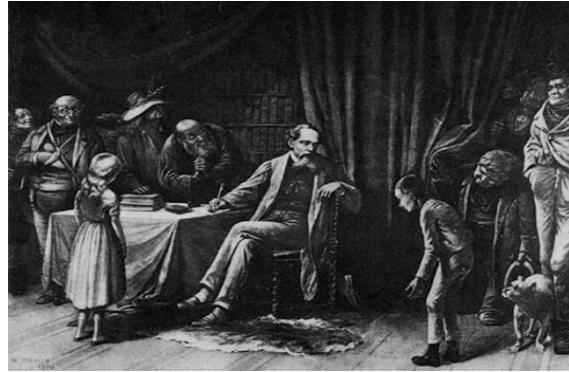




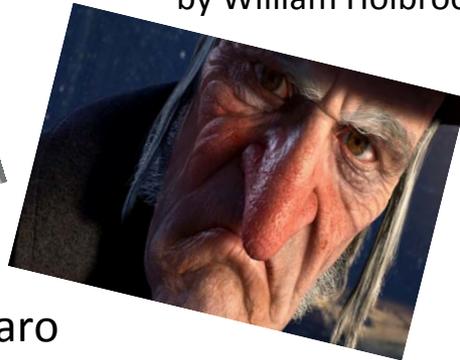
Dickens's characters

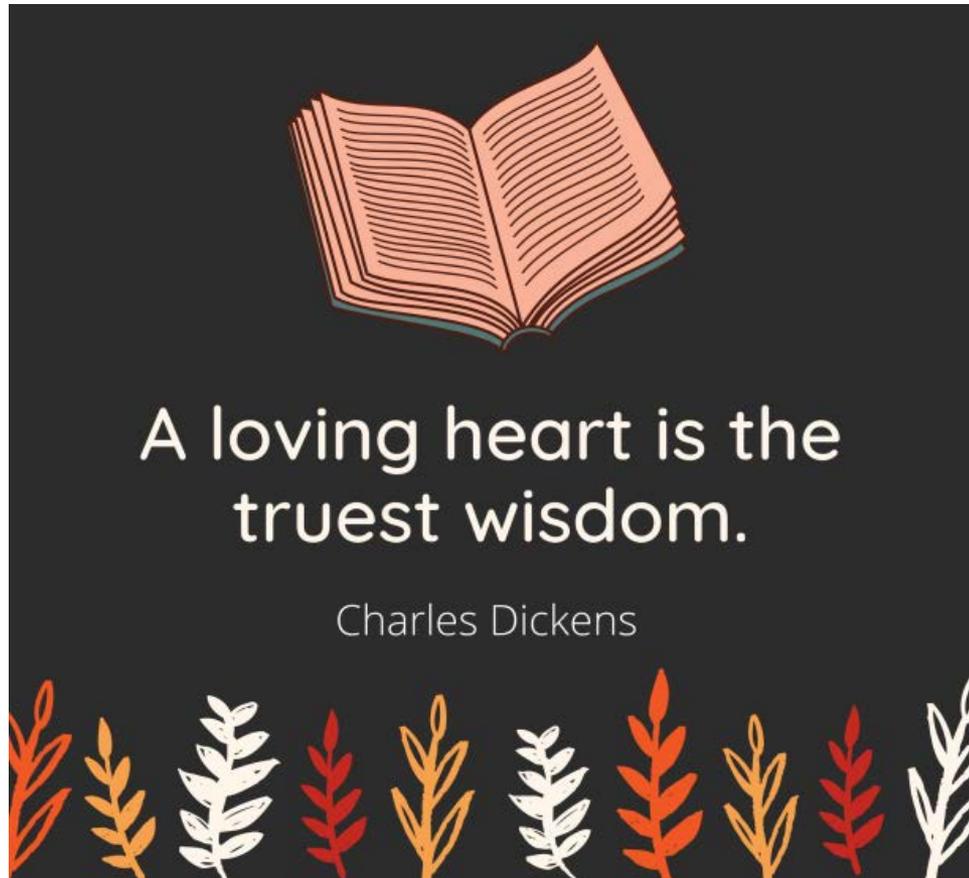


Charles Dickens receiving his characters, drawing by William Holbrook Beard (1824-1900)



Luisanna Paggiaro





Booktuber

What the Dickens! | How to Get into Charles Dickens with [#BookBreak](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jld6oIn-VM>

“Dickens’s characters were often so memorable that they took on a life of their own outside his books. His characters are amongst the most memorable in English literature, especially so because of their typically whimsical names”.

Claire Tomalin

“Dickens si serviva dei tratti salienti delle persone che incontrava o conosceva: coglieva una caratteristica, uno stato d’animo o un comportamento singolare e poi, per mezzo dell’immaginazione, lo rielaborava fino a quando il ‘personaggio’ manteneva solo una vaga somiglianza con la persona in carne e ossa”.

Peter Ackroyd

“We remodel our psychological geography when we read Dickens as he produces characters who exist not in detail, not accurately or exactly, but abundantly in a cluster of wild yet extraordinarily revealing remarks”.

Virginia Woolf

“Dickens excelled in character; in the creation of characters of greater intensity than human beings”.

T.S. Eliot

Samuel Pickwick

Samuel Pickwick is the main protagonist in *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* or *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), the first novel by Dickens. Pickwick is a retired successful businessman and is the Founder and Chairman of the Pickwick Club. He has an almost childlike simplicity: he is **loyal** and **protective** toward his friends but is easily tricked; he is always **gallant** towards women, young and old, but can also be **indecisive** in his dealings with them.

The "Pickwickians" (Samuel Pickwick- the idealistic gentleman -, Mr Nathaniel Winkle – the sporting -, Mr Augustus Snodgrass –the poetic - and Mr Tracy Tupman – always in admiration of the fair sex) should make journeys to places remote from London and report on their findings to the other members of the club.





“A casual observer, adds the secretary, to whose notes we are indebted for the following account – a casual observer might possibly have **remarked nothing extraordinary in the bald head, and circular spectacles,** which were intently turned towards his (the secretary’s) face, during the reading of the resolutions: to those who knew that **the gigantic brain of Pickwick** was working beneath that forehead, and that **the beaming eyes of Pickwick were twinkling** behind those glasses, the sight was indeed an interesting one [...]

And how much more interesting did the spectacle become, when, starting into full life and animation, as a simultaneous call for ‘Pickwick’ burst from his followers, **that illustrious man slowly mounted into the Windsor chair,** on which he had been perviously seated, and addressed the club himself had founded.

Chapter I. The Pickwickians

What a study for an artist did that exciting scene present!

The eloquent Pickwick, with one hand gracefully concealed behind his coat tails, and the other waving in air to assist his glowing declamation; **his elevated position revealing those tights and gaiters,** had they clothed an ordinary man, might have passed without observation, but which, when Pickwick clothed them – if we may use the expression – **inspired involuntary awe and respect;** surrounded by the men who had volunteered to share the perils of his travels, and who were destined to participate **in the glories of his discoveries”** .

Oliver Twist

The Adventures of Oliver Twist (1837-39)

It may be related to the Christian novel by John Bunyan *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but Dickens's tone is in sharp contrast with Bunyan's optimism.

Oliver is **an orphan** brought up in a **workhouse**, an institution for poor people, and together with his companions he suffered the tortures of **slow starvation**. But one day Oliver was chosen to walk up to the master after supper in the evening and ask for more food.

Child as he was, he **was desperate with hunger**, and **reckless with misery**. He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity: **'Please, sir, I want some more.'**

The master was a fat, healthy man; but he turned very pale. He gazed in **stupified astonishment** on the small rebel for some seconds, and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants **were paralysed with wonder; the boys with fear.**

What! said the master at length, in a faint voice. The master aimed a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle; pinioned him in his arm; and shrieked aloud for the beadle.



Children's exploitation

Hunger and famine

all over the world

“This the first class in English spelling and philosophy, Nickleby, “said Squeers, beckoning Nicholas to stand beside him.

“We’ll get a Latin one, and hand that over to you. – Now, then, where’s the first boy?”

“Please, sir, he’s cleaning the back parlour window,” said the temporary head of the philosophical class.

“So he is, to be sure,” rejoined Squeers. “We go upon **the practical mode of teaching**. Nickleby – **the regular education system**. C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-i-n-, win, d-e-r, der, winder, a casement. When the boy knows this out of book, he goes and does it. It’s just the same principle as the use of the globes. – where’s the second boy?

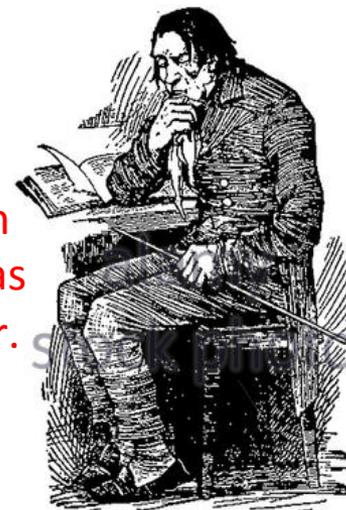
“Please, sir, he’s weeding the garden, “replied a small voice.

“To be sure,” said Squeers, by no means disconcerted. “So he is. B-o-t, bot, t-i-n, tin, bottin, n-e-y, ney, bottinney, noun substantive, a knowledge of plants. When he has learned that bottinney means a knowledge of plants, he goes and knows ‘em. **That’s our system**, Nickleby; what do you think of it?”

Nicholas Nickleby (1838-39)

Mr Squeer

Wackford Squeer is the principal of Dotheboys Hall, a school for boys in Yorkshire, where Nicholas is employed as a teacher. Mr Squeer explains to Nicholas what “his practical mode of teaching” consists of.



Mr. Squeers
(*Nicholas Nickleby*)

www.alamy.com - KW4XP9





Nell Trent is a beautiful and virtuous girl of “not quite fourteen”: **she is an orphan** who lives with her maternal grandfather in his shop of odds and ends.

Secretly obsessed with ensuring that Nell does not die in poverty as her parents did, her grandfather attempts to provide Nell with a good inheritance through gambling at cards. So he borrows a lot of money from **Daniel Quilp, a malicious, grotesquely deformed hunchbacked dwarf moneylender**. As a consequence of it Quilp seizes the opportunity **to take possession of the shop and evict Nell and her grandfather**, who suffers a breakdown that leaves him bereft of his wits, and Nell takes him away to the Midlands of England, to live as beggars.

The Old Curiosity Shop (1840-41)

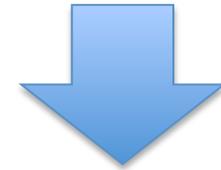


Dickens and Little Nell, a bronze sculpture by Francis Edwin Elwell (1890)
Clark Park, Philadelphia, US

The hardships endured during Nell and her grandfather's wanderings are too much for the delicate Nell and she dies in a quiet village where they had gained employment.



Dickens's account of her death is often considered the apotheosis of Victorian sentimentality



Nell's death is related to Mary Hogarth's, Catherine's younger sister who died at 17 in Dickens's arms. Mary became an idealized image of woman

Daniel Quilp

“[...] Mr Daniel Quilp, who, having entered unseen when the child first placed herself at the old man’s side, refrained – actuated, no doubt, by motives of the purest delicacy – from interrupting the conversation, and stood looking on with **his accustomed grin**. [...] **the dwarf** being one of that kind of persons who usually make themselves at home, he soon cast his eyes upon a chair into which he **skipped with uncommon agility**, and perching himself on the back of his feet upon the seat, was thus enabled to look on and listen with greater comfort [...] then he sat, **one leg cocked** carelessly over the other, his chin resting on the palm of his hand, his head turned a little on one side, and **his ugly features twisted into a complacent grimace**”.

Chapter IX



Daniel Quilp (1889) by Joseph Clayton Clark ‘Qyd’ (1857-1937), British artist best known for his illustrations of characters from the novels of Dickens

Ebenezer Scrooge



"A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, **covetous, old sinner!** Hard and sharp as flint... secret, and self-contained, and **solitary as an oyster.**"

"The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, made his eyes red, his thin lips blue, and he spoke out **shrewdly** in his **grating voice.**"

A Christmas Carol (1843)

Films

- *Scrooge* (1913); (1935); (1951)
- *Ebenezer Scrooge* (1997)
- *A Christmas Carol* (2009)

The good and the evil

Paul Dombey

Father – daughter relationship



"In all his life, he had never made a friend. His cold and distant nature had neither sought one, nor found one". He is left a widower with two children by the end of Chapter 1. However, **he only considers his son, Paul**, to be worthy of his attention; **his daughter, Florence**, is "merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested — a bad boy". **The son's death shatters** Mr. Dombey's hopes for an heir. His neglect of his daughter Florence causes problems with his second wife, Edith, whom he essentially purchased. Due to Edith's hatred for him and his own misplaced trust in James Carker, **Dombey loses his business and his wealth.** Dombey finally realises that **his daughter was the only person who truly cared for him**, even when he has nothing left. He reconnects with her in his later years and gains an heir through his son-in-law.

Dombey and Son (1846-48)

David Copperfield

The emotional identification of Dickens with David is very strong (1st person narration), and David's events are the same as the novelist's (unhappy childhood, working as a child, being a parliamentary reporter and then a literary man, etc.).



David Copperfield (1849-50)

“I know enough of the world now, to have almost lost the capacity of being much surprised by anything; but it is matter of some surprise to me, even now, that I can have been so easily thrown away at such an age. **A child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager, delicate,** and soon hurt bodily or mentally, it seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf. But none was made; and **I became, at ten years old, a little labouring hand in the service of Murdstone and Grinby.** [...]

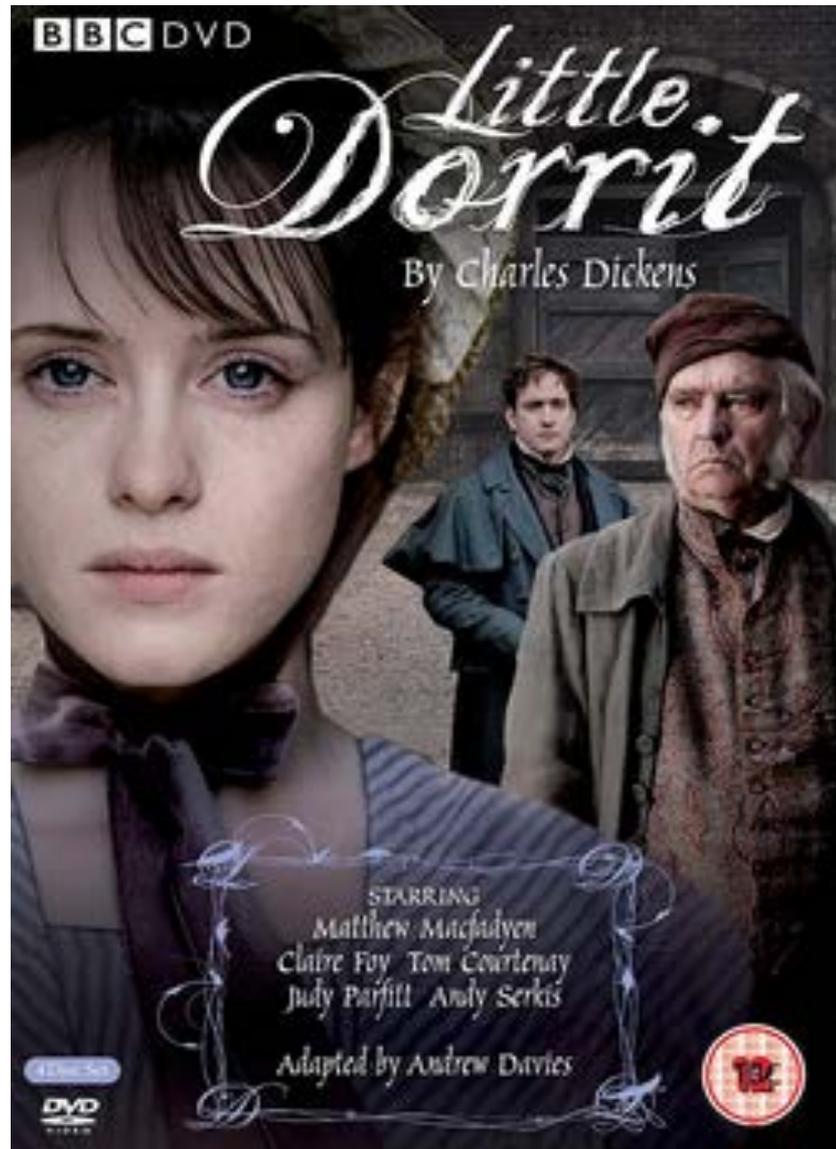
My working place was established **in a corner of the warehouse,** where **Mr. Quinion could see me,** when he chose to stand up on the bottom rail of his stool in the counting-house, and look at me through a window above the desk. Hither, on the first morning of my so auspiciously **beginning life on my own account,** the oldest of the regular boys was summoned to show me **my business”.**

Little Dorrit

Amy Dorrit, youngest child of her family, was born and raised in the Marshalsea prison for debtors in London, the same prison where Dickens's own father had been imprisoned.

She grows up as a girl who cares for others, with a tender heart and is practical as to getting enough money to eat and live with her father in the prison. She is 22 years old when the story opens.

Little Dorrit (1855-57)



Esther Summerson

She is Dickens's only female narrator. Esther is raised as **an orphan** by Miss Barbary (who is in fact her aunt). She does not know her parents' identity. Miss Barbary holds macabre vigils on Esther's birthday each year, telling her that her birth is no cause for celebration, because the girl is her mother's "disgrace". Because of her cruel upbringing she is **self-effacing, self-deprecating** and **grateful** for every trifle. The discovery of her true identity provides much of the drama in the book

Bleak House (1852-53)



Esther Summerson in BBC drama

Esther's tone is quiet, conversational, confidential, intimate; the third-person voice is rhetorical and emphatic and the tone is declamatory.

“double narrative”

Sydney Carton

Carton's parting words:
"It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known."



No character better illustrates the possibility of finding the good and the bad in the same person than Sydney Carton, the **dissipated English barrister who sacrifices himself** so the woman he loves can be with the man she loves.

Carton **facing the guillotine**, taking the place of Charles Darnay, who will get married with Lucie.

A Tale of Two Cities (1859)

Pip and Miss Havisham



“My father’s family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip”.

Chapter 1

Great Expectations (1860-61)



Miss Havisham

“She was dressed in **rich materials** – satins, and lace, and silks – **all of white**. Her shoes were white. And she had a long **white veil** dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but **her hair was white**. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. [...] I saw that everything within my view **which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow**. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the **brightness of her sunken eyes**”.

Bella Wilfer

“Bella, putting back her hair with both hands, as if she were making the most business-like arrangements for going dramatically distracted, would enter on the household affairs of the day”.



Educated and literate, Bella describes herself as “**mercenary**”. This is what she says to her father, Mr Boffin:

“Pa, think how terrible the fascination of money is! I see this, and hate this, and dread this, and don’t know but that money might make a much worse change in me. And yet I have **money** always in my thoughts and my desires; and the whole life I place before myself is **money, money, money**, and what **money** can make of life!”

How much Dickens loves his heroine Bella!

Our Mutual Friend (1864-65)

The novelist delighted in peculiar names, which often reflect their owner's characteristics, like Mr Bumble or Thomas Grandgrind

Serjeant Buzfuz (*Pickwick Papers* — sounds like personal grooming product from Remington)

Master Bates (*Oliver Twist* — the character's full name is Charley, but Dickens delights in calling him Master Bates)

Wackford Squeers (*Nicholas Nickleby* —, fond of whacking pupils)

Dick Swiveller (*The Old Curiosity Shop* — look out for the bit in chapter 7, where he 'with difficulty ejaculated')

Simon Tappertit (*Barnaby Rudge* — the titular character has a strange enough appellation, but Simon gets the nod for his slightly rude surname)

Charity Pecksniff (*Martin Chuzzlewit* — it should be noted that almost everyone in this novel has a silly name.)

Rev Melchisedech Howler (— not the best of novels, and also a little fallow for peculiar names)

Uriah Heep (*David Copperfield* — a well-known character who gave his ridiculous name to a band)

Woolwich Bagnet (*Bleak House* — brother of Malta and Quebec, after their birthplaces)

Mr M'Choakumchild (*Hard Times* — the stupidest name in the whole of Dickens. He's a school master, obviously)

Decimus Tite Barnacle (*Little Dorrit* — or we could have chosen Tudor Stiltstalking)

Jarvis Lorry (*A Tale of Two Cities* — one of the more sombre novels, where silly names are scarce)

Uncle Pumblechook (*Great Expectations* — a classic Dickensian mouthful)

Pleasant Riderhood (*Our Mutual Friend* — surely a future Bond girl)

Hiram Grewgious (*Edwin Drood* — not sure if it's deliberate, but this weird name is an anagram of 'Gregarious Whim')

My own favourite character

<https://padlet.com/luisanna398/vpz6637kqwlwujhx>



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