

Restless Dickens: A Victorian *Life* in Motion, 1872–1927

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ABSTRACT

By comparing John Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1872–1874) with subsequent amateur forms of biographical activity in the period 1872–1927, this essay aims to challenge lingering conceptualizations of the material properties of Victorian biography as smooth and standardized. I argue that the parity of practice revealed between Forster's biography and the various composite forms of biographical narrative that came in its wake, such as Grangerizations and photography collections, throws into question the supposed unity of Forster's original text. It shows the ways in which his Dickens was always an unstable and metamorphosing figure, tracing an alternative genealogy for the subsequent forms of memorialization that push these biographical qualities further. It demonstrates continuities of preoccupation and practice in biographical activity 1872–1927, producing a narrative of Victorian and Modernist biography that emphasizes connection rather than rupture. Examining these composite forms of biographical narrative also reveals the proto-cinematic way in which they juxtapose and sequence similar but marginally different Dickenses, in order to create the sense of a figure temporally, physically and mentally in motion. From Forster's text onwards, Dickens is thus produced materially as well as verbally as a 'restless' subject, continually poised between stasis and movement. The recurring biographical use of montage, collage and compilation in order to put the subject in motion suggests a previously unconsidered dimension to the ancestry of cinema. It also works to extend our understanding of the media available to Victorian biography.

KEYWORDS: Dickens, biography, Forster, Grangerization, cinema, film, literature, photography, collecting

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1874, the Danish translator Ferd. C. Sørensen wrote to John Forster about the imminent publication of the third and final volume of Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1872–1874): 'Congratulating you with all my heart on having finished this "opus aere perennius"'.¹ Sørensen's reference was to the closing poem of Book III of Horace's *Odes*, in which the poet declares 'Exegi monumentum aere perennius' (I have raised a monument more permanent than bronze).² His quotation invokes a 'notion of biography as durable monument' which had itself endured since at least 1579, although its appropriateness was beginning to be questioned in the nineteenth century.³ Lytton Strachey offers a distinctly less grandiose conception of the

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¹ Ferd. C. Sørensen to John Forster, 19 January 1874, HM 52561, Box 2, John Forster Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

² Q. Horatius Flaccus, *The Odes and Epodes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), *Carmina*, III:30; p. 278.

³ For the history of the 'notion of biography as durable monument', see Ian Donaldson, 'National Biography and the Arts of Memory: From Thomas Fuller to Colin Matthew', in *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, ed. by Peter France and William St Clair (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2002), pp. 67–82 (pp. 68–69). For the nineteenth-century questioning of this metaphor, see Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 94.

material properties of Victorian biography in his preface to *Eminent Victorians* (1918), writing of '[t]hose two fat volumes . . . with their ill-digested masses of material . . . their lamentable lack . . . of design . . . works which certainly deserve the name of Standard Biographies.'⁴ If 'ill-digested' might suggest some irregularity in the texture of these works, the invocation of the predictable 'two fat volumes' nevertheless delineates an outline that is hard, standardized and inflexible.

This conceptualization of the material properties of Victorian biography has remained persistent. Kathryn Hughes has recently described it as her intention to restore the suppressed materiality of Victorian bodies to biography: 'I hope to introduce a certain lumpiness to canonical life narratives that have previously been rendered as smooth, symmetrical, and as strangely unconvincing as a death mask.'⁵ By comparing Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* with subsequent amateur forms of biographical activity in the period 1872–1927, this essay aims to challenge conceptualizations of the material properties of Victorian biography as smooth and standardized, restoring the suppressed materiality of Victorian biography to scholarly narratives, and demonstrating the ways in which this restoration enables a rethinking of Victorian biography's strategies and effects. I will argue that the parity of practice revealed between Forster's biography and various composite forms of biographical narrative that came in its wake, such as Grangerizations and photography collections, throws into question the supposed unity of Forster's original text. It shows the ways in which his Dickens was always an unstable and metamorphosing figure, tracing an alternative genealogy for subsequent forms of memorialization that push these biographical qualities further.

Attentiveness to the actual material properties of Victorian biographies works to rewrite the story of biography between 1872 and 1927 in terms of continuity and adaptation, disrupting existing scholarly narratives of Modernist rift with Victorian biographical practices. In doing so, the essay responds to Juliette Atkinson's call for the connection between nineteenth- and twentieth-century biography to be 'reconsidered in terms of dialogue rather than rupture.'⁶ A focus on these composite forms of biographical narrative reveals that Forster and his successors repeatedly use montage, collage and compilation in order to put the subject in motion; this produces a revisionist account of the relationship between Victorian literature and early cinema. In making the case for a link between the techniques of Victorian biography and those of film, the essay offers a previously unconsidered dimension to the genealogies of cinema which in the last 16 years Kamilla Elliott and Juliet John have traced from Victorian theatre and from Dickens's novels.⁷

2. FORSTER'S UNSTABLE TEXT

If John Forster's Danish translator saw his *Life of Charles Dickens* as a durable monument, some other contemporary readers of this biography conceptualized its material properties rather differently. For Thomas Carlyle, Forster's text was a form of collage, in which '[b]y . . . those sparkling clear and sunny utterances of Dickens' own . . . which were at your disposal and have been intercalated every now and then, you have given to every intelligent eye

⁴ Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 10.

⁵ Kathryn Hughes, *Victorians Undone: Tales of the Flesh in the Age of Decorum* (London: HarperCollins, 2017), p. xiv.

⁶ Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 12.

⁷ See Kamilla Elliott, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 125; Juliet John, *Dickens and Mass Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 196.

the power of looking down to the very bottom of Dickens' mode of existing in this world.⁸ Noting the ways in which late Victorian biographies 'mak[e] up their biographical subjects from autobiographies, letters, and other self-written texts', Amber K. Regis has argued for reading these biographies as 'a mode of edition.'⁹ However, Carlyle's language of 'intercalation', or insertion, also suggests the popular contemporary practice of Grangerization. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the verb *Grangerize* as meaning '[t]o illustrate (a book) by the addition of prints, engravings, etc., especially such as have been cut out of other books.'¹⁰ Carlyle may have had reason to think of Forster as a Grangerizer: Helena Langford has noted that Forster's library included '*Cromwelliana*, which Forster and Carlyle appear to have collaboratively Grangerised with various printed portraits.'¹¹

The writer and *Household Words* contributor Percy Fitzgerald famously described Forster taking the scissors to Dickens's letters in order to incorporate them into his biography: '[t]o save time and trouble, and this I was told by Mrs. Forster, he would cut out the passages he wanted . . . and paste them on his MS.'¹² This image of Forster as collagist is supported by the accounts of his working practices given directly by his widow, Eliza, and by his memoirist Henry Rawlins. In a letter of 1879, Eliza Forster lamented that '[u]nfortunately, my husband has so sadly cut up his own diary – that it is all in bits – . . . perhaps the best pieces were used with the ms of the Dickens Life.'¹³ In his undated memoir, Rawlins recalls that: 'Mr F was always . . . cutting out pieces from newspapers to the day of his death – In the preparation of his early vols of the [*Lives of the Statesmen of the Commonwealth*] he had cut up many books & it was to obviate this that he engaged me to copy the extracts required for his note books –'¹⁴ In confirming collage, insertion, and the repurposing of texts written both by himself and others as part of Forster's biographical practice, Fitzgerald, Eliza and Rawlins work to undo the distinction between Forster's biography and the Grangerization of it that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Other contemporary readers of Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* found analogies, not necessarily favourable, between its author and the figure of the collector. An anonymous article in *The Athenaeum* was written in terms that foreshadow some of Strachey's criticisms:

Forster was surprisingly little of a biographical artist. . . . He lacked the instinct of symmetry and the sense of proportion; . . . it is difficult to see or understand what

⁸ Thomas Carlyle to John Forster, 16 February 1874, HM 52473, Box 1, John Forster Papers.

⁹ Amber K. Regis, 'Un/making the Victorians: Literary Biography, 1880–1930', in *A Companion to Literary Biography*, ed. by Richard Bradford (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), pp. 63–86 (pp. 68, 64).

¹⁰ 'Grangerize' in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2019) <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 8 October 2019]. For an account of the origins and development of Grangerization, see Lucy Peltz, *Facing the Text: Extra-Illustration, Print Culture, and Society in Britain, 1769–1840* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library Press, 2017), pp. 1–50.

¹¹ Helena Langford, 'John Forster as Biographer: A Case Study in Nineteenth-Century Biography' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2010), p. 76. If true, this was not the only occasion on which the role of Dickens biographer was combined with that of Grangerizer. Percy Fitzgerald (1834–1925), author of *The Life of Charles Dickens as Revealed in his Writings* (1905) and *Memories of Charles Dickens* (1913), was described by A. M. Broadley as one of the most 'enthusiastic living grangerizers', 'the proud possessor of an inlayed "Pickwick," in fifty volumes'. A. M. Broadley, *Granger, Grangerizing and Grangerizers; A Preface to Granger Grangerized by A Grangerizer* (Bridport: W. & E. Frost, 1903), p. 3.

¹² [Percy Fitzgerald], *John Forster by One of his Friends* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1903), p. 16.

¹³ Eliza Forster to Whitwell Elwin, 11 December 1879, HM 52499, Box 1, John Forster Papers.

¹⁴ HM 52546, Box 2, John Forster Papers.

were his principles of selection and appropriation. . . . As yet we know nothing of . . . [Dickens] except what we are able to pick out for ourselves from the collections of [his] biographer.¹⁵

Lacking finish, symmetry, and sufficient selectiveness, Forster's biography seems according to this view to resemble the dust heaps of *Our Mutual Friend*: readers themselves must comb it for items of value. In comparable vein, Baron Tauchnitz wrote to Forster: 'I read of course your *Life of Dickens* with the highest interest. I am myself in possession of many letters of the late Mr Dickens, most valuable to me.'¹⁶ His ambiguous compliment suggests that Forster's biography might be reducible to a collection of Dickens letters, of which he himself possesses the equivalent.

If Sørensen's image of Forster's *Life* as a 'monument more permanent than bronze' suggested qualities of hardness, stasis, unity and impermeability, and Strachey's 'two fat volumes' suggest a standardized predictability, what emerges from these other contemporary conceptualizations of Forster's text is a sense of affinity with forms of biographical activity – Grangerization and collection – that tend rather towards polyphony, mutability and open-endedness. Forster was himself a collector, whose substantial bequest at his death to the South Kensington Museum included Grangerized texts that he had owned.¹⁷ Spanning the years 1831 to 1876, his career as biographer produced nine volumes of biographical essays and five full-length biographies, with subjects including the seventeenth-century parliamentarians Sir John Eliot and Oliver Cromwell, as well as literary figures including Oliver Goldsmith, Walter Savage Landor, and Jonathan Swift (biography incomplete), in addition to Dickens.¹⁸ He played a significant role in the professionalization of the figure of the biographer: Elisabeth G. Gitter writes that '[m]ore than any other biographer of his time, Forster made a business of biography'.¹⁹ Nevertheless, there is an overlap between some of his biographical techniques and those of the collectors and Grangerizers whose work I will discuss later in this essay, and the experimental vibrancy of these amateur forms of life-writing is also present in his *Life of Charles Dickens*.

Carolyn Steedman has argued that 'the narrative closure of biography is the figure that has been created through the pages of the book', and that in this sense biography and autobiography are in conflict with the open-endedness of history.²⁰ The Dickens created through the pages of Forster's book, however, resists closure and unity, to the extent that what he is composed of is not a book but a series of books. Forster's decision to publish the biography serially, in three volumes, may have been made partly in tribute to the mode of publication that Dickens had practised so successfully, and that was associated with Dickens; it may also have been prompted by fears that he might not live to complete the work (he died in 1876, two years after the last volume was published). Helena Langford notes that '*The Life of Dickens* was the only biography of Forster's to be published in this triform way'.²¹ The figure that Forster

¹⁵ *Athenaeum*, 29 November 1879, p. 687.

¹⁶ Baron Tauchnitz to John Forster, 8 January 1873, HM 52563, Box 2, John Forster Papers.

¹⁷ Langford, 'John Forster', p. 3.

¹⁸ See Langford, 'John Forster', pp. 8–9.

¹⁹ Elisabeth G. Gitter, 'The Rhetoric of Reticence in John Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 25 (1996), 127–39 (p. 138n).

²⁰ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 147.

²¹ Langford, 'John Forster', p. 211.

bequeathed to the public was from the first, therefore, a fragmented and multiple one. The instant commercial success of the first volume rapidly generated a series of near-replica editions. Each bore evidence of a lapse of time; each produced a fractionally different Dickens to the extent that the mounting edition numbers, and publisher's advertisements and notices in the later editions of the volumes, bore witness to the swiftly expanding cultural reach of the biographical figure produced by Forster.²²

The tenth edition of the first volume additionally included a notice by Forster to the reader, advising that minor corrections of fact had been made, and containing some extra information about Dickens's early life that he had gleaned since the biography was first published, via his own research and via a reader of the biography who had written to him. The eleventh edition included a new notice (written a month later) advising of a new footnote quarrelling with the illustrator George Cruikshank's recent claim to have originated *Oliver Twist*. The twelfth edition included a footnote with additional information about Dickens's work. The second volume of the biography contained a notice to the reader which summarized all these changes, spelled out the corrections of fact that had been made in the tenth edition, and advised the reader that 'I have received letters from several obliging correspondents . . . but such remark as they suggest will more properly accompany my third and closing volume.'²³ In fact, the third volume 'closed' with an appendix listing corrections made in the latest reprinting of the second volume, followed by this statement:

At the close of the corrections to the first volume, prefixed to the second, the intention was expressed to advert at the end of the work to information, not in correction but in illustration of my text, forwarded by obliging correspondents who had been scholars at the Wellington House Academy (i. 54). But inexorable limits of space prevent, *for the present*, a fulfilment of this intention.²⁴

That is, the last line of Forster's three-volume *Life of Charles Dickens* is a notification to the reader that the biography is not finished and may be taken up again.²⁵ It seems unlikely, but just possible, that this was intended by Forster as a tease to the reader: a tribute to the cliff-hanger endings of serial publication, a satirization of the public's apparently insatiable thirst for information about Dickens's life, and a parody of his own tendency towards endless revision of this biography. When a cheaper two-volume edition was published by Chapman and Hall in 1876, it omitted this final appendix, making Dickens's will the closing document, and thus eliding the overtly unfinished Dickens that Forster's earlier text had presented to its Victorian readership.

The combination of serial publication, commercial success rapidly generating multiple editions, and Forster's scrupulosity, meant that what this first readership of Dickens's authorized biography received was a figure in motion, mutating under the reader's eye, and avowedly under construction. Forster's decision to bring the written reactions of readers within his text – whether to expand upon what he had written, or to quarrel with them – created a

²² See Langford, 'John Forster', pp. 210, 212.

²³ John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 3 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872–1874), II (1873), vii.

²⁴ Forster, *Charles Dickens*, III, 521 (italics mine).

²⁵ It was, in fact, taken up again, but not with the promised information from Dickens's schoolfellows. A later printing of the third volume appends a very short list of 'CORRECTIONS IN THE TWELFTH THOUSAND OF THE THIRD VOLUME':

polyphonous biographical voice, and a sense of Dickens's biography as an ongoing and communal work. This rapidly multiplying plethora of similar but marginally different editions also meant that Forster's biography became not just one, but many texts, co-existing with each other and producing a plethora of similar but marginally different Dickens. While this layering effect might be ascribed to a combination of the factors affecting the biography's publication history that I describe above, rather than a deliberate design by Forster to keep his biographical figure of Dickens in motion, it is worth noting that it is also used as a visual technique within the biography. Each volume of the three-volume edition includes 'as a frontispiece, a portrait of Dickens (in volume i, aged 27 by Maclise; in vol. ii, at 47 by Frith; in vol. iii, at 56 . . . from the last photograph taken in America of Dickens)' (Figures 1–3).²⁶

Forster made the choice to have these diverse portraits regularized in terms of size, style and medium (the first two are reproductions engraved by Robert Graves; the third is engraved by J. C. Armytage). There is evidence to suggest that Victorians read these images in sequence. The art critic Elizabeth Eastlake wrote to Forster on receipt of the third volume of the biography: 'How charming are those three profiles by dear old Maclise! I see the likeness in each.'²⁷ Her mistaken ascription of all three portraits, rather than only the first one, to Maclise, shows Forster's success in regularizing the images to create the sense of a unified yet changing figure. Her letter also demonstrates that readers receiving the third volume might retain their memory of the frontispiece images in the first two, mentally and perhaps physically juxtaposing them and reading across them to track Dickens's altering 'likeness' as it moves both temporally and physically. John Plunkett has described the ways in which mid-Victorian pictorial journalism and illustrated children's books sought to reproduce in print the 'way[s] of seeing' associated with moving image technologies of the period, such as panoramas, dioramas, and magic lantern shows.²⁸ By regularizing and sequencing a series of Dickens portraits, Forster was able to incorporate into his biography the aesthetic of recent technologies, such as Antoine Claudet's stereo moving-picture device in 1852, that experimented with the use of sequenced pictures to create a sense of movement.²⁹

Forster's decision to disrupt the continuity of the images by choosing a third portrait in which Dickens's gaze switches to the left, rather than selecting another photograph, from the plenitude available, as the basis of the engraving, suggests a conscious choice to depict this third stage of Dickens's life as a swerve away from his previous self. This echoes the themes of rupture (both in terms of Dickens's relationship with his wife, and his relationship with Forster) which recent criticism has noted in the third volume.³⁰ It also echoes the broader way in which this *Life* verbally enshrines a sense of movement and agitation, both physical and mental, as central to biographical conceptions of Dickens. 'Restless' is a key word in Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*. It is foregrounded not only by frequency of use, and by the echoing formulation 'restless and resistless', but by its prominence in the organizing structure of the

²⁶ Langford, 'John Forster', p. 212.

²⁷ Elizabeth Eastlake to John Forster, 18 November 1874, MSL/1970/2993, Forster and Dyce Auxiliary Collection, National Art Library, London.

²⁸ John Plunkett, 'Optical Recreations and Victorian Literature', in *Literature and the Visual Media*, ed. by David Seed, *Essays and Studies*, 58 (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), pp. 1–28 (p. 13).

²⁹ See John Plunkett, 'Depth, Colour, Movement: Embodied Vision and the Stereoscope', in *Multimedia Histories: From the Magic Lantern to the Internet*, ed. by James Lyons and John Plunkett (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), pp. 117–31 (pp. 125–27).

³⁰ See Holly Furneaux, 'Inscribing Friendship: John Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* and the Writing of Male Intimacy in the Victorian Period', *Life Writing*, 8 (2011), 243–56 (p. 246).



Figure 1. Frontispiece to John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 3 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872–1874), I. Courtesy of the Charles Dickens Museum, London. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.

chapters: ‘The old restlessness’ as a sub-heading of volume II, chapter XVIII (where it refers to the desire to travel physically while generating a new book); ‘Restlessness’ as a sub-heading of volume III, chapter II (ditto); and ‘Restlessness and impatience’ as a margin-marker of volume III, chapter VII (where it refers obliquely to Dickens’s growing dissatisfaction with his marriage, as well as to the range and strenuousness of his pursuits).³¹ As these uses indicate, Forster exploits the word’s multiple significations, which encompass both physical and

³¹ The formulation ‘restless and resistless’ is used twice, early in vol. I, at important moments: once when reflecting on the ‘restless and resistless energy’ which enabled Dickens to transcend his unpromising childhood circumstances, and once when recollecting Forster’s own and others’ reactions to Dickens’s face on first meeting, and the ‘restless and resistless vivacity and force’ which they perceived in it. See Forster, *Charles Dickens*, I, 51, 97. For the use of ‘restlessness’ in the organizing structure of the chapters, see Forster, *Charles Dickens*, II (1873), xix; III, vii, 157.

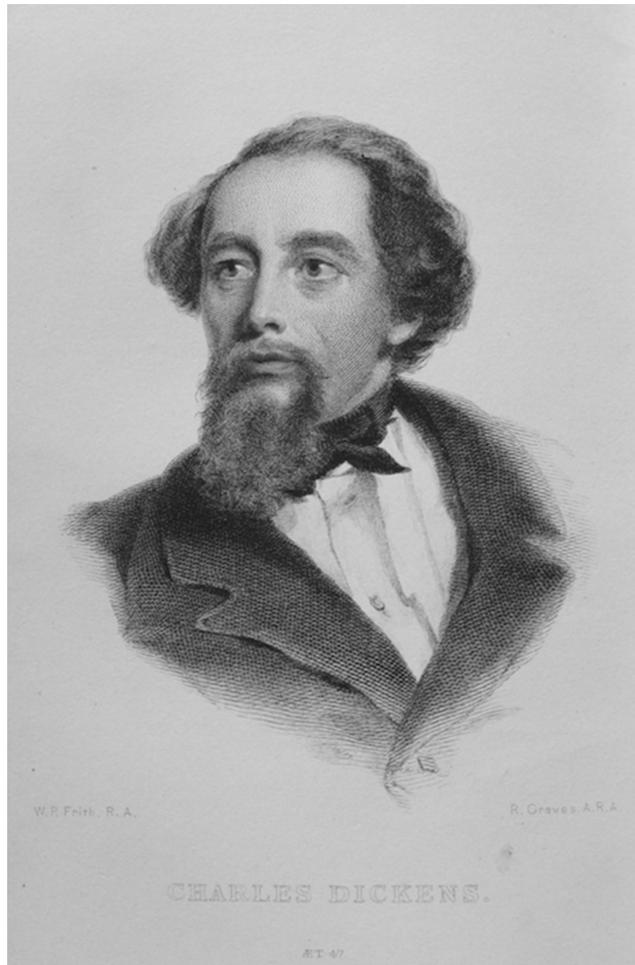


Figure 2. Frontispiece to John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 3 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872–1874), II (1873). Courtesy of the Charles Dickens Museum, London. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.

mental activity: it can mean ‘constantly stirring or active, or wishing to be so’.³² Rosemarie Bodenheimer has highlighted Forster’s biographical handling of Dickens’s restlessness, with similar breadth of meaning, arguing that ‘Forster . . . manages a neat juxtaposition of Dickens’s restless roaming and his need for a daily schedule of work and exercise’.³³

Thus, both in foregrounding textual revision and the multiple editions it generates, and in the visual culture of his biography, Forster uses a montage of multiple and marginally (or less marginally) disrupted Dickenses to reinforce his biography’s textual depiction of a figure

³² ‘Restless’ in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2019) <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 8 October 2019].

³³ Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 178.



Figure 3. Frontispiece to John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 3 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872–1874), III. Courtesy of the Charles Dickens Museum, London. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.

constantly in motion physically, mentally and emotionally. Hermione Lee’s use of the language of cinematic technique is therefore less anachronistic than it might seem, when she writes that Forster’s *Life of Charles Dickens* ‘gave a sympathetic, energetic close-up of its remarkable subject’.³⁴

In a critique echoing the conceptualization of the material properties of Victorian biography as inflexible and impermeable, Ian Hamilton has argued that Forster’s ‘biographer’s instinct . . . was to leave behind a narrative that would be hard to alter’.³⁵ Yet what I have aimed to demonstrate is that Forster encouraged the perception of his text as continuously reworkable.

³⁴ Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 59.

³⁵ Ian Hamilton, *Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography* (London: Hutchinson, 1992), p. 156.

In its multiple editions, with their burgeoning lists of corrections and additions, what his biography visibly bequeathed the public was less a monumental Dickens than a malleable and mutable one. In doing so, it prepared the way for the amateur forms of life narrative that would push this mutability further.

3. GRANGERIZED FORSTER

The Grangerization of Dickens biographies is a diverse practice. Auction notices from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries make it clear that editions of Forster's *Life* became a repository for extensive and sometimes valuable material related to Dickens's life during this period, including autographed letters and other manuscripts, and 'rare and original' playbills (see for example [Figure 4](#)). Forster's three volumes 'were typically extended to between six and eighteen volumes'.³⁶ However, Forster's was not the only late-Victorian biographical work on Dickens to be Grangerized. The Huntington Library contains editions of *The Letters of Charles Dickens, Edited by his Sister-in-Law and his Eldest Daughter* (1880–1882), Robert Langton's *The Childhood and Youth of Dickens* (1891), and the *Letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins* (1892), which have also been Grangerized, albeit more sparsely, and without the inclusion of

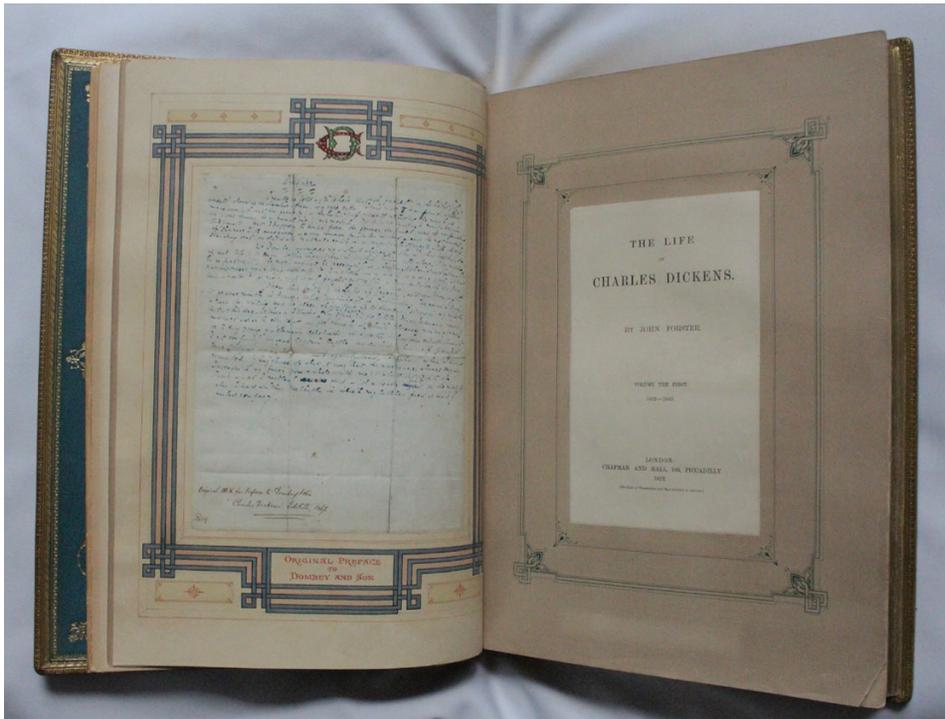


Figure 4. Charles Dickens's manuscript preface to *Dombey and Son* inserted opposite the printed title page of John Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens*. Irving Grangerization, 8 vols, Forster, *Charles Dickens*, I. Courtesy of the Charles Dickens Museum, London. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.

³⁶ Langford, 'John Forster', pp. 225–26.

manuscripts. The Huntington Library also contains at least two sparsely Grangerized editions of Forster's *Life*, showing that this text attracted a spectrum of Grangerizing practice.

As well as variations in the frequency of insertion and type of extra material inserted, the form which insertion took was also varied. The Grangerized Dickens biographies I have examined at the British Library, Charles Dickens Museum, and Huntington Library include editions with entirely pasted-in material and editions with entirely loose extra material inserted between pages, as well as editions which contain both. Most overtly, then, editions which have been Grangerized with loose insertions tend towards a destabilized biographical figure. The Huntington Library contains two editions of Forster's *Life*, and an edition of Robert Langton's *The Childhood and Youth of Dickens*, that have been Grangerized in this way. The insertions in these volumes are not valuable manuscript letters or large topographical prints, nor are they bound into the published text (although in one case, they sit alongside insertions which have been bound in). Rather, they are loose miscellaneous snippings, often much smaller than the pages they are inserted into, and sitting in constant danger of tumbling out when the book is re-opened. They are drawn from ephemeral forms of print media: newspapers, magazines, and auction catalogues. These Grangerizations make use of forms of materiality that were not available to Forster's *Life*, to keep the published text of their chosen biography permanently open to insertion, addition, annotation, correction, and criticism, creating Dickens as a figure who is constantly moving and metamorphosing under the reader's eyes.

Grangerizations with entirely pasted-in material can also use their insertions to put their biographical figure of Dickens in motion. Victoria Mills has discussed the ways in which the movement of bodies through landscapes, and the pasting of insertions into a printed text, were linked in late-Victorian publishing practices, as the Leipzig publisher Bernhard Tauchnitz and Co. produced 'unbound editions of novels and travel guides set in Italy . . . [with] blank spaces onto which tourists could paste photographs or postcards relating to scenes in the text'.³⁷ Mills highlights 'the interplay between the form of tactile engagement necessary to extra-illustrate [i.e. Grangerize] – that involving fingers and hands, producing objects that were portable – and the experience of the body moving past large, stationary objects (monuments, buildings)'.³⁸ The Grangerized Dickens biographies that I have studied suggest the ways in which pasted-in insertions might also be used to create a sense of mental movement and activity. The Huntington Grangerization of the *Letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins* has been specially bound, with its original pages and insertions alike inlaid and mounted on larger sheets.³⁹ The British Library holds a Grangerized edition of Forster's *Life* which the Dickens collector John Furber Dexter (1848–1927) was compiling until at least 1919. This edition is not currently bound, but is contained in 14 large green boxes. Both the leaves of Forster's text, and Dexter's insertions, have been inlaid and mounted on larger sheets. These two Grangerizations make particularly rich use of the insertion of topographical images which is common in Grangerized Dickens biographies.

³⁷ See Victoria Mills, 'Photography, Travel Writing and Tactile Tourism: Extra-Illustrating *The Marble Faun*', in *Travel Writing, Visual Culture and Form, 1760–1900*, ed. by Mary Henes and Brian H. Murray (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 65–86 (p. 65).

³⁸ Victoria Mills, 'Photography, Travel Writing and Tactile Tourism', p. 71.

³⁹ I treat this selected edition of the letters, with its introduction and linking explanatory passages by the editor, Laurence Hutton, as a form of Dickens biography.

Covering the period 1851 to Dickens's death in 1870, and thus including the breakdown of his marriage and the commencement of his public readings in 1858, the Grangerized *Letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins* encompasses a particularly peripatetic period in Dickens's generally peripatetic life – which may partly account for the frequency of topographical insertions. Rather than only being used to illustrate Dickens's actual travels, however, the insertions are also used to illustrate places as they exist in his mind – that is, they illustrate Dickens's ideas and wishes as well as his experiences. Thus, a print of 'Le Nouveau Theatre [*sic*] de la Porte Saint-Martin' in Paris is inserted opposite a letter to Collins, not because Dickens's and Collins's play *No Thoroughfare* was actually performed there, but because Dickens has been told that 'if it could have been done at the Porte St. Martin it would have gone 200 nights.'⁴⁰ Images of Rochester Bridge, and of Hampstead Heath, are inserted opposite earlier letters, not to mark the fact that Dickens and Collins actually went there together (which remains uncertain), but to represent the fact that Dickens wanted to go there and was inviting Collins. These insertions illustrate the idea of Rochester in Dickens's mind, not (or not only) the presence of his physical body in Rochester.

The effect is even more overt in a series of insertions made in Dexter's Grangerization, where a decision has clearly been made to illustrate Dickens's mental topography in preference to the place where he is actually staying. The relevant Dickens letter, quoted in Forster's text, states that '[t]his [Torquay] is a very pretty place – a compound of Hastings, Tunbridge Wells, and little bits of the hills about Naples'. What follows this page in Dexter's Grangerization is three inserted topographical prints: of Hastings, of Tunbridge Wells, and of Naples.⁴¹ Thus, taken together, these insertions attempt to enrich and extend the account of Dickens's subjectivity offered by their foundational texts from the verbal to the visual: they seek methods to enable the reader to inhabit Dickens's subjectivity as fully as possible. In sequence, the still images offer a quasi-cinematic attempt to map the movement and play of his mind. Untethered from the verbal, they might be seen as an attempt to access forms of experience in which the visual is foregrounded: Dickens's hypnagogic mental processes or his dreams. The materialization of Dickens biography becomes a method for capturing the most intangible aspects of his lived experience.

The Dexter Grangerization extends the collage and montage techniques of Forster's biography to generate new stories about Dickens's life. In exaggerating, materializing and foregrounding these techniques, it offers an interpretative reading of Forster's biography and the processes by which it is put together. However, this 14-box Grangerization also foregrounds and externalizes the methods of biography more broadly. This is also true of the eight-volume Grangerized edition of Forster's biography which in 1891 was given as a gift to the actor-manager and Dickens collector Sir Henry Irving (1838–1905), and which is currently owned by the Charles Dickens Museum.⁴² In their excess of insertion, these Grangerizations dramatize the processes of selection and construction of narrative involved in literary biography. They stage both the chaos and surfeit of the materials generated by a life, and the attempt to impose order. These Grangerizations also highlight the gaps in biographical archives and in the accessibility of the biographical subject. Some of the manuscript letters inserted

⁴⁰ Grangerization, *Letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins*, ed. by Laurence Hutton (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1892), pp. 160–61, Huntington Library.

⁴¹ Dexter Grangerization, 14 boxes, Forster, *Charles Dickens*, vol. III part III, 238, British Library, London.

⁴² This Grangerization had been 'in the catalogue of Mr. [Francis] Harvey, the bookseller', before it was acquired by John L. Toole as a gift for Irving. See The Editor [B. W. Matz], 'When Found—', *Dickensian*, 2 (1906), 3–4 (p. 3).

into the Irving Grangerized Forster have holes in them where the sealing wax has been removed.⁴³ A fragmentary letter from Dickens to his sister Fanny has a pencil note on it in a later hand: ‘this part [of the letter is] entirely irrecoverable | taken probably (says Burnet [i.e. Dickens’s brother-in-law]) to light a candle.’⁴⁴

Grangerized insertions also make visible the processes of biographical research, and document the pursuit of further biographical information about the subject. Pasted-in advertisements for theatrical benefit performances in the Irving edition show pencilled annotations or ticks against Dickens’s name in the printed list of Committee members, dramatizing the quest of the Grangerizer who has searched for him among the rest.⁴⁵ The Dexter Grangerization foregrounds the processes of biographical pursuit even more explicitly. Its insertions capture correspondence to Dexter from people he evidently wrote to in pursuit of Dickens material, including several letters from Dickens’s sister-in-law Helen Dickens, in the 1880s and early 1890s. A letter she wrote to Dexter on 26 January 1888 reads in part:

I shall be happy to assist you if I can. . . . I will show you my portraits of Mr. Charles Dickens & you will see if there are any not already in your collection. You shall also see a portrait of my husband Alfred Dickens.

An envelope addressed to him by her bears the pencil annotation ‘Wife of [Dickens’s brother] Alfred Dickens.’⁴⁶

That is, this Grangerization stages in materialized form the sort of biographical pursuit that would later be dramatized in purely textual form in the influential Modernist biography *The Quest for Corvo*. Written by A. J. A. Symons and published in 1934, *The Quest for Corvo* incorporates the texts of letters to the biographer from his subject’s family and acquaintances, in response to his queries. However, it is missing the envelopes and pencil annotations that Dexter’s Grangerization includes. The subtitle of *The Quest for Corvo* is *An Experiment in Biography*, and recent criticism has accepted Symons’s claim that in foregrounding the biographer’s quest for his subject he was indeed doing something experimental.⁴⁷ However, the Dexter Grangerization suggests that what was experimental about *Corvo* was not so much its foregrounding of biographical pursuit, as its presentation of that pursuit in dematerialized and purely literary form. Symons’s biography was not so much a radical Modernist innovation as a more literary and stylish, but also dematerialized, take on Grangerizing texts and practices of which Symons, as a bibliographer and rare book collector with a particular interest in Dickens biography, seems likely to have been aware.⁴⁸

These Grangerized biographies occupy an ambiguous position, then, between private and public objects. To the extent that they remain open, and are not showpiece objects,

⁴³ Irving Grangerization, 8 vols, Forster, *Charles Dickens*, I, Charles Dickens Museum, London.

⁴⁴ Irving Grangerization, IV.

⁴⁵ Irving Grangerization, V.

⁴⁶ Dexter Grangerization, vol. III part III.

⁴⁷ See Laura Marcus, ‘The Newness of the “New Biography”’, in *Mapping Lives*, ed. by France and St Clair, pp. 193–218 (p. 211); Allen Hibbard, ‘Biographer and Subject: A Tale of Two Narratives’, *South Central Review*, 23 (2006), 19–36 (pp. 23–24); Richard Holmes, ‘Teaching’, in *This Long Pursuit: Reflections of a Romantic Biographer* (London: William Collins, 2016), pp. 45–70 (p. 56) (first publ. in ‘The Proper Study?’, in *Mapping Lives*, ed. by France and St Clair, pp. 7–18 (p. 14)).

⁴⁸ See Julian Symons, *A. J. A. Symons: His Life & Speculations* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 33.

Grangerizations with loose insertions seem more likely to reflect a private reading experience. However, in 1906 the *Dickensian* editor B. W. Matz described the Irving Grangerization as having been ‘much talked about in public and in the Press’ when it was in the catalogue of the bookseller Francis Harvey before 1891, and noted that it was acquired as a gift for Irving after he and the gift-giver John L. Toole had been ‘[a]mong the many persons who went to view it.’⁴⁹ The inclusion within the Dexter Grangerization of numerous insertions which Dexter annotated to record their status as gifts from other Dickens enthusiasts and collectors, similarly suggests texts that were intended for display and circulation within at least a select coterie, prior to their being acquired by public institutions. (The Irving volumes were acquired by the Charles Dickens Museum in 1927, and the Dexter volumes by the British Museum in 1969.) Grangerization as a practice also made its way back into the domain of published biography. In 1911, Chapman and Hall, who had published Forster’s original *Life of Charles Dickens*, published a Memorial Edition ‘[w]ith 500 portraits, facsimiles and other illustrations, collected, arranged, and annotated by B. W. Matz’. The boundary between these private assemblages, and the history of published Dickens biography, was thus a permeable one.

Dexter’s Grangerized Forster provides a suggestive example of a bridge between Victorian and Modernist biography. Taking a Victorian biographical text as its foundation, its insertions offer evidence of biographical activity undertaken from the 1870s to at least 1919. The dates of its genesis and compilation as a Grangerization remain elusive; however, it evidently drew on existing Victorian practices of Grangerizing Dickens biography, while introducing a less-established form of insertion that would prove influential in the development of biography as a genre. Offering a palimpsest of changing biographical practice, this Grangerization records the re-creation of Dickens from a Victorian to a Modernist subject.

4. PHOTO-BIOGRAPHY

Dexter’s Grangerized insertions include several large sheets onto which multiple photographs of Dickens have been pasted. Each sheet contains similar but slightly different photographs from the same portrait sitting, with one or two sittings included. While the sequencing of these photographs varies, they are on several occasions ordered so as to foreground the movement of Dickens’s expression, face and body which has taken place between shots (see for example [Figure 5](#)).⁵⁰

This sequencing reads as an extension of the visual technique discussed above, whereby Forster regularized three engraved portraits of Dickens as the frontispieces to his three volumes, in order to reinforce a sense of temporal, physical and emotional movement in the biographical figure that he was creating. This Grangerizing technique is itself extended, in a collection that experiments with telling a narrative of Dickens’s life through visual images of him. The Huntington Library holds three photography collections relating to Dickens’s life and works that were owned by the American collector William Glyde Wilkins (1854–1921), including one partially composed of a chronological sequence of 95 photographic portraits

⁴⁹ The Editor [B. W. Matz], ‘When Found—’, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Dexter Grangerization, vol. III part III.

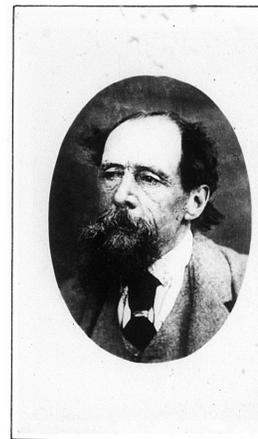


Figure 5. Inserted sheet with four photographs of Dickens. Dexter Grangerization, 14 boxes, John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, vol. III part III. © British Library Board (Dex.316). This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.

of Dickens, as well as 16 photographic reproductions of painted, sketched, and lithographed portraits of him.⁵¹

While the original containers for this collection were discarded by the Library at some point after the collection was acquired in 1922, the surviving containers for the remaining two Wilkins photography collections at the Huntington suggest that Wilkins conceived of these collections as a form of text (Figure 6). These containers were used to house photCL 34 (described in the Huntington online catalogue as ‘Collection of photographs illustrating places mentioned in the works of Charles Dickens’), and photCL 35 (‘Collection of photographs depicting scenes and places associated with Charles Dickens’s *The Pickwick Papers*’).⁵² The containers have been made up to look like book covers (and perhaps to match an existing set of Dickens texts owned by Wilkins). Handwritten or printed captions on the photographs themselves make these collections a bimodal meshing of image and text analogous to Forster’s illustrated biography of Dickens, and indeed to the majority of other Dickens biographies both contemporaneous with and subsequent to Forster. If the Wilkins collection of Dickens portraits is to be read as a form of biography, however, it is unquestionably one that foregrounds image over text. Of particular note within the collection are clusters of images from individual photoshoots that show Dickens in an almost identical pose, but with slight variation indicative of movement between shots (see for example Figures 7–8).

Sharon Marcus has discussed the ways in which compilers of theatrical scrapbooks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cut carefully around the outlines of performers’ bodies in photographs before pasting them into albums, ‘liberat[ing] images of actors from rectilinear frames, [and] using deft scissor work to emphasize how the dynamic, fluid contours of images endowed performing bodies with the illusion of motion.’⁵³ The contemporary context of this cut-out technique throws emphasis on the specifically proto-cinematic way in which Forster, Dexter and Wilkins all instead turn to the sequencing of marginally disrupted images of Dickens in order to produce a sense of animation. Placed in succession, within a collection, the Wilkins clusters of images read as a prototype for early cinema stills, or what Garrett Stewart describes as the ‘photogram . . . [:] the individuated photographic unit on the transparent [celluloid] strip that conduces in motion to screen movement.’⁵⁴ They suggest

⁵¹ It should be noted that the provenance of this specific collection, as currently catalogued by the Huntington Library (‘photCL 36’), is somewhat unclear. The photographs were evidently acquired by Henry E. Huntington at the sale of Wilkins’s Dickens Collection that took place 13–14 February 1922. However, the collection as it stands does not align neatly with any of the single lots listed in the auction catalogue. It may have brought together elements of lot 458 (‘A Scarce collection of Reproductions of Dickens Portraits, covering various periods in his life’) and lot 460 (highlighted in an inserted note at the front of the auction catalogue as ‘brought together by Mr. Wilkins . . . and . . . considered by him to contain every likeness of Dickens published, without duplication’). To accept the chronological sequence in which the portrait photographs currently stand, may therefore be to accept the structuring logic of a subsequent cataloguer, rather than that of Wilkins himself. However, I have considered it reasonable to read the portraits in this way, partly in the absence of other sequencing information, and partly on the grounds that a chronological interest is implied by Wilkins’s desire comprehensively to map ‘every likeness of Dickens published’. See *The Dickens Collection of the Late William Glyde Wilkins of Pittsburgh, PA* (New York, NY: Anderson Galleries, 1922), p. 55 and title page.

⁵² ‘PhotCL 34’, in *Huntington Library Catalog* <<https://catalog.huntington.org/record=b1837133>> [accessed 8 October 2019], and ‘PhotCL 35’, in *Huntington Library Catalog* <<https://catalog.huntington.org/record=b1837134>> [accessed 8 October 2019].

⁵³ Sharon Marcus, ‘The Theatrical Scrapbook’, *Theatre Survey*, 54 (2013), 283–307 (p. 301).

⁵⁴ Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen: Modernism’s Photo Synthesis* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 5.

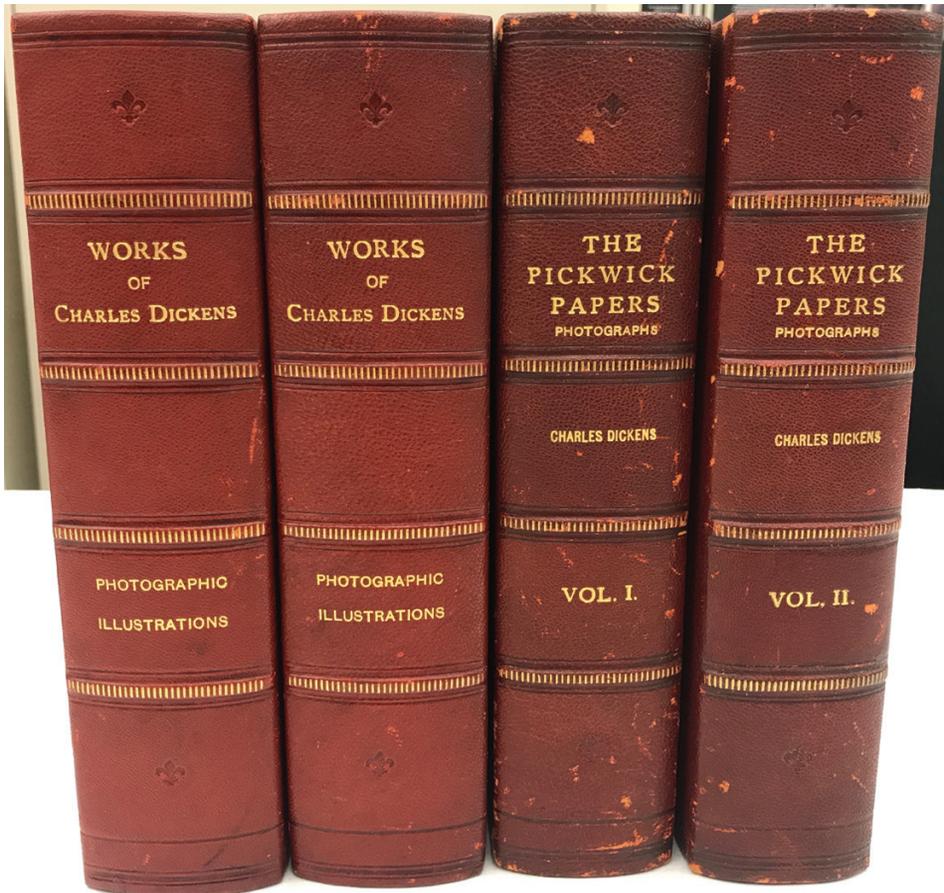


Figure 6. William Glyde Wilkins's containers for two collections of photographic illustrations to Dickens's works. photCL34 (Box 3), Collection of photographs illustrating places mentioned in the works of Charles Dickens, and photCL 35 (Box 3), Collection of photographs depicting scenes and places associated with Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers*, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Digital image by Lucy Whitehead. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.

that late Victorian and early Modernist Dickens biography needs to be considered as a potentially filmic, and not exclusively as a literary, space.

They are suggestive, too, of the aspects of Dickens that might be brought to the fore by this shift in medium, and the type of figure that might be produced. These images accentuate embodiment, ostensibly offering us information about the ways Dickens stood, sat, lounged, read, or wrote, in place of a narrative about his family history or professional development. In their invitation to read character through external appearance and physical mannerisms, they are an eminently Dickensian form of biography. Focussing on the Dickens portraits taken by a particular photographer, Herbert Watkins, Leon Litvack has argued that Watkins 'continually strove for a feeling of verisimilitude in portraiture', and notes that for one session, the usual studio prop desk was replaced with Dickens's own: 'The desk was conveyed to Watkins's



Figure 7. photCL36 (66), Collection of photographic portraits of Charles Dickens, Dickens's family and friends, and his residences, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.

studio for the session, then fetched back to Tavistock House in mid-July 1858 by Dickens's manservant, John Thompson.⁵⁵ In this reading, then, what these photographs offered to their audience was a sense of naturalistic access to Dickens's physical appearance and material accoutrements.

Daniel Novak, however, has argued that the Victorians thought of photography also as 'a medium with the potential to *efface* particularity and individuality.'⁵⁶ He highlights a trial of

⁵⁵ Leon Litvack, 'Dickens Posing for Posterity: The Photographs of Herbert Watkins,' *Dickens Quarterly*, 34.2 (2017), 96–158 (p. 137).

⁵⁶ Daniel Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 5.



Figure 8. photCL36 (67), Collection of photographic portraits of Charles Dickens, Dickens's family and friends, and his residences, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.

1883, in which the photographer Napoleon Sarony successfully sued a lithographic company for copyright infringement, on the grounds that Oscar Wilde's 'pose' in the photographs that Sarony had taken of him was Sarony's 'original' creation.⁵⁷ As Litvack notes, there is evidence to suggest that Dickens experienced portrait sittings partly as an infringement of his own creative agency. Litvack describes a manuscript page, held by the Free Library of Philadelphia, on which Dickens, at Herbert Watkins's instruction, has written out some pre-set text while being photographed on 17 June 1858: 'Here we have the author positioning himself submissively, so as to allow the photographer to take control of his subject's attitude at the desk, and – at least momentarily – to influence his written output'. Underneath the pre-set text, Dickens

⁵⁷ Novak, *Realism*, p. 33.

has written in French ‘Je vous avoue que je suis fâché [*sic*] de tout cela, mon cher’, which Litvack translates as ‘I confess to you that I am angry about all this, my dear.’⁵⁸

This sense of a photographic subject as at least partly at the mercy of the creative agency of his photographer, is one that Dickens seems to have encouraged in his Victorian audience. On 3 July 1858 he published a short story by John Hollingshead, titled ‘A Counterfeit Presentment’, about a ‘literary lion’ who finds himself forced to sit for his portrait: ‘sitting helplessly, under a broiling sun, in a glass cage upon the tiles of an elevated house near the Haymarket, W., composing my countenance according to the imperious instructions of the relentless photographer.’⁵⁹ While John M. L. Drew has rightly cautioned against reading contributions to Dickens’s journals as necessarily expressing Dickens’s own views, the fact that this story was published so shortly after Dickens’s sitting with Watkins makes it plausible to suggest that its composition may have been influenced by Dickens’s recent experience.⁶⁰ If this story served partly as an outlet for Dickens’s indignation at the experience of portrait-sitting, its publication also enabled Dickens to guide his audience on how to read the photographs of him that they encountered.

In publishing this story, Dickens warns his audience against reading any individual image of him as an unmediated naturalistic representation, and alerts them to an element of collaborative theatricality in photographic portraiture, which Wilkins’s collection foregrounds. Sequencing the images from a single photoshoot in a collection enables the viewer to read an individual, widely circulated Dickens image as only one amongst an array of possible public personae and relationships to his readership that photographer and subject experimented with and tested. The clusters of images from the same photoshoot show that not only props and setting, but also clothes, pose, expression, and manner of engagement with the viewer (see particularly [Figures 9–10](#)) were contingent and subject to alteration. The project of this type of ‘biography’ need not be to accumulate a coherent account of a unified self; the nature of the figure offered to the viewer by this type of ‘biography’ is malleable, multi-faceted or even plural.

To the extent that there is coherence in the Dickens produced by this ‘biography’, then, it lies in his commitment to the practice of self-staging, rather than in the nature of the self/ves that is/are represented. The ‘biography’ created by Wilkins’s photographic collection is predicated on the subject’s awareness of, and complicity in, his own portrayal. It is also an intensely self-reflexive form that continually draws attention to its own processes of representation, and its status as highly mediated truth. If Forster’s biography is largely concerned with documenting the creation of Dickens’s novels, Wilkins’s ‘biography’ documents Dickens in the creative and collaborative endeavour of producing himself; it records Dickens’s construction of (an) authorial persona(e) that would in turn influence how Dickens’s novels are read. In its bringing together of portraits ranging from the pre-photographic era, through theatrical studio portraiture, to the outdoor photography of the 1860s in which Dickens’s own house and grounds at Gad’s Hill become the stage, it also documents some of the changing technologies and conventions of representation available to biography. The collection therefore becomes a kind of metabiographical document as well as a form of biography, mapping its own changing processes of depiction and memorialization, and raising questions about how

⁵⁸ Litvack, ‘Dickens Posing’, pp. 139, 126, 140.

⁵⁹ [John Hollingshead], ‘A Counterfeit Presentment’, *Household Words*, 3 July 1858, pp. 71, 72.

⁶⁰ See John M. L. Drew, *Dickens the Journalist* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 106, 121–22, 125.



Figure 9. photCL36 (21), Collection of photographic portraits of Charles Dickens, Dickens's family and friends, and his residences, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.

literary biography might be impacted by technological innovations that enable the subject's voice, face, and even movement to be captured.

Like the Dexter Grangerization, the Wilkins collection of Dickens portraits resists easy periodization as a form of Victorian or Modernist biographical activity, to the extent that its dates of genesis and compilation remain elusive, and may have spanned years or even decades. The only definitive boundaries are set by the dates of Wilkins's own life (1854–1921). As the work of an American collector, the compilation also represents biographical and cultural engagement with a Victorian contemporary, rather than Victorian biography *per se*. Nevertheless, this compilation is suggestive of one of the ways in which late nineteenth-century biographical activity might be productive of a playfulness, experimentalism and self-reflexiveness not traditionally associated with biography at this period. It is also suggestive of a potential counter-argument to Kathryn Hughes's claim that:



Figure 10. photCL36 (22), Collection of photographic portraits of Charles Dickens, Dickens's family and friends, and his residences, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.

most biographers of the time behaved as if their subjects had taken leave of the body, or had never possessed such a thing in the first place. If flesh and blood registered in Victorian life stories at all, it was in the broadest, airiest generalities – a manly stride here, the sweetest smile there. Mostly, though, there was a hole in the biographical text where arms, legs, breasts and bellies should have been.⁶¹

Expanding her criticism to include recent works, Hughes notes that '[b]iographies typically contain visual likenesses, to be sure, but those quarter-page black-and-white images don't show the body in motion, can't give you much idea of its habitual off-duty slouch, let alone

⁶¹ Hughes, *Victorians Undone*, p. xi.

its sound or smell.⁶² Sound and smell were beyond the reach of Wilkins's compilation, and, as I have argued, one of its effects was to cast a question mark over the 'habitual' nature of any of Dickens's poses. It did, however, produce a form of biography that placed Dickens's body front and centre, and that showed an interest in some of the ways that 'quarter-page black-and-white images' might be used to create the sense of that body in motion.

5. CONCLUSION

Close examination of these composite forms of biographical narrative reveals the proto-cinematic way in which they juxtapose and sequence similar but marginally different Dickenses, in order to create the sense of a figure temporally, physically and mentally in motion. From Forster's text onwards, Dickens is thus produced materially as well as verbally as a 'restless' subject, continually poised between stasis and movement.⁶³ Discussing the historical progression from photography to cinema, Garrett Stewart has compared 'the Victorian body . . . as it was first available to mechanical representation' with 'the human body's coming disjunctive mutability . . . on the cinema screen.'⁶⁴ In this reading, the Modernist body and subject is fundamentally different to the (pre-1895) Victorian one, to the extent that it possesses the capability to be represented in movement. These late Victorian Dickens biographies, however, also use disjunctive mutability to put the body and subject in motion. Cinema is partially the product of the methods which they use. While critical attention has been paid to the role of Dickens's own novels in 'dreaming' the emergence of film, the late Victorian biographical activity which he generated may also have played its own part in imagining the coming of the cinema.⁶⁵

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

⁶² Hughes, *Victorians Undone*, p. xiii.

⁶³ Forster, *Charles Dickens*, I, 51, 97; II (1873), xix; III, vii, 157.

⁶⁴ Stewart, *Between Film and Screen*, p. 227.

⁶⁵ See for example Grahame Smith, *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).