



Title of Paper: Crystal Fragments: Museum Methods at the Great Exhibition of 1851, in *London Labour and the London Poor* and in *1851*

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Section: Articles

Date of Publication: January, 2017

Issue: Vol. 5, No. 1

Abstract: This essay examines the ways in which the Great Exhibition of 1851 introduced the Victorian viewing public to methods associated with the museum such as catalogue and taxonomy. Drawing on the work of museum scholars like Tony Bennett and the work of Michel Foucault, it argues that methods associated with the museum moved out of the Crystal Palace and were used to classify individuals. Such methods also impacted the literature of the time and can be seen in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* and his little-studied novel *1851*. In the latter, the museum world created by the Great Exhibition is exaggerated and mocked and the museum begins to discipline individuals far more than museum visitors can discipline the contents of the museum. These works of literature (along with the guidebooks and literature created for the opening of the Crystal Palace) demonstrate the influence of the museum in the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, The Great Exhibition, *1851*, taxonomy, catalogue, heteroclite

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Walls of glittering glass rose so high that they closed over living trees and they were so clear that they seemed to drink in the light of sun and stars, needing no further illumination. It was as though captive starlight had been put into the mundane service of offering shelter. Inside of these walls, a hoard of treasure was piled that would have stirred not just the heart of earthly kings and queens but those of heroes, dragons, and dwarves in myth. The three men who made this building possible knelt to feel the touch of a blade on their necks and rose with new titles (Colquhoun 190).

The preceding paragraph may seem taken from a book of fairytales by the Brothers Grimm or from one of the colorful fairytale collections of Andrew Lang, published from 1889 to 1913. However, it is a true story – the story of the Crystal Palace of 1851, built to house the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations. This paper argues that the real magic of the Crystal Palace – the real fairytale – was that, while not a museum proper, this institution introduced thousands of visitors to the museum’s methods of organization, observation, catalogue, and taxonomy. A key event in museum culture, the Great Exhibition is also the parent institution of some of Britain’s most famous museums, including the Victoria and Albert. Described as “perhaps the most influential representative body of the nineteenth century,” the Crystal Palace altered Victorian notions about commodities, advertising, and even national status (Richards 17).

Victorian audiences expected the great, crystalline showcase to produce changes in attitudes about art and manufacture, as well as literal changes in methods and types of production. Alongside these things, the Crystal Palace Exhibition also produced bewilderment in its audiences as they attempted to comprehend and classify its contents. This paper will examine that bewilderment through the lens of Michel Foucault’s heteroclite, a site of “disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law,” and discuss the use of guidebooks and museum catalogues to ameliorate visitor anxiety and codify and contain the wonders of the Crystal Palace (xvii). These attempts at containment will also be shown to appear in Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* where the journalist attempts to discipline and order the world of the poor in the same way that audiences used catalogue and taxonomy to discipline and order the world of the Crystal Palace. Finally, this paper will turn to Mayhew’s little read *1851*, where the museum world created by the Great Exhibition is exaggerated and mocked and where the museum begins to discipline individuals far more than museum visitors can discipline the contents of the museum. The transfer of museal methods of discipline to the social sphere in *London Labour* and to the world of the novel in *1851* highlights the reach of the museum’s influence in the nineteenth century.¹

¹ I consider the museal to include the institutions that surround and share methods with the museum (fairs, human zoos, menageries, etc.) and which undermine or seek to borrow from its legitimacy. The museal also includes those aspects of the museum that travel from the museum proper into other cultural areas.



Intended to provide “a true test and a living picture of the point of development at which the whole of mankind [had] arrived,” the Great Exhibition was an experiment in classification as much as it was a spectacle, a celebration, or a competition between nations (Martin 208). Originally, the goods and treasures piled within the Crystal Palace were meant to be arranged within the four major categories of raw materials, machinery, manufactures, and fine arts. The categories mimic the industrial process whereby raw materials may be transformed into (or by) machinery, yielding, at the highest level, works of artistic beauty. However, the practical arrangement of the Exhibition’s floor plan led goods to be categorized “first by nationality and only secondarily by function,” with the British Empire “occupying the lion’s share of the Crystal Palace” (Gillooly 27). In arranging the floor plan “into a miniature tour of the world,” the organizers of the Exhibition threatened the very classificatory system they set in place (Buzard 44). Furthermore, “the slow arrival of exhibits and exhibit information” forced organizers to group items as they arrived, a situation which favored groupings by “geographical location and political status” (Purbrick 55). The picture viewers came away with was ultimately one of British superiority, a sort of nationally-based taxonomy in which the lion truly ruled over all of the other beasts.²

Despite the taxonomies and floor plans meant to guide and instruct them, visitors could easily become lost, dazzled, or taken aback by the manufactured jungle of commodities houses inside of the Crystal Palace. The site on which all of the wonders of the modern world were gathered became the site of the heteroclite, a site of “disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law,” (Foucault xiv).³ This disorder owed much to the organizers’ abandonment of the original classifying scheme. With this scheme removed, the visitors were left to make meanings of their own. Therefore, each visitor to the Crystal Palace contributed to the “number of possible orders” of meaning as he or she combined images and meanings to create personal taxonomies.

However interesting they might have been, these personal taxonomies (these fragments) did not substitute for an official sense of order, a lack which may be perceived in visitor responses to the Great Exhibition. In a travel diary, William A. Drew remarked on “the infinite variety of goods, wares, specimens of fine arts, skill, taste, and &c.,” suggesting the difficulty of putting the Palace’s sights into words (207). Queen Victoria herself related exhaustion, writing that she was “really bewildered by the myriads of beautiful and wonderful things, which now quite dazzle one’s eyes.” She later admitted to being awed at “the vastness of the building, with all its decorations and exhibits” (Fay 45, 47). Charles Dickens claimed to find “too much” in the Exhibition, uncertain, in the end “if [he] had seen anything but the fountain and perhaps the Amazon” (Fay 73). Responses like these refute the museum precept that to see is to know and enforce the need for an ordered way in which to encounter the wonders of the exhibition (Hibbard 153). Without a taxonomic framework, a visitor might see a great deal but fail to absorb the sights or to connect

² See Richards 32-33 for a discussion of the compromised classification system.

³ While Foucault likely was not thinking of the Crystal Palace during the composition of *The Order of Things*, the use of the word “glitter” is especially appropriate in that fairy world of glass.



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them in any meaningful narrative.⁴ Meaning “glitters” in the distance like the walls of the Palace, but remains elusive, disconnected, and impossible to pin down.

Fortunately for visitors to the Crystal Palace, the Great Exhibition provided an exhilarating economic opportunity for publishers and printers, who churned out guidebooks to the city, guides to transportation and lodging, and museum catalogues in huge numbers.⁵ A single publisher produced four separate guides to the city of London in 1851 alone (Bellon 311). These publications came in a wide range, from *The Crystal Palace Penny Guide* with its twenty-two pages of advertisements (out of a total of sixty-four pages) to the four volume *Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, 1851*, published by the Royal Commission. The latter was much too bulky for any spectator to carry it to the Exhibition for consultation; it served, instead, as a take-home museum that could be browsed and acted more as a commemorative publication than as a guide. Sixpenny guides and clothbound works with titles like *How to Enjoy London during the Great Exhibition* were also available for those planning to visit the Exhibition (Bellon 311). Richards describes the problems associated with the guidebooks produced by the Planning Commission, noting that: “the short one offered descriptions so terse as to be unintelligible, while ... the long one was too heavy to be carried around the Exhibition” (27).

Despite their limitations, the guidebooks actively sought to improve visitor experience and to combat the visual onslaught produced by the massed commodities inside of the jewel-box of the Crystal Palace. Out of the “site of disorder” each guidebook sought to produce a single, correct interpretation. For instance, *Hunt’s Hand-Book to the Official Catalogues* emphasizes a “general desire” to “provide some concise description of the Exhibition – some guide” and to “afford that interpretation which appeared to be required” (volume 1, vi). That interpretation should be required and should be sought outside of the objects proper indicates that the Exhibition was not instantly and readily readable. The great and glassy jewel lid conceived by Joseph Paxton seemed capable of closing in the entire world, but it did not offer a cohesive narrative of what it contained; because of this, the concept of the Crystal Palace is fragmented from the start.

Other catalogues supported the idea that the Exhibition was difficult to read. Because many orders of meaning were possible, it was difficult for viewers to determine if they had hit upon the correct one. The “object” of *Routledge’s Guide* was “to supply an obvious deficiency in the existing catalogues, namely the *whereabouts* of some of the most striking and interesting articles exhibited” and to “relieve the bewilderment” experienced by the Palace’s visitors (v, vi). Such a claim challenges both the set up of the Exhibition and the arrangement of other publications and holds

⁴ Michelle Henning describes this as a “crisis of knowledge” and notes the measures museums have taken to correct the problem of “confused, disoriented, and distracted spectators”: “... they [museums] reorganized displays into clean, uncluttered exhibitions, marshalling objects into more coherent narratives...” (308)

⁵ This museum book mania is captured in 1851 when Mayhew notes that “Bradshaw’s Railway Guide had swelled into an encyclopedia” and “‘ATLASES’ were being made extra strong so that they might be able to bear the whole world on top of them;” about to be swarmed by exhibition-goers, London prepares marshalling museum know-how and creating catalogues (Mayhew 4).



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out *Routledge's Guide* as the authoritative source. The *Penny Guide* offered a “ready Handbook” for visitors too busy for a detailed examination of the Exhibition and contained “a list” of a “series of handbooks” for those interested in a more detailed study (3). Tallis’s four volume *History and Description of the Crystal Palace* offered engravings of “superior excellence” intended to provide “pleasing remembrances” of objects seen during one’s visit to the Exhibition (iii, iv). *The Official Catalogue* (four volumes) echoed this in its hopes “to serve as a lasting memorial of the splendid collection of which it professes to be the exponent” (vi). Finally, *The Crystal Palace Exhibition Illustrated Catalogue* strove “to include, as far as possible, all such as might gratify or instruct; and thus to supply sources of after-education,” allowing the benefits of the exhibition to be reaped even after one had departed the halls of glass (v). Guidebooks helped transform the spectacle of the Exhibition into an opportunity for rational recreation even as they helped to stabilize the contents of the Palace and to forestall the heteroclititean chaos that they seemed to represent.

In order to undo the Exhibition’s overwhelming effects, the catalogues often sought clarity through limitation. Only the *Official Illustrated Catalogue* presented every item on display; the others used significant items as touchstones, representations that stood in for a huge number of objects that were not described (just as modern museums do today). Meaning-making was further facilitated by the organizational choices of guidebook editors, the majority of which followed a particular pattern in the arrangement of their texts.⁶ The two-volume *Hunt's Handbook* serves as an example of catalogue organization. It begins with a floor plan and an introduction that outlines the catalogue’s philosophy. Hunt is quick to assure readers that items have been chosen not because they “are superior to others” but because the Exhibition contains “a variety and vastness to which we are unused” (v). The text then escorts the reader from the Transept (1) up the West Main Avenue (5), through the item featured outside of the building (17-21) and then through the interior. The second volume continues this pattern, devoting the final section first to “Colonies and Dependencies” and then to the Foreign Department (710). The emphasis, as with the floor plan inside of the Palace, is placed upon British items, regardless of class. Whatever the organizational method chosen, each catalogue was a discreet method (its binding creating a literal boundary) for limiting “the large number of possible orders” contained in the heteroclitite world of the Crystal Palace. Each catalogue subjects the objects to an order and puts a halt to the popular illusion that “the commodities in the Crystal Palace appeared to be expanding profligately in every direction possible” (Richards 27). Within the world of the guidebook, these commodities existed in limited, numbered, and knowable quantities.

Besides sharing organizational principles, the catalogues also shared methods which can be traced back to the nineteenth-century museum. The museum-based methods most favored by these guidebooks are cataloguing, the creation of taxonomies, and evaluation. These three methods are central organizing devices in the natural history museum, both in the nineteenth century and today. Cataloguing reveals the contents of the museum, taxonomy reveals the relationship of specimens to one

⁶ Obviously, economic concerns would have been a factor in the creation of the handbooks and guidebooks. Therefore, the *Penny Guide* is less inclusive than the multivolume works.



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another, and evaluation, often appearing in explanatory plaques, explains either the “lesson” the museum-goer should take from a particular exhibit or the rationale behind including such an object or exhibit in the wider collection. In transferring these devices out of the museum and into print, guidebook editors attested to the cultural capital and influence of the museum as a model to make sense of the world.

As one of these models, the museal idea of catalogue cannot be reduced to the mere act of listing. As a particular taxonomic process the act of cataloguing can also refer to the act of collecting and arranging objects within a larger exhibit. Many natural history museums today have a representative catalogue on the floor (a hall of mammals, for example) which is only an excerpt from a larger “hidden” catalogue which exists in roll-top drawers and specimen boxes.⁷ A museum may display some of its best treasures, but it is rare for any museum catalogue to contain only one of a particular specimen. This abundance, the vastness of the collecting enterprise, is the impetus for cataloguing and collecting and was certainly not limited to the Victorian museum.

During “the heyday of natural history,” museal hobbies were undertaken by vast numbers of Victorians (Barber 1). Victorians took on museal labor as they created rock collections, parlor cabinets of curiosities, salt and freshwater aquariums, fern cases, insect collections, and flower pressings. Collection was so widespread that weekend newspaper articles addressed its importance. For example, *The Saturday Magazine* ran several features regarding the creation of a domestic museum. In one of these, concerns about cataloguing arise. While the curator of a private, domestic collection is discouraged from over-labeling items which were “chosen” for “his own intellectual use” and thus are “too familiar to him to require labels,” public museums are urged to label and classify items in order that “the humblest visitor, whether possessed of books or not [could] identify” the items on display “as a means of pleasure and instruction” (229). In short, a museum should know what it possesses and be able to make this information easily known to a visitor. Where such information was perceived to be lacking, as in the case of the Great Exhibition, catalogues and guidebooks looked to fill the void by creating lists and descriptions of the items on display.

These lists and descriptions formed museum catalogues that existed in one of two formats. The first is exemplified by the *Illustrated Catalogue*, which devotes much of each page to engravings, the high number of which is evidence “that neither cost nor labor has been spared” in its creation (v). These engravings are then paired with a few lines of text which identify the object, its maker, and include some form of evaluation. For example, the half-page engraving of a statue of Godfrey of Bouillon includes this description: “We should most assuredly have omitted one of the *greatest* features of the Exhibition had we neglected to introduce into our Catalogue the colossal statue of the renowned crusader, GODFREY OF BOUILLON, modeled by M. SIMONIS, of Brussels. It is a work conceived in a noble spirit, and admirably

⁷ The problem of overabundance or “over” collection is so well known to museum scholars that the actively caution curators against it. For example, the *Handbook for Museums* states in bold letters that are set off from the surrounding paragraphs: “**Museums should not, except in very exceptional circumstances, acquire material that the museum is unlikely to be able to catalogue, conserve, store, or exhibit... in a proper manner**” (Dean 93).



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carried out” (185). The second method of cataloguing relies much more heavily on text and may or may not include an engraving of the object described. *The Official Catalogue* eschews engravings, for example, and its inclusion of every single object in the Exhibition renders the descriptions quite short. Under the class heading of “LEATHER, SADDLERY, BOOTS, AND SHOES,” for example, one finds catalogue entries like these:

“BEVINGTONS & SONS, *Neckinger Mill, Bermondsey*,
Manufacturers.

Goat, sheep, seal, kid, and lamb skins, in the manufactured state.

Goat, seal, sheep, and calf skins manufactured into morocco, roans, skivers, and enamelled [sic] leather, for furniture, bookbinding, and shoe leather.

Kid, lamb, Cape sheep, and calf skins (alum leather), manufactured for gloves, shoes, and shoe binding.

Specimens of leather, with varieties in tanning and leather dressing.”

The editor then adds this explanatory note, “Leather, such as that used for boots and shoes, is strictly a chemical product. The skins of a variety of animals are employed in the preparation of this article of universal use. The preparation of most varieties of leather consists essentially in the formation of a chemical compound, of the gelatine [sic] of the skin, and of a chemical principle called tannin, contained in the liquid used. Alum leather differs from ordinary leather in its properties and composition.” (volume 2, 518).⁸

The reader can imagine the difficulty of matching this particular entry to the goods on display, to say nothing of the labor involved in perusing four volumes of such lists. Other catalogues endeavored to make their entries more interesting and to make sure that readers could connect the item catalogued to the physical item on display. For this reason, large, flashy, expensive, and significant items often feature in the catalogues alongside samples of carpet or lists of raw materials.

The creation of lists or catalogues to organize data and make it accessible is not a purely Victorian preoccupation, but the Victorian connection between the catalogue and the museum was very strong.⁹ “A sizeable sum of money” was spent on the creation of a cataloguing scheme for the British Museum, for example, though it did not ultimately yield a catalogue (Strout 267). Attended by six million people, the Great Exhibition helped make the catalogue form a familiar one to the Victorian reading public. When describing the Exhibition in the novel *1851*, Henry Mayhew attests to this familiarity when he notes that most viewers “have catalogues or small guide-books in their hands,” and that they “gaze” in an “earnest manner” at the assembled objects before “refer[ing]” to the books (160). His example shows that the museum-going public has learned how to use catalogue as a form; guidebooks provide

⁸ The spacing and alignment used here is meant to replicate the appearance of the text in the catalogue. Entries appear on both sides of the page in columns.

⁹ For a discussion of the historical use of catalogues, see Strout, Ruth French. “The Development of the Catalog and Cataloguing Codes.” *Library Quarterly*. 24.6 (October 1956) 254-275. Print.



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a means by which to navigate museum collections and offer a concrete interpretation of the items on display.

Victorian museum-goers would also have been familiar with the concept of taxonomy, although it, like catalogue, was not a nineteenth century invention. Taxonomy can be traced back to ancient Greece, entering its familiar form in 1738 when the Linnaean system was developed (Anderson 17, Yoon 26). The Victorian twist on taxonomy was to apply its concepts to social categories such as race, class and sexuality (McClintock 52, 46, Ledger and Luckhurst 291). Intended for use as a tool for organizing the natural world, taxonomy became an ordering system for locating one's place on "the evolutionary family Tree of Man," or within the "racial hierarchy," or marking one's proximity to the "dangerous" or criminal classes or those classified by a "sexological taxonomy of perversion" (McClintock 37, 38, 46, Ledger and Luckhurst xxi). Like cataloguing, this "social" taxonomy was meant to illuminate and order that which threatened to overwhelm. In the guidebooks, taxonomy could organize the contents of the Exhibition; outside, it addressed concerns of disease, poverty, savagery, and deviant sexuality. These areas may also be seen as places where "a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law," but the Victorians created taxonomies that quickly shut down any "possible orders" that seemed deviant.

Museums contributed to this repurposing of taxonomy. Racial exhibits positioned the white, European male at the top of the evolutionary ladder. Animals were grouped into "families" that bolstered notions of the "natural, patriarchal family," visibly denouncing alternative familial constructions (matriarchal, homosexual, etc.) (McClintock 45). Confronted daily by newspaper accounts that ranked and classified people, visitors to the Great Exhibition would have quickly recognized the taxonomical techniques at work inside the Crystal Palace (where Britain's placement indicated its superiority) and in guidebooks. The taxonomies used were either those officially set out by the exhibition (raw materials, machinery, manufactures, and fine arts, including the thirty-four classes into which these were separated) or spatial taxonomies, which introduced readers to objects as it led them through a visible hierarchy.

The final museal method used by the guidebooks is the simplest. In order to display culturally relevant objects, museums authenticate and evaluate specimens before displaying them. Inside of the Crystal Palace, visitors might evaluate objects based on the enjoyment or wonder they provided or by their usefulness or perceived wealth. The floor plan arrangement lacked price tags, so these evaluations were likely quite subjective. However, the "material arrangement of the various national departments" did "invit[e] the observer to contrast them competitively," an invitation also taken up by the editors of the guidebooks, who weighted their catalogue entries with adjectives denoting the value of the goods on display (Gillooly 28). This value might be cultural, national, industrial, or merely aesthetic and would have influenced reader opinion of the objects just as museum plaques influence visitor interpretation today.

The museal methods outlined above did not merely migrate into guidebooks; they also appear in the newspaper accounts of Henry Mayhew that would become *London Labour and the London Poor* and in his novel *1851*. Just as the guidebooks



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and catalogues attempted to combat the disorder and endless possibilities of interpretation arising from the Great Exhibition by containing it and imposing a narrative structure, Mayhew harnesses museal methods in an attempt to order and contain the world of the lower classes. Like the guidebooks outlined above, *London Labour* relies on catalogue and taxonomy to organize “the misery, the vice, the ignorance, and the want” that attend the world of Victorian poor (447). Mayhew’s mission, like that espoused by the nineteenth-century museum, is one of social uplift. In presenting his catalogue of the poor, he hopes to change attitudes about the poor and to “induce” his readers “to apply [themselves] steadfastly to the removal or alleviation of those social evils that appear to create so large a proportion of ... vice and crime” (447).

The format of *London Labour* closely resembles the catalogue format used by exhibit guidebooks, with a strong reliance on print rather than engravings. Indeed, “the same acquisitive and classifying impulse that fed the Great Exhibition” and the catalogues that described it may be seen operating in the pages of *London Labour* (Joshi 97). Like the Exhibition and its catalogues, *London Labour* first outlines the broad categories that will be examined. In place of raw materials, machinery, manufactures, and fine arts, Mayhew introduces the “large and varied class” “who obtain their living in the streets of the metropolis” and proceeds to arrange them “under six distinct genera”: street-sellers, street-buyers, street-finders, street-performers, artists and showmen, street artizans [sic], and street-labourers [sic] (5). Having established these categories, Mayhew goes on to use headings similar to that in the leather goods example above. These headings are followed by essential information that will allow the reader to recognize and distinguish the class being described. Under the heading of “OF THE SELLERS OF TREES, SHRUBS, FLOWERS (CUT AND IN POTS) ROOTS, SEEDS, AND BRANCHES,” one finds the following information: “The better class of flower-girls reside in Lisson-grove, in the streets off Drury-lane, in St Gile’s, and in other parts inhabited by the very poor. Some of them live in lodging-houses, the stench and squalor of which are in remarkable contrast to the beauty and fragrance of the flowers they sometimes have to carry thither with them unsold” (60). Mayhew then follows this generalization with the story of two orphan flower girls. As a catalogue entry, their story serves as a representative specimen of a type, just as a particular piece of sculpture might illustrate that entire class in a guidebook.

These catalogue entries are highly detailed, often running to three pages in length. By including specific details (how much is paid for lodging, what times of day the girls work), Mayhew suggests that the entire class of street sellers may be known and understood through these examples, just as the guidebooks suggested that one could know the world of manufacture by studying a few of the key goods on display in the Crystal Palace. Furthermore, just as “things ... spoke for themselves, using ... a language of their own” in the Great Exhibition and in its catalogues, Mayhew allows his “specimens” to speak for themselves by transcribing their words, dialect and all, and commenting on their behavior. The little flower girl above is quick to combat notions of her ignorance by claiming that she can read and proving it by reading from *The Garden of Heaven* (Mayhew 63). Her behavior suggests that she is aware of attitudes toward her class and wishes to situate herself in opposition to such



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expectations. Just as objects seemed to take on characteristics of living things within the Crystal Palace, Mayhew's catalogue entries transform a class regarded as impediments or objects back into human beings with voices.

This transformation is complicated, however, by Mayhew's recourse to taxonomy. Like the guidebook editors, the journalist turns to this museal method to impose order on the world of the London poor. While human beings do occupy a place in the taxonomic tree, the average person rarely contemplates taxonomy as applied to anything but animals and plants. For the Victorians, taxonomy became a tool that could be taken out of the natural history museum and applied to the world of goods (in the Crystal Palace) or to the world of human beings sharing their streets. Such a taxonomy would lead to knowledge of the London underclass and methods for ameliorating their condition. In order to discipline the poor into proper and productive members of society, a hope held out by *London Labour* and one of the missions of the nineteenth-century museum, they first must be made known.

In order for his readers to recognize particular members of the London poor, Mayhew creates a detailed taxonomy that perfectly matches the taxonomic order of Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species, even though he does not write it out in the Linnaean form.¹⁰ If we use the family of "street-sellers" as an example Mayhew's taxonomy is as follows:

Kingdom: Workers

Phylum: Working Class (other phyla would include the middle class or upper class, for example)

Class: Working Class of London

Order: Street Workers

Family: Sellers (Mayhew also includes the families of: Buyers, Finders, Artists, Artizans, Labourers)

Genus: sellers of fish (also included are: sellers of vegetables, sellers of eatables and drinkables, sellers of stationery, sellers of manufactured articles, sellers of second-hand articles, sellers of live animals, sellers of mineral productions and curiosities)

Species: sellers of wet fish (Mayhew 5-8).

By reading and studying the articles that became *London Labour*, the Victorian middle and upper classes could learn to distinguish individuals on the street down to the hyper-specific species or sub-species level. For example, in the case of street artists, readers could recognize street showmen (genus) and then further distinguish the species "extraordinary persons" and move on to the sub species of "dwarfs," all in a single assessing glance. The streets of London become a museal space where the

¹⁰ It must be noted that, as a journalist rather than a scientist, Mayhew sometimes misuses taxonomic terminology. The families listed above, for example, are written as "genera" in his text, a classification that makes no sense if we are to take sellers of a specific article as a species, which they must be as they are the stopping point of the taxonomy (5). Furthermore, Mayhew sometimes complicates his taxonomy with mentions of race, distinctions between English and Irish sellers, for example. Such errors suggest that the application of taxonomy outside of the museum was not the perfect science it may have masqueraded as. It did, however, carry scientific authority and thus should be taken seriously.



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average person can practice the museum's method as they assess and categorize their fellow citizens. Taxonomic work becomes the work of the masses rather than the work of an individual scientist.

The idea of the museum as a cultural structure or space that can discipline bodies and citizens through such methods as taxonomy is not a new one. Eileen Hooper-Greenville theorizes the "surveyed and controlled" space of "the disciplinary museum" as a central nineteenth century structure that offered democratic education and yielded "docile bodies" (167, 190). In these spaces, great works of art or specimens, such as specimens of the healthy human body, were "held up as examples to be imitated" the viewing of which was meant to "civilise the mass of people" or at least inspire them into "behaving well" (Hooper-Greenville 189). Bennett follows this work with similar observations, revealing the nineteenth-century museum as the space where bodies "function as... *object[s]* made visible by" science "while also doubling as the *subject* of the knowledge" science has "[made] available" and where such subjects could be "inscribe[d]" with "self-activating and self-regulating capacities" that would yield sober, productive, and upright individuals (7, 20).¹¹ What is unique in the case of Mayhew is that the museum walls have been replaced with the city skyline. Instead of objects grouped together, the exhibits are bodies in constant flux. In identifying and assessing the London poor, the upper and middle classes *become* the example to be emulated even as they merely go about their day to day lives. Imposing order via a museum framework has become the day to day work of the average person. In *1851*, Mayhew will carry these museal methods even farther to show that it is also the work of the novel reader.

Known for his work as a social researcher and a pioneer in the developing social science of ethnography, Mayhew's name usually arises only in connection with his work *London Labour and the London Poor*. Conducted throughout the 1840s, Mayhew's interviews with the underclass of London were collected into three volumes and published in 1851 (the same year that the Great Exhibition opened). While Mayhew's chronicles of street sellers and prostitutes have acted as a major source of information for scholars since their publication, the novel *1851* has passed out of print and has garnered little critical attention.¹² Indeed, the current critical conversation surrounding the novel consists of a handful of articles, including notable works by Philip Landon and Nick Fisher.¹³ If *1851* is considered within a museum

¹¹ Other scholars have also forwarded Foucaultian readings of the museum space. See Hetherington, Kevin. "Foucault, the museum, and the diagram." *The Sociological Review*. 59.3 (2011) 457-475.

¹² Mayhew's *London Labor* is seen as partial impetus for the growth of social exploration writing in the second half of the nineteenth century. See Ledger, Sally and Roger Luckhurst. "Outcast London." *The Fin de Siecle: A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880-1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 25-27. Print.

¹³ Landon's reading of the novel marks the Crystal Palace out as a haven of respectability and insists that characters must "conform... to the Crystal Palace ideology" in the face of a "hostile world" (35). Fisher's view is historical, chronicling Mayhew's engagement with the articles housed in the Exhibition (10). Thomas Richards also briefly considers the novel in his work *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*. Richards sees *1851* as a "conversion narrative" that transforms Cursty Sandboys into a consumer (37). While I agree that Sandboys is driven from home for lack of commodities, I



context it proves a valuable insight into the power of museum culture and the importance of the Great Exhibition of 1851, an event, along with other world's fairs, that has been credited with "shap[ing] both the form and substance of the modern world" (Rydell 136). Chronicling one family's increasingly desperate attempts to visit the great museum prototype, the Great Exhibition of 1851, the novel replicates the overwhelming effects of the exhibition itself. Using museal language and museal methods found in the catalogues created to aid visitors to the Crystal Palace, Henry Mayhew ultimately makes the palace the last place one would *want* to visit. He unmakes the museum (and the traditional form of the novel) with the very schemes of classification which have been made to give it order.

As *1851* begins, the world takes on the aspect of a museum, just as it does in the pages of *London Labour* where individuals become walking examples of a taxonomic order. The text begins with the words "The Great Exhibition."¹⁴ This is a Genesis-like moment, with Mayhew signaling the importance of exhibition in the hierarchy of the world. At this foundational moment in the text the audience has not even been introduced to the major characters whose adventures they will share. Instead, they learn of the massive impact of the exhibition: "nine-tenths of the human family" are marked out as "sight-seers," individuals who have already absorbed a nineteenth century museal culture founded in catalogue and taxonomy (Mayhew 1). The reader is to join these nine-tenths in a sight-seeing journey through the novel and to the Crystal Palace itself. Like the upper and middle class readers of *London Labour*, the reader is to see in order to *know* and Mayhew quickly begins ordering knowledge in accordance to practices of the nineteenth-century museum.

In the first pages of *1851*, the reader is indoctrinated into the world of catalogue, the most popular museal method used by journalists and guidebook writers in an attempt to organize the wealth of wonders gathered beneath the jewel box lid of the Crystal Palace. As a showing of "All Nations" the Great Exhibition will be attended by: "the Esquimaux [sic]," "The Hottentot Venus," the "Yemassee," "the Truefit of New Zealand," "the Botocudo," "the Maripoosan," "the Cingalese [sic]," and "the King of Dahomey – an ebony Adam" (Mayhew 1-2). This list testifies to the breadth of the British Empire, indicates the universality of the exhibition, and demonstrates the museum's ability to transform a sight-seer into an exhibit. By entering into the space of the exhibition, colonial visitors could quickly become visual attractions like the Hottentot Venus, ogled as British "possessions" by those living in the British Isles. Mayhew will continue to highlight the contrast between native British visitors and foreigners throughout *1851*, but his primary purpose in documenting those who will attend the Exhibition is to make the reader work through layers of lists. The list above is one of his shorter efforts and his recourse to cataloguing does not yet seem subversive.

At first glance, the lists featured in the first few pages of *1851* may simply seem amusing to the reader, a minor intrusion into the larger story of the Sandboys.

argue that he is much more closely aligned with the laboring classes (through his knowledge of minerals, for example) than with the "tightfisted middle class" (36).

¹⁴ Later in the text when the event is opened it will be listed as GREAT EXHIBITION OF ALL NATIONS and set apart from the rest of the novel to indicate its importance (128).



However, the amount of cataloguing that Mayhew subjects his audience to quickly becomes exhausting. Take, for example, London's preparations, its emphasis on itself as a properly cosmopolitan city (fitting site of a museal event like the exhibition).¹⁵ The reader is told about a hotel of all nations offering a mere seventeen amenities (all listed) and a restaurant serving delicacies suited to foreign visitors – seven examples are given (Mayhew 2). The narrative of the Sandboys will never intersect with this hotel or this restaurant. The reader is ejected from the space of the narrative by the sheer work of reading through lists. The same process could occur within the pages of the guidebooks or catalogues. Take, for example, this excerpt from *A General Guide to the British Museum* from 1893:

“In order to render this skeleton [of a sperm whale] more instructive, and to bring it into relation with the elementary specimens of osteology in the adjoining bay (No. 1., west side), the names of the principal parts have been attached to them. This will enable the anatomist to trace at a glance the extraordinary modifications in the form and relations of its component bones which the huge skull has undergone, and will show in the clearest manner to the least instructed visitor the so-called fin or flipper of the whale is composed of all the same parts – shoulder, elbow, wrist, and fingers – as his own arm and hand” (Flower 26).

The narrative being conveyed is about evolution and the similarities between human development and the development of “one of the most colossal of animals,” but it is not the same type of narrative one would expect to find in *The Moonstone* or *Middlemarch* (Flower 26). Of course, such novels have been criticized for just the type of writing one would expect to find in a museum guide. Critics of the Victorian novel often light upon its cataloguing tendencies, its overly detailed fictional spaces and imagined worlds cluttered with lists of goods, items, and things (Freedgood 1, 19-20). Such lists, while used by their creators as a bid for realism, earn criticism precisely because they break the narrative. Mayhew capitalizes on this effect and amuses himself with *1851* – an attempt to convey a narrative almost completely through catalogue.

The catalogues of *1851* proliferate as the reader draws closer to the opening day of the Exhibition. Surnames of Brits preparing for invasion appear in the novel in alliterative lines (“Beds, Bucks, Notts, Wilts, Hants, Hunts, and Herts,”) that are both tiresome and generic (Mayhew 2). The world itself is reduced to a series of relationships presented in catalogue form: “not a village, a hamlet, a borough, a township, or a wick,” or “such was the state of the world, the continent, the provinces, and the metropolis” (Mayhew 3). Writing *after* the Exhibition had commenced, Mayhew was well aware of its ability to dumbfound visitors, and he recreates that effect for the reader by bombarding her or him with endless lists.

While Mayhew's work is largely comic, one suspects that he had *some* sympathy for the readers he set to laboring. Mayhew, writing for the *Edinburgh News*

¹⁵ Buttermere will remain the anti-museum, an area that is not urban, lacks modernity, and does not struggle with urban problems the Sandboys clan will encounter throughout the text.



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and *Literary Chronicle* attempted a serialized catalogue of the contents of the Crystal Palace. But despite the many lists that appear in both *1851* and *London Labour*, “this project utterly defeated him” and was never completed (Fisher 10).¹⁶ Though students of the Crystal Palace may regret this unfinished project, Mayhew’s attempts at taxonomy were not all slated for failure. Focusing on people rather than objects, the author uses just such a taxonomy to detail the London underworld, repeating the classifying and disciplining methods used in *London Labour*. As Cursty and his family journey toward London, they begin to participate in the very activity that awaits them at the Crystal Palace: they gawk. In the train carriage that carries them to London, the Sandboys are examined by a “strange gentleman” even as “the Sandboys, one and all, did the same for the strange gentleman” (44). The characters are then endorsed in this action: “and truly the gentleman was so *very* strange, that the curiosity of his fellow passengers was not to be wondered at” (Mayhew 44). In this small moment, Mayhew reminds readers of the importance of vision and visual assessment in the nineteenth century. Strange sights were meant to be taken in, wondered at, and assigned a place, whether inside of the museum or out. The museum world of *London Labour* reappears, enlarged, in *1851* and the Sandboys prove unfortunately naïve as to its methods. For an audience schooled in museal techniques, this naiveté becomes a source of amusement; the audience can laugh at the Sandboys because they can never imagine being in their shoes.

Indeed, the museum’s effect on the world is so large that almost no one encountered by the Sandboys lacks the ability to assess, authenticate, and taxonomically place all that they see. Though likely no museumgoer, the strange gentleman being observed on the train has had more practice with visual assessment than the Sandboys clan and he pegs them before they can assign him to some undesirable category. Having done so, he offers them a lesson in the taxonomic table of London’s underclass. He begins with broad groups (genus) of thieves (family), which he classifies by both their formal name and a description of their actions. These broad groups make up another of Mayhew’s lists that the reader must labor through:

“cracksmen, or housebreakers; rampsmen, or footpads; bludgers and stick-clingers, or those who go out plundering with women; star-glazers, or those who cut out shop-windows; snoozers, or those who sleep at railway hotels; buzzers, or those who pick gentlemen’s pockets; and wires, or those who do the same kind office for ladies. . . thimble-screwdrivers, or those who wrench watches from their chains; dragsmen, or those who rob carts and coaches; sneaksman, or those who creep into shops and down areas; bouncers, or those who plunder by swaggering; pitchers, or those who do so by passing one thing off as another; drummers, or those who do the same by stupefying others with drink; macers, or those who write begging letters; and lurkers, or those who follow the profession of begging” (Mayhew 43).

¹⁶ For the importance of catalogue in *London Labour* see Nancy Metz “Mayhew’s Book of Lists” *Studies in Literature* 14.2 (1982) 42-50. Print.



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Not only does this section of text change from narrative to catalogue, it provides a detailed taxonomy of London thieves and suggests that the city might not be just a showcase for items and goods, but a living, moving museum space full of unsavory specimens.¹⁷ That their railway companion is so well versed in this taxonomy *should* make the Sandboys wary, especially when this taxonomic table is further broken and down and detailed over the following three pages. There is a Linnaean skill here that could only be gained by close study of the subjects being discussed. When he fails to make use of this taxonomy to read their guide as a thief, Cursty exhibits a failure to fit within *1851*'s museum world.

The museum enters *1851* through catalogue, but Mayhew is not content to disrupt the narrative merely by importing methods from the museum. At the same time that the text is being transformed into a string of lists, the world of *1851* is being made into a museum, rife with all of the problems that plagued visitors of the Crystal Palace. In the museum world that Mayhew creates, individual subjects can be exhibited like objects, objects take precedence over people, authenticity is of paramount concern, and the one edifice that can hold out salvation is the museum itself. Only the museum can organize, order, and discipline the chaos faced by the Sandboys clan. By making these themes an integral part of the text, Mayhew uses his text as a commentary on the world (re)created in the wake of the Exhibition.¹⁸

As shown in *London Labour*, the city streets have become museal spaces where their occupants practice observation and assessment. Entering this space, Cursty also enters a taxonomic hierarchy in which his clothing and manners rank him above the many specimens of the London poor. On a search for lost items and money, Cursty and his son Jobby find themselves in the museal space of a secondhand market (Mayhew 98-99). This place is a horrid parody of the museum (a second example of which will be seen in the dust heaps of *Our Mutual Friend* in chapter

¹⁷ Within the novel, the use of catalogue is not restricted to the metropolis, the urban environment of the museum where it would have proven a native form of reading. In that rural idyll of Buttermere, Mayhew again resorts to list after list to establish the scene in the mind of the reader. "Social facts" such as births and deaths are delivered in precise numbers, linking *1851* to *London Labor* (Mayhew 6, 7). Further catalogues tally all of the things which *cannot* be found in Buttermere (bills, tradesmen, attorneys, tax-gatherers, butchers, bakers, drapers, booksellers etc.) the births, deaths, and inhabitants of the village ("the Flemings, the Nelsons, the Cowmans, the Clarks, the Riggs, the Lancasters, the Branthwaites, the Lightfoots...") the comments of a local visitor's book, the contents of Cursty's son Jobby's pockets, and, finally, the exodus of the people of Buttermere for London and the Exhibition (Mayhew 4, 6, 5, 10, 14, 15-17).

¹⁸ Another aspect of a world in the wake of the Great Exhibition was commodity culture. Thomas Richards highlights the connections between the Exhibition and commodity culture, pointing to the Crystal Palace as a sort of meta-factory that helped to produce the conditions and products that ushered in the modern relationship between people and goods. Richards marks the Exhibition as the moment at which the commodity began to become "the centerpiece of everyday life, the focal point of all representation, the dead center of the modern world" (1). What he refers to as "The Great Exhibition of Things" ushered in capitalism as "a dominant form of exchange" with "a dominant form of representation": the piles of glittering goods arranged within the Crystal Palace (Richards 3). Mayhew was not ignorant of the effects of the Crystal Palace on the world of buying and selling. Indeed, he documented a fear among the working class that the true purpose of the Exhibition was for the bourgeoisie to learn how to craft cheaper goods and lower the wages of those who worked for them (Fisher 10).



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three) where instead of exotic diamonds and industrial treasures, people bargain over “bones and bits of old iron and pieces of rag” (Mayhew 99). Here, “refuse [is] piled on the ground like treasure” – and is still worth more to the inhabitants of this world than any museum could ever be (Mayhew 99). Inside such a world, Sandboys becomes “the universal object of observation,” considered so avidly precisely because he does not belong (Mayhew 101). Landon sees the “dangerous, unsanitary Old Clothes Exchange” as a dark and twisted inversion of the Great Exhibition where Cursty is an object of interest rather than the sightseer he would be inside of the museum itself (32-33).

The bargaining and squabbling over goods that occurs in the marketplace is not a class-based phenomenon. Rather, in Mayhew’s museum world, objects have the ability to become more important than the individuals who possess them. Nor is this merely a manifestation of Mayhew’s imagination. According to the work of John Plotz, some Victorians regarded their possessions not merely as goods or mementoes, but as material manifestations of elements of their selfhood. This attitude can be seen in *1851* in the character of Mrs. Sandboys. In her mind, possessions stand in for the respectability of her family. It is for this reason that she is initially moved to leave Buttermere despite her dread of London’s squalor. Having survived several deprivations, she cannot bear to see Cursty without proper pants or Jobby without shoes. The loss of these items is equated with a loss of self and of standing so devastating that even London may be risked.

Plotz describes a connection similar to that of Mrs. Sandboys in his reading of *The Mill on the Floss*. For Mrs. Tulliver in *Mill*, “[a]ny object monogrammed with her initials or her family name seems an almost physically attached extension of herself” (Plotz 8). When Mrs. Tulliver discovers that her sense of selfhood is “physically enshrined in objects that can, as fiscal currents [or, in the case of the Sandboys, sheer misfortune] fly away,” she experiences “despair” (Plotz 8). This type of despair is exactly mimicked in *1851*. Mayhew writes that “the peculiar feature of Mrs. Sandboys’ mind was to magnify the mildest trifles into violent catastrophes. If a China shepherdess or porcelain Prince Albert were broken, “she took it almost as much to heart as if a baby had been killed” (Mayhew 13). Thus, when Mrs. Sandboys prepares to journey to London, she *must* have twenty-three pieces of luggage containing her “gowns,” “morning dresses,” “evening dresses,” “cardinals and paletots,” “night-caps and night-gowns” “muffs and tippets,” “whiskers and artificial flowers and feathers,” and “bustles and false fronts” (Mayhew 34). These function not only as female ornamentation, (or as another catalogue) but as objects that contain sentiment and selfhood and which act as a bulwark against the filth and chaos of the fearful city. The loss of such items leaves Mrs. Sandboys literally and figuratively exposed to the terrors of London, as illustrated in the catalogue of thieves above.

Besides acting as embodiments of self, goods also helped people to make sense of their neighbors in an urban environment. The same sort of visual acts used in the museum can migrate outside of it to help city dwellers determine the class and status of those around them. With class and status came respectability and trust. Naturally, such an environment bred concerns about imitation and counterfeiting – concerns about authenticity. Such concerns are brought home to the Sandboys clan when Mrs. Sandboys trades away an old pair of Cursty’s trowsers [sic]. These pants



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contain articles that can be used for identification, articles which can confirm the carrier's authenticity. Their purchaser, a flower seller, soon drinks himself into trouble with the law and is arrested *as* Curtsy Sandboys. In the eyes of middle class Victorians, this thief and drunkard is the type of person who could have been helped by the museum, but in a world obsessed with the Exhibition, he focuses only on drink and popular entertainments all the while acting under a counterfeited identity (Mayhew 106-107). The existence of such individuals highlights the usefulness of the taxonomy created by Mayhew in *London Labour*.

Unable to read such taxonomies themselves, the Sandboys continually run afoul of London's lowest classes. Mrs. Sandboys is as easily "counterfeited" as her husband, her alter ego being arrested shortly after his (Mayhew 111). In an urban world, museal reading is necessary to parse the true from the fake. The Sandboys clan lacks the skill to perform these readings and lacks the documents (the marriage license, etc.) to prove their own validity. In Buttermere, they would have been vouched for by kin, community, and reputation, but the Great Exhibition is about appearances and the Sandboys' rustic behavior fails to garner them respect (Mayhew 112). The canny friend of the flower seller, arrested as Mrs. Sandboys, makes deft use of museal claims, proving her authenticity when she produces the stolen marriage license. The judge even agrees that no policeman should not have insulted her without proof.¹⁹ The next day, the papers print Cursty's assault on the police, making it a proven fact. Because there is a real, tangible paper out in the world that says that Cursty is a thief, he will be read as one thereafter with no chance to clear his name. When he finally does reach the Crystal Palace, he is denied entry because of his crimes and his inability to prove that he is not the man who has committed them.

The solution to all of the problems in the novel is ever present, shimmering the distance. Every deficiency attributed to the Sandboys can be corrected by the museum. Having entered the halls of the Crystal Palace, they will, Mayhew suggests, become more cosmopolitan, become more aware and educated regarding their fellow citizens, and become better and more tasteful consumers. All of these benefits are suggested early in the text when Cursty announces his intention to abstain from visiting or allowing his family to visit the Great Exhibition. Surprised by his attitude, Cursty's well-meaning neighbors first set out to woo him with tales of "amusements and gaieties at the capital" (Mayhew 15). When Cursty fails to yield to such persuasions, the denizens of Buttermere shift to familiar museum rhetoric, emphasizing the museum's educational value and citing travel as a way of "expanding the mind" (Mayhew 15).²⁰ As a form of rational recreation, the museum held out the

¹⁹ The real Mrs. Sandboys is far better at the museal skill of judging true from false (authentic from fake) than her husband. When Cursty is taken in by a thief on the trains, Mrs. Sandboys doubts his tales and claims.

²⁰ When Cursty raises objections citing the dangers of London, another surprising aspect of the museum enters the text. According to Tony Bennett, Victorian museums are key cultural institutions in which to study Foucaultian paradigms of surveillance. This analysis has also been taken up by scholars of Victorian optics; Crary sees the museum as providing a single "correct" viewpoint that it pushed all visitors toward. Cursty's fears about the busy metropolis and its rate of crime are soothed in a catalogue of Foucaultian language. Cursty learns that "all the dormitories [are] to be well lighted with gas," and "watched over by efficient wardens and police constables," two methods used by the museum



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promise of guiltless entertainment precisely because it “contain[ed] some element of useful instruction or moral uplift” (Barber 16). The entire village of Buttermere is able to leave en masse for London because the Exhibition holds out the promise of learning as well as that of enjoyment. Enjoyment is not enough to motivate the head of the Sandboys clan, however, and it is only when Cursty’s family endures an impressive catalogue of deprivations (hunger, inability to replace household goods, lack of coal, etc.) that they join the world in flocking to the center of “stuff” – the Great Exhibition. By making this a viable solution (and, indeed, the mechanism by which the novel’s plot is moved forward) Mayhew argues that it is only a museal environment that can rescue the middle class from squalor, disease, and depredation.²¹

The nineteenth-century museum’s freighted existence as an object of salvation and discipline to be used to “transform the inner lives of the population so as to alter their forms of life and behaviour” did not mean that it was free from anxieties about the very classes Mayhew sought to catalogue in *London Labour* (Bennett 20). The museum might have been an institution for helping the lower classes, but there were concerns regarding their behavior in such a space. Mayhew and others like him also expressed concern about how much actual and practical good the museum could actually do. These concerns enter *1851* when Mayhew leads readers to “one quarter of the deserted town where people were not holiday-making, but still labouring – for what was to them indeed – dear life” (Mayhew 56). In this place it is quite clear that the, “workmen [have] no money to spend on pleasure” but their absence from the Exhibition still proves a shock to the wondering Cursty, who questions them about their absence. His query is greeted by bitter laughter and disdain for an exhibition that causes a working man’s earnings to fall from “three and ninepence” to “two and a penny” (Mayhew 56). “Exhibition of Industry!” one of the workers cries, “let them as wants to see the use of industry in this country come and see this here exhibition” (Mayhew 56). While the world admires the fairyland of glassy walls created by Joseph Paxton in Hyde Park, the Great Exhibition remains just that – fantasy – to those who must continue to earn their bread, those for whom even shilling days are far too costly. This scene also plays out in *London Labour* where street sellers lament that “the Great Exhibition can’t be anything for me” despite its celebration of labor (Mayhew *Labour* 74). Others hope that the crowds brought into the city will bring more work (or more charity) their way and “speculat[e] whether the Great Exhibition will be ‘any good’ to them or not” (Mayhew *Labour* 95). The celebration of labor passes these laborers by, suggesting that the transformations promised by the Crystal Palace may not reach into every life and that those who most need the benefits promised by the museum may be those least likely to reap them.²²

Mayhew’s worries about the reach of the palace give way, in *1851*, to broader, public concerns about working class behavior within the Exhibition. Prior to the

in South Kensington to police its lower class audience (16). Furthermore, “an office [is] to be opened for the security of luggage” and “every care [shall] be taken to ensure the comfort, convenience, and strict discipline of so large a body” (16-17).

²¹ Mayhew’s work in *London Labour* allows us to extend this thesis. It is not only the middle class who can be rescued by the museum, but all classes.

²² Reformers like Henry Cole would confront these problems, prompting traveling exhibits taken out of the palace and reassembled in factory towns (Black 33).



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shilling day, “the great topic of conversation” is how the working class will behave in a museum environment. As noted in the first chapter, the behavior of the working class was often a concern for those who promoted museums as transformative for workers.²³ The crowds streaming for London raised worries about “unprecedented crime, disease, and anarchy” and were “fueled by the Chartist rallies and Continental upheavals of 1848, and by escalating problems of urban health” (Landon 28). Such worries often centered on the working class. In *1851*, questions about working class behavior include: “Would they come sober? will they destroy things? will they want to cut their initials or scratch their names on the panes of the glass lighthouses?” (Mayhew 161). Barbara Black echoes these concerns when she documents middle class fears about the working class vandalizing statues or being given ideas by classical nudes (104). By asking these questions, the narrative reproduces a cataloguing and taxonomic process – labeling the working class as problematic, setting them off from the middle and higher classes – even as it argues that the museum might save them. These working class individuals represent the same problem as the mountains of articles piled inside of the Crystal Palace. Like them, they hint at the possibility of lawlessness, of any of a dozen outcomes – Foucault’s heteroclit made flesh and represented by bodies that have previously been marked out as sites of disease, disruption, crime, and madness.

The answer to this fear was the same answer Victorians gave in the face of the Exhibition’s overwhelming abundance: discipline. Victorian fears about the working class were met a particularly Foucaultian manner. The police force is “strengthened” and visits are “engineered”; entry fees are kept at rates that bar working class entry except for special shilling days (Landon 28). In the case of the working classes, nothing was left to chance. Travel, lodging, and even spectatorship were “regulated” through “pre-planned itineraries” and “order and hygiene” were emphasized and attended to in detail (Landon 28). Mayhew replicates these arrangements in *1851*, creating a catalogue of disciplinary measures. The reader learns that in preparation for the arrival of the lower classes, barriers have been erected, policemen are stationed, an “extra force” is arrayed around the jewels of the Queen of Spain, and ushers are placed inside to help guide the expected crowds of tens of thousands (153). Other nineteenth century methods for disciplining museum visitors included “crowd reports,” “police guards,” “guidebooks that instructed museum goers on proper behavior,” “casings, cordons, special lighting, and labels” – all instituted to insure the routine nature of the museum experience and the proper behavior of the bodies (of all classes) that sought it (Black 104).

Victorian visions of the museum’s power to inaugurate change in the working class fell short. (Indeed, the Victorian faith in progress embodied under the Palace’s great glass panes would ultimately be destroyed in a world where more bullets could be manufactured than men to kill with them, in a world of mud and trenches and barbed wire and rapid-fire artillery). Individuals were, of course, sustained and inspired by the museum and scholars like Lara Kriegel have shown that laborers were able to capitalize on the museum’s popularity and use the Crystal Palace as a platform

²³ See “The Public in the Museum.” *The Emergence of the Modern Museum*. Jonah Siegel, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 Print. Pg 79-136.



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from which to demand more rights (160-190). Ultimately, the museum and its methods of taxonomy and catalogue could help to explain the poor and to provide examples by which they could improve their lives, but it could not discipline them into upright middle class citizens unless it offered practical improvements in areas such as housing, sanitation, and nutrition. This failure is not the reason that scholars of literature should turn to the museum as a nineteenth century structure that influenced texts and day to day life alike. Despite its failings, the Crystal Palace's importance and, by extension, the museum's, lies in its ability to inspire such lofty dreams for an entire age. Today, it may be easy to cast stones at that glass house and to see it as a container for Victorian failings like colonialism, consumerism, and nationalism, but the Great Exhibition was also a grand experiment in optimism and a material example of the Victorian faith in progress. When considering Victorian literature and Victorian life these principles should not be forgotten.



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