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Dickens Posing for Posterity: The Photographs of Herbert Watkins

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Dickens Posing for Posterity: The Photographs of Herbert Watkins



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Dickens was a public figure who was constantly in demand – particularly after he embarked on his public reading tours in 1858; he said that he hoped this enterprise “could drop into some hearts, some new expression of the meaning of my books, that would touch [the public] in a new way” (*Letters* 11: 354). Another means by which he reached out to his admirers was through the hundreds of images of him that circulated in his lifetime – particularly photographic portraits, which, according to Malcolm Andrews, served as “further projections of Dickens’s multifaceted persona that had begun with the voice, or voices, of Boz back in the 1830s and were to culminate in the physical presence of the man before his public” (2006: 158). Photography was a burgeoning phenomenon in the 1850s: it attracted huge numbers of followers, and produced a “dramatic change in the practices of visual communication and visual understanding in the nineteenth century” (Curtis 1995: 217). In an article in the *Quarterly Review* Lady Eastlake (whose husband Charles was the first President of the Photographic Society) contemplated the extensive reach and pervasive influence of what she called this “new and mysterious art”:

Who can number the legion of petty dabblers, who display their trays of specimens along every great thoroughfare of London, executing for our lowest servants, for one shilling, that which no money could have commanded for the Rothschild bride of twenty years ago? Not that photographers flock especially to the metropolis; they are wanted everywhere and found everywhere. [...] Thus, where not half a generation ago the existence of such a vocation was not dreamt of, tens of thousands [...] are now following a new business, practising a new pleasure, speaking a new language, and bound together by a new sympathy. (Eastlake 442–43)

Dickens was clearly aware of the power of photography to direct the general public’s attention towards important events or individuals; but on a personal level he was, according to Gerard Curtis, “remarkably capable

of exploiting it for his own benefit" (1995: 236). Photographic portraiture was an important element in shaping the authorial persona; by the 1850s, he argues, it had come to reflect "the increasing money/commodity concern of publishing" (146). Due to the ubiquity and ready acceptance of these new, vivid, more precise – and cheap – visual images, which embodied elements of both art and science (see Eastlake 461–68), the Victorians experienced a "dramatic change in the practices of visual communication and visual understanding" (Curtis 1995: 217). This development required a new intimacy between writers and readers, and obliged important public figures like Dickens to "create and maintain a visible presence in society" (Curtis 2002: 151).

While photographs served an important public purpose for the professional writer, in private Dickens could be rather disparaging, or even comical, concerning their inability to capture a favorable likeness. In January 1857 he wrote to his friend William Charles Macready, about a photograph of the actor that he acquired at the house of a mutual friend:

We dined yesterday at Frederick Pollock's. I begged an amazing Photograph of you, and brought it away. It strikes me as one of the most ludicrous things I ever saw in my life. I think of taking a Public-House, and having it copied large, for the Sign. You may remember it? Very square and big – the Saracen's Head with its hair cut – and in modern gear? Staring very much? – As your particular friend I would not part with it on any consideration. I could never get such a wooden head again. (*Letters* 8: 270)

In spite of what this unfavorable (though humorous) comment suggests, Dickens's attitudes towards photography were more varied, complex and subtle. He was, for example, aware of the opportunities that this technology offered for employment. In the same year as he made the observation to Macready, he agreed to the proposal of Angela Burdett Coutts to have his son Walter taught photography before the boy left for India (*Letters* 8: 372). It is not clear whether the training was ever undertaken, as Dickens reports that it had to be postponed on account of more pressing matters related to Walter's imminent departure; yet it is evident that photography – particularly the production of portraits – was very much on the mind of the author as he, accompanied by his eldest son Charley, bade farewell to Walter at Southampton. He wrote at the time to his friend Edmund Yates with thoughts about how quickly children grow up: "Seeing Charley and he going aboard the Ship before me just now, I suddenly came into possession of a photograph of my own back at 16 and 20" (*Letters* 8: 379). He was thus imagining himself at the ages his two sons were in 1857, and was using photography as a means of verifying how like himself they were. It is an

interesting instance of his employing the metaphor of photography as a way into memory, and comparing this faculty to a highly sensitive imaging device. He used the same trope a year later, in a letter from Newcastle to his sub-editor W. H. Wills, written at a time when he was on a public reading tour:

I walked from Durham to Sunderland, and made a little fanciful photograph in my mind of Pit-Country, which will come well into H[ousehold] W[ords] one day. I couldn't help looking upon my mind as I was doing it, as a sort of capially prepared and highly sensitive plate. (*Letters* 8: 669)

The language here relates to the creation of a lasting, vivid impression, which Dickens could add to his vast storehouse, to be called up and used as the occasion demanded. These details were in fact used in an article entitled "A Clause for the New Reform Bill," on which Dickens collaborated with Wilkie Collins: they pondered on how towns and cities prepared ostentatious and unnecessary municipal displays to mark the arrival of the Queen (Dickens and Collins 385).

Other contributors to *Household Words* were also sensitive to the power of photographs. In August 1858 Charles Collins contributed "Her Face," a story with fairy-tale elements, in which a hack journalist sees the image of a beautiful girl in the front window of a photographer's studio; it opens thus:

'Twas the sweetest face imaginable – and the most feminine. I could read in it – for by our faces, our gestures, our attitudes, our manner of dressing, and fifty other external indications that we have not the least idea of, we divulge continually all sorts of mental characteristics that we think our neighbours know nothing about: – I could read in the face before me, I say, an ignorance of evil, a good sense and kindness of heart, that made me long to know the possessor of such a countenance. [...] Is it possible that I have absolutely forgotten, till this moment, that I am talking all this time about a photograph? About a cheap photograph, too, in a street-door case, with a touter lying in ambush, who was down upon me with a pressing invitation to sit, just as I was concluding the above analysis. (Charles Collins 258)

After catching a glimpse of her on the street, he pursues her relentlessly, until he learns her name and background. He eventually discovers that she is the daughter of a dancing master, and he arranges for some lessons, with the intention of meeting her. At the close of the tale he asks for the daughter's hand in marriage and his request is granted. Dickens approved of the tale, and wrote to Wilkie Collins to say that it was "very droll [that is, amusing] and good" (*Letters* 8: 616). The story is interesting because it attests to the

power of the photograph to move an individual; also, to a twenty-first century sensibility, it may speak to the arousal of an irrepressible sexual urge on the part of the viewer: the narrator notes that the woman “came in promiscuous” (by which he means casually) to the studio to have her photograph taken; using emotive journalistic phrasing, Collins refers to his “restlessness,” and of being “haunted” by the image of the woman he calls “my beauty,” and imagines that worshipping outside her house is an action “fraught with tremendous gratification” (Charles Collins 258, 259, 260). Without reading too much into these lines, it is clear that the narrator is driven on in his pursuit of pleasure by an image captured through a camera lens.

There are very few mentions of photography in Dickens’s fiction. The earliest occurs in *Oliver Twist*, chapter 12 (published in the sixth monthly part, in August 1837), in which Oliver’s attention is drawn to a painting on the wall (later disclosed to be of his mother). Mrs. Bedwin remarks of this image: “Painters always make ladies out prettier than they are, or they wouldn’t get any custom. [...] The man that invented the machine for taking likenesses might have known that would never succeed; it’s a deal too honest” (*Oliver Twist* 70). The second reference is found in the opening chapter of *Great Expectations*, where Pip bases the mental image he has of his parents on the shape of the letters on the tombstones, because “their days were long before the days of photographs” (*Great Expectations* 3). The last reference occurs in *Our Mutual Friend*, where, in book 1 chapter 4, Reginald Wilfer is described through a reference to a “conventional Cherub,” who, if it could “ever grow up and be clothed [...] might be photographed as a portrait of Wilfer” (26). These three references are rather brief, and only the one in *Oliver Twist* is of any significance, as it relates to a key likeness which has an impact on the plot, and reveals details of Oliver’s origins. It is unclear from these passages how much Dickens knew about the various technologies involved in reproducing images. The reference in *Oliver Twist* seems to relate to heliography (Paroissien 123–24): the process invented by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (1765–1833), used to create the earliest known permanent “point of view,” entitled *View from the Window at Le Gras* (c. 1826; see Gernsheim and Gernsheim 55–64, and Lemagny and Rouillée 16–17). The passing references in *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend* probably relate to later, more advanced technologies, such as the daguerreotype (named for its inventor, Louis Jacques-Mandé Daguerre; see Daguerre), the calotype, invented by William Henry Fox Talbot (see Fox Talbot), or the collodion process, developed by Frederick Scott Archer (see Archer). The essence of Dickens’s fictional allusions seems to lie in the potential for photography to capture or convey an accurate representation of an object or a person.

The author’s image was captured by a number of prominent photographers

in the course of his career. They include Antoine François Jean Claudet (1797–1867; see Schneider); John Jabez Edwin Mayall (1813–1901; see Morley and Wills, “Photography”; Reynolds and Gill; Hannavy; and Xavier); Alphonse Maze (see “Chronique du mois” and Kitton, *Supplement* 36–37); Robert Hindry Mason (1825–85; see Litvack 2016); John Watkins and his brother Charles (1823–74 and 1835–82 respectively – the subjects of a forthcoming piece by Litvack); Benjamin Gurney (1812–86; see Peyrouton); and Adolphe Naudin (see Litvack 2015). The lives and works of some of these photographers have been carefully documented, and their images of Dickens have, to varying extents, been scrutinized by scholars. Little critical attention has, however, been paid to (George) Herbert Watkins (known professionally as “Herbert Watkins”), a popular and widely respected photographic artist of the 1850s, 60s, and 70s, who took the first mass-produced photographs of the novelist, thus facilitating the ownership and consumption of “authentic” Dickens images by a multitude of readers and admirers, and in the process enhancing his reputation.

Herbert Watkins (Fig. 1) was born at 32 Newport Street, Worcester, on 12 July 1828, to a Dissenting family (*Protestant Dissenters’ Birth Registry* 1: 125). His father John (1790–1866) was a provision dealer and commercial traveler, and by 1840 the family had had moved to Bristol. In the 1851 census Herbert’s occupation is given as “Grocer’s Assistant,” and he was still living at home with his parents at 5 Brunswick Square (UK Census 1851 H.O.107/2448). In 1853 he married in London, and in 1856 opened what he called his “Institute of Photography” at 179 Regent Street: the premier thoroughfare in London for the photographic trade. His near neighbors were such well-known photographic artists as William Kilburn (No. 222 Regent St.), Samuel Robert Lock (No. 178), John Mayall (No. 224), William Telfer (No. 194), and Thomas Richard Williams (No. 236). Also nearby were the premises of Antoine Claudet (No. 107), and the headquarters of the Photographic Society (No. 21; for details of photographic establishments see Kelly 1856: 641–43, 1835–36). While it is not known precisely how Herbert Watkins effected the transition from grocer’s assistant to photographer, he clearly made a success of his business. He promoted his trade in the press, and boasted in the *Literary Gazette* in January 1857: “The untouched photographs of Mr. Herbert Watkins are as remarkable for their agreeable fidelity to nature as for their brilliancy of production and their economy of cost” (“Institute of Photography” 1). In that same month he contributed several portraits to the Photographic Society’s exhibition, including those of the actress Charlotte Cushman and the playwright Joseph Stirling Coyne (Taylor); these were judged highly successful by the *Saturday Review*, on account of the poses his sitters adopted, and the lifelike veracity with which they were rendered:

Who has not longed to know what [Alfred] Wigan, or [Frederick] Robson, or Miss [Jenny] Marston, or Miss Cushman are like off the stage? Here they are, thanks to Mr. Watkins, and no mistake! And so are other celebrities – Sterling [*sic*] Coyne, Ernest Read, Albert Smith, [J. A.] Heraud, &c. Each one is here, *ipsissimus homo*. Mr. Watkins, moreover, is remarkable for a breadth of treatment and variety of *pose* which seem wanting in Messrs. Maull and Polybank's works, and which entitle him to be classed as the best portrait-taker in the exhibition. ("The Photographic Society's Exhibition" 77; see also "The Photographic Exhibition" 193–94, 216)

The comparison with the well-known firm owned by Henry Maull and George Henry Polybank is significant: their studio (established in 1854 in the City of London) specialized in large-format portraits, and in May 1856 they began publishing a monthly series (which eventually extended to 40 parts) entitled *Photographic Portraits of Living Celebrities*. Each issue featured a cabinet-sized print of a contemporary personality, accompanied by a biographical notice; those who featured included a number of Dickens's associates (George Cruikshank, William Powell Frith, Daniel Maclise, Clarkson Stanfield, and Samuel Lover), as well as Richard Owen, Michael Faraday, David Livingstone, William Ewart Gladstone, and Cardinal Wiseman. The series was well received in the periodical press: the *Critic* called it an "excellent series of photographic portraits" ("English Literature" 64), and the *Examiner* noted that the portraits "are all remarkable for their great excellence" ("The Fine Arts" 86).

The first four biographical sketches in the Maull and Polybank series (of Owen, T. B. Macaulay, Robert Stephenson, and John Arthur Roebuck) were authored by Herbert Fry (1830–85), who then resigned from the project, in order to begin publishing his own competing series, under the title of *National Gallery of Photographic Portraits*; Fry provided the text, and Herbert Watkins contributed the images ("Fine-Art Gossip" 694). It is at this particular point that Dickens enters the story: he corresponded with Fry in March 1856, declining the offer to sit for *Photographic Portraits of Living Celebrities*:

I regret that you should have been at the trouble of seeking me in vain, owing to my being quite unacquainted with the nature of your business – to my being in town from Paris for a very few days – and to my having, in addition to many engagements, a [severe] cold. [. . .] Nor can I have the pleasure of complying with your request. I have but just now finished sitting to a distinguished French painter, and have thoroughly made up my mind to sit no more. (*Letters* 8: 72)

The painter was Ary Scheffer, who had completed a portrait of the

novelist and exhibited it at the Royal Academy that year; the letter reveals the frustration that Dickens felt in sitting for the French artist (see also *Letters* 7: 758). It is notable that Dickens does not distinguish between sitting for a painter and a photographer, at a time when daguerreotypes were giving way to the collodion process – a method of producing multiple prints of consistent quality, on paper coated with an emulsion of egg albumen and salt, which was then dipped in silver nitrate to render it photosensitive; these prints were produced from glass-plate negatives coated in a photosensitive solution of gun-cotton, ether, and alcohol (Gernsheim and Gernsheim 197–206). Paper prints were generally made available in two standard formats: cabinet-size photographs, measuring 5 by 4 inches, and cartes de visite, measuring 4¼ by 2 5/8 inches. These were mounted on cards, with the photographer’s (or distributor’s) name and address on the back (see Fig. 24), or occasionally below the photo on the front of the card. The images for the cartes de visite were produced using cameras with multiple lenses, and were particularly popular on account of their price and portability: they were the size of visiting cards, and were traded among friends and visitors (McCauley 27–52); cartes were often kept in albums by enthusiasts, who included Dickens’s daughter Mamie (*Letters* 11: 462), and his wife Catherine (“Lot 218”).

With Watkins as the portrait photographer, Fry believed that if he could obtain Dickens’s approval it would add greatly to the success of his project. In response to a second appeal, Dickens replied to Fry, in December 1856:

I regret that I cannot comply with the request you do me the favor to prefer. My wish is, to avoid sittings at all, for any sort of portrait; but if it should fall out that I cannot have my wish, I am already under conditional promises enough in the Photographic way, to haunt mankind with my countenance (*Letters* 8: 232).

One “conditional” promise is presumably the one he made to Mayall about taking a group photograph, possibly the one of the company that performed in *The Frozen Deep* in 1856–57 (See *Letters* 8: 199 and frontispiece). He also had to turn down a request from William Kent, another photographer, for a sitting; he wrote:

I cannot leave your letter unanswered, because I am really anxious that you should understand why I cannot comply with your request.

Scarcely a week passes, without my receiving requests from various quarters, to sit for likenesses, to be taken by all the processes ever invented. Apart from my having an invincible objection to the multiplication of my countenance in the Shop-Windows, I have not – between my avocations and my needful recreation – the time to comply with these proposals. At

this moment there are three cases out of a vast number, in which I have said 'If I sit at all it shall be to you first – to you second – and to you third'. But I assure you I consider myself almost as unlikely to go through these three conditional achievements, as I am to go to China. Judge when I am likely to get to Mr. Watkins! (*Letters* 8: 245)

The two original letters from Dickens to Fry quoted above, along with another on a different subject (*Letters* 9: 298), are bound into Fry's own copy of his *National Gallery of Photographic Portraits*, held by the National Portrait Gallery in London (for a fulsome discussion see Prescott 101–56). This unique volume provides an interesting account of the genesis of the project, and features drafts – both handwritten and in printed proof – of the biographical entries which Fry hoped to include in the series. These sketches were composed so as to meet with the general approval of their subjects: they were limited in scope, discussing public activities rather than private lives. Indeed some of the proposed subjects, such as the classicist Francis Newman, drafted their own entries. There are quite a few personalities in the series with connections to Dickens. Douglas Jerrold was photographed for the collection, but died before it could be published; his son Blanchard provided a few notes of correction to the memoir composed by Fry. John Forster, who was also approached to appear in the volume, wrote in a rather self-effacing way to Fry in November 1856:

I thank you for the compliment you pay me, and shall hope, if your undertaking proceeds, and you still desire to obtain a sitting from me, to make my appearance in the course of it. At this particular time I should be unable to give even the short attendance required – but you will best secure success by putting your best names first & beginning with those about whom the public has most curiosity. I would prefer, if you please, waiting to a more advanced stage of your project, to which I wish all success. (Fry folio 271)

Dickens's friend Macready was also approached, and wrote to Fry, first in November 1856, to say that he was rarely in London (Fry folio 269), and then again in November 1859, to say that he gave several sittings to Herbert Watkins, and that the photographer "possesses the best photographs of me that have yet (in the opinion of my friends) been taken of me. [...] Mr Watkins is certainly the *best* I know of" (Fry folio 277). Other friends of Dickens who agreed to have their photograph taken include William Harrison Ainsworth and Wilkie Collins (Fry folios 295, 297); those who declined include Elizabeth Gaskell, who had a "strong, insurmountable objection to it" (Fry folio 305) and Edward Bulwer Lytton, who found it "unprofitable to spare time for a sitting" (Fry folio 309). In the end sixteen

sets of portraits and memoirs were published, and it is possible that Dickens's own decision to pose for Watkins was influenced by the recommendations of friends.

Formal portraiture in the mid- to late nineteenth century was generally conservative and formulaic, with different studios adopting similar conventions with regard to lighting, positioning, props and backgrounds, in order to lend a certain seriousness of purpose to this genre. The *Athenaeum*, in a review of the first London Photographic Society exhibition in 1856, praised Mayall's portraits for being "dignified, self-possessed and aristocratic," with the subjects' heads evoking "grace and bearing" ("The Photographic Society" 78). The *Saturday Review* observed that individual temperament and profession contributed to the appropriateness of a human subject for photographic treatment ("Photographic Portraiture" 377). London photographer Alfred H. Wall reinforced the convention that "a fully-pronounced, well-developed smile [...] is not desirable" (Wall, "Photographic Portraiture Chapter III" 511). The New York photographic chemical manufacturer L. M. Dornbach contributed a highly proscriptive article to the *Photographic News*, in which he described a set of "rules" concerning, for example, the arrangement of individual body parts, including head, breast, arms, hands and feet; the arrangement of the folds of a lady's dress; and the prerequisite of an "adjunct," such as a small table, for seated figures. By following these directions, Dornbach concludes, "we may easily secure all that is desirable in a portrait: ease in posture, relief in outline, and beauty of composition, harmony in all parts, and – what is of the utmost importance in a good picture – the general impression of natural life and ease" (Dornbach 233–34). Such pronouncements set the agenda for the studios for the rest of the century. There were, however, those who objected. For example, G. B. Ayres, a Philadelphia photographer, noted in the *British Journal of Photography* that "Monotony is a thing characteristic of photographic exhibitions," to the extent that such convocations become "like a 'family gathering' on thanksgiving day [*sic*], with the family likeness in common" (Ayres 342). Wall mused in the same journal on what could be learned from the work of Sir Joshua Reynolds, in order to infuse "invention" into photographic portraiture, in terms of varying attitudes and incidents, as well as light and shade (Wall, "Photographic Portraiture Chapter II" 426–28). Despite such considerations, the general public demanded no such ingenuity in their photographs – whether of themselves or those (which they purchased) of more notable persons. Such matters of taste had important implications for most of the poses adopted by Dickens in photographs.

There were important questions of timing to be considered in photographing a subject in the standard mode. The Lowestoft photographer George Croughton, in a paper for the South London Photographic Society,

compared photography to painting, and noted that the photographer was at a disadvantage: whereas the painter could get to know and engage with the subject over a number of sittings, “to become acquainted with an expression that is both natural and most pleasing,” the photographer “can only take what is before his camera and lens; and having only seen the sitter once, perhaps, cannot know if the expression be natural or not, much less can he be expected to judge if it is characteristic.” Other considerations, notes Crougton, include whether subjects feel at ease in the surroundings where the photograph is to be taken. He advises that “the place they are in should be like home; that is the studio should be furnished and arranged as much like an ordinary room as possible.” Lighting, he adds, is of paramount importance, and should be made to seem natural (Crougton 1872: 229). Such observations imply that time needed to be taken in order to obtain a result which would be approved of by sitter and operator; yet the photographer had to complete the entire process, from coating to developing (often, in the case of a larger studio, with the aid of an assistant) within a ten-minute window, before the chemicals dried out, thus rendering them useless.

There are notable elements of style evident in Herbert Watkins’s photographs. In full-length portraits the primary source of light (or key light, which was always, in the 1850s and 1860s, natural light) generally originates to the left of the subject (the viewer’s right), and falls on the face and upper torso, thus illuminating facial features and mode of dress; a duller “fill light” (controlled by blinds or screens) is cast from the opposite direction so as to prevent the appearance of dark shadows. In close-ups Watkins uses a full, unshaded frontal light in order to emphasize the forehead, eyes, and cheeks, with shadows falling around the nose and mouth. In virtually every case there is an immense clarity about the facial features, with a precise delineation of contours in order to sculpt the face for unambiguous definition. Backgrounds are generally plain, and often softly focused (an effect obtained by using a short depth of field) so as not to draw attention away from the subject (see “The Optics of Photography”). If a subject is standing (thus necessarily emphasizing the linear format), the vertical line is frequently broken by the introduction of a studio prop such as a table, often draped with a cloth to take away from the rectilinear shape. Chairs are also used, for similar effect.

Judging from the collection of nearly two hundred images by Herbert Watkins in the National Portrait Gallery, we can see how this photographer was well aware of the convention of identifying a sitter unambiguously with his or her profession: clergymen such as Cardinal Wiseman were photographed in their clerical vestments; musicians like Joseph Richardson were posed with their instruments. The expectations for theatrical performers

were somewhat different, as they were trained to hold poses and exhibit expressive gestures for public display; some, like Martha Cranmer (“Pattie”) Oliver, were photographed in costume, so as to be immediately recognizable. These examples demonstrate that Watkins was not particularly adventurous or imaginative in his choice of poses; but he made an attempt to arrange some more famous personalities in postures that clearly spoke to their occupations. Writers presented a particular challenge, because their profession was not one that necessarily lent itself to exciting or stimulating positioning; nevertheless, because, as Curtis notes, “mass literacy, mass publication and mass portraiture went hand in hand,” the Victorians “wanted to see the hand leaving a trace,” and so the writer at his or her desk was an expected pose (2002: 151, 174). The American photographer Marcus Aurelius Root, in his seminal work *The Camera and the Pencil*, was clearly aware of this desire amongst literate consumers, and recommended that writers should be posed sitting down, in order to help them recreate a “mental mood” in which their “chief excitations of intellect are experienced” (165). Yet the image of the writer sitting at a desk by no means encompassed all that Dickens could be: his multifarious nature meant that his personality invited not only creative posing, but also variation in the uses to which photographs of him could be put.

It is clear that Dickens admired the images by Watkins, which were lauded in the periodical press. The *Athenaeum*, in a review of Fry’s *National Gallery of Photographic Portraits* in August 1857, praised Watkins’s photos of Lord Brougham, Earl Stanhope, and Douglas Jerrold: “For power and fidelity we have seen no portraits to compare with these specimens” (“Our Weekly Gossip” 1059). It was while this series was being published that Dickens first corresponded with Watkins, in November 1857. The photographer had sent the novelist a number of the portraits; Dickens was very pleased:

I send you a thousand thanks for the remarkable, interesting, and admirable collection of Photographs you have sent to me. I shall always prize them highly and shall never tire of them. They are not the less agreeable to me for including two capital heads of yourself. (*Letters* 8: 476)

It seems that the periodical press agreed with Dickens’s assessment. While the note in the Pilgrim *Letters* records that the author was sent the October and November numbers of Fry’s series, this is not necessarily the case, as there are no comments about the memoirs, and two photographs would not necessarily constitute a “collection.” Watkins might simply have sent Dickens a number of albumen prints. The author’s reaction to them confirms his approval of Watkins as a photographer; it would also have provided a sound material basis for choosing Watkins to capture his own image.

It is difficult to attach precise dates to the sessions in which Dickens posed

for Herbert Watkins. A careful scrutiny of the available evidence indicates that the first occasion was an important one from a commercial stance, timed to coincide with the first series of paid public readings, in April–July 1858, at London's St. Martin's Hall (see Collins 1975: xxii–xxiii and Andrews 2006: 269–70). The famous collodion print of Dickens prepared as if to read from his work at St. Martin's Hall (Fig. 2) features the author standing at a table that is meant to look like his reading desk; he holds a volume that is the same size as one of his reading copies in one hand, and his paper knife (which he used as a prop, and is now in the Charles Dickens Museum) in the other. A handkerchief lies on the table, along with a decanter; he looks into the camera, as if he is gazing directly at a member of his audience. There is a glint in his bright eyes, and it is clear that he is confident and at home in this guise. The textures of the various materials in the image provide variety and warmth. The heavy curtain in the background (slightly out of focus because of the short depth of field) does not hang straight downward, but is gathered towards Dickens's left (the viewer's right), thus breaking up the vertical, and providing a wavy chiaroscuro effect because of the way the light falls from above on the folds in the material. Top lighting of the subject sculpts Dickens's figure, and allows him to stand out prominently from the background. His entire upper body – particularly his head and face – are in sharp focus and brightly lit, thus allowing the viewer to form a clear impression of the man and his stage presence. His clothes are carefully chosen: the coat, with its large buttons, velvet collar and wide lapels, emphasizes confidence and pride in his engagement with the public. Likewise his neatly knotted bow tie (here somewhat hidden by the wisps of his beard) speaks of smartness and occasion. The way in which illumination, from both the top and side, catches the folds in the material on the sleeve carries forward in detail the shades of light and dark hinted at in the background. Dickens's waistcoat, which is of a rather dark hue, provides a useful contrast to both the whiteness of his shirt and the lighter shade of his coat, and clearly distinguishes between the three layers of clothing. The Albert-style gold watch chain, with its characteristic T-bar, hangs prominently from the waistcoat, and is clearly visible, together with its fob, below his left hand; it is of significant weight, as befits a man of standing, and the sharpness of focus allows the individual links to be discerned.

What is most interesting about the props in the lower half of the image is the striving for verisimilitude on the part of photographer and subject. The horizontal surface of the table, and the geometrically shaped, raised box on which Dickens rests his left arm, are meant to resemble his reading desk, which, while it took several forms in the course of his career, primarily functioned as a practical vehicle for the effective delivery of his performance. By 1858 Dickens was in the process of changing his stage set from the pulpit-

style desk that featured in the painting by Robert Hannah, to the smaller, bespoke cutaway desk, with its fringed border and raised armrest, which he used throughout his professional career (Andrews 2006: 128–36). The flat surface in the Watkins reading portrait – more of a table than a desk – does not match any of the existing images of the bespoke reading desk: the surface is too wide, and the raised book-rest block is too large; nor does it resemble Dickens's own design on paper for the desk, or the preserved physical object (Fig. 3; both now in the Dickens Museum; see Andrews 2006: 132–35). Also, Watkins's image does not feature the little shelf, lower down, on which Dickens placed his decanter, water glass, handkerchief and gloves. The most likely explanation is that the “desk” and raised box in the photograph are studio props; Philip Collins concurs:

H. Watkins's much-reproduced photograph of Dickens at his reading desk [...] shows the decanter and handkerchief on the desk-top, – but a likely explanation of this anomaly is that probably Dickens was photographed in Watkins's studio and was in fact using, not his own reading-desk, but a table provided by the photographer. (Collins 1975: 9).

Additional doubt may be cast on the ostensible location for the photograph by the fact that it would almost certainly have been impossible to establish a set at St. Martin's Hall (an indoor performance venue; see G. Sargent's drawing of the interior in Andrews 2006: 139) with the requisite level of precisely controlled lighting required for a successful photographic portrait. It must be remembered that in Dickens's day artificial illumination for interior photography was unknown: lighting effects were achieved solely through the manipulation natural light by a system of screens and blinds specially constructed in the photographer's studio (which often had skylights and large windows; see Fig. 4). Only in this way could lighting be employed as the “photographer's tool, to be used with judgement and discretion,” in order to create a portrait of distinction (Croughton 1876: 137). Another factor is the need for speed in developing and fixing wet collodion glass plates almost immediately after exposure in the camera (Lemagny and Rouillé 36); it would have been extremely difficult – if not impossible – to assemble and use a field laboratory in the confines of St. Martin's Hall.

Despite claims in the press that Watkins's photographs were “untouched” (“Fine-Art Gossip” 694), the Dickens reading portrait shows obvious signs of retouching – particularly the hands, the reading copy and the objects on the desk (see below for a fuller discussion of retouching). The hands seem whiter, and the book appears lighter than would be the case if these were naturally illuminated. The printing in the book (which would have been visible – even faintly – given the distance from the camera and the sharpness

of focus) seems to have been whited out to heighten the contrast with Dickens's torso. The decanter and handkerchief are, according to Malcolm Rogers, more like an artist's sketch than precisely photographed objects (54–55); the decanter in particular lacks the crisp outlines and reflections of light that one would expect from a substantial glass vessel of this type. Thus the photograph was a reflection of a particular "reality" manufactured through a conscious collusion between the operator and his subject: it was based on, or inspired by, Dickens, but was manipulated in order to convey an illusion of him as the performer about to begin a recitation from one of his popular works. In many ways it subscribes to what Rosalind Krauss calls a "simulacrum," or false copy (62). This reading photograph is a carefully posed, compositionally balanced image, which presents the author as an animated, dramatic personality, and gives the viewer the illusion of being present at an exciting theatrical performance.

"Fidelity" was the hallmark of Herbert Watkins; the word appears in his own advertisements (see, for example, "Institute of Photography" 1; see also Fig. 24, which features his motto, "Semper Fidelis"), and is either implied or explicitly proclaimed in reviews of his work in the periodical press, which highlighted his "truthfulness" ("Marion's Illustrated Calling Cards" 5); his "keen observations" captured in "all the correctness of the camera" ("Critical Notices" 29); and his concern for "surface, grain and texture" to such an extent that a "painter must envy the touch of light" ("Fine-Art Gossip" 694). Verisimilitude is also a consideration in the unique stereograph of Dickens as a reader (Fig. 5), produced by Watkins at this time to coincide with the first reading tours. Such images, mounted on cards, were viewed through a stereoscope: a device with viewing lenses at one end, and frame with clips at the other, into which cards could be temporarily inserted. They varied in design from simple, handheld devices to more elaborate wooden or metal cabinet enclosures; interestingly, they were advertised in the second monthly number of *Little Dorrit*, in January 1856. Stereoscopes exploit a feature of human binocular vision, which allows a person to juxtapose two slightly different views of the same object, and thus perceive a single, three-dimensional image (see Carpenter). The photographic image is made by a single camera with two lenses, set approximately two and a half inches apart: about the same distance as that between the eyes. Dickens demonstrated his interest in this invention and its physiological basis through his comments on an article entitled "The Stereoscope" for *Household Words* (Morley and Wills, "The Stereoscope", and *Letters* 7: 125); he also owned stereoscopes, and used them to view images of his daughters Mamie and Katey (*Letters* 9: 77). The vogue for stereoscopic cards caused a surge in the British photographic industry in the later 1850s, and had implications for portraitists like Watkins, who needed to adapt to market forces in order to

survive and expand (Lemagny and Rouilée 41, and “Marion’s Illustrated Calling Cards”).

The stereograph was taken by Watkins at the same time as the standard reading portrait (Fig. 2): Dickens’s clothes are identical, and almost all the objects on the table are similarly positioned. The only alteration is that the handkerchief has been replaced by a pair of gloves, the outlines of which are visible in front of the subject’s right hand. He holds the paper knife in an authoritative manner – almost as he would hold a pen (and thus confirming the strong connection between the published works of fiction and the public readings); the turning of the knife to reveal its broad surface gives a clear idea of its shape and substance. Dickens looks off slightly to his right, as if focusing on a member of his audience, and making a definitive point. Unlike in the standard, flat photograph, the objects on the desk in the stereograph do not seem to have been retouched. The reflection of light on the decanter, for instance, seems much more natural, and it is possible to see through this vessel to reveal the water glass behind; also the way in which the light falls from above on his left hand defines it more clearly. The three-dimensional illusion is enhanced by the creation of several planes: the table and the objects on it in the foreground, Dickens striking a dramatic, authoritative pose in the middle, and the gather of the rich, dark material in the background; taken together, these had the potential to draw the viewer further into the experience, and into Dickens’s imaginative world.

The two “reading” images are difficult to date precisely. F. G. Kitton, for example, fixes the date for Fig. 2 as 1861, and then incorrectly attributes it to Fradelle and Young, whose business was only established in 1884 (Kitton 1888: 324, and “Fradelle & Young”; the firm may, however, have had the negative; see discussion below). Closer to the mark are the details available in the Charles Dickens Museum, which possesses several prints of these poses, and identifies them as “Charles Dickens as Reader in St. Martin’s Hall,” dated 1859. Yet there is no reliable evidence for this date, and only ambiguous provenance attached to these prints, which have come together from different (undocumented) sources; details of each of the images were written on the reverse, in different hands at different times, and in some cases, such as the Mason portraits, the information is clearly inaccurate (Litvack 2016: 166, 172, 173). More reliable – but perhaps overly precise – are the catalogue entries for these images in the National Portrait Gallery, London, which fix the time for Watkins’s “readings” session as 29 April 1858. This date, for which no reliable evidence is provided, was used in a 2013 exhibition hosted by the National Portrait Gallery on the work of Herbert Watkins (Trompeteler and “Characters and Caricatures”). It derives from an imprint on the reverse of the stereograph, which reads “CHARLES DICKENS / READING AT ST. MARTIN’S HALL. / HERBERT WATKINS, Photo.,

/ 215, Regent Street.” Given what has been offered above about the improbability of St. Martin’s Hall (with its long and narrow side windows) as the location of the sitting, it is nevertheless clear, from the Watkins imprint on the reverse, that this stereograph formed a part of the advertising campaign surrounding the author’s first professional readings, which ran at the Hall from 29 April to 22 July 1858 (Andrews 2006: 269–70). There is no proof of Dickens’s posing on 29 April; rather it is an assumption on the part of the National Portrait Gallery. It is clear from external evidence, however, that these photographs were executed at the time of this first series of London readings. On 31 July 1858 the *Bristol Mercury* referred specifically to Watkins’s “excellent stereoscopic photograph of the popular author” (“Mr. Charles Dickens’s readings”), thus demonstrating beyond doubt that the image was produced before the appearance of this article, to coincide with this first series of paid readings. On this same date the *Illustrated London News* published an engraving depicting Dickens in a pose similar to that adopted in the Watkins photographs (see “Mr. Charles Dickens Reading ‘Little Dombey’” Fig. 6); the likeness is rather poor – Collins remarks that he “looks squat and fat” (1978: 9) – yet all of the same elements are present: the wider flat surface, as well as the decanter, water glass, handkerchief, paper knife and reading copy; the textured, pleated curtain is also faintly replicated. Unlike Watkins, the engraver includes a reasonable facsimile of the cutaway reading desk, with its lowered shelf for the decanter and glass, and with Dickens’s lower body visible; while it would thus seem the artist was working partly from first-hand familiarity with the all-important stage prop, he also appears to have seen the photographs. Dickens’s pose in the engraving does not precisely reproduce either of the ones adopted in the Watkins images; nevertheless the composition is sufficiently similar to indicate that the artist was at least partly inspired by the productions of Herbert Watkins.

Dickens’s next professional encounter with Watkins can be dated with greater precision. He wrote to the photographer on 31 May 1858:

I wish, without any regard to cost, to get the best photograph of myself that can be produced, to send to a friend in Italy [Emile de la Rue]. As I wish it to be tolerably easy to carry about in some elegant little case, I presume it should be a head merely.

If you will have the kindness to undertake this little commission, I shall have perfect confidence in the result. (*Letters* 8: 576)

The image (Fig. 7), one of a series taken in the first half of June 1858 (by which time Watkins had moved into new premises at 215 Regent Street; see *Letters* 8: 576), is of a strong, confident, mature Dickens, with a full head of

dark hair – accentuated by his being photographed from the left, so as not to emphasize unduly his high forehead, which was particularly evident on the right-hand side, where he parted his hair. There are fine gradations in light and shading on the cheekbones, jaw and neck, and particularly around the eye, with the creases at the outer corner indicating maturity. His beard is full, dark and mature, with only wisps of grey evident; this strong coloring may be taken as a sign not only of masculinity, but also (if evidence from academic work in psychology is considered) dominance, vigor, and self-confidence (see, for example, Pellegrini 29–33, and De Souza *et al.* 2006). The beard has the additional function of masking the author's weak chin, as revealed in a Mayall daguerreotype of 1855 (See Xavier 4–6).

Another pose from this series (Fig. 8) shows Dickens standing, looking to his left, and holding open his coat with his closed right hand. His confident pose facilitates the prominent display of the Albert-style watch chain, which curves round to his left, and runs into a waistcoat pocket. Dickens's expensive, bespoke clothes are interesting for their layering effect: the long, tailored coat with its velvet collar conveys an idea of substance and stature; the darker waistcoat beneath is closer fitting, and extends an uninterrupted line downward towards the outward and inward curve of the lighter colored trousers; the brilliantly white shirt with the high collar complements the face above, and directs the viewer's attention towards the author's visage. The left hand, resting on a sloping desk (a studio prop), provides solid support, and contrasts nicely with the right arm, which is bent at a right angle, and breaks up the predominantly vertical nature of the pose. It is a successful portrait, in terms of the balanced composition, the clarity of focus, the quality of the illumination, and the message it conveys about a poised, self-assured personality.

A third photograph from this June 1858 series (Fig. 9, one of two in this pose) also features a desk (a studio prop) at which Dickens sits, as if writing intently. Such images of Dickens with pen in hand (which also appear in the series by Mason and Gurney) give the viewer “a sense of being present at the moment of creative mark-making” (Curtis 2002: 173). The author's eyes are fixed on the page, and the dark-feathered quill is poised as if in the act of writing. Papers are spread across the desk, perhaps to give the impression of volume of composition. The fact that Dickens adopts an artificial pose is emphasized by the position he occupies on the seat: instead of naturally resting his back against the chair for support, he is leant forward, and turned round to the left on the chair, so that the camera captures the flow of his coat down his back, thus drawing attention to the outline of the writer's figure. Dickens's right thigh stretches out in front of the leg of the desk, in order to strike an affirmative pose. Almost every detail in the image is in sharp focus, and the light from the viewer's right strikes both the desk and



Fig. 1 (George) Herbert Watkins, self-portrait, March 1859.
By kind permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London.



Fig. 2 Herbert Watkins, Dickens posed for his public readings, April-May 1858. By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.



Fig. 3 Dickens's reading desk, in red velvet cloth, first used in spring-early summer 1858. It was not used for the Watkins "reading" portraits.
By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.



Fig. 4 Studio of William Walter Winter, 45 Midland Road, Derby. This image (*circa.* 1910) provides a clear idea of the layout of a typical Victorian photographic studio – this one founded in 1867 in Derby. On the left the large windows and skylights, with their adjustable curtains to control the light, illustrate the point about the need for precise control of illumination in order to achieve the appropriate effects in portraiture. Also visible in the image are the large-format camera left of centre; a curtain rail just below the skylights, stretching across the middle of the room; ornately carved chairs, stools, and other items of furniture; small statues, potted plants, and other items used as props; patterned rugs; and a dado rail with ornate plasterwork below, in a darker colour than the plain wall above. The electric lights on the ceiling would not, of course, have been a feature of the room in Dickens's day.

By kind permission of W.W. Winter Ltd.

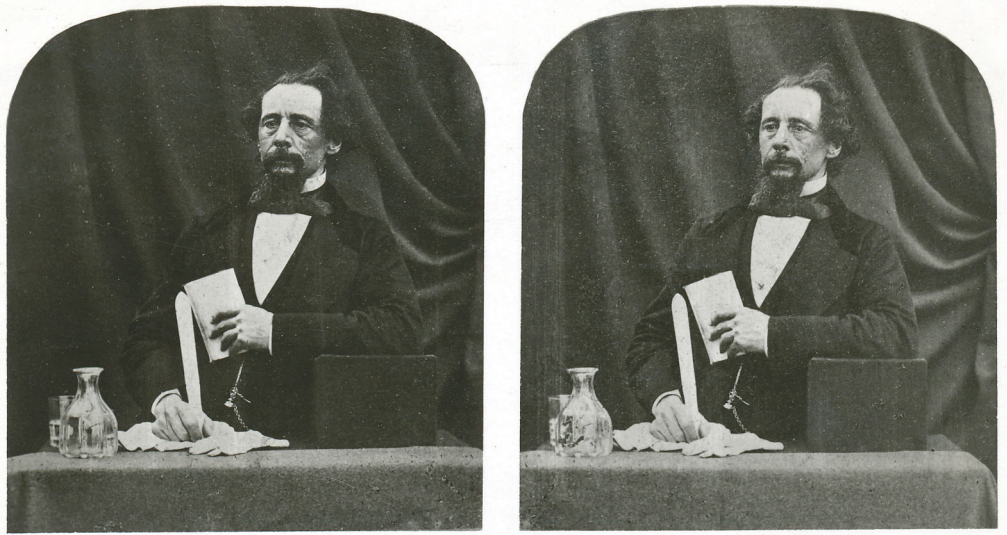


Fig. 5 Stereograph of Dickens posed for his public readings,
April–May 1858.
By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.



Fig. 6 “Mr. Charles Dickens Reading ‘Little Dombey,’
at St. Martin’s Hall,” *Illustrated London News* 31 July 1858: 99.
The engraving is based on Watkins’s “reading” portrait (Fig. 2) and the
stereograph (Fig. 5). Photograph by Leon Litvack.



Fig. 7 Herbert Watkins, head-and-shoulders portrait of Dickens,
probably taken for presentation to Emile de la Rue, June 1858.
By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.



Fig. 8 Herbert Watkins, Dickens standing at a desk, June 1858.
By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.



Fig. 9 Herbert Watkins, Dickens sitting at a desk, posed as if writing,
June 1858.
The desk and chair are studio props.
By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.



Fig. 10 Herbert Watkins, Dickens sat at his own desk from Tavistock House, quill in hand, June 1858.

The chair is a studio prop.

By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.



Fig. 11 Herbert Watkins, Dickens sat at his own desk, quill in hand, June 1858. The photographer has introduced a cloth, draped over the corner of the desk, to add texture and depth to the image. By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.

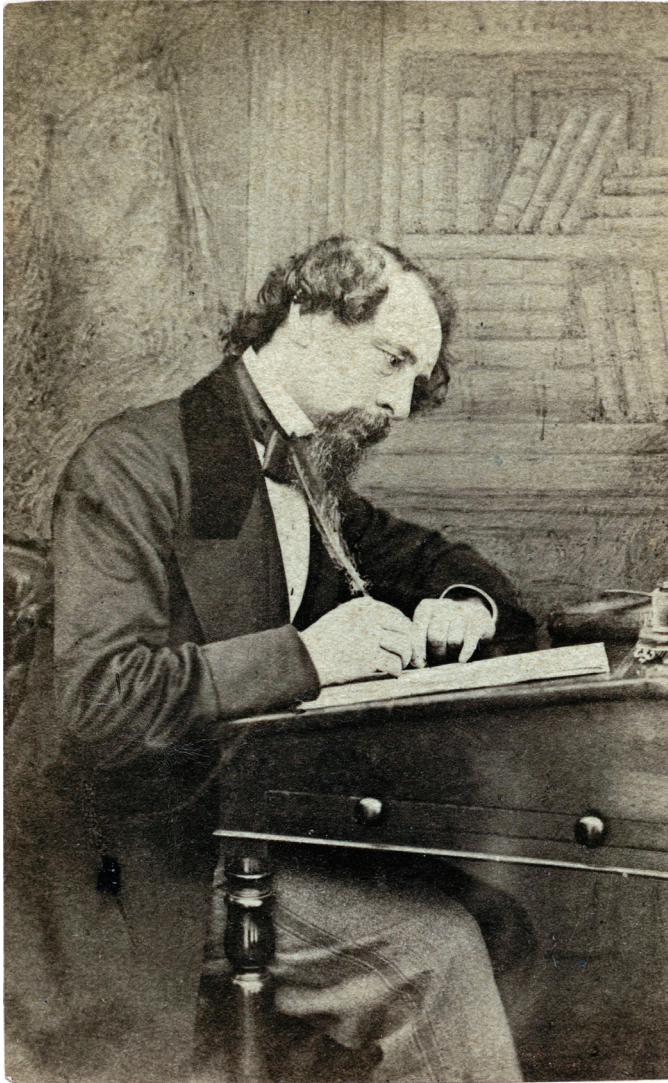
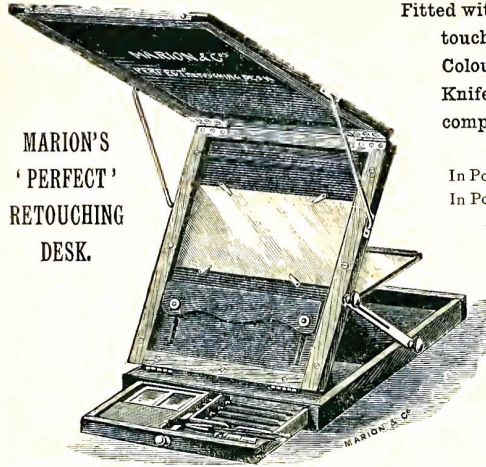


Fig. 12 Herbert Watkins, Dickens sat at his own desk, quill in hand, June 1858. This print (a variation on Fig. 9) has been reproduced from a retouched negative, to include a faint background image of a bookcase on the right (with books shelved upright, on their sides, and at an angle), and a curtain on the left, pulled further away at the top than the bottom, to introduce a diagonal that matches the line of the quill pen. By kind permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London.



**MARION'S
'PERFECT'
RETOUCHING
DESK.**

Fitted with Faber's Pencils, Retouching Medium, Water Colours, Brushes, Palette, Knife, and Pencil Pointer, complete in Drawer.

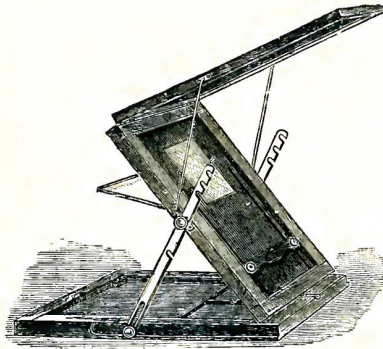
In Polished Mahogany . . . 85/
In Polished Pine Blacked . . . 70/

This is the most complete Desk ever invented, combining all the desiderata for a Retoucher. It has, in addition to the completely fitted drawer, several special features of its own. Provision is made for retouching negatives of any size up to 12 x 10, and it is so constructed that a portion only of the negative may be viewed through, so that the attention of the

artist may be centred, but in the cases of groups the whole width may be left open. The silvered Glass Reflector may be easily adjusted to any angle; whilst the supports of front may be readily fixed to any desired elevation.

COLE'S RETOUCHING DESK.

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There are some new features in this Instrument which make it an improvement on many kinds in use. The platform on which the white paper or reflector is placed can be adjusted at any angle. There is a slit at the top of the instrument, to allow the negative to slide through when it is desired to retouch parts of the negative awkward to get at without this provision. The bar across front, on which the negative rests, can be shifted at different angles to facilitate working. The supports of front, as will be seen by the woodcut, can be screwed firmly at any desired elevation. The desk also forms a convenient easel, on which finishing of enlargements may be done. It can be used for negatives from $\frac{1}{4}$ plate to 10 x 12.

Cheap Retouching Desks, in Blackened Pine, for whole, $\frac{1}{2}$, and $\frac{1}{4}$ Plates, price 12/6.
Cheap Retouching Desks, strong and serviceable, for 12 x 10 Plates, with Carriers for smaller sizes, price 25s.

Pencil cases and leads specially prepared for retouching, any grade, 1s. each.

MARION & CO., 22 & 23 Soho Square, London, W.

Fig. 13 Advertisements for retouching easels, or desks, in Robert Johnson, *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Retouching Photographic Negatives* (1898).

Marion & Co. were well-known suppliers of photographic equipment, and the largest carte de visite dealers in the country.

Photograph by Leon Litvack.

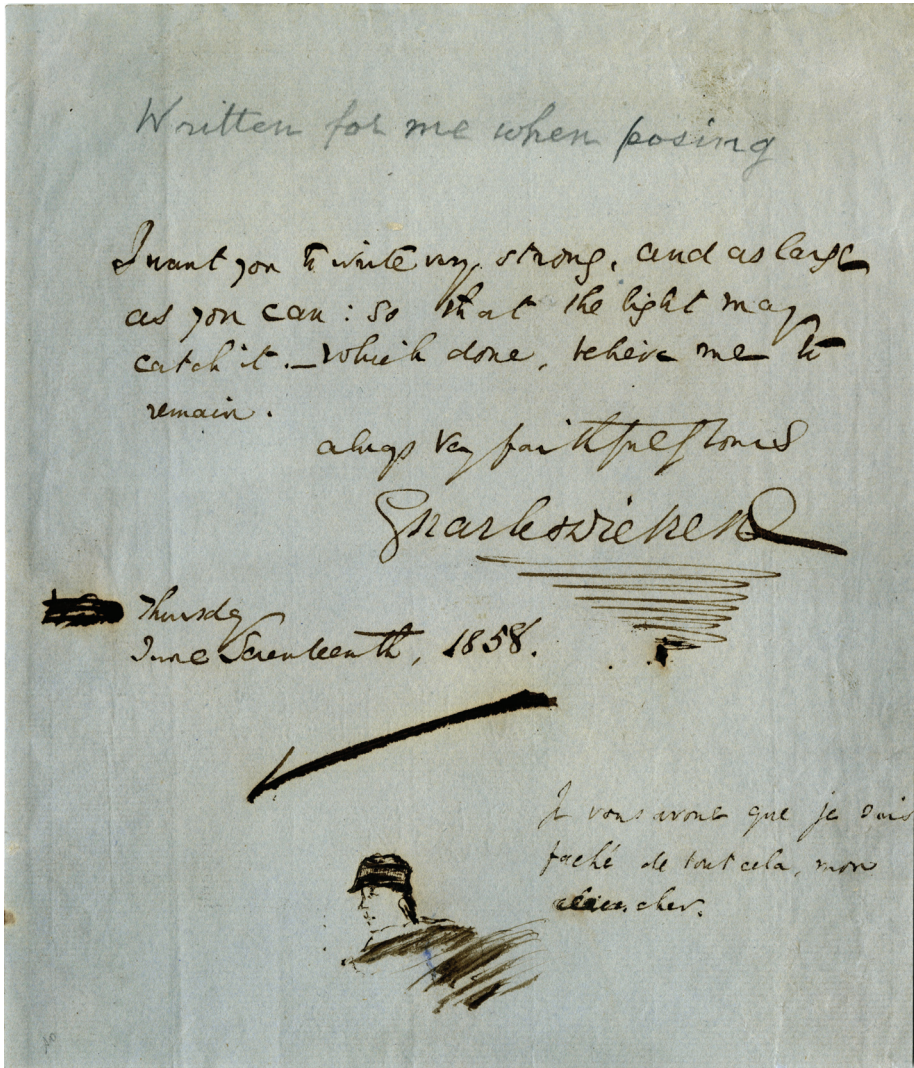


Fig. 14 Manuscript “prompt” page, with statement requested by Herbert Watkins from Dickens; dated 17 June 1858. The author’s text reads: “I want you to write very strong, and as large as you can: so that the light may catch it. – which done, believe me to remain. / Always Very faithfully Yours / CHARLES DICKENS / Thursday / June Seventeenth, 1858.” Dickens added in French, “Je vous avoue que je suis fâché de tout cela, mon cher”; he also drew a small sketch of a man, possibly wearing a hat, with what looks like a photographer’s hood. At the top of the page in pencil (presumably in Herbert Watkins’s hand), is “Written for me when posing.”

By kind permission of the Free Library of Philadelphia.

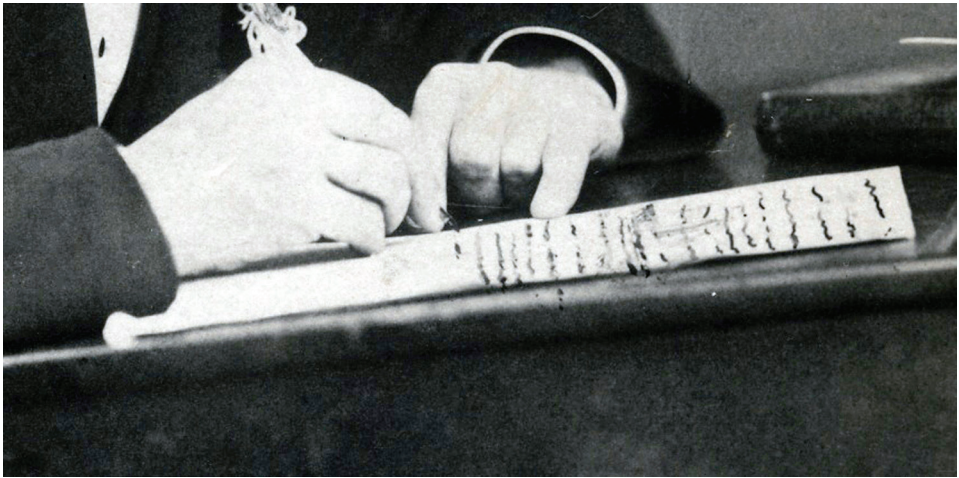


Fig. 15 Herbert Watkins, close-up of retouched version of the “writing” portrait, 1858. This image is based on Fig. 10, except that on the negative from which this print has been produced, the page in front of the novelist has been retouched, so as to feature wavy lines and smudges, meant to resemble writing on a page. In several lines the wavy markings extend off the page to the right, and onto the desk.
By kind permission of the Watts Gallery Trust.



Fig. 16 “Portrait and Fac-simile Autograph, Presented with *The Critic, Weekly Literary Journal*,” 4 Sept. 1858. This image, drawn by Luke Wells and engraved by Butterworth & Heath, was based on the pose in Fig. 10, and formed part of a series entitled “Portrait Gallery of Celebrities in Literature, Science, and Art.” The placement of the lines of writing on the page before Dickens approximate those in Fig. 15; this suggests that Wells worked from a retouched print, with wavy lines on the page. *The Critic* considered the Watkins photograph to be “one of the happiest specimens of even that excellent photographer.”

Photograph by Leon Litvack.



Fig. 17 Herbert Watkins, photograph of Charles Lyall's cartoon "From Whom We Have Great Expectations," 1861. In Wilkins and Matz, *Dickens in Cartoon and Caricature*, Plate X. Photograph by Leon Litvack.



Fig 18 Herbert Watkins, photographic study of Dickens, 17 January 1859, for the portrait by William Powell Frith (Fig. 19).
By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.



Fig. 19 William Powell Frith, *Charles Dickens in His Study*, 1859. Dickens is depicted at his home, Tavistock House. The desk, chair, and velvet coat in this painting also feature in Herbert Watkins's photographic study (Fig. 18). On the desk lies the opening chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities* (see Kitton, *A Supplement to Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil* 76).

By kind permission of the Victoria & Albert Museum.



Fig. 20 Herbert Watkins, portrait of Dickens with tartan waistcoat,
watch chain and diamond ring, 1859.
By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.



Fig. 21 Herbert Watkins, portrait of Dickens with tartan waistcoat,
1859.

By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.



Fig. 22 Herbert Watkins, Dickens in 1861-2
By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.



Fig 23 Herbert Watkins, Dickens in 1861-2
By kind permission of the Charles Dickens Museum.



Fig 24 Trademark of Herbert Watkins, printed on cards to which his photographic prints were affixed, 1865–78. The image in the upper portion of the photograph depicts the sun, under which appears Watkins's Latin motto, "Semper Fidelis" ("always faithful"), referring to his reputation for accurate reproduction of individuals' likenesses.
Photograph by Leon Litvack.

the subject in such a way as to accentuate the shape of the desk, as well as the writer's hand and face, and the papers spread before him, which are uniformly lit, and appear clear and distinct (though no writing is visible). All facets of the image harmonize to convey an impression of the writer energetically at work.

As indicated above, Watkins continually strove for a feeling of verisimilitude in portraiture; this aim is most clearly evident in a pose that is very similar to Fig. 9, but is from a different (though contemporary) session: it features Dickens sat at his own desk, quill in hand, and eyes directed at the page before him (Figs. 10, 11). Even though Dickens wears precisely the same clothes for the first session (Figs. 7, 8, 9) and the second (Figs. 10, 11), there are slight differences between the two sets of photographs. The most obvious is the change of desk, from a studio prop to Dickens's own; also the quill features a white plume, rather than a dark one. Dickens's hair is differently styled: in this second set his hair is brushed further back from his temples, and appears generally flatter against his head; also his hair falls over the top of his right ear, concealing it more so than in the first set. The distance between camera and subject is greater in the second set, so as to display more of the desk's surface – particularly the ornate rear portion. Four photographs were taken in this sitting position, with slight variations. Figs. 10 and 11 are particularly interesting for what they reveal of the desk and the items placed upon it. This piece of furniture (still owned by the Dickens family) has a sloping writing surface (originally covered with a skive of yellow tooled leather), and a brass gallery extending all round the rear and sides of the flat area at the back; this sloping surface is attached with hinges, so that the top of the desk lifts up to reveal a storage compartment beneath. A sliding shelf with two protruding knobs is visible on the right-hand side of the desk; this can be extended to hold books and papers (Parker *et al.* 34). The desk was conveyed to Watkins's studio for the session, then fetched back to Tavistock House in mid-July 1858 by Dickens's manservant, John Thompson (*Letters* 8: 602). At Dickens's left elbow is a book which, the image suggests, he might need to consult in the course of composition. On the top of the box there is balanced an object which looks like a ruler, or the author's paper knife. On the flat surface at the back there is an opened inkwell, which may well have been Dickens's own (though it may equally have belonged to Watkins; there is no record of this particular object amongst Dickens's surviving possessions). It is a single inkwell, made of hand-blown and cut crystal, with a square cross-section and chamfered corners, and a metal circular top mount surrounding the hole for the quill. The decorated, hinged lid (to stop evaporation of the ink) is opened, to suggest the author in action. The base has four cast foliated and pierced feet, and there is ornamentation in a Naturalistic style (possibly a

vine or plant with tendrils) extending upward from the base, on a diagonal in this side view. It is a beautifully crafted item (characteristic of some of the designs that emerged in the wake of the 1851 Great Exhibition), but with a practical purpose.

Figs. 10 and 11 include a neutral background, which is appropriate for photographic portraits intended to emphasize Dickens's personality, without unnecessary distractions (though it is questionable whether the cloth over the edge of the desk in Fig. 11 adds anything to the image). There is, however, a variation on Fig. 10 that features an artificially touched-in background; this image (Fig. 12) is particularly interesting, because it demonstrates the degree of manipulation to which photographs could be subjected, in order to alter the circumstances of original creation. Here the artificial background consists of a faintly represented curtain and bookcase, which may have been added by Watkins himself, or possibly by another individual who manipulated a copy of the glass negative. The bookcase and its indistinct volumes serve to associate Dickens more closely with his profession; the books are imagined as sitting at various angles, thus lending interest and variety to the background; they also enhance the impression that this is a writer of great substance, who occupied the premier position in the world of Victorian letters. The touched-in curtain is pulled further away at the top than the bottom; this inclination introduces a diagonal line that complements both the angle at which the author holds his pen, and the extended lower right leg under the desk. The art of retouching glass negatives and prints (considered briefly above, in the discussion of the public reading images) was widely practised in Dickens's day; indeed for photographic portraits in particular, these ameliorations were considered essential by some. The photographer William John Hubbard, in an extended description of his methods for the *Photographic Journal*, noted that "every portrait photographer with the least discernment will tell you that [...] in almost every negative he takes [...] there is some part in it that does not come out truthfully," and so, by careful retouching, all comes out "perfect in print." He adds:

If [...] pure and unsophisticated photography cannot bring out the various colours in monochrome so as to represent the picture truthfully, then, I say, it is quite legitimate to use the pencil, the brush, or to adopt any means in your power to make good these shortcomings. (Hubbard 144–45).

These sentiments were echoed by other writers in the *Photographic Journal* (see, for example, "Judicial Photography" and Blanchard). The intricate techniques for retouching negatives varied; but the most common instruments used were lead pencils – particularly those produced by the firm of A. W. Faber in Nuremberg (see "On Retouching" 114; "On the

Retouching” 132; Hubbard 143; and Johnson 4). Once the glass negative was placed into a retouching easel (Fig. 13, onto which light could be shone from behind) the pencil could be moved over the varnished surface with ease. This simple implement was perfectly suited to retouching because it allowed for the application of slight, delicate strokes, which could then be blended or softened into the surrounding area with a leather or paper stump (“Retouching Negatives” 190). Also, powdered graphite could be mixed with oil of turpentine to achieve a more diffuse effect (“On the Retouching” 132). Because pencils were produced in different levels of hardness, they could be chosen to match the toughness of the negative’s varnish: a hard pencil was required for a hard (older) varnish, and a soft pencil for a soft (newer) varnish (see “Retouching the Negative” 197). Larger areas could be darkened through the application of black “oil chalk” (creta polycolor), or India ink (see “Retouching Negatives” 66). Other retouching techniques involved scratching the surface of the negative with a sharp blade or pin; the application of water-colors to the glass plate; or treatment with collodion mixed with turpentine varnish (“Retouching Negatives” 190–91). It is clear that a variety of effects could be achieved, including the artificial creation of the bookcase and curtain featured in Fig. 12. Whether or not this particular case of touching-in can be attributed directly to Watkins, it is clear that he did employ retouching techniques – particularly in the public reading photographs (Figs 2, 5), but probably also in these “writing” portraits (Figs. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12; see also discussion of Fig. 15 below).

There is evidence to suggest that Dickens did in fact write on the page placed before him, in at least one of the images discussed above, though it is impossible to determine precisely which one. In the archives of the Free Library of Philadelphia there exists a manuscript page (Fig. 14), on which Watkins had asked Dickens to write the following:

I want you to write very strong, and as large as you can: so that the light may catch it – which done, believe me to remain.

Always Very faithfully Yours
CHARLES DICKENS

Thursday
June Seventeenth, 1858.

This page, not markedly discernible in any of the “writing” portraits (Figs. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) is fascinating, because it enhances what is verifiable about the relationship between these two men. 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. Dickens’s observation in French at the

bottom (which translates as “I confess to you that I am angry about all this, my dear”) is, judging from the masculine “mon cher,” addressed to Watkins himself (a circumstance strengthened by the line in pencil at the top of the page: “Written for me when posing”). Perhaps Dickens protests at his manipulation by the photographic operator, who has an acute awareness of the requirements of a successful portrait, however much it might inconvenience the sitter; but it is also possible, given the presence of the sketch of the hooded figure foot of the page, and its proximity to the comment in French, that Dickens was making a joke.

This “prompt” page features an exact date; but associating it with a specific photograph (and thus precisely dating that image) is more difficult, because the paper before Dickens in each of the images seems to have been retouched to remove any signs of writing. The portraits that feature a desk and writing materials date from June 1858; but they do not appear to be from the same sitting, given the two different desks involved, and the slight alterations in hair style (see discussion above). The letter of thanks that Dickens sent to Watkins on 17 July does not clarify matters; he writes:

I owe you many thanks for your most obliging note. I am glad to hear so good an account of the Portraits, and I do not doubt that they will be admirable.

It would give me great pleasure to have some five and twenty impressions for private friends, if those should not be too many. (*Letters* 8: 607)

The Pilgrim *Letters* editors do not help either: while they discuss the “prompt” page, they only observe, “When posing on 17 June, [Dickens] was asked by Watkins to write the following words on a sheet which he was holding” (*Letters* 8: 607); the particular photograph in which this document appears is, however, impossible to determine.

There was clearly immense public appetite for observing the novelist at his “mark-making” (Curtis 2002: 173). This desire accounts for an interesting cabinet-sized print (Fig. 15), based on Fig. 10, but featuring fabricated lines – rather than Dickens’s own handwriting – on the page before him. The image is in the Rob Dickins collection of the Watts Gallery in Guildford; it is part of a large group of photographic prints and other primary materials relating to the Watkins brothers. In this particular case, the image has been retouched to give the appearance of Dickens writing on the page; careful examination, under high magnification, however, reveals that these are actually wavy lines and smudges introduced onto the negative. Some of the touched-in lines actually run off the page and onto the writing surface. This is not, therefore, either the “prompt” page, or an authentic sheet of Dickens’s handwriting, but rather an alteration probably made by Watkins

himself (see discussion of Fig. 16 below). This print is an interesting example of the lengths to which purveyors of photographic prints would go in order to satisfy public demand.

The Watkins photographs of Dickens seated at his desk were heartily approved of by the novelist himself, who asked the photographer to send him a hand-colored version (*Letters* 8: 607, 617). The images were widely reproduced and sold – particularly in the smaller format of the *carte de visite* (mentioned above), the craze for which had begun in France in 1857–58 (McCauley). This handy format was quickly adopted by Watkins, who worked with the firm of Marion and Company (the largest *carte de visite* dealer in the country) to distribute these particular images of the author, branded by the *Daily News* as “one of the greatest triumphs of the art” (“Marion’s Illustrated Calling Cards”) and by the *Morning Chronicle* as offering “the best guarantee” of “fidelity and artistic finish” (“Photographic Visiting Cards”). *Cartes* were produced in far greater numbers than other portraits, and, as noted above, were collected into albums by enthusiasts. These small-format portraits of famous personages became a form of mediation between the “masses” and the “well known,” and gave the illusion of intimacy with celebrity figures (Lemagny and Rouillé 39–40).

The longing for details about luminaries like Dickens inspired *The Critic* to produce a “Portrait Gallery of Celebrities in Literature, Science, and Art,” consisting of large-format wood engravings based on photographs, and short biographical sketches of “‘men’ and women [*sic*] ‘of the time’ who are distinguishing themselves in the various branches of literature, art and science, and who are influencing by the exercise of their intellects the mental condition of their fellow creatures” (“To Our Readers”). The first of these, featuring Wilkie Collins, with an engraving based on a photographic portrait by Herbert Watkins, was published in June 1858. The Dickens instalment, with an image (Fig. 16, by the artist Luke Wells) of the author at his desk, and derived from Fig. 10 and Fig. 15, was published on 4 September 1858. The biographical sketch chronicled the author’s life and work, concentrating on his fictional output up to *Little Dorrit*, and also discussing his journalism and amateur theatricals; the sketch is followed by John Hollingshead’s article on the public readings. The engraving of Watkins’s photograph (accompanied by Dickens’s signature, thus implying that he authorized the photograph, and perhaps the sketch; see Chaudhuri 144, and *Letters* 8: 607) was promoted as an exceptional feature of the piece (see, for example, “Mr. Charles Dickens.—The Critic”). The journal’s commentary on the image ran as follows:

One word upon the portrait which accompanies this. It is from an exquisite photograph by Mr. Herbert Watkins – one of the happiest specimens of

even that excellent photographer. The engraver has done all in his power to translate that portrait upon the block, and so far as it is possible to render the delicate tones and gradations of photography by lines, his labours are satisfactory to us. It may add some little interest to this work to know that the desk upon which Mr. Dickens is writing is that upon which almost all of his works have been written. ("Charles Dickens" 536–37)

It is interesting that Wells chooses to include in his image the same sorts of lines on the page as in Fig. 15: their replication in the engraving adds to the impression of Dickens working at his desk, rather than simply posing.

The extent to which the author appreciated Watkins's efforts at this time may be judged from comments made in a letter of 15 February 1859, previously available only as an extract (see *Letters* 9: 29), and now published, complete, for the first time:

My Dear Mr. Watkins

I am exceedingly obliged to you for your kind assistance and handsome letter. Pray accept my cordial thanks.

The last Edition of my books (which is called The Library Edition) is now in course of publication. The Publisher will immediately send you all the Volumes that are out, and an additional volume every month. Please consider these, as a set in their working clothes for common use. When the Edition is completed I shall hope to send you another set, in brighter holiday costume.

I have gone through the highly interesting scenes I return with this, and venture to enclose a list of a dozen that I should like to have. I hope I am not encroaching too much on your liberality and good nature. (Litvack, *Dickens Letters Project*)

Watkins's side of this exchange does not survive, and so it is impossible at this stage to discover anything further about the nature of the assistance proffered; but it is clear that Dickens and Watkins enjoyed a warm relationship. Their lively and friendly correspondence concerned not only the scheduling of sittings and approval of particular poses for printing (*Letters* 8: 576, 607) but also the exchange of presents: Watkins sent Dickens photographic portraits and other unidentified "scenes," and Dickens reciprocated with gifts of his books, in both plain and fine bindings (*Letters* 8: 476; 9:151). It is also important to remember that in the discoverable details of the agreements reached between Dickens and his various photographers, there is no evidence to indicate that the author was ever paid for the sittings; nor did he derive any income from the subsequent sale of his image: this was standard practice in the trade at this time (McCauley 82). The income that could be derived from a particular image was rather precarious: prints

of celebrities (including Dickens) were frequently copied, pirated and unscrupulously adapted by competitors (see, for example, Andrews 2003). Photographs and their creators were not afforded protection of intellectual property until the passing of the Fine Art Copyright Act in 1862; but even then most photographers did not choose to safeguard their work, because they had to register individual images at Stationers Hall, London, and pay a fee – an impractical step for someone like Watkins, on account of the sheer number of poses he produced (see Litvack 2010: 155, and Beck).

The terms of the relationship between Dickens and Watkins could also extend to a kind of playfulness or mischievousness. On Dickens's side this is demonstrated by the comments in French and the hooded figure on the "prompt" page discussed above (Fig. 14). On Watkins's side, the light-heartedness is evident in his photograph of a cartoon issued in 1861, to coincide with the publication of *Great Expectations* (Fig 17; Wilkins and Matz 55–56). The image was drawn by Charles Lyall (1833–1911), an opera singer who was also an accomplished caricature and watercolor artist (for a selection of Lyall's drawings see Bennett); his artistic talents were recognized by such publications as *Vanity Fair*, to which he contributed five caricatures in 1872–73. In 1880 a selection of his work was exhibited at the Dramatic Fine Art Gallery on Bond Street; the catalogue noted:

Mr. Lyall, who is as equally well-known in the artistic as he is in the musical world, sends a large number of his grotesque character sketches. The way in which the peculiarities of the individuals are exaggerated, without offensiveness, displays a rare power of caricature. (Larkins 24–25)

This description may be applied to the caricature of Dickens, which imagines the author sitting at the same desk (with a spiral pattern carved into the legs) as in two of the Watkins photographs discussed above (Figs 8 and 9). He wears a dark coat and light-colored trousers; he uses a similar quill, and is sat in the same padded chair with the rounded back, though here his position is reversed from that in Fig. 9. The Lyall caricature clearly used the Watkins photographs (particularly Fig. 9) for inspiration.

Lyall's comic effect stems from the enlargement of Dickens's head, and the author's pointing to his temple, to indicate either something about his creative process, or the enormity of his genius. He looks directly at the viewer as he does this, with a knowing expression: not taunting, but rather self-satisfied. Dickens enjoyed the image enormously, as he told his friend Lavinia Watson, on 8 July 1861:

I hope you may have seen a large-headed photograph with little legs, representing the undersigned, pen in hand, tapping his forehead to knock

an idea out. It has just sprung up so abundantly in all the shops, that I am ashamed to go about town looking in at the picture windows – which is my delight. It seems to me extraordinarily ludicrous, and much more like than the grave portraits done in earnest. It made me laugh when I first came upon it, until I shook again, in open sun-lighted Piccadilly. (*Letters* 9: 438)

It is significant that Dickens concentrates on the ridiculousness of the image, and the fun that it embodies, even causing him to laugh out loud on the street (see also Mamie Dickens's comments in Kitton, *Supplement* 49). Andrews believes that the author seems to have liked it because it "catches him in action" and "does not take him too seriously" (2006: 162). Watkins's production was part of an effort to widen his portfolio, and experiment with photo-caricatures, for which enlarged heads from cartes de visite were added to bodies done in watercolor or freehand drawing; this resulted in uniquely collectable images, of such famous figures as Lord Brougham, Lord Palmerston, and Anthony Trollope (see "Characters and Caricatures", and "The Photographic Exhibition at the Crystal Palace" 30). These innovations pushed the boundaries of formal Victorian portrait photography, and led to later developments in the avant-garde, in the work of such innovators as Henry Peach Robinson and Oscar Rejlander.

A further instance of Watkins's versatility manifested itself in January 1859, at the instigation of Dickens's friend, the painter William Powell Frith, who wished for a photograph of Dickens to be taken, to aid him in creating a portrait (commissioned by John Forster in 1854; see Forster 668, and *Charles Dickens: An Exhibition* 109). The utility of photographs for this purpose was a topical subject (see, for example, "Photographic Portraiture"); in 1853 Robert W. Buss, who provided early illustrations for *Pickwick Papers*, and himself employed a photograph by John Watkins to create his famous posthumous portrait of Dickens (Litvack 2007: 23–24), wrote an article welcoming the formation of the Photographic Society, and discussing the benefits of photography for artists. While discounting "slavish imitation of the camera picture," he acknowledged that dialogue between art and science could have mutual benefit:

The Photographic Society will [...] be hailed with pleasure by artists; good is sure to result from the unreserved intercourse between scientific men and artists. The artist, with his ceaseless mental occupation in the composition and execution of his pictures, has no time to bestow upon a series of experiments; he must throw himself upon his scientific friends to correct lenses, and to promulgate the shortest and most certain mode of obtaining photographic pictures, while in his turn the artist can throw much light upon photography in an artist-like view.

By making photography easy, it will come into general use amongst artists, and any way by which it could be made available in the painting-room is indeed a desideratum to them. These remarks, of course, apply principally to the painter of portrait and figure subjects. (Buss 75, 76)

Frith approved of such views; in his *Autobiography and Reminiscences*, he recalls having heard that as portrait-painters “had often derived advantage from photography, I asked Dickens to give me a meeting at Mr Watkins’s, who was thought to be one of the best photographers of that day” (1: 307–08). Dickens, once again seeking to provide an air of verisimilitude, had his writing table and chair brought from Tavistock House (*Letters* 9: 9).

The photograph (Fig. 18) was taken at Watkins’s Regent Street studio on 17 January 1859 (*Letters* 9: 9). It presents Dickens in comfortable domestic attire, and the effect is quite different from the earlier photos by Watkins of Dickens at his desk: here he is more relaxed, shifted round in his chair to look at the viewer, not passive, but rather communicating with the viewer through the eyes. According to Curtis the pose reinforces an impression of “the genial yet successful working writer at his ‘job’” (2002: 149). Dickens’s desk (the same one as in the 1858 Watkins photograph, and barely visible in this image) is on the subject’s left; he rests his left elbow lightly on the arm of the chair, with his hand in his pocket. In his right hand he holds a light-colored quill, which is in the dead center of the image, and stands out from his dark velvet coat, thus highlighting his *raison d’être*. Dickens looks directly at the camera, confirming his confidence and ease as the most popular writer of his day. Frith (who was present for the photographic session) clearly had a say in how Dickens posed, as Frank Stone had before him: the author took Stone with him when he was photographed by J. J. E. Mayall in 1852 (*Letters* 6: 834). It was the central figure that interested Frith, rather than the wider scheme of furnishings. In the end the artist deemed Watkins’s effort “not very successful,” and claimed that he did not “derive the slightest assistance” from the photograph “in the prosecution of the portrait” (Frith 1: 309), even though the positioning of the upper body, arms and legs is nearly identical with the painting. Frith did not object to photography *per se*; indeed he made more constructive use of the medium in 1861, when he employed Herbert Watkins’s brother John to produce photographs of his own paintings; Frith wrote to the brother as follows:

I am perfectly delighted with the photography – they [*sic*] are of inestimable value to me & bad as my picture may prove to be, it would undoubtedly be much worse without your assistance. (“Album of Autograph Letters,” folio 82)

Clearly Frith believed that the photographs, which could be widely distributed, would enhance his commercial success as an artist.

The sittings for the Dickens portrait (Fig. 19), of which several versions exist (Parkinson 96), continued through the early months of 1859 (Kitton, *Charles Dickens* 74–78, and Frith 1: 308–13). It was exhibited at the Royal Academy, and had a mixed reception. The *Athenaeum* called it “the best likeness by far that has yet appeared [...] a culminating portrait, perfect in colour and likeness” (“Fine Arts: Royal Academy” 587). The *Art-Journal*, on the other hand, objected to Dickens’s pose:

He wears a velveteen wrapper, and appears to have put his left hand hastily, and significantly, into his pocket, as turning round with an expression of countenance somewhat severe, he seems to negative [*sic*] some application we are quite sure he would have answered in the affirmative. The action is certainly ungraceful, if not unbecoming; it is, to say the least, ‘a mistake’ so to picture such a man, – an error on the part of the author as well as on that of the artist. (“The Royal Academy Exhibition” 165)

Forster was delighted with the result, and wrote to Frith in March 1859 to say “The picture is, indeed, all I wished – more than I dared hope, because I know what a ticklish thing a likeness is” (Frith 1: 391). Dickens was more ambivalent, and wrote, rather jokingly, to Lavinia Watson, “It is a little too much (to my thinking) as if my next door neighbour were my deadly foe, uninsured, and I had just received tidings of his house being a-fire; otherwise, very good” (*Letters* 9: 71).

Later in 1859 Dickens sat for Watkins again; the result was two poses (Figs. 20, 21) that emphasized the author’s sunny disposition, and his penchant for brightly-colored clothing. In Fig. 20 Dickens faces the camera squarely, and is dressed in a wonderfully textured jacket with a velvet collar and wide lapels. There is an interesting chiaroscuro effect on the sleeves (the right one in soft focus, while the left one appears sharper and more detailed), as Dickens sits comfortably, hands laid one on top of the other, and elbows comfortably bent. The outer garment includes three buttonholes down each side; these are decorative rather than functional. The jacket also features wide cuffs, made from a different material (possibly in a different color) to the rest of the jacket; these nicely contrast with the collar, and add interest to the overall effect of the garment. His tie features a pronounced wavy pattern that catches the light, and thus makes it a conspicuous feature of his outfit. Dickens’s crossed legs, and light-colored trousers, serve as an effective contrast to the upper portion of the photograph, which primarily features darker hues. The brilliantly white shirt forms a neutral inner layer, which extends upward towards the face. The collared waistcoat, in Clan

Gordon tartan, is also of significance because it a conspicuous – perhaps even ostentatious – item of fashion, and confirms the observation made in a review article in the *Dickensian* that “Dickens’s taste in dress [...] struck all observers like a streak of lightning.” That same piece includes comments from W. P. Frith, G. A. Sala, and Wilkie Collins, who was asked by an artist what he should do with a gorgeous piece of material that was sent to him; Collins is said to have replied, “Oh, send it to Dickens. He will make a waistcoat of it” (Castieau 267). Dickens had a penchant for this item of clothing: there exist letters to his tailors with precise details of waistcoats (*Letters* 9:442, 12:371), and he treasured a particular one he had received from Mary Boyle; he told her it was his “constant companion” and promised to “wear it as a kind of charm” (*Letters* 12: 270). Flamboyantly colorful waistcoats were also the subject of a humorous exchange between Dickens and William Charles Macready: the author admired a particular one, with “broad stripes of blue or purple,” that the actor had worn, and wanted to borrow it for his tailor to copy; he signed the letter “*The Unwaistcoated One*” (*Letters* 4: 407).

Dickens’s ostentation is also evident in the diamond ring he wears in Fig. 20. He was fond of these items of jewellery, and owned at least three of them. The first record of Dickens’s interest in a diamond ring appears in a letter to a London firm of goldsmiths and jewellers in 1848 (*Letters* 5: 239); it is not clear whether he went ahead with this purchase, but by 1850 he certainly did own one, and noted that on a visit to Westminster Ragged School “some people to whom I talked, took occasion to admire my diamond ring” (*Letters* 6: 141); details of this ring are unknown. Dickens was presented with another, by the Birmingham Society of Artists, in 1853 (*Letters* 6: 838), and said in an acceptance speech, “I shall remove my old diamond ring from my left hand, and in future wear the Birmingham ring on my right, where its grasp will keep me in mind of the good friends I have here, and in vivid remembrance of this happy hour” (Fielding 155; see also 406). There are no traces of the Birmingham ring, and no known images (see Bower); therefore it is impossible to know whether it is the one Dickens wears in the Watkins photograph – albeit on his left hand.

Two other extant diamond rings must also be scrutinised. The first is the one allegedly given to Dickens by Alfred Tennyson in 1854. This surfaced at auction in 2009, and was formerly in the possession of “Hector Charles Bulwer Lytton Dickens,” alias Charley Peters (1854–1932; see Tomalin 141–42), who had purportedly obtained it in Melbourne from Dickens’s son Alfred (see Flood). Though the engraving reads “Alfred Tennyson to Charles Dickens 1854,” the provenance of this item has not been established beyond doubt; indeed Leonee Ormond, in an article about the relations between the poet and novelist, notes: “It would have been out of character

for Tennyson to make such a gift, and there is no evidence that he ever did so" (77). Whatever the origins of this item, it is clear from auctioneers' photographs – particularly those of the prongs (or claws) and shoulders of the ring – that it is not the one in the Watkins image. The second possibility is a ring that was passed down through Dickens's son Henry, and is still in the possession of the family: it features a single diamond set with an inverted shell motif, and features scrolling on the shoulders; the shank is engraved with the words "Belonged to Charles Dickens." It is commonly known as the "Mary Hogarth ring," and is supposedly the one that Dickens wore for the rest of his life (*Letters* 1: 323); yet the association of this particular ring with Mary Hogarth is in doubt: other than a statement composed by its former owner, Cedric Dickens, in 2002, there is no corroborating evidence to prove that this piece of jewellery was ever bought for, or worn by, Dickens's seventeen-year-old sister-in-law. Careful analysis demonstrates that neither the "Tennyson" ring nor the "Mary Hogarth" ring is the one in Fig. 20, which features six (or possibly eight) prongs, equally spaced around the perimeter of the stone. The shank (evident just above the stone) is a plain band, without ornamentation. This is the only photograph of Dickens in which a ring of any kind is evident. The impression, enhanced by the tartan waistcoat, light-catching tie, and tailored jacket, is of a man who, while wishing to be noticed, is comfortable with his own fame and reputation.

The other image from this sitting (Fig. 21) strikes a different pose: it is a half-length image of Dickens turned to the right on the chair, and looking directly at the camera. What is most captivating about this photograph is the author's face, which is evenly lit, with no shadows, thus allowing the viewer to concentrate on the eyes – those key features which, according to Marcus Root, "speak all languages" and produce the "appearance of intent" (113, 116). Dickens's eyes in particular made an impression on those who knew him. In an article entitled "Those Wonderful Eyes," Arthur Hearn collates the opinions of Dickens's contemporaries (including Forster, Carlyle, Sala and others), who characterize his eyes as "flashing," "expressive," "intelligent," "sparkling," and "beaming alike with genius and humour." Hearn concludes: "all agree that they were wonderful eyes" (25–29). This Watkins photograph emphasizes their inviting and welcoming quality, enhanced by the hint of a smile: an expression that, according to Root, serves to "brighten" a portrait by its "brilliant and spiritual vivacity" (95). The shaping of Dickens's mouth (here partly concealed by his beard) might be seen to offer a subtle indication of the warmth of relationship that existed between photographer and sitter: Watkins was clearly able to make Dickens feel at ease in his photographic studio, and was thus able to charm or entice him into a pose offering a "genuinely characteristic expression" (Root 91), which would appeal to both the sitter and viewer.

Dickens's precise reaction to these 1859 photographs is unknown, though he did write to Watkins in November of that year, extending "a thousand thanks for the remarkable, interesting, and admirable collection of Photographs you have sent to me. I shall always prize them highly and shall never tire of them" (*Letters* 9: 151). The discernible context suggests that Dickens was not referring to photographs of himself. Watkins certainly had an excellent reputation at this time, and was particularly praised in the press for his portraits of contemporary celebrities, which were put on display by the Photographic Society at Sydenham ("The Photographic Exhibition at the Crystal Palace" 29). By 1861 his business had grown sufficiently large for him to employ an apprentice by the name of George Morgan (1842–1905, who later opened his own photographic business) and five boys to assist him in the studio. In assessing Watkins's financial position it is useful to note that his studio also served as his place of residence, where he lived with his wife Eliza (whom he married in 1853), his sister Matilda, and the apprentice Morgan (UK Census 1861 RG 9/42).

The last of Herbert Watkins's sessions with Dickens took place in 1861 or 1862, by which time he was also being photographed by John Watkins (*Letters* 9: 465). The author had aged significantly in the space of a couple of years: the hair on the top of his head was thinner, and the wrinkles around his eyes were more in evidence. He was still a commanding presence, and capable of producing literary works of great power, including *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations* (both published in the newly-established *All the Year Round*); he also traveled extensively on the physically demanding reading tours, in the aftermath of his separation from his wife, Catherine. Michael Slater notes that at this time Dickens led several distinct lives: professional writer, public figure, "genially hospitable paterfamilias" to his children, as well as "discreet friend and [...] 'fairy godfather' of the Ternan family" (471). He likened himself to "a steamer in a storm," not knowing whether he would "go on whirling, or go down" (*Letters* 9: 391); this sentiment seems to be captured in the four poses he sat for in this session. In two of them Dickens is turned to his right, and looks away from the camera, into the distance; in two others he looks directly at the camera. Fig. 22 is interesting because of the rather dishevelled look of the subject: Dickens's face is shot in profile, and looks drawn and careworn: his eyelids are heavy, and he seems to lack purpose or direction in this posture. The focus is not as clear and sharp as in many of the other Watkins images; indeed the links and T-bar of the watch chain are out of focus. This is not a successful image, and it is unclear whether it was ever intended for wide distribution; nevertheless it makes the point that photographs of Dickens – even from such an accomplished practitioner as Watkins – varied in quality and appeal, and present the author in a variety of moods and guises.

Fig. 23 makes a radically different impression: this photograph is very sharply focussed – particularly the upper portion. Dickens stands out clearly – even boldly – from the neutral background. What is most remarkable about his pose is the way the eyes look out with a powerful intensity; this is accentuated through the use of a “catch-light” – a small spot of light reflected on the surface of each of the corneas, thus brightening the eyes and causing them to shine back at the camera (Root 114). This technique helps to suggest a directness in Dickens’s look, which evokes a clear connection between subject and viewer; this may be termed rapport, affinity or even magnetism. Also noteworthy are the wrinkles and creases around his eyes: the sharp focus, combined with the sensitive direction of light from above and from Dickens’s left (the viewer’s right) allows minute details in the contours of his face to stand out. Yet these signs of maturity and advancing age do not detract from the power of the author’s penetrating gaze. The artist and illustrator Marcus Stone, in an assessment of Dickens’s features, highlights elements that may be appreciated from a careful examination of this particular image:

He was a lean man, with beautiful limbs and well-developed arms, and an erect carriage made for activity. His face was singularly handsome. He had a nose of almost perfect beauty, with a nostril of exquisite curvature and sensitiveness which is impossible to describe. His eyes also were the most impressive and wonderful eyes I ever saw. They were green-grey in colour – an unusual eye. (Stone 63–64)

Such is the readily discernible impact made by many of the photographs of Dickens taken by Herbert Watkins in the late 1850s and early 1860s – and indeed throughout the author’s adult life. John Forster writes in similar terms in his *Life*, and emphasizes how there was a presence in the author’s facial features that remained unaltered over time:

He had a capital forehead, a firm nose with full wide nostril, eyes wonderfully beaming with intellect and running over with humour and cheerfulness, and a rather prominent mouth strongly marked with sensibility. The head was altogether well-formed and symmetrical, and the air and carriage of it were extremely spirited. [...] there was that in the face [*sic*] as I first recollect it which no time could change, and which remained implanted on it unalterably to the last. This was the quickness, keenness, and practical power, the eager, restless, energetic outlook on each several feature, that seemed to tell so little of a student or writer of books, and so much of a man of action and business in the world. (84)

Though Dickens and Watkins may have parted ways professionally by

1862, the photographer's business continued to flourish. He was a member of the Photographic Society of London (later known as the Royal Photographic Society), and his studio was ranked alongside those of Mayall and Claudet as among the most fashionable and admired of the day ("Editorial" 261). By 1865 Watkins had acquired premises on Torriano Avenue in Camden (a neighborhood where a number of photographic artists and chemists lived and worked in the 1870s and 1880s), and ran a second studio from there, which specialized in "Equestrian & Instantaneous Photography" (Fig. 24). In 1869 he was accorded the honor of presenting Queen Victoria with a portrait of her son, the Prince of Wales, in his uniform as Captain-General of the Honourable Artillery Company ("New Portrait" 107).

In 1872 Watkins's fortunes changed: he entered into a short-lived partnership with Edward Makinson Haigh (a pupil of the war photographer Roger Fenton), to run the two studios; this was dissolved in June 1874 (*London Gazette*, 31 July 1874, 3785). Thereafter he traded exclusively from the less fashionable establishment in Camden. In 1876 Watkins filed for divorce: his wife Eliza was found to have committed adultery (UK Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Files, J77.183.4688). Almost immediately after the issuing of the final decree in November 1877, Watkins married Augustine Touet, a woman less than half his age. Despite these alterations in circumstances, Watkins persisted with his chosen craft, and was selected to participate in the Exposition Universelle in Paris, which took place between May and September 1878. His entries included photographic prints that used the carbon transfer process, which produced extremely durable images of very high resolution (*Paris Universal International Exhibition* 62). By 1879 he had retired, and had transferred ownership of his business to his brother Charles.

By the time of the 1881 census Herbert Watkins had moved to Lancaster Street, Paddington, where he lived with his young second wife and his daughter Florence (born in 1879), along with three boarders and four servants (UK Census 1881 RG 11/15). He continued to dabble in his former profession, to the extent that the *British Journal of Photography* published a brief commentary on an encounter with him in 1884, on which occasion he showed the reporter a collection of thirty or forty photographic portraits of celebrities (including Dickens) which he had produced in his heyday, each "accompanied by a little story of the circumstances under which it was taken." The narratives are not recorded; but the article confirms Watkins's place in the annals of British photographic practice:

In portraiture it was, in former days, that Mr. Watkins made his reputation, and few photographers of the present time, even with all the increased rage for 'celebrities,' can [...] show so valuable – so priceless – a collection

of 'portraits from the life' as one[s] we looked over with our friend, Mr. Watkins, the other day. ("Permanency, and Toning and Fixing" 404).

There are relatively few details available concerning Watkins's latter years. By 1891 he had moved to Hammersmith, and in the census it is interesting to note that his wife's profession is listed as "Photographer," though she is not known to have engaged in this trade (UK Census 1891 RG 12/36; this could well have been a clerical error). By 1901 Watkins (then aged 72) was installed in Kensington Workhouse on Marloes Road (UK Census 1901 RG 13/33); while he was recorded as married, his wife Augustine, who had moved to Hammersmith, declared herself "widowed" (UK Census 1901 RG 13/46; see also Crawford). By 1911 Watkins had been moved to the Hammersmith Workhouse on Du Cane Road (UK Census 1911 RG 14/226); meanwhile Augustine had once again listed herself as widowed in the census, and had fraudulently lowered her own age, and that of their daughter Florence, by six years (UK Census 1911 RG14/253).

In the final period of his life Herbert Watkins was in poor health. In the 1913 and 1914 Hammersmith Workhouse records he is listed as "Aged and Infirm" (Hammersmith Board of Guardians HHBG/106/001, 106/002). In February 1916 he was transferred to the St. Marylebone Workhouse on Northumberland Street (St. Marylebone Board of Guardians STMBG/154/13). He died there, in a coma, at the age of 89 on 15 September 1916 of cardiac disease and "serous apoplexy" (Death Certificate). He had no assets at the time of his death, and the place of his burial is unknown.

As an individuated personality, Watkins faded into obscurity; all that remains of him materially are his photographic prints. His glass negatives (numbering some 35,000) have not survived: Kitton records that these passed from Herbert Watkins to his brother Charles, and then to Charles Watkins Jr., on the death of his father in 1882. The son "eventually disposed of the stock of negatives," (*Charles Dickens* 80): quite possibly he sold them to the photographer Albert Antonio Young (Wilkins and Matz 57), who lived at 16 Torriano Avenue (just down the street from the Watkins premises) in the early 1880s (UK Census 1881 RG 11/223); in 1884 Young partnered with Albert Fradelle, to form the highly successful firm of Fradelle and Young, which traded until 1922 (see "Famous Feasters"). If Fradelle and Young did have the negatives, it would account for their publication of a copy of one the "reading" images (Fig. 2) discussed above. Presumably it was while in their care that the glass plates of Dickens were demolished; Kitton records: "The most valuable of these 35,000 negatives were stowed away on a particular shelf which unfortunately broke down one night, and bore to destruction many interesting portraits of the novelist" (*Charles Dickens* 80). Even though none of these valuable artifacts has survived, it does not detract from what

can be appreciated from the prints produced by this celebrated photographer.

Studies of Dickens and photography are still rather few; but from the evidence presented in this study it can readily be seen that exploration of such a multifaceted visual subject provides great insight into the medium, the posed subject, the photographer, and the uses to which the images could be put. When Dickens made his arrangement with Herbert Watkins, this operator already had an established reputation for quality and fidelity, and had captured images of some of the leading personalities of his day; but it was a tough, constantly evolving business: competitive, technically demanding, and rather precarious, as the fortunes of Watkins's enterprise in the 1870s demonstrate. Yet in the period 1858–62, when he photographed Dickens, Watkins was at the height of his fame, competing with the likes of Mayall, Claudet and others. Dickens recognized the value of photography in developing what Curtis calls "a model of the writer both professional and entrepreneurial" (2002: 149). His authorial persona – industrious, inspired, distinguished, and professional – is communicated through the lens, to a public that demanded Dickens's visible presence. They wished to become intimately familiar with him: with the fall of his hair, the cut of his clothes, the appearance of his hands, the look in his eye, and, perhaps most iconically, with the very place where he wrote. Without these memorable images we would not feel that we know Dickens, and could relate to him, as well as we now do. They reveal a strong, confident personality, particularly in his roles as professional writer and public reader, but also as a flamboyant, eye-catching celebrity, magnificent in his custom-tailored garments and expensive accoutrements. It is through these photographs that succeeding generations have come to know and visualize the man behind those works that have exercised such widespread influence on English literary tradition.

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