



**Charles Dickens and the Sciences of Childhood:
Popular Medicine, Child Health and Victorian
Culture (Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century
Writing and Culture)**

Katharina Boehm

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The first in-depth study of Dickens's creative engagement with popular science and medicine, this book brings to light the scientific entertainments, shows and institutions, and the material and print cultures that revolutionized the ways in which Victorian audiences encountered childhood. It explores Dickens's literary and journalistic writings, his private interests and public causes across the span of his long career. In doing so, it offers a new way of understanding Dickens's preoccupation with childhood by showing how his fascination with novel scientific ideas about childhood and with new practices of scientific inquiry shaped the development of his narrative techniques and aesthetic imagination.

Drawing on fascinating archival material, this book reconstructs Dickens's experience of mesmerist trials and hospital ward tours, anatomical museums and popular scientific performances. It provides new readings of some of Dickens's most famous works, including *Oliver Twist*, *Dombey and Son* and *Our Mutual Friend*, as well as of lesser-known texts. Dickens's child characters were a source of inspiration to many medical writers, institutions and journalists, and the book also traces how these groups appropriated Dickensian characters and motifs in order to debate and bolster the authority of new scientific ideas.

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