renewed sitting (as leading photographers were in the habit of updating their stock of celebrity portraits to maintain prominence in the field). "I fear it will not be in my power to sit," wrote Dickens, "I have so much to do and such a disinclination to multiply my 'counterfeit presentments.'"[13] Analogous to the term representation, this archaic figure of speech taken from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (III, iv, 54) may have been intended by Dickens to reiterate his dislike of the sitting process, but it may also reflect the uneasiness with which he viewed himself in a daguerreotype, the so-called "mirror with a memory," as Oliver Wendell Homes put it in 1861. Renown for his power to observe others with exceptional perceptiveness, Dickens was unaccustomed to ponder his own physiognomy in a like manner. As he stated in response to the excitement brought about by the splendid result of his December 1852 sitting, "I suppose it *must have* something good in it. I don't pretend to such a knowledge of my own face, as I claim to have of other peoples' faces."[14] Finally, this portrait may have been the image used for the engraving discussed above, whose retouched beard may explain Dickens's uneasy attitude toward photographic truth. Yet, despite his continuing reservations, Dickens eventually consented to more "counterfeit presentments" and he, like other celebrities, gained tremendous public exposure when the collecting of mass-produced cartes-de-visite became all the rage in the late 1850s. Shown in the exhibition is a larger cabinet card published by the New York firm of G. G. Rockwood on the occasion of the novelist's second North American lecture tour held in 1867-68 (cat. no. 36).

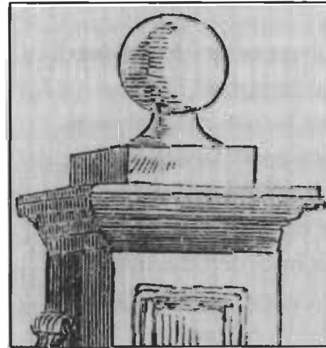
Among Dickens's contemporaries, there were others who responded with mixed emotions, but none with as much foreboding as Honoré de Balzac, whose sitting of May 1842 in the Parisian studio of Louis-Auguste Bisson led him to dread photography in no uncertain terms. According to the later recollections of Nadar, the leading portraitist of his generation, Balzac believed that "all physical bodies are made up entirely of layers of ghostlike images, an infinite number of leaflike skins laid one on top of the other. Since Balzac believed man was incapable of making something material from an apparition, from something impalpable—that is, creating something from nothing—he concluded that every time someone had his photograph taken, one of the spectral layers was removed from the body and transferred to the photograph. Repeated exposures entailed the unavoidable loss of subsequent ghostly layers, that is, the very essence of life."[15]

Though Balzac's theory found few proponents, by the 1860s a number of astute photographers—some might say charlatans—devised clever ways to capitalize upon the spectral connotations of camera images and the growing fascination with spiritualists and mediums. Known as spirit photographs, these amusing "counterfeit presentments" of a different sort purportedly revealed the existence of ghosts and other paranormal phenomena. Cognizant of the accidental blurring of moving subjects in early pictures, spirit

photographers made the best of this peculiar characteristic. Various techniques were devised, but most combined deliberate *mises-en-scène* with lengthy or double exposures and the fleeting presence of shrouded figures. One of the most common tricks was to dismiss the "ghosts" partway through a long exposure in order to record their ephemeral aspect as see-through specters and apparitions.

Dickens's own interest in ghosts and spirits is reflected first and foremost in *A Christmas Carol* (1843), but also in *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848) and in a number of lesser known short stories, including "The Haunted-House" (1859) and "The Signal-Man" (1866). While making the most of these supernatural phenomena from a literary perspective, he despised the fraudulent claims of spiritualists and often mocked their pretensions in his journalistic essays.[16] Perhaps the most satirical of these denunciations can be found in "Rather a Strong Dose," a scathing review of William Howitt's *History of the Supernatural* (1863).[17] In order to debunk the spiritualist humbug preached by the author, Dickens highlighted some of the articles of faith presented to the readers as dogma "with the view of assisting him to make converts."[18] At one point, the reviewer informed "the candidate for examination in pure belief" that a visit to "the spirit-photography department" of Medium Mumler was *de rigeur*, as many of his clients had, according to Howitt, "found deceased friends photographed with themselves."[19]

Known as the originator of spirit photography, William H. Mumler first came to prominence in Boston in 1861. Such an early reference to him in British literature demonstrates how quickly spiritualists capitalized upon the alleged objectivity and assumed truthfulness of the photographic medium. Then universally regarded as unmediated records of reality, camera images were thus ideally suited to provide concrete visual evidence of paranormal activity. Nevertheless, Mumler's necromantic claims and prohibitive services eventually raised broad suspicion. By 1869 he faced fraud charges and some of his fallacious methods were exposed in a well-publicized preliminary court hearing held in New York.[20] Dismissed for lack of evidence, the case did little to prevent the growth of spirit photography, which spread to Britain by the early 1870s. Exemplifying the three instances of purported ectoplasmic manifestation included in the exhibition is plate 13 by Frederick A. Hudson, the earliest British practitioner of the genre. Despite his hostility towards spiritualism and the spirit photographers' abuse of people's credulity, Dickens knew the importance of catering to his audience's craving for ghost stories, just as he consented, however reluctantly, to its demand for his "counterfeit presentments." Such compromises reflect the author's awareness of market forces and his willingness to adapt accordingly.



Of Icons and Relics

From the very infancy of photography, observers noted the medium's inherent ability to convey a sense of place in telling detail. This was already apparent in such early urban depictions as Daguerre's *Boulevard du Temple* (1838-39) or Talbot's *Nelson Column* (1844). The ease with which photographs of cityscapes and architectural monuments create the illusion of "being there" undoubtedly owes something to the camera's predisposition for linear perspective and hyperrealism, but according to Roland Barthes there exists a more fundamental explanation. In his essay "Rhetoric of the Image," the phenomenologist explains: "The type of consciousness the photograph involves is indeed truly unprecedented, since it establishes not a consciousness of the *being-there* of the thing (which any copy could provoke) but an awareness of its *having-been-there*. What we have is a new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the *here-now* and the *there-then*."[21]

Perhaps it would not be entirely fanciful to suggest that a similar notion of "having-been-there" is also at play within the world of Dickensian imagination. As Tony Lynch has noted in his gazetteer, "A fine sense of *place* is also apparent in the works [of Dickens]: you generally know *where* you are with Dickens. The England that he knew leaps from his pages—at times exciting; at times heavy with the cloying atmosphere that we associate with the grimmer aspects of the Victorians—yet always with that sense of 'being there.'"[22] Lynch's inquiry, which surveyed the remnants of the English sites associated with the writer and his work, amply demonstrated that "locations were invariably borrowed from reality and then rebuilt in his imagination."[23] While much of Dickensian London

has disappeared, some sense of the architectural sources and urban settings that inspired him can be gleaned, as if "having-been-there," from nineteenth-century photographs. It is unfortunate, however, that only a limited number of relevant images were produced during the writer's lifetime, as the first concerted efforts to photograph old London did not originate until the mid 1870s.[24]

While Parisian photographers were preoccupied with representing the city's architectural heritage from the very beginning, their British counterparts did not share a similar urgency until later in the century. This may be due, at least in part, to the impact of the British patents on the daguerreotype and calotype processes which impeded the initial growth of the medium. In addition, it is as if the well-established graphic tradition perpetuated by wood engravers and popular illustrators like George Cruikshank and Hablot K. Brown (known as 'Phiz'), both of whom worked closely with Dickens, sufficed to fulfill the representational needs associated with urban issues. Nonetheless, there was one area in which early British photographers excelled and produced in abundance: the portrayal of the nation's industrial might and technological tours de force. This can be seen not only in the documentation of the expanding network of railway stations and bridges, but also in the proliferation of images depicting new building techniques and architectural experiments.

Foremost among the icons of British ingenuity in the Victorian era is the Crystal Palace designed to house The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, the world's first universal exposition held in London in 1851. Acclaimed for its unprecedented scale, its conservatory-like design of iron and glass, and its modular construction, the Crystal Palace has come to symbolize the love of experiment, the practical expertise, and the sense of pride that marked the Industrial Age in Great Britain. Even Dickens, who expressed reservations about the exhibition, marveled at the complexity of the ambitious undertaking. "Two parties in London, relying on the accuracy and good faith of certain iron-masters, glass-workers in the provinces, and of one master carpenter in London, bound themselves for a certain sum of money, and in the course of four months, to cover eighteen acres of ground with a building upwards of a third of a mile long (1,851 feet—the exact date of the year) and some hundred and fifty feet broad."[25]

Two months into the fair, Dickens, who had only visited it on two occasions, made clear that he had enough of the crowds, the media hype, and the overwhelming displays. "I find I am 'used up' by the Exhibition," he wrote to an acquaintance. "I don't say 'there's nothing in it'—there's too much. . . . So many things bewildered me. . . . I am not sure that I have seen anything but the Fountain," by which he meant the wondrous crystal waterworks adorning the building's central transept, "and perhaps the Amazon," a sculpture by August Kiss.[26] Though initially conceived as a temporary structure, the prefabricated building and its fountain were eventually dismantled and rebuilt with alterations in the nearby suburb of Sydenham. Two views of this second incarnation of the Crystal Palace are part of the exhibition, including the breathtaking stereoscopic daguerreotype from around 1855 reproduced as plate 2.

As anyone who has looked through a stereoscope can attest, even a prior understanding of the principles of binocular vision does little to lessen the sensorial wonder educed by the device. In this particular instance, several factors contribute to heighten the illusion, thereby making the awareness of the thing "having-been-there" an even more complex perceptual conundrum. In the first place, this double "mirror with a memory" is itself a mirror image of a symmetrical reflection depicted as if caught in liquid crystal. When viewed as intended within the self-contained world of the stereoscope, these properties, together with the marked spatial hierarchy and steep perspectival lines of the composition, coalesce into a stunningly modernistic simulacrum of spatiotemporal reality. Reminiscent of the novel sensation associated with the velocity of early railway travels, this viewing experience does indeed bring out "an illogical conjunction between the *here-now* and the *there-then*." Though long obsolete as a technology of virtual entertainment, the stereoscope still retains its uncanny ability to bring us back to the future.

As noted above, such engaging testimonies of Britain's industrial might were not uncommon in the mid-nineteenth century, when photographers repeatedly bore witness to those projects destined to become architectural landmarks and cultural icons. Yet, until such time as the expanding railway system brought an end to the centuries-old tradition of coaching inns, practically no one was engaged in documenting old London with the camera.

The urgency of the matter came to the fore in 1875—five years after Dickens's death—with the imminent destruction of the Oxford Arms, a picturesque sixteenth-century hostelry located in

Warwick Lane, a short distance from St. Paul's Cathedral. Alarmed by the thought of this irretrievable loss, the antiquarian Alfred Marks joined forces with other like-minded preservationists to commission photographs of the structure from the father-and-son firm of Alfred and John Bool of Pimlico (see plates 3 and 4). This initial assignment gave rise to the Society for Photographing Relics of Old London, a project that resulted in the publication of one hundred and twenty views representing a sampling of threatened architectural relics and other notable sites.[27] Of these images, only the first twenty-four were taken by A. & J. Bool, with all but one of the remaining negatives exposed by Henry Dixon (or his son Thomas James, who apprenticed with him before formally entering into partnership in 1886). Lavishly printed by the carbon process, the resulting photographs were issued by annual subscription until the demise of the Society in 1886.[28] Twenty-five of these evocative images, each imbued with a palpable Dickensian atmosphere, form a major component of the exhibition (cat. nos. 1-25). Eight of them are reproduced within these pages (see covers, plates 3-8).

As the antithesis of the progressive spirit of experimentation underlying the conception of such iconic monuments as the Crystal Palace, it was a fear of modernization and its threat to the city's architectural heritage that served as the *raison d'être* of the Society for Photographing Relics of Old London. Like Dickens's ambivalence towards the Great Exhibition and its trumpeting of cultural progress and social advancement within an imperialist frame of reference, London's desire to safeguard its architectural relics was tempered by the conflicting imperatives of fast-paced urbanization and cultural preservation. Although the Society's efforts to raise public awareness failed to save more than half of the photographed structures, its concerns gained broader exposure as other organizations joined the argument for preservation.

Seen from another perspective, the Society's photographs afford a rare opportunity to view a number of sites relevant to Dickens and his writings. From Drury Lane and Aldersgate Street to Barnard's Inn and Temple Bar, there are numerous connections that can be readily identified. Some of the most pertinent of these parallels are explored elsewhere in this catalogue. For the moment, let us return to the awareness of the subject *having-been-there,* which, according to Roland Barthes, differentiates photography from other forms of "counterfeit presentments." While the Society's photographs provide concrete evidence—by virtue of their indexical bond with reality—that these structures once existed, it is interesting to consider their temporal relationship with Dickens. When these urban sites made their impression upon the novelist, London photographers, as we have seen, were not yet engaged in the systematic portrayal of the city's architectural patrimony. Once Dickens weaved fragments of these recollections within the fabric of his immensely popular narratives, the places themselves began, at least in the popular imagination, to acquire new connotations which remain to this day. While no evidence suggests that the Society's photographers consciously intended to capture these Dickensian connotations, one might argue that the very awareness of *his* "having-been-there" is now inseparable from these images. Thus it is tempting to view these supposedly objective documents of urban relics as an altogether new form of paranormal imaging, the architectural spirit photograph.

Of Fiction and Artifice

Having explored how Dickens and the phenomenology of photography can be viewed in a common light, I now wish to turn to the notion of characterization, which, like conveying a sense of place, is another representational strategy shared by the novelist and certain Victorian photographers. Defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "the artistic representation (as in fiction or drama) of human character or motives," the art of characterizing has always been regarded as an index of Dickens's genius. Blessed with an acute sense of observation, a fertile imagination, and the ability to metamorphose fact into fancy, Dickens rose to prominence as the very epitome of literary characterization. His influence in this regard, like that of Shakespeare, crossed over disciplines and can be traced within diverse strands of photographic practices. Evidence of his imprint can be found from the illusive pursuit of objectivity professed by social documentarians to the artistic aspiration of painters-turned-photographers and other aesthetes.

Among the earliest intimations of Dickensian characterization within British photography is Henry Mayhew's seminal social-reformist publication *London*

Labour and the London Poor, the first illustrated edition of which appeared in 1851.[29] Broadly regarded as a valuable social survey and oral history of under-privileged and destitute urban dwellers, this work is also noted for its extensive collection of wood engravings, several of which bear the credit line "from a daguerreotype by Beard"—incidentally, the same entrepreneur who portrayed Dickens back in 1841. While this suggests that Mayhew may have initiated the use of social documentary photography as a catalyst for social change, it is curious that historians have not questioned the validity of this claim.

With dozens of engravings allegedly modeled after daguerreotypes—details from a number of which illustrate this catalogue—one might expect some of the original plates to have survived. While the total loss of this substantial collection does not justify doubting the credit line, other factors make it more difficult to accept it at face value. Among them is the disparity between Beard's customary half-figure studio likenesses and the full-length out-of-doors portrayals of the engravings. As a close look at the latter reveals, Mayhew's street folks are too often depicted in complex scenarios and lively scenes beyond the reach of the daguerreotype technology. From the coster-monger riding his cart in a standing position to the gesticulating street stationer to the coffee cups raised in midair, Mayhew—or his publisher—would have us believe that by 1851 the daguerreotype was capable of capturing such animated scenes. Ultimately, despite Beard's renowned expertise, only considerable mediation and artifice on the part of the draughtsman and the engraver engaged in the reproductive process could have yielded suitable results.

Inclined to underscore the legitimacy of his own observations, Mayhew may have been tempted to exploit the purported veracity of photographs, by then a universally held belief. Until such time as the alleged missing plates are recovered, it may be wise not to trust Mayhew's captions any more than his "counterfeit presentments," since without the indication "from a daguerreotype by Beard," few would posit that the genesis of these character studies is to be found in photographs. Admittedly baffling, however, is the specific reference to Beard which, if these reservations are well founded, implies collusion or, at the very least, a willingness on his part not to reveal the truth. Whatever the case may be, there is little doubt that Mayhew's study, like Dickens's emphatic focus upon the plight of the lower classes, helped to galvanize public opinion in favor of social reform.

Also contributing to this contentious debate were visual artists, some of whom strongly believed in the potential of art to raise awareness, elicit compassion, and effect change. Foremost within this circle was the Swedish-born photographer Oscar Gustave Rejlander, who studied the Italian masters while training in Rome as a painter. Influential as an early advocate of art photography, Rejlander drew from diverse artistic and literary traditions as he produced genre scenes of domestic life, biblical reenactments, and moral allegories. Using friends and neighbors as studio models, he staged metaphorical portraits and narrative tableaux that were intended to be interpreted in symbolic terms. Among the themes that he pursued with conviction around 1860 was the depiction of impoverished youths as street peddlers, urchins, and waifs. Three of these poignant characterizations can be viewed in the exhibition, including a seemingly resigned costermonger that is likely to have been inspired by Mayhew's typology of street workers and downtrodden outcasts (cat. no. 32).

Nowhere, however, is Rejlander's empathy for the concerns of social reformists more evident than in *Homeless* (plate 15), a heartrending composition first exhibited in 1861. The product of a skillful *mise-en-scène,* this pictorial fiction dramatizes the weariness and despair of a ragged lad slumbering through the night. To achieve a compelling simulacrum of reality, Rejlander even retouched the upper part of the image in order to show the boy as if illuminated by a bull's eye lantern, used at that time by the London police to patrol the urban underworld. First popularized by Dickens in *Sketches by Boz* (1836-39), the thrill of wandering the city streets at night in search of the

dispossessed had become a trendy, if voyeuristic practice by the time Rejlander conceived his allegory of homelessness. Equally relevant to the reading of this emblematic image is the character of the crossing sweep simply known as Jo, whom Dickens brought to life in *Bleak House* (1852-53).[30] That the two have long been associated is confirmed by Alfred H. Wall, the critic and champion of the artist, who specified that *Homeless* was "another photograph of Rejlander's, which was widely popular . . . of a little outcast of the street, another 'Poor Joe' asleep in a doorway."[31] Hence, the alternative title *Poor Jo,* which is sometimes encountered in the literature, as is *A Night in Town,* a third designation for the same image published in *The Photographic News* of 8 October 1886.

Widely popular in mid-nineteenth century art and literature, depictions of orphans and beggar children were even more common within photographic circles, where the high-minded principles of artists like Rejlander represented only one of many possible forms of production.[32] As shown by other works displayed in the exhibition, there were those who specialized in the mass manufacturing of inexpensive cartes-de-visite intended for a flourishing middle-class market (though, upon occasion, even Rejlander made use of this popular format to reach a broader audience). An entirely different perspective, that of the application of photography to advertising and propaganda, is exemplified by the ornate broadside promoting the good deeds of Dickens's hometown chapter of the Royal Seamen and Marines' Orphan Schools and Female Orphan Home (plate 10).

A related example, not part of the exhibition but historically significant, is the controversial series issued around 1875 of before-and-after portraits of orphans said to have been socially reformed by Dr. Thomas John Barnardo. Formally accused of having manipulated the appearance, demeanor, and personal history of these children to suit the promotional needs of his charitable foundation, Dr. Barnardo argued that the results were not particularized portraits of specific individuals, but generalized depictions of representative types. In a court case of 1877, the doctor admitted that his organization had been less than candid about factual details, but pleaded that his hired photographer was as entitled to artistic license as were painters and art photographers. Rejecting this argument, the court chastised Dr. Barnardo for attempting to pass what it called "artistic fictions" as hard evidence of changing social conditions.[33]

Among the pictorial works that Barnardo may have had in mind when he stated his case were the well-known composite photographs of Henry Peach Robinson, who learnt intricate photomontage techniques from Rejlander. Believing that "a method that will not admit of the modifications of the artist cannot be an art," Robinson advocated the assemblage of photographic fragments in order to achieve seamless compositions technically beyond the reach of single negatives.[34] Contemporaneous with Barnardo's court appearance is the large-scale photomontage *When the Day's Work is Done* (1877), a moral tale of piety masterfully collaged in a nearly invisible fashion from six different negatives. According to Robinson, the idea for this genre scene of rural domesticity came to him as he first met the seventy-four-year-old crossing sweep who served as his male model. Also on view within the exhibition, together with the preceding work, is the seemingly straightforward *Dawn and Sunset* from 1885 (plate 14), for which three negatives were joined to attain an archetypal allegory of the ages of man. It is interesting to note that despite the combined representation of old age, motherhood, and infancy, the title overlooks the age of maternity. Not universally embraced at the time as a legitimate practice, this art of photomontage gave rise to a heated debate concerning the assumed role of the photographic medium as a conveyor of unmediated factuality. Yet, in the eyes of the art photography establishment, the figure of H. P. Robinson loomed large as the leading exponent and chief theorist of the emerging Pictorialist aesthetic that would dominate the scene for years to come.

Meanwhile, in 1877, as Robinson first exhibited *When the Day's Work is Done,* new photographs full of Dickensian flavor appeared in British bookshops. This was the latest undertaking of John Thomson, a fellow of the Royal Geographical and Ethnographical Societies with ten years of experience as an expeditionary photographer in the Far East, but no affiliation to the art-photography community. Initially released in twelve monthly installments, *Street Life in London* is comprised of thirty-seven high-quality Woodburytypes[35] with descriptive texts, some of which were written by Thomson, but whose majority is due to his co-author, the journalist and union activist Adolphe Smith (Headingly).[36] Deliberately conceived in the tradition of Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (and perhaps Dickens, as some suggest),[37] this modest publication sought to remind the British public that "as our national wealth increases . . . the poverty that nevertheless still exists in our midst" cannot be ignored.[38] Viewing "the precision of photography" as the most objective means "to portray these harder phases of life," Thomson and Smith argued that "the unquestionable accuracy of this testimony will enable us to present true types of the London Poor and shield us from the accusation of either underrating or exaggerating individual peculiarities of appearance."[39]

From this body of work, the exhibition presents eleven forms of livelihood assumed by the underprivileged as they struggled to survive in the face of adversity (cat. nos. 37-47). From chimney sweeps and public disinfectors to shoeblacks and sandwich men (plate 12), a sampling of the most picturesque street characters is represented, with undeniable compassion, for the scrutiny of those who could afford the pricey photographs.[40] Yet, despite Thomson's noble intentions, the objectivity which he strove to achieve proved as unattainable for him as it would be for later social documentary photographers. Forced by technological constraints to pose his willing subjects in predetermined settings, Thomson was also susceptible to the inevitable forces of social conditioning and cultural bias that informed his personal vision. As Richard Stein has shown, "to a significant extent Thomson's celebrated urban realism derives from the methodology of his Asian documentaries; these sympathetic glimpses into familiar daily life grow out of a highly developed colonial gaze, embedded in the relations of class and racial types."[41] While Thomson's endeavor deserves credit for pioneering the use of photography as a weapon of social critique, it is equally important to acknowledge that it remains a "counterfeit presentment" of street life in London.

Having surveyed the three visual themes that make up *Dickensian London and the Photographic Imagination*—Counterfeit Presentment and Apparitions, Icons and Relics, Fiction and Artifice—I want to conclude this essay with a few remarks concerning the relationships between truth, fiction, and imagination. If there is one recurring notion that seems relevant to the exhibition as a whole, it is the realization that fiction is ubiquitous within the photographic imagination. Probing beneath the surface of daguerreian mirrors, alluring ghost images, factual testimonies, stereotyped characterizations, and seamless photomontages reveals ample evidence that things are not always as they appear to be. Time after time, the ground shifts below the thin emulsion encapsulating the photographic representation.

While Dickens objected to the scams of spiritualists on the grounds of people's unwavering credulity in the photographic image, he questioned the very ability of the new art to convey truthful representations at all. In his view, the process yields no more than a "counterfeit presentment," more sham than truth. Reflecting upon some of the London neighborhoods that fed the novelist's imagination, we are reminded how difficult it is to dissociate these sites from his "having-been-there" and from the related tales that he so convincingly brought to life. A related pattern of shared inspiration and collective memory is also discernable in Rejlander's allegories, such as *Homeless,* which exemplifies not only Dickens's influence, but also, perhaps, that of Mayhew upon the novelist. Likewise, as we contemplate Poor Jo's predicament, the formal treatment of Rejlander's bowed figure even brings to mind such references as Michelangelo and Raphael. As for the once widespread belief in the unqualified objectivity of typological surveys, there is now no escaping the processes of deconstruction that can discern even the most subtle underlying ideologies. Indeed, photographs are no longer perceived to be

the truthful "windows on the world" that they were once believed to be.

As a final note, I would like to linger for a moment along Portsmouth Street, where passersby can still enter the "Old Curiosity Shop Immortalized by Charles Dickens," or so the sign reads on the shop front. Though most scholars now reject this claim as unsubstantiated, the association is so deeply ingrained in the popular imagination that it defies dissuasion. In the view of it included in the exhibition (plate 9), the ghost of Dickens is particularly palpable. While the building's dubious claim surely qualifies it as a "counterfeit presentment," its historical significance as a structure erected in 1567 makes its status doubly interesting as a relic of old London and an icon of Dickensian fiction. Adding further dimension to this richly evocative set piece drenched in London fog is the loaded cart of Horace Poole, the waste-paper dealer occupying the premises, together with the bobby, the bystanders, and the child in the shop doorway, all of whom seem mesmerized by the hidden photographer. Like the rubberneckers standing along the perimeter of Thomson's *mises-en-scène,* these characters remind us of the mediating agent whose presence—like that of Dickens—may be unseen, but is nonetheless indelible from the very fabric of the image.

Notes

[1] Dickens to Miss Burdett Coutts, 23 May 1841. *The Letters of Charles Dickens* (the Pilgrim edition), ed. Madeline House, Graham Storey, and Kathleen Tillotson, 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-2002), 2:284. This portrait was undoubtedly taken by Richard Beard (or his assistant John Goddard), who set up England's first daguerreian studio at the Royal Polytechnic Institution in March 1841.

[2] See Craig Schneider, "That Mayall is a Claudet: Half-Plate Daguerreotype of Charles Dickens at the Library Company of Philadelphia," *The Daguerreian Society Newsletter* 15, no. 3 (May-June 2003): 4-7. In my view, however, it is more likely that these plates date from 1849, rather than 1852 as suggested in this paper. For one source corroborating the 1849 dating, see Harry Stone, comp., *The Uncollected Writings of Charles Dickens: Household Words 1850-1859,* vol. 1 (London: Allen Lane, 1969), pl. 1.

[3] Dickens to Miss Burdett Coutts, 25 December 1852. *Letters of Charles Dickens,* 6:838.

[4] Dickens to Miss Burdett Coutts, 23 December 1852. *Letters of Charles Dickens,* 6:834.

[5] Ibid. Dickens's emphasis.

[6] For a reproduction of this undated engraving, see Arlene M. Jackson, "Dickens and 'Photography' in 'Household Words,'" *History of Photography* 7, no. 2 (April-June 1983): 147.

[7] For the corresponding beardless daguerreotype, see John Hannavy, "Henry Morley, Charles Dickens and the J. J. E. Mayall Studio," *The Daguerreian Annual* (2001): 112. Incidentally, another beardless daguerreotype of Dickens, a vignetted profile that may have been produced during the same sitting, sold for £40,000 at Christie's South Kensington on 11 May 2001 (ibid., 110). For more up-to-date information on Mayall, including compelling evidence that his Regent Street studio was operational as early as May 1852, see http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/DSmayall.htm. Based upon this latter evidence, my inclination would be to associate the beardless daguerreotypes with the December 1852 sitting, rather than with the 1853-55 period cited by Hannavy (ibid., 111-12, 117).

[8] Jackson, "Dickens and 'Photography,'" 149.

[9] "Photography" was originally published with no byline in *Household Words* 7, no. 156 (19 March 1853): 54-61. Its proper authorship was revealed following its reprint as "Photography 1853 by Charles Dickens?" in *History of Photography* 5, no. 1 (January 1981): 51-57. See Alan M. Cohn's letter to the editor published in *History of Photography* 5, no. 4 (October 1981): 356.

[10] Morley and Wills, "Photography," 55.

[11] Ibid., 56.

[12] Dickens to Wills, 5 August 1853. *Letters of Charles Dickens,* 7:125. "The Stereoscope," also known to have been authored by Morley and Wills, appeared in *Household Words* 8, no. 181 (10 September 1853): 37-42.

[13] Dickens to Mayall, 4 October 1856. *Letters of Charles Dickens,* 8:199.

[14] Dickens to Miss Burdett Coutts, 25 December 1852. *Letters of Charles Dickens,* 6:838. Dickens's emphasis.

[15] Nadar, *Quand j'étais photographe* (Paris: E. Flammarion, [1900]), quoted from the partial English translation by Thomas Repensek, *October,* vol. 5 (summer 1978), as reprinted in Vicki Goldberg, *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 128.

[16] See, for example, Philip Collins, "Dickens on Ghosts: An Uncollected Article, with Introduction and Notes," *The Dickensian* 59 (January 1963): 5-14.

[17] Charles Dickens, "Rather a Strong Dose," *All the Year Round,* 21 March 1863, as reprinted in *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens' Journalism,* vol. 4, *The Uncommercial Traveller and Other Papers, 1859-70,* ed. by Michael Slater and John Drew (London: J. M. Dent, 2000), 202-9.

[18] Ibid., 203.

[19] Ibid., 206-7.

[20] For more on spirit photography, Mumler, and the specifics of his court case, see the virtual exhibition "Do You Believe? Spirit Photography 1868-1935" on the American Museum of Photography website www.photographymuseum.com.

[21] Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image Music Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 44. Barthes's emphasis.

[22] Tony Lynch, *Dickens's England* (New York: Facts of File, 1986), 7. Lynch's emphasis.

[23] Ibid., 8.

[24] For a useful survey, see Gavin Stamp, *The Changing Metropolis: Earliest Photographs of London, 1839-1879* (New York: Viking, 1984).

[25] As quoted in Cecil D. Elliott, *Technics and Architecture: The Development of Materials and Systems for Buildings* (Cambridge: MIT, 1992), 131.

[26] Dickens to Mrs Richard Watson, 11 July 1851. *Letters of Charles Dickens,* 6:428–29.

[27] On SPROL, see Graham Bush, *Old London: Photographed by Henry Dixon and Alfred & John Bool for the Society for Photographing Relics of Old London* (London: Academy Editions; New York: St Martin's Press, 1975); Gertrude Mae Prescott, "Architectural Views of Old London," *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas at Austin,* n.s., no. 15 (1981): 9-40; and Kenneth E. Foote, "Relics of Old London: Photographs of a Changing Victorian City," *History of Photography* 11 (April-June 1987): 133-53.

[28] The carbon process is a permanent photographic process, which uses carbon pigment of any color to form an image in slight relief. It was introduced on a commercial scale in the mid 1860s to alleviate the troublesome fading of albumen prints.

[29] This work originated as a series of essays commissioned by the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper in 1849-50. Published without illustration, the installments were issued as numbered letters under the general title *Labour and the Poor.*

[30] According to Peter Ackroyd, the figure of the crossing sweep in *Bleak House* may have been inspired by one of Mayhew's earlier accounts. See his *Dickens* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1990), 641-44.

[31] As quoted in Robert A. Sobieszek, *Masterpieces of Photography from the George Eastman House Collections* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 182. Rejlander paid further tribute to Dickens in the two versions of a work from around 1860 entitled *Hard Times,* one of which, obtained by double exposure or some other means of superimposition, anticipates the later craze for spirit photographs.

[32] Among those who shared Rejlander's artistic aspirations was Lewis Carroll, whose haunting interpretation of Alice Liddell as *The Beggar Maid* (1858) is widely regarded as a masterpiece.

[33] The case against Dr. Barnardo was first summarized in *The Camera and Dr. Barnardo* ([London: National Portrait Gallery], 1974). See also Jeff Rosen, "Posed as Rogues: The Crisis of Photographic Realism in John Thomson's *Street Life in London,*" *Image* 36, nos. 3-4 (fall/winter 1993): 29-32.

[34] Henry P. Robinson, "Paradoxes of Art, Science, and Photography," *Wilson's Photographic Magazine* 29 (1892), as quoted in Nathan Lyons, ed., *Photographers on Photography: A Critical Anthology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 83.

[35] Patented by Walter Woodbury in 1866, the Woodburytype is a photomechanical printing process yielding continuous-tone images in slight relief. Like carbon prints, which they resemble, Woodburytypes are valued for their rich tonalities that are not subject to fading.

[36] In 1881, an abridged version was also issued under the title *Street Incidents.*

[37] See, for example, Richard L. Stein, "Street Figures: Victorian Urban Iconography," in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination,* ed. Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 247.

[38] As stated by Thomson and Smith in the preface to *Street Life in London* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, [1877-78]).

[39] Ibid.

[40] As stated on the protective wrapper for the initial installment issued on 1 February 1877, each set of three Woodburytypes and their description cost 1 shilling and 6 pence.

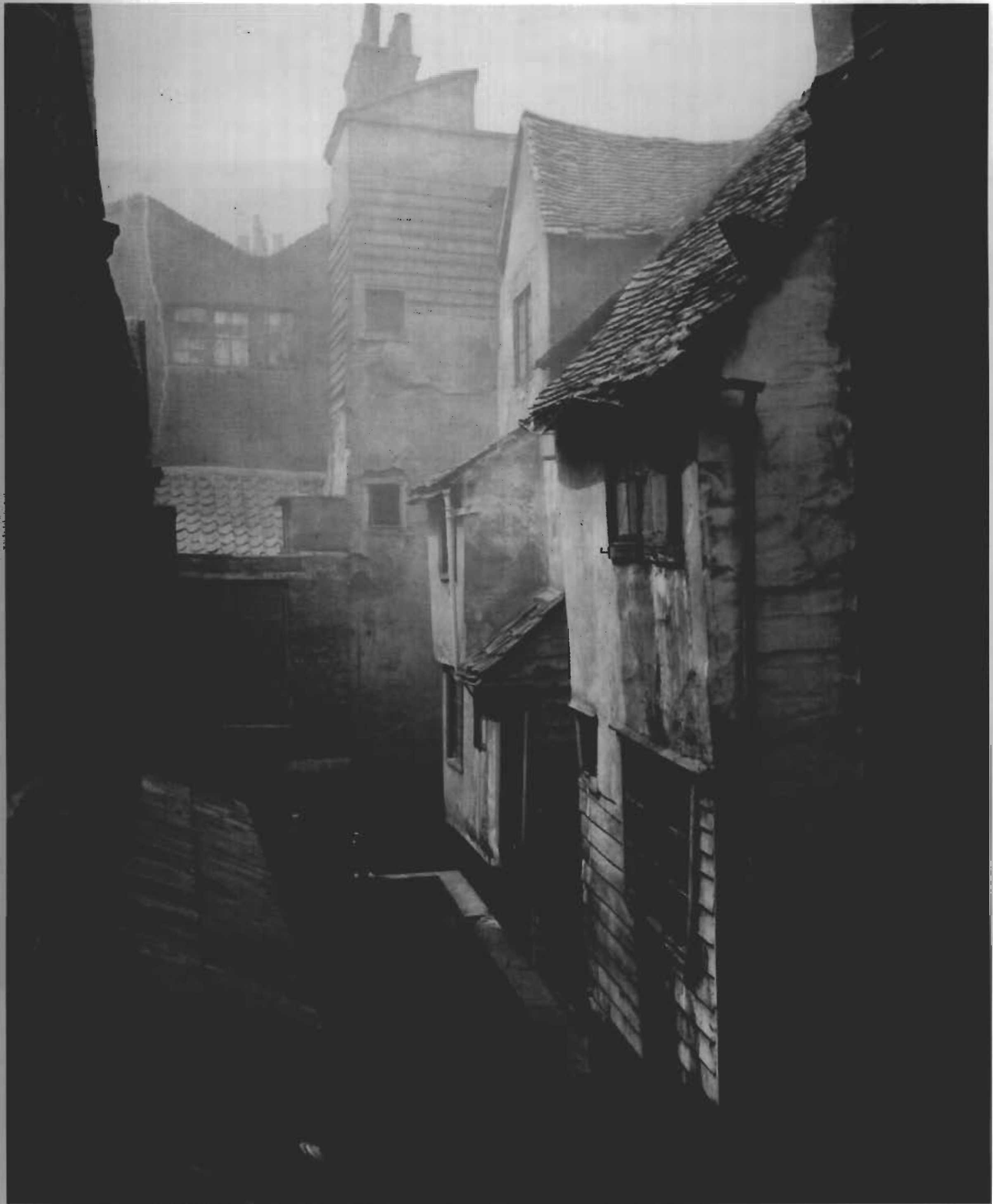
[41] Stein, "Street Figures," 249.

2. Unknown photographer, *Osler's Crystal Fountain in the Crystal Palace, Sydenham,* ca. 1855 (cat. no. 52).
Wm. B. Becker Collection/American Museum of Photography.

3. A. & J. Bool, *Oxford Arms Inn (from the Old Bailey towards St. Paul's)*, 1875 (cat. no. 5).
George Eastman House Collection.

4. A. & J. Bool, *Oxford Arms Inn Yard,* 1875 (cat. no. 2).
George Eastman House Collection.

5. A. & J. Bool, *Cloth Fair (Poors' Churchyard Looking East),* 1877 (cat. no. 10).
George Eastman House Collection.



6. A. & J. Bool, *Cloth Fair (Poors' Churchyard Looking West),* 1877 (cat. no. 11).
George Eastman House Collection.

7. Henry Dixon, *Barnard's Inn Courtyard,* 1879 (cat. no. 15).
George Eastman House Collection.

8. Henry Dixon, *King's Head Inn Yard, Southwark,* 1881 (cat. no. 19).
George Eastman House Collection.

9. M. L. (possibly Millar & Lang), *The Old Curiosity Shop, Portsmouth Street,* ca. 1890s (cat. no. 29)
George Eastman House Collection.

"Prowling About" London: Dickens's Pen and the Photographic Lens

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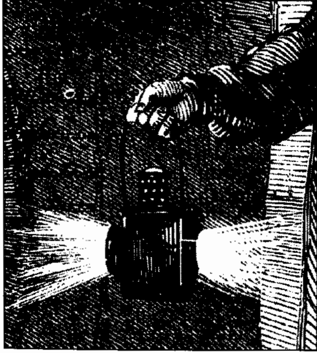


"[I]n this age three things are clamorously required of Man in the miscellaneous thoroughfares of the metropolis. Firstly, that he have his boots cleaned. Secondly, that he eat a penny ice. Thirdly, that he get himself photographed."[1] Thus wrote Charles Dickens in September 1860, one hundred forty-three years before this exhibition's exploration of the connections between Dickens, London, and nineteenth-century photography.

Charles Dickens enjoyed a long and intimate relationship with London, and perhaps no other English writer has been so closely connected to the Victorian city. His contemporary, the writer and social commentator Walter Bagehot, praised Dickens's penning of London with a painting metaphor: "There are scarcely anywhere such pictures of London as he draws."[2] This opinion is echoed by twentieth-century literary critics, for whom Steven Marcus speaks when he names Dickens "one of the great poet-novelists of the modern city."[3] Dickens even linked his brief writer's block in 1844 when he lived in Genoa, Italy, to his inability to walk the streets of London: "Put me down on Waterloo-Bridge at eight o'clock in the evening with leave to roam about as I like, and I would come home, as you know, panting to [continue writing]."[4] Dickens's avid pedestrianism (he enjoyed walks of fifteen to twenty miles at a brisk pace, preferably at night) allowed him to observe and represent the myriad sights/sites of the city.[5] His literary genius, informed by his strong emotional identification with city "Others"—children, the disabled, the poor, fallen women, and criminals—resulted in fifteen novels and numerous stories, sketches and essays. Dickens's genius found food enough for a lifetime of writing in his childhood suffering as a virtual orphan. His parents, anticipating bankruptcy (shortly thereafter, his father was arrested for debt, and the family moved into the Marshalsea debtor's prison), sent him to work at a boot-blacking warehouse, pasting labels on bottles of boot blacking (polish). At age twelve, he worked six days a week, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and earned six shillings a week. He lived alone in lodgings, bought his own food, and became well acquainted with the streets of the city.[6] Later, in his twenties, working as a newspaper reporter, Dickens increased his knowledge of the city and its inhabitants, and began writing his journalistic sketches of London life, *Sketches by Boz*. Dickens never stopped portraying the city, its vitality and its darkness. In the 1830s Oliver Twist deliciously anticipates his escape from authority: "London! that great large place! nobody—not even Mr. Bumble—could ever find him there!" while in 1870 Dickens transports readers to a London opium den in his unfinished *Mystery of Edwin Drood*.[7]

Dickens, dying unexpectedly at the age of 58 in 1870, did not live long enough either to see John Thomson's series of photographs or read Adolphe Smith's commentaries on the photographs, published in 1877-78 as *Street Life in London*. However, he did experience the invention and rising popularity of photography, since both his lifetime, 1812-1870, and the reign of Queen Victoria, 1837-1901, intersected the development and early years of photography as technology and art, 1825-1915.[8] Dickens noted

the popularity of photograph-albums filled with photographic portraits, decried the sensationalist photographing of "an appalling accident" of a high-wire performer, disbelieved in spirit photography, and cited the photographing of criminals as evidence of technological advancement.[9] Photography becomes an historical marker in *Great Expectations*, when the protagonist Pip introduces his orphan state: "I never saw my father, or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photography)."[10]

Beyond Dickens's awareness of photography as a growing cultural phenomenon, his ability to visualize characters and scenes in his work was repeatedly compared with photography and painting. In 1856, George Eliot, later a famous novelist herself, praises Dickens's working-class characters as figures portrayed with "the delicate accuracy of a sun-picture." In a retrospective of Dickens's career after his death, R. H. Hutton lists as one of his "great literary gifts" the "power of observation so enormous that he could photograph almost everything he saw."[11] But some critics complained of what seemed to them over-whelming detail. George Brimley compared *Bleak House* to "a daguerreotype of Fleet Street at noon-day . . . though the daguerreotype would have the advantage in accuracy of representation." The wealth of detail exhausted William Forsythe: "The eye of the spectator [of a painting] can take in the whole of the picture at one glance, but the mind of the reader must go through the successive points of a description until it becomes fatigued by the multiplicity of details."[12] Some of the discomfort about physical detail might arise from Dickens's subject matter, because Dickens creates characters "soiled with the mire and soot of the London streets," chronicling the so-called "lower regions of society."[13] As such, Dickens as a social reformer and artist may participate in the dilemma facing photographers whose work is featured in this exhibition, the dilemma of the power relations between artist and subject, articulated so clearly in John Tagg's *The Burden of Representation*. At what point do "the insatiable appropriations of the camera" further marginalize the poor, rather than awakening the social consciences of those persons more economically advantaged?[14] Also, the issue of what it really means to be "true to life" in one's representations of street life and street people arises in the work of both Dickens and Thomson.

Oliver Twist's prostitutes, thieves, fencers of stolen goods, and boy-pickpockets earned their livings from the Victorian street, and it was this novel that Dickens prefaced with his famous defense of his novel's truth to life, its literary *realism*. Behavior such as Nancy the prostitute's, Dickens wrote in his 1841 *Preface*,

> [involves] the best and worst shades of our nature: much of its ugliest hues, and something of its most beautiful; it is a contradiction, an anomaly, an apparent impossibility; but it is a truth. I am glad to have had it doubted, for in that circumstance I should find a sufficient assurance (if I wanted any) that it needed to be told.[15]

Nancy's amalgam of sin and virtue later became the basis of Dickens's most riveting performance of his fiction, the murder of Nancy by Bill Sikes. Dickens's insistence on the "truth" of his portrayal reverberates in claims made in the *Preface* to *Street Life in London*, by photographer John Thomson and social reformer Adolphe Smith:

> We are fully aware we are not the first in the field . . . [still, we cannot] be too frequently reminded of the poverty that nevertheless still exists in our midst.
>
> And now we also have sought to portray these harder phases of life, bringing to bear the precision of photography in the illustration of our subject. The unquestionable accuracy of this testimony will enable us to present true types of the London Poor and shield us from the accusation of either underrating or exaggerating individual peculiarities of appearance.[16]

The authors of *Oliver Twist* and *Street Life in London*, respectively, assert the truth value of their representations, and claim that work like theirs needs to come before the public's eye and heart. Both expect to be doubted, but while Thomson and Smith use language indicative of nineteenth-century empiricism and social sciences and insist on "unquestionable accuracy" and "true types," Dickens defends the possibility of individual moral redemption even for the prostitute Nancy, and by extension, for all the city's fallen. He draws on the geography of the city to make his point: "Nor did I doubt that there lay festering in Saint Giles's as good materials towards the truth as any flaunting in Saint James's," thereby leveling the moral distinction between London's poor slums and its affluent areas.[17]

Thomson's most important visual predecessor was Henry Mayhew, whose illustrated series, engravings based on daguerreotypes by Beard, accompanied by commentary, was entitled *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). Mayhew attempted to classify "street folk" into types such as "the wanderers and the settlers—the vagabond and the citizen," relying on "contemporary anthropological discourses on race and class."[18] Mayhew saw costermongers (those who sell items from a street barrow or stall) as "a distinct race," set apart from the respectable, largely middle-class Victorians who made up his primary audience.[19]

The engraving reprinted here from Mayhew's work, entitled *Street-Seller of Dogs' Collars* appears as an almost sinister figure, his hat and shaggy hair dipping over one eye, and wearing most of his inventory around his neck and arms. He is as severely manacled as Jacob Marley's ghost in *A Christmas Carol*, and like Scrooge and Marley is visually imprisoned by his commercial pursuit. Catherine Gallagher's claim that "costermongers *force* on the city dweller the ubiquitousness of the competitive marketplace"[20] completes the thematic link between this street seller and the selfish greed of Scrooge and Marley by showing both the costermonger and Marley as victims of their own commerce. "I wear the chain I forged in life," says Marley's ghost, who then asks Scrooge to estimate the weight of his own manacles of greed.[21] Mayhew's dog-collar seller and Thomson's costermongers in Covent Garden (cat. no. 42) are part of London's limitless marketplace, where "everything can be got with money," as Jane Austen wrote.[22] But as much as Dickens, having been a hungry twelve-year-old alone in the city, is aware of London as a market, having "stared at the pineapples" in Covent Garden, the city and its people transcend any single meaning.[23] Dickens's London remains as mysterious as it is various, and the commodities for sale listed by Mayhew—dog collars to fit any size canine, hot eels, plum "duff," penny "gaffs," rat-poison, cigar ends, and second-hand "curiosities"—point beyond themselves to the amazing lives lived in the city. Dickens's power as an artist and Mayhew's limitation as a social observer derive from their respective abilities to participate in the experience of the working poor. Where Mayhew carefully isolates his costermonger from his reader by portraying him as working-class, physiognomically "different," chain-entangled and potentially criminal, Dickens works his way fictionally beyond human types toward human selves, always seeing his characters with a compassionate eye. Thus Bill Sikes, house-breaker, kidnapper, even murderer, can still strangely rouse the reader's sympathy when, running from the law on the outskirts of the city, he stops to help fight a fire, and for a moment, regains a sense of identity within a human community.[24]

When Thomson began to publish his photographs in *Street Life in London*, he was well aware of Mayhew's and Dickens's work. His writing partner in

Henry Anelay, del., and W. G. Mason, sc., (allegedly) after Richard Beard, daguerreotypist, *The Street-Seller of Dogs' Collars*. Wood engraving from Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London, 1851).

Street Life, Adolphe Smith, refers directly to Dickens, in passages such as his commentary on "Hookey Alf, of Whitechapel," an epileptic amputee with an individual history behind his physical deformity (cat. no. 44). Smith refers not only to Captain Cuttle from *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), but to Dickens's belief in practical help rather than institutionalized charity:

> [H]ence my belief that time spent among the poor themselves is far more productive of good and permanent results, than liberal subscriptions given to institutions of which the donor knows no more than can be gleaned from the hurried perusal of an abbreviated prospectus. In this manner Dickens acquired his marvelous stores of material and knowledge of the people. Exaggerated as some of his characters may seem, their prototypes are constantly coming on the scene, and as I talked to "Hookey" it seemed as if the shade of Captain Cuttle has penetrated the wilds of Whitechapel.[25]

Smith refers to Dickens's use of exaggeration, often marked by "signature" gestures or traits that help the reader distinguish between Dickens's usually quite large cast of characters in each novel.[26] Cuttle's irrepressible hope for the best, expressed in his poignant groping toward verbal and moral order in the tag phrase, "When found, make a note on," serves as a "hook" or refrain to his character. Significantly, Smith "reads" the London of the 1870s through a Dickensian lens, evoking sympathy in the reader for "Hookey's" damaged body and "spoilt manhood," for his inability to "fulfill the same duties as a man in sound health."[27] But in stressing "Hookey's" incompleteness, Smith diminishes his selfhood. Unlike Dickens, Thomson and Smith can't get past "Hookey's" namesake, the hook where his hand used to be. The visual "hook" of the photograph has hooked them. Thomson's photo shows a young girl staring right at the artificial limb, a stare Smith willfully misinterprets as the child's moral drive to "penetrate" the group and reclaim a drunken parent from the scene.[28] Dickens, whose work some critics faulted for what they termed the "nastiness of [dwelling] on offensive peculiarities in his characters" and his "cruel consideration of physical defects"[29] is both a realist and a romantic, using scars and deformities to express the painful life experiences of characters, as well as to award moments of emotional and spiritual transcendence to characters with such physical limitations.[30] Captain Cuttle's fidelity to his friends, his emotional wisdom that Dickens clearly values over the business savvy of the wealthy merchant Paul Dombey, Sr., hooks the reader in the end.

Fascinated by London's physical vitality and decay, and sensing that acts of imagination could transcend the deadliness of materiality, Dickens knew his world wouldn't last forever. In an early sketch, "Scotland Yard," he concludes by predicting that the London he and his reader now inhabit will disappear and escape detection by future antiquarians and researchers.[31] Almost three decades later, in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, he finds decaying London churches, "buildings at the heart of the world's metropolis," that are less known to most Londoners than "Pyramids of Egypt," an archaeological analogy that shows his acceptance of the city's mutability.[32] He wrote this acceptance into his fiction, unafraid to question the institutions he saw failing the Victorian poor, including the Church of England.

In *Bleak House*, the orphaned street-sweeper Jo sits munching bread near Blackfriar's Bridge, looking up uncomprehendingly at St. Paul's Cathedral. The cathedral dominates the London skyline, and Dickens referred to it as the heart of London, that "when it should cease to beat, the City would be no more."[33] Henry Dixon's photograph, *Oxford Arms Inn (from the Old Bailey towards St. Paul's)* (plate 3), with a hazy St. Paul's looming in the background, visually reverses the fates of the two buildings, making the inn seem permanent and enduring, despite its broken rails and busted windows, and St. Paul's distant and dreamlike. In actuality, the Oxford Arms has been demolished (1877), while St. Paul's withstood the German's bombing during WWII.

Although every photograph in the exhibition can be linked to Dickens's work in one fashion or another, the remainder of this essay considers only nine of them, beginning with the "spirit" photograph by Frederick Hudson, entitled *Lady Helena Newenham and the Spirit of Her Daughter* (plate 13). Dickens "had more than once publicly ridiculed the Spiritualist movement,"[34] and his skepticism appears in short stories such as "The Haunted House," and essays such as "Rather a Strong Dose." However, Dickens did believe in the narrative power of ghost stories which pervade his canon, and particularly his Christmas books. Ghosts walk not only in *Bleak House*, but they swing from a rope in *Great Expectations*, and come to reclaim furniture in "Chambers."

Thomson's photograph *Street Doctor* (plate 11) shows upon close examination a poster to the left of the doctor, advertising a London theatrical performance of "Poor Jo," an adaptation of *Bleak House.* However much Dickens bemoaned the lax copyright laws that allowed American publishers and theatrical entrepreneurs to cannibalize his novels, the influence of his fiction was undeniable.[35] The street doctor himself, a purveyor of "cough lozenges and healing ointment," is the poor man's solution to the difficult problem of medical care for the poor in the city. Dickens revered legitimate physicians such as Alan Woodcourt in *Bleak House,* while his friend and protégé Wilkie Collins celebrated the successful con of quack "doctors" such as Captain Wragge in *No Name* (1862).

Visual display of his wares helped sell the "medicines" of the street doctor, as the Victorian age witnessed the burgeoning of print advertisements.[36] Dickens coined the term "sandwich man," describing the London boardman as "a piece of human flesh between two slices of pasteboard."[37] In Thomson's photograph and Smith's text entitled *The London Boardmen* (plate 12), the man is a walking sign for a product, a performance or a lecture by someone named "Renovo." The hand attached to the front of the boardman's head is there to arrest the attention of passersby, and contributes to the sense Smith has that boardsmen are "often men who have fallen in the world," and as boardmen have reached a "pitch of degredation" in becoming a walking sign signifying something other than their own human identity. Dickens's most famous street-seller, Silas Wegg of *Our Mutual Friend*, avoids such anonymity by imagining he is the faithful retainer to the family near whose house he sells his dilapidated wares. Even the fantasy of connection, Dickens suggests, is better than no connection at all.

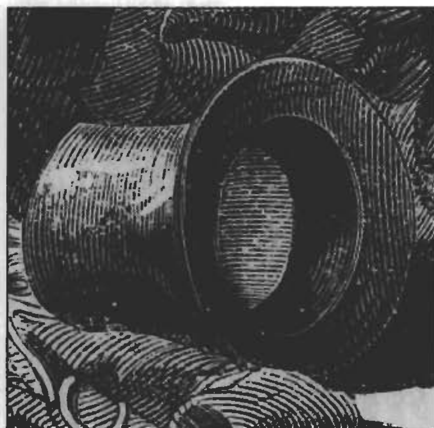
Henry Peach Robinson's *Dawn and Sunset* (plate 14), with its grouping of a mother holding a sleeping child, and an aging father, head bent, crutches leaning against his chair, epitomizes the domestic hearth represented repeatedly in Dickens's work. This photograph shows two sources of light: a hearth fire, occluded by a chair, and sunlight from a window shining in on flower pots. Alexander Welsh interprets Dickens's valorization of the domestic hearth as the "antithesis of the city," of "urban poverty and desolation."[38] One of Dickens's favorite painters, Sir David Wilkie, specialized in such scenes of domestic security and quietude, drawing this praise from Dickens: Wilkie "made the cottage hearth his grave theme, and . . . surrounded the lives, and cares, and daily toils and occupations of the poor, with dignity and beauty."[39] Dickens's idealization of the Victorian home and hearth has frequently been criticized as overly sentimental, but as Fred Kaplan explains, such depictions are evidence of Dickens's need to privilege emotion over a formalist aesthetic.[40] The presence of three generations in Robinson's photograph recapitulates the endings of several Dickens novels, especially the trios of grandparent or grandparent-surrogate, parent and child in *Oliver Twist, Dombey and Son,* and *Bleak House.*

The misty photograph of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (plate 9), with a policeman and two anonymous men in bowler hats in the foreground, shows a shop on Portsmouth Street, near the south-west corner of Lincoln's Inn Fields, where lawyer Tulkinghorn of *Bleak House* cohabited with his fifty-year old wine, "that blushes in the glass to find itself so famous." Although this location was known to Dickens (his close friend and biographer John Forster lived around

the corner), its identity as the original location for the Old Curiosity Shop is tenuous at best, a mixture of exploitation and appreciation which Dickens knew all too well from his American tours, during which fans "furtively snipped bits of fur from his coat to treasure as souvenirs."[41] Jennifer Wickes sees a "permeability" between Dickens's fiction and advertisements of it, evidenced in products named after Dickens's characters, such as "Pickwick" cigars, "Captain Cuttle" tobacco, and "Micawber" pens. Wickes notes that such practices have extended to our own time, in Smirnoff Vodka's punning caption next to a photograph of a martini: "Oliv'r Twist."[42]

The faux Old Curiosity Shop's subheading, "Immortalized by Charles Dickens," reminds us of the Victorian response to Little Nell's death, the outpouring of grief when the serialized novel concluded in 1841, as well as Oscar Wilde's taunt, "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing."[43] For Wilde, only sixteen years old when Dickens died, Dickens's literary influence seemed an irrelevant "curiosity," and for entrepreneurial Londoners, Dickens had become a brand name.

At last, then, we turn away from the populated commercial street with its shops and street-sellers, seen in work by Thomson, Smith, and Mayhew, and items from the Wm. B. Becker Collection, to depopulated buildings past their glory days, from the portfolio *Photographic Relics of Old London*. Just as the old clothes for sale in Monmouth Street, St. Giles, challenged Dickens to imagine the lives of the garments' former owners, these photographs challenge the viewer to imagine not only the buildings as they are pictured in the photographs, but as they were in their heyday.[44] What lives were lived there, professional and personal? What aspect of Victorian England has been lost with the destruction of these sites?



Photographs of coaching inns, such as the King's Head Inn, the George Inn, and the Queen's Head Inn (cat. nos. 18-24), all in Southwark, an area on the south bank of the Thames between the Southwark and London Bridges, speak to the displacement of coaches by the railways, eloquently presented in *Dombey and Son* and in the nostalgic imaginative journey of "Travelling Abroad." Although many coaching inns in Dickens are comically portrayed as having terrible food and even worse service, they demarcate a past rapidly being lost, so much so that in one sketch the narrator treats a post-chaise as an artifact of a bygone era, and hears the bells ringing, "WHAT's-be-come-of-THE-coach-es!"[45] Inns also punctuate Dickens's narratives as way stations in characters' development. Pip's ascension to a gentleman and thus a suitable escort for Estella on her way as she journeys to Richmond in *Great Expectations* is only one such example. Coaching inns are, for a writer so convivial as Dickens, an excellent place to get a drink, and Dickens's canon effervesces with potables, from Micawber's rum and lemon peel punch in *David Copperfield*, to "those delectable drinks, Purl, Flip, and Dog's Nose," served up at the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters in *Our Mutual Friend*.

In Dickens's work, many roads lead to the Thames, the dark artery that flows through London, providing livelihoods and offering a ready-made grave for the desperate. The Thames is present from the beginning of Dickens's career, in sketches such as "Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings," in which a kind landlady prevents a female lodger from committing suicide by drowning, to Dickens's last finished novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, in which poor river-side dwellers at Limehouse in East London earn their livelihood scavenging corpses from the Thames.[46] *St. Mary Overy's Dock* (cat. no. 25), also from *Photographic Relics of Old London*, lay between the river and an old church, known as Saint Saviour's church in Dickens's time, and since 1905 as Southwark Cathedral.[47] Dickens sounds the themes of secrecy and invisibility in *Oliver Twist* on the fateful night Nancy meets Rose and Mr. Brownlow on London Bridge, describing the river area thus:

> indistinct buildings on the banks . . .
> The tower of old Saint Saviour's church and the spire of Saint Magnus, so long the giant warders of the ancient bridge, were visible in the gloom; but the forest of shipping below bridge, and the thickly scattered spires of churches above, were nearly all hidden from sight.[48]

In the exhibition photograph of the dock, two people, slightly blurred, gaze from the dock into the river, framed by a gas lamp and the run-down façade of a riverside building. The Thames remains invisible in the photograph, but visible to the photograph's blurred humans, whose gaze on a disappearing world we may be replicating even now.

If photographs of Victorian London are "an urban time machine," as Richard Stein suggests, then so is the work of Charles Dickens, who transmitted his vivid imaginings of London through language.[49] Dickens requires that we give up the need for absolute knowing, a need the enormity of the city defies anyway, and give in to the imagination (and most particularly, to his imaginative rendering of this landscape).[50] He tells us,

> What inexhaustible food for speculation do the streets of London afford! . . . We have not the slightest commiseration for the man who can take up his hat and stick, and walk from Covent Garden to St. Paul's Churchyard, and back into the bargain, without deriving some amusement—we had almost said instruction—from his perambulation.[51]

He asks us to adopt a more active habit of wonder, to activate not only our legs but our sympathetic imaginations. We are invited to join Dickens, Mayhew, Thomson and others who were willing to "prowl about" the city, meet its people, and learn its places. "I am prowling about, meditating a new book," Dickens wrote to a friend in August of 1860; the book that emerged was *Great Expectations*.[52] In that spirit of discovery, I hope visitors to *Dickensian London and the Photographic Imagination* will view the photographs and then return to Dickens's canon to find some of the many other Londons he has drawn with his pen.

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Notes

I would like to thank my colleagues Andrea Eis, Tamara Machmut-Jhashi, and Jude Nixon, and my student John Martin, for their feedback as I worked on this essay.
I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Department of English, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Provost's Office for helping to fund this exhibition.

[1] "Arcadian London," in *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens's Journalism*, vol.4, *The Uncommercial Traveller and Other Papers*, ed. Michael Slater and John Drew (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000) 186. Hereafter cited as *UT*.
[2] "Charles Dickens," *National Review* Oct. 1858, vii:458-86, in *Dickens: the Critical Heritage*, ed. Philip Collins (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971) 393. Hereafter cited as *Collins*.
[3] *Dickens: from Pickwick to Dombey* (New York: Basic Books, 1965) 278. Hereafter *Marcus*.
[4] *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Waugh et al. (Bloomsbury, 1938) 627. Quoted in *Marcus*, 278.
[5] Steven Marcus suggests Dickens "needed these streets and walks because for him writing was mysteriously and irrevocably connected with that epoch in his life when he was literally a wanderer in the city," *Marcus*, 279-80. Dickens's essay "Night Walks," takes the reader on a nocturnal ramble through London. See *Uncommercial Traveller*, 150; the essay appeared originally in *All the Year Round*, 21 July 1860.
[6] See Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (New York: Viking, 1980) 30-41 and Fred Kaplan, *Dickens: a Biography* (New York: William Morrow, 1988) 38-44.
[7] *Oliver Twist*, ch.8, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Fred Kaplan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993) 59-60; *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, ch.1:1-4. *Oxford Illustrated Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 50. All further references to Dickens's work, unless otherwise indicated, are from this edition.
[8] Kevin Z. Moore, "Viewing the Victorians: Recent Research on Victorian Visuality," *Victorian Literature and Culture* (1997): 367.
[9] On the growing popularity of photograph-albums, see *The Companion to "Our Mutual Friend,"* Michael Cotsell (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986) 192. Characters in *Our Mutual Friend* hold a clandestine conversation while pretending to examine a photograph-album, bk. 2:ch.16. Dickens chides the spectators of a high-wire accident, taking "photographs everywhere," in "The Boiled Beef of New England," *UT:* 278-80. Spirit photography is criticized in "Rather a Strong Dose," *All the Year Round*, 21 March 1863, reprinted in *UT:* 206-7. Dickens classes photography as evidence of technological progress along with steam, gas and electric telegraphs in "On an Amateur Beat," *All the Year Round,* 27 February 1869, *UT:* 381.
[10] *Great Expectations*, ch.1:1.
[11] George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," *Westminster Review*, July 1856, lxi:55, quoted in *Collins*:343; [R. H. Hutton] from "The Genius of Dickens," *Spectator* 18 June 1870, xliii, in *Collins*:519.
[12] George Brimley, unsigned review of *Bleak House*, *Spectator*, 24 Sept.1853, xxvi: 923-5, in *Collins*:284; William Forsythe, "Literary Style," *Fraser's Magazine*, March 1857, lv:26-3, in *Collins*:350-1.
[13] Unsigned article, "The Late Charles Dickens," *The London Illustrated News*, 18 June 1870, lvi:639, in *Collins*:516.
[14] *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988) 92 and 118-9. Susan Sontag describes the photographing of oppressed subjects as "the gentlest of predations" in *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978).
[15] *Oliver Twist, "Author's Preface to the Third Edition, 1841,"* Norton Critical Edition: 7. Dickens's practice of literary realism is a rich, complex topic. See especially J. Hillis Miller, "The Fiction of Realism: *Sketches by Boz*, *Oliver Twist*, and Cruikshank's Illustrations," *Dickens Centennial Essays*. Ed. Ada Nisbet and Blake Nevius (Berkeley: University of California, 1971) 85-129. On Dickens and visual realism, see Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 52-68 and Regina B. Oost, "'More Like Than Life': Painting, Photography, and Dickens's *Bleak House*," *Dickens Studies Annual*, vol. 30 (2001): 141-58.

[16] *Street Life in London* (1877; New York and London: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1969) "Preface."
[17] "Author's Preface to the Third Edition (1841), in *Oliver Twist*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Fred Kaplan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992) 3.
[18] Henry Mayhew, *"The Street Folk," in Mayhew's London,* ed. Peter Quennell (London: Spring Books, 1969) 29, sees "street folk" as a race apart. Thomas Prasch offers an excellent discussion of Mayhew and Thomson, arguing that Thomson's photographs "replicated" the "existing visual conventions" practiced by Mayhew in his earlier series, and that Thomson's composition of photographs, as well as his selection of subjects, emphasized their marginality and "Otherness." Prasch does not discuss Adolphe Smith's commentary, however. See Prasch, "Photography and the Image of the Urban Poor," *Victorian Urban Settings,* ed. D. J. Trela and Debra N. Mancoff (New York and London: Garland, 196) 181.
[19] Henry Mayhew uses this phrase as he introduces the reader to "Varieties of Street Folk in General and Costmongers in Particular," *Mayhew's London,* 30.
[20] Catherine Gallagher, "The Body Versus the Social Body in the Works of Thomas Malthus and Henry Mayhew." *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laquer (Berkeley: University of California, 1987) 101.
[21] *A Christmas Carol,* 19.
[22] *Mansfield Park*, 1814, ch.6. The worldly Mary Crawford speaks these words.
[23] John Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens* (1876), quoted in Johnson, 36.
[24] Murray Baumgarten might see this instance as yet another example of what he calls the potential Dickens's characters have for "moral self-making . . . [that can bring] people together across class and social lines," "London, Dickens, and the Theatre of Homelessness," *Victorian Urban Settings*, ed. D. J. Trela and Debra N. Mancoff (New York and London: Garland, 1996) 79. Baumgarten stresses the dynamic quality of Dickens's working-class characters, in contrast to Mayhew's more static representations.
[25] *Street Life in London.* Text by Adolphe Smith. Photographs by John Thompson: 116.
[26] Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Fiction.* (New York: Harper, 1953) 130.
[27] Smith and Thompson, 115-6.
[28] Ibid., 113.
[29] [James Augustine Stothert], from "Living Novelists," *The Rambler*, Jan. 1854, n.s. i:41-51, in *Collins:*296; [Henry Fothergill Chorley], from a review in the *Athenaeum*, 17 Sept. 1853, 1087-88, in *Collins:* 277.
[30] See especially Natalie McKnight, *Idiots, Madmen, and Other Prisoners in Dickens* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); Garrett Stewart, *Dickens and the Trials of Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974) on Jenny Wren, 198-214; Helena Michie, " 'Who is this in pain?': Scarring, Disfigurement, and Female Identity," *Novel* (Winter, 1989): 199-212.
[31] *Sketches by Boz,* 68.
[32] "City of London Churches," *UT:* 116.
[33] *Master Humphrey's Clock*, 107.
[34] Michael Slater and John Drew, notes to "Rather a Strong Dose," *UT:* 202.
[35] On Dickens's strong advocacy for international copyright laws, see Kaplan, 124-9, *passim.*
[36] See Dickens, "Bill-Sticking," *The Amusements of the People and Other Papers: Reports, Essays, and Reviews 1834-50*, ed. Michael Slater (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1996) 339-50.
[37] Joss Lutz Marsh, "Imagining Victorian London, An Entertainment and Itinerary (Chas. Dickens, Guide)," *Stanford Humanities Review* 3:1 (Winter 1993): 68. Dickens also used the "sandwich" description in the sketch *"Dancing Academy," Sketches by Boz.* A young man sees a boardman advertising a dancing school: "an animated sandwich, composed of a boy between two boards," 257. This essay first appeared in *Bell's Life of London*, Oct. 11, 1835.
[38] Alexander Welsh, *The City of Dickens* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1986, 1999) 147.
[39] *Speeches of Charles Dickens*, ed. K. J. Fielding (1960), 13-4, quoted in Leonee Ormond, "Dickens and Painting: Contemporary Art," *Dickensian* (Spring 1984): 4.
[40] Fred Kaplan, *Sacred Tears: Sentimentality In Victorian Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987) 41.
[41] Tony Lynch, *Dickens's England* (New York and London: Facts on File Publications, 1986) 138-9 and Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*, 202-3.
[42] Jennifer Wickes, *Social Fictions: Literature, Advertising, and Social Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 40, 52.
[43] Richard Ellman, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Knopf, 1988) 469.
[44] "Meditations in Monmouth Street," *Sketches by Boz.* "There was a man's whole life written as legibly on those clothes, as if we had his autobiography engrossed on parchment before us" 75.
[45] "An Old Stage-Coaching House," *UT:*273.
[46] "Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings," *Christmas Stories.*
[47] Jonathan Keik, *Everybody's Historic London* (London: Quiller Press, 1984) 62-3 and Lynch, 164-7.
[48] *Oliver Twist*, ch.46.
[49] Richard Stein, "Street Figures: Victorian Urban Iconography," *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Berkeley; University of California, 1995) 251.
[50] Julian Wolfreys puts it this way: "For Dickens, London is where the knowable is constantly displaced, as *difference* takes place," *Writing London: the trace of the urban text from Blake to Dickens* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1998) 143.
[51] "Shops and Their Tenants," *Sketches by Boz*, 59.
[52] Charles Dickens. "To the Earl of Carlisle." 8 August 1860. *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, Pilgrim Edition. Vol. Nine, 1859-1861, ed. Graham Storey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 282.

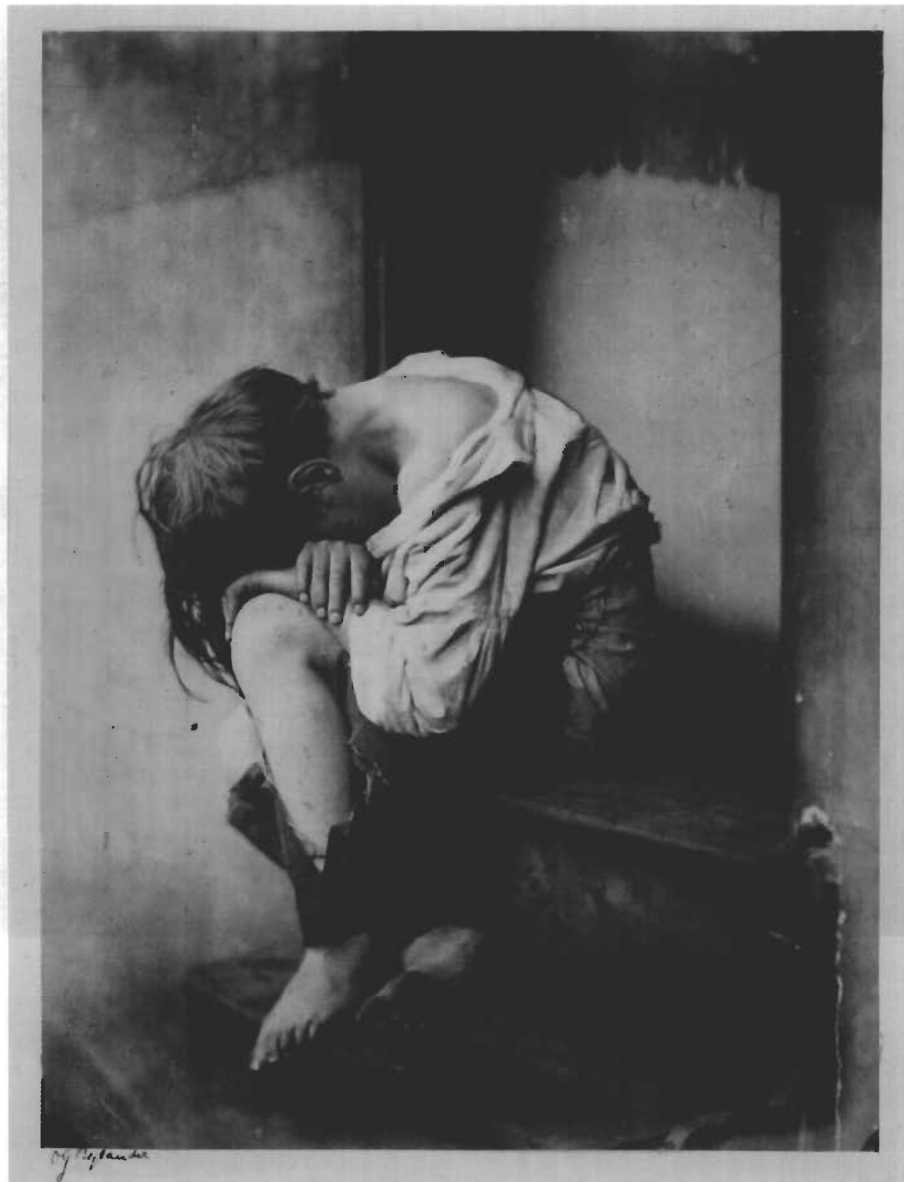
10. Unknown photographer, *Orphans from the Royal Seamen and Marines' Orphan Schools and Female Orphan Home, Portsmouth, Visiting the Victory's Anchor on Southsea Beach,* ca. 1870s (cat. no. 51).
Wm. B. Becker Collection/American Museum of Photography.

11. John Thomson, *Street Doctor,* 1876 (cat. no. 39).
George Eastman House Collection.

12. John Thomson, *The London Boardmen,* 1876 (cat. no. 43).
George Eastman House Collection.

13. Frederick A. Hudson, *Lady Helena Newenham and the Spirit of Her Daughter,* 1872 (cat. no. 26).
Wm. B. Becker Collection/American Museum of Photography.

14. Henry Peach Robinson, *Dawn and Sunset,* 1885 (cat. no. 34).
George Eastman House Collection.



15. Oscar Gustave Rejlander, *Homeless,* ca. 1860 (cat. no. 33).
George Eastman House Collection.

LONDON'S LIKENESS: A COMPARATIVE LOOK AT DICKENS AND 19TH CENTURY PHOTOGRAPHY

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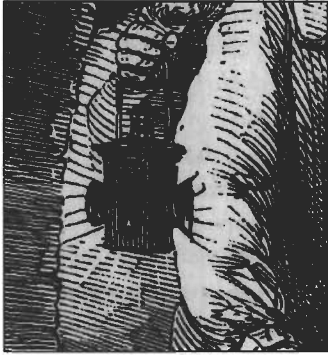

Growing up in the latter part of the twentieth century, I have often tried to think what it would be like to live in a world without mass media. What would life be like without color photos in our daily newspapers, without live newscasts from the latest crime scene, without the daily dosage of reality programs, and without the computer on which I find myself composing this essay today? It seems in our everyday lives we take realism for granted. We often assume that these presentations of reality are objective. We choose to suspend our disbelief long enough to consume the information we have been presented, and then it's back to the daily routine as we feel newly nourished by the facts of the world. Artists of Victorian London did not take the presentation of "reality" for granted; rather they were fascinated by it. The early daguerreotypes, followed by the development of photographs, thrived in a culture "whose appetite for accuracy had been whetted by eighteenth century engravings, etchings, and the panoramic watercolors of the early nineteenth century."[1] Concurrently, the literary movement that focused on realism, attempted to take a closer look at the experience that was London, and convey that experience to the Victorian public.

Formal realism in the novel, as defined by scholar Ian Watt, is constructed of "a set of narrative procedures" employed to create "a full and authentic report of human experience" by relying on "a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms."[2] The literary employment of such techniques by authors such as Charles Dickens was also witnessed within the art world during this period through the new medium of photography. Like Dickens, photographers John Thomson and Oscar Rejlander sought to depict, and sometimes stage, a more "authentic report of human experience" through photography. Through a comparative look at Dickens's use of language in *Oliver Twist* (1837-38), *Bleak House* (1852-53), and *Great Expectations* (1860-61), and photographs by Oscar Rejlander and Henry Dixon, one begins to see how the different "realisms" presented through each type of media complement each other while maintaining their own distinguishing characteristics and sense of realism.

While photographers captured images through the use of technology, authors such as Dickens rendered an image by using techniques such as listing. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens introduces Fagin, a thief and corruptor of youth, by first describing the "back-room" that he occupies by stating: "the walls and ceiling . . . were perfectly black . . . There was a deal table . . . a candle . . . a ginger beer bottle . . . Several rough beds."[3] These items not only accompany the physical description of Fagin, they serve, as scholar J. Hillis Miller proposes, as "the starting point of an act of interpretation which moves beyond them to the hidden ways of life of which they are signs."[4] Dickens's metonymical description places Fagin within the visual environment and invites the reader to look beyond the "signs" of Fagin's moral darkness.

"Victorians welcomed and embraced the optical inventions and the more realistic realities they could picture."[5] However, these optical inventions also were viewed as having their own set of limitations. Dickens offers a comparison between the new art of photography and portrait painting in *Oliver Twist,* in the words of the housekeeper Mrs. Bedwin: "painters

always make ladies out prettier than they are, or they wouldn't get any custom, child. The man that invented the machine for taking likenesses might have known *that* would never succeed; it's a deal too honest. A deal!"[6] Dickens's claim at once recognizes the implicit realism involved in the new form of art, yet at the same time criticizes its level of realism and inability to soften the likeness. This illusion of the "honest" photograph led many Victorians to believe that the photograph could not lie. The likeness represented within the photograph was somehow an "authentic report" of reality.

Photography, as well as literature, relies heavily on the art of composition. The photographer, as well as the author, is always mindful of his/her composition. Some elements remain within the field of view while others are discarded. Some objects are brought forward while others are left within the background. The final arrangement of compositional elements is designed to present the artist's interpretation of the subjects, often leaving the viewer with an incomplete, framed perception of reality. This leads many to question the authenticity of realism and the incompleteness of any rendering, photographic or literary, leaving the viewer/reader with an impression of verisimilitude, yet never quite reaching that "full and authentic report."

While some have questioned the authenticity of Rejlander's photographic subjects, his photo entitled *Homeless* (plate 15) attempts to capture the solitude and despair of the homeless youth. Similarly, Dickens's character Jo in *Bleak House*, a young homeless boy who sweeps horse manure from the streets of London for spare change, represents the societal outcast implicit in Rejlander's photo. Dickens's narrator speculates about Jo's thoughts:

> To be hustled, and jostled, and moved on; and really to feel that it would appear to be perfectly true that I have no business, here, or there, or anywhere; and yet to be perplexed by the consideration that I *am* here somehow, too, and everybody overlooked me until I became the creature that I am! It must be a strange state, not merely to be told that I am scarcely human . . . but to feel it of my own knowledge all my life! To see the horses, dogs, and cattle, go by me, and to know that in ignorance I belong to them, and not to the superior beings in my shape, whose delicacy I offend![7]

Both mediums share the ability to invoke sympathy in the mind's eye. Rejlander's image signals poverty through the boy's tattered clothing and the dirt that covers his skin, while Dickens's Jo feels "scarcely human" as later within the novel the physician Mr. Woodcourt considers "that in the heart of a civilized world this creature in human form should be more difficult to dispose of than an unowned dog."[8] Here Dickens captures Jo's essence as he likens him to animals. Dickens specifically chooses to list animals that are exploited by man rather than give the reader any sense of Jo's freedom or independence. His sense of self-degradation is reinforced by Woodcourt's analogous response to the difficulty in disposing of Jo.

Jo appears in *Bleak House* without origin, history, or any sense of belonging to the overall picture, yet Dickens begins to empower Jo by allowing him within the narrative to link the City of London with Bleak House and Chesney Wold as his disease-carrying body infects Esther Summerson with her disfiguring illness that ultimately protects the secret of Lady Dedlock. Contrary to Dickens's images of Jo, Rejlander's image of the homeless boy includes no characterizing scenery, no sense of anyone around him, and no sense of origin or history; moreover, Rejlander chooses to leave the boy helpless, alone, and personally with drawn from the city around him. While the evidence presented advocates dissimilarity in the artists' vision, Jo's eventual death makes clear that both artists envisioned a dismal ending to youth in poverty.

Seven years after Jo's untimely death, Dickens introduces his readers to Pip, another orphan entering the "Modern Babylon," London, in *Great Expectations*.[9] Although Pip's fate is quite dissimilar from Jo's, Dickens's development of Pip as a young man begins in his first lodgings away from his childhood home when he takes up residence within Barnard's Inn that originally stood as an Inn of Chancery to prospective barristers within London's legal district.[10] Dickens, again, creates a dismal view of London with Pip's thoughts of his new lodgings.

> We entered this haven through a wicket-gate, and were disgorged by an introductory passage into a melancholy little square that looked to me like a flat burying-ground. I thought it had the most dismal trees in it, and the most dismal sparrows, and the most dismal cats, and the most dismal houses (in number half a dozen or so), that I had ever seen. I thought the windows of the sets of chambers into which those houses were divided, were in every stage of dilapidated blind and curtain, crippled flower-pot, cracked glass, dusty decay, and miserable makeshift . . . A frouzy mourning of soot and smoke attired this forlorn creation of Barnard, and it had strewn ashes on its head, and was undergoing penance and humiliation as a mere dust-hole.[11]

Dickens's description of the courtyard serves as an entry point to Dixon's image of the courtyard of Barnard's Inn by lending a sense of character to an otherwise static image. The visibly flat courtyard and leafless trees of Dixon's image create a barren landscape that Dickens's use of descriptive terms like "dismal," "dilapidated," "crippled," and "miserable" creates within the minds of his readers. Dickens uses Barnard's Inn as a staging ground for the second, of three, "stage(s) of Pip's expectations."[12] Pip, within this dismal scene in London, learns the finer points of middle-class life as his roommate Herbert Pocket reminds him "that in London it is not the custom to put the knife in the mouth—for fear of accidents—and that while the fork is reserved for that use, it is not put in any further than is necessary."[13] Dickens's images of Barnard's Inn not only capture the cold harsh exterior of the building, but they also capture the human experience. Pip's relationship with Herbert, the discovery of their history together, their first meal together, and Pip's awkward visit from Joe Gargery all collaboratively bring to life the many different experiences of living in Victorian London.

While the photographs discussed vividly visualize the destitution of poverty and city life in London, Dickens's vision attempts to create the "full and authentic" through narrative descriptions of the city as well as through the thoughts and feelings of his characters. Dickens's vision of Jo and Pip seem to underline the motifs within the photographs, exploring social and economic status through the poverty of Jo, while the "expectations" of wealth pervade Dickens's characterization of Pip. Dickens's "likenesses," although they remain textual, penetrate deeply into the world of Victorian London, bringing life to the still image. Rejlander's photograph depicts a homeless boy, tattered by poverty, dirtied by the streets of London, and faceless to a world that ignores him, while Dickens's Jo *feels*, like any of us would feel, trapped within the voiceless despair of poverty, less than human.

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Notes

[1] Kevin Z. Moore, "Viewing the Victorians: Recent Research on Victorian Visuality," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 25 (1997): 367.
[2] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957) 32.
[3] Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993) 65.
[4] J. Hillis Miller, "The Fiction of Realism: Sketches by Boz, Oliver Twist, and Cruikshank's Illustrations," in *Dickens Centennial Essays*, ed. Ada Nisbet and Blake Nevius (London: University of California Press, 1971) 94.
[5] Moore, 368.
[6] *Oliver Twist,* 84.
[7] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (New York: Penguin Putnam Ltd., 1996) 257-58.
[8] Ibid., 719.
[9] Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (New York: Random House Inc., 2000) 148.
[10] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993) 134.
[11] Ibid., 136-37.
[12] Ibid., 125.
[13] Ibid., 141.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

A. & J. Bool
(British firm, active ca. 1870s)

1. *Oxford Arms Inn (Entrance from Warwick Lane)* (demolished 1877)
Published 1875
Carbon print
23.2 x 18.3 cm
Plate 1 from *Photographic Relics of Old London* (London: Society for Photographing Relics of Old London, 1875–86) [hereafter SPROL portfolio]
George Eastman House Collection

2. *Oxford Arms Inn Yard* (demolished 1877)
Published 1875
Carbon print
19.0 x 23.2 cm
Plate 2 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection
Repr. plate 4

3. *Oxford Arms Inn (Portal towards Warwick Lane)* (demolished 1877)
Published 1875
Carbon print
18.5 x 23.9 cm
Plate 3 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

4. *Oxford Arms Inn (Upper Gallery)* (demolished 1877)
Published 1875
Carbon print
18.7 x 22.9 cm
Plate 4 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

5. *Oxford Arms Inn (from the Old Bailey towards St. Paul's)* (demolished 1877)
Published 1875
Carbon print
18.6 x 24.0 cm
Plate 6 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection
Repr. plate 3

6. *Old Houses in Wych Street (South Side Looking East)* (demolished 1903)
Published 1876
Carbon print
23.1 x 18.3 cm
Plate 7 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection
Repr. front cover

7. *Old Houses in Wych Street (South Side Looking West)* (demolished 1903)
Published 1876
Carbon print
22.9 x 18.2 cm
Plate 8 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection
Repr. back cover

8. *Old Houses in Drury Lane* (demolished 1890)
Published 1876
Carbon print
22.5 x 18.7 cm
Plate 9 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

9. *St. Bartholomew the Great and Cloth Fair (Boys' School)* (demolished early 1900s)
Published 1877
Carbon print
23.5 x 19.0 cm
Plate 16 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

10. *Cloth Fair (Poors' Churchyard Looking East)* (demolished early 1900s)
Published 1877
Carbon print
23.5 x 18.6 cm
Plate 17 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection
Repr. plate 5

11. *Cloth Fair (Poors' Churchyard Looking West)* (demolished early 1900s)
Published 1877
Carbon print
23.4 x 19.0 cm
Plate 18 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection
Repr. plate 6

12. *Temple Bar* (dismantled in 1878 and later rebuilt in Hertfordshire)
Published 1878
Carbon print by Henry Dixon
22.0 x 17.7 cm
Plate 19 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

13. *Old Houses in Gray's Inn Lane* (demolished 1878)
Published 1878
Carbon print by Henry Dixon
17.6 x 22.2 cm
Plate 21 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

Henry Dixon **(British, 1820–1893)**

14. *Barnard's Inn Hall* (extant)
Published 1879
Carbon print
17.4 x 21.7 cm
Plate 27 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

15. *Barnard's Inn Courtyard* (altered)
Published 1879
Carbon print
17.4 x 22.3 cm
Plate 28 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection
Repr. plate 7

16. *Barnard's Inn (Fetter Lane Front)* (demolished 1910)
Published 1879
Carbon print
22.3 x 17.8 cm
Plate 29 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

17. *Old Houses in Aldersgate Street* (demolished 1879)
Published 1879
Carbon print
22.5 x 17.9 cm
Plate 30 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

18. *King's Head Inn Yard, Southwark* (demolished 1876)
Published 1881
Carbon print
17.9 x 22.5 cm
Plate 49 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

19. *King's Head Inn Yard, Southwark* (demolished 1876)
Published 1881
Carbon print
17.5 x 22.5 cm
Plate 50 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection
Repr. plate 8

20. *White Hart Inn Yard, Southwark* (demolished 1889)
Published 1881
Carbon print
17.7 x 22.4 cm
Plate 51 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

21. *White Hart Inn Yard, Southwark* (demolished 1889)
Published 1881
Carbon print
17.9 x 22.5 cm
Plate 52 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

22. *George Inn Yard, Southwark* (extant)
Published 1881
Carbon print
22.5 x 17.9 cm
Plate 53 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

23. *Queen's Head Inn Yard, Southwark* (demolished 1886)
Published 1881
Carbon print
22.5 x 17.9 cm
Plate 54 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

24. *Queen's Head Inn (Entrance), Southwark* (demolished 1886)
Published 1881
Carbon print
17.8 x 22.5 cm
Plate 55 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

25. *St. Mary Overy's Dock, Southwark* (demolished 1890s)
Published 1881
Carbon print
22.5 x 17.8 cm
Plate 57 from SPROL portfolio
George Eastman House Collection

Frederick A. Hudson
(British, dates unknown)

26. *Lady Helena Newenham and the Spirit of Her Daughter*
4 June 1872
Albumen carte-de-visite
Wm. B. Becker Collection/ American Museum of Photography
Repr. plate 13

27. *Mr. Raby with the Spirits 'Countess,' 'James Lombard,' 'Tommy,' and the Spirit of Mr. Wootton's Mother*
ca. 1875
Albumen print
9.8 x 8.4 cm
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

London Stereoscopic & Photographic Company
(British firm, active 1840s–1920s)

28. *'Grip,' the Original Raven of Barnaby Rudge*
ca. 1860s–70s
Albumen stereograph
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

Millar & Lang
(British firm, active from ca. 1890)

29. M. L. (possibly Millar & Lang)
The Old Curiosity Shop, Portsmouth Street
ca. 1890s
Albumen print
8.8 x 13.8 cm
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography
Repr. plate 9

F. M. Parks (British, dates unknown)

30. *Mrs. Collins & Her Husband's Father, Recognized by Several*
1875
Albumen carte-de-visite
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

Oscar Gustave Rejlander
(British, born Sweden, 1813–1875)

31. *Caught!*
1860s
Albumen carte-de-visite
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

32. *Costermonger*
1859
Albumen print
30.0 x 22.5 cm
George Eastman House Collection

33. *Homeless*
ca. 1860
Albumen print
20.2 x 14.9 cm
George Eastman House Collection
Repr. plate 15

Henry Peach Robinson
(British, 1830–1901)

34. *Dawn and Sunset*
1885
Composite photograph from three negatives
Platinum print by Ralph Winwood Robinson, ca. 1902
53.8 x 76.6 cm
George Eastman House Collection
Repr. plate 14

35. *When the Day's Work is Done*
1877
Composite photograph from six negatives
Platinum print by Ralph Winwood Robinson, ca. 1902
53.3 x 76.0 cm
George Eastman House Collection

George Gardner Rockwood
(American, 1832–1911)

36. *Charles Dickens*
1867–68
Albumen cabinet card
George Eastman House Collection

John Thomson (British, 1837–1921)

37. *Sufferers from the Floods*
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.6 x 9.1 cm
Plate 5 from John Thomson and Adolphe Smith, *Street Life in London* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1877–78) [hereafter *Street Life in London*]
George Eastman House Collection

38. *Public Disinfectors*
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.6 x 9.1 cm
Plate 6 from *Street Life in London*
George Eastman House Collection

39. *Street Doctor*
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.5 x 8.6 cm
Plate 7 from *Street Life in London*
George Eastman House Collection
Repr. plate 11

40. *The Temperance Sweep*
Published 1876
Woodburytype
9.1 x 5.7 cm
Plate 12 from *Street Life in London*
George Eastman House Collection

41. *The "Wall-Worker"*
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.5 x 7.6 cm
Plate 17 from *Street Life in London*
George Eastman House Collection

42. *Covent Garden Labourers*
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.4 x 8.6 cm
Plate 18 from *Street Life in London*
George Eastman House Collection

43. *The London Boardmen*
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.5 x 8.5 cm
Plate 25 from *Street Life in London*
George Eastman House Collection
Repr. plate 12

44. *"Hookey Alf," of Whitechapel*
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.1 x 8.4 cm
Plate 29 from *Street Life in London*
George Eastman House Collection

45. *The "Crawlers"*
Published 1876
Woodburytype
11.5 x 8.7 cm
Plate 30 from *Street Life in London*
George Eastman House Collection

46. *Old Furniture*
Published 1877
Woodburytype
11.2 x 8.8 cm
Plate 35 from *Street Life in London*
George Eastman House Collection

47. *The Independent Shoe-Black*
Published 1877
Woodburytype
11.1 x 8.6 cm
Plate 36 from *Street Life in London*
George Eastman House Collection

Unknown photographers

48. *Beggar Girl, I*
ca. 1860s
Albumen carte-de-visite
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

49. *Beggar Girl, II*
ca. 1860s
Albumen carte-de-visite
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

50. *The Crystal Palace, Sydenham*
(destroyed by fire 1936)
ca. 1870s
Albumen print
10.8 x 18.3 cm
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

51. *Orphans from the Royal Seamen and Marines' Orphan Schools and Female Orphan Home, Portsmouth, Visiting the Victory's Anchor on Southsea Beach*
ca. 1870s
Albumen print
5.8 x 7.8 cm (image); 9.6 x 12.2 cm (ribbon-shaped border)
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography
Repr. plate 10

52. *Osler's Crystal Fountain in the Crystal Palace, Sydenham* (destroyed by fire 1936)
ca. 1855
Stereoscopic daguerreotype
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography
Repr. plate 2

53. *St. John's Gate, Clerkenwell* (extant)
ca. 1860s
Albumen print
10.8 x 18 cm
Wm. B. Becker Collection/
American Museum of Photography

Acknowledgments

Planned to coincide with the Eighth Annual Dickens Society Symposium being chaired by English Professor Natalie Cole at Oakland University on October 10-12, 2003, *Dickensian London and the Photographic Imagination* brings together fifty-three nineteenth-century photographs inspired by the great novelist and his work. Of these, forty-one prints are borrowed from the outstanding George Eastman House Collection, Rochester, NY. Our warmest thanks go to Therese Mulligan, formerly Curator of Photographs, for supporting our initiative and making the loan possible. Also highlighted in the exhibition are twelve works generously lent by the Wm. B. Becker Collection, the backbone of the innovative virtual museum located at www.photographymuseum.com. The Oakland University community is greatly indebted to Wm. B. Becker for his continued support of our exhibition program.

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