



## The Shows of London (Belknap Press)

*Richard D. Altick*

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A berserk elephant gunned down in the heart of London, a machine for composing Latin hexameters, and the original rock band (1841)?these are but three of the sights that London curiosity-seekers from every walk of life paid to see from the Elizabethan era to the mid-Victorian period. Examining hundreds of the wonderfully varied exhibitions that culminated in the Crystal Palace of 1851, this generously illustrated book sheds light on a vast and colorful expanse of English social history that has thus far remained wholly unsurveyed.

Drawing on a wealth of never-before-used information, Mr. Altick traces London exhibitions as they evolved from the display of relics in pre-Reformation churches, through the collections of eighteenth-century virtuosi, to the first science museums and public art galleries. He also narrates for the first time the history of the panorama and diorama as an influential genre of nineteenth-century popular art. At every point, the London shows are linked to the prevailing intellectual atmosphere and to trends in public taste.

The material is fresh and fascinating; the range--from freaks to popular science, from the funeral effigies at Westminster Abbey to Madame Tussaud's waxworks--impressive. Like the exhibitions that best served the Victorian ideal of mass culture, *The Shows of London* is both entertaining and informative.

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