



STUDY GUIDE BY AISLIN DYER AND
WILMA ISLE, DRAMATURGS

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Illustration by Frederick William Pailthorpe

WHAT THE DICKENS?

Charles Dickens was born February 7, 1812 in Portsmouth, Hampshire. His family moved in his younger years to Yorkshire and then London. He described himself as a “very small and not over-particularly-taken-care-of boy.”

His father became a clerk in the Naval Pay Office, but amassed so much debt that he and was arrested and sent to Marshalsea debtors’ prison along with his family, with the exception of Charles and his older sister Fanny.

Charles, who was only 12 at the time, had to go and work in a blacking factory, where he stuck labels on bottles for six shillings a week to help support his family.

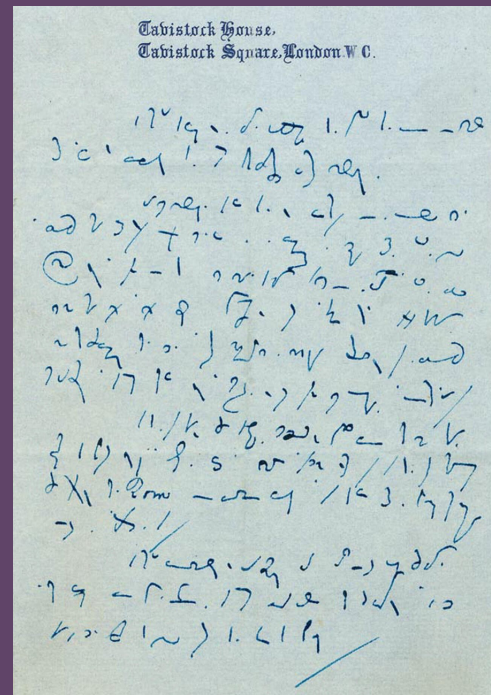
His family’s experience with debtor’s prison was not widely known during the author’s lifetime, but Dickens would later use Marshalsea debtor’s prison as the setting of his novel *Little Dorrit*.



Charles Dickens, age 23, 1835

WHAT THE DICKENS?

15-year-old Dickens found work as a junior clerk at a law office, but instead of working to become a lawyer, he voraciously studied Thomas Gurney's shorthand method. The skill allowed him to begin working as a reporter in the 1830s covering Parliament and British elections for outlets like *The Morning Chronicle*. To the right is an example of the shorthand he



used while drafting his novels Dickens described his earliest muse as the main character in the fairytale Little Red Riding Hood—perhaps as a way of dealing with his own childhood innocence devoured by unexpected evils. “She was my first love,” he wrote. “I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding-Hood, I should have known perfect bliss. But, it was not to be.”



Charles Dickens, age 26, 1838

WHAT THE DICKENS?

Dickens started *Great Expectations* in October 1860, not long after separating from Catherine, his wife of 22 years and the mother of his ten children. On top of that, his son was running up gambling debts, his daughter married a man Dickens didn't like, and his elderly mother was showing signs of dementia. All this was on his mind as he started to write.

Dickens had become smitten with a young actress named Ellen Ternan when he hired her to perform in the play *The Frozen Deep*. While Ellen seems to have resisted Dickens's advances at first, she eventually became his mistress. Many biographers think that the beautiful and unloving character of Estella may have been Dickens's view of his early relationship with Estella.

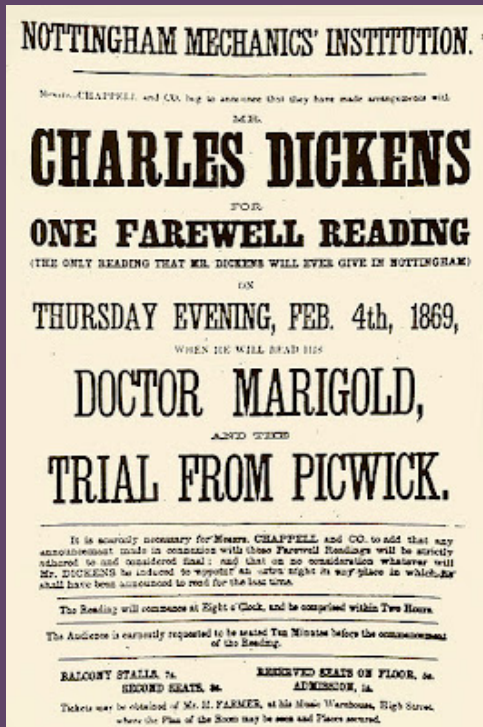


Charles Dickens ca. 1860



Ellen Ternan

WHAT THE DICKENS?



Advertisement for one of Dickens' readings



"Charles Dickens Reading" by Henry Furness

In the last decade of his life, Dickens performed public readings of his works himself, touring the United States and United Kingdom, reading and acting out scenes to rave reviews. He was a massive celebrity and a consummate performer.

Charles Dickens had a close association with the theatre throughout his life, working as an amateur actor, director, stage manager, and producer at various times during his career. This love of the theatre can be seen in his work as an author.

Dickens' novels are extremely theatrical, with larger-than-life characters and very visual descriptions. We have a tremendous opportunity to bring *Great Expectations* to life in a medium he loved so much.♦

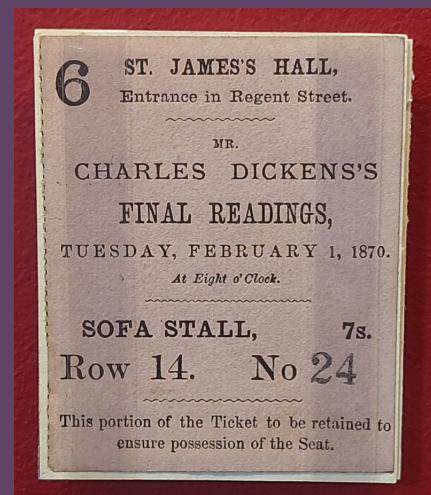
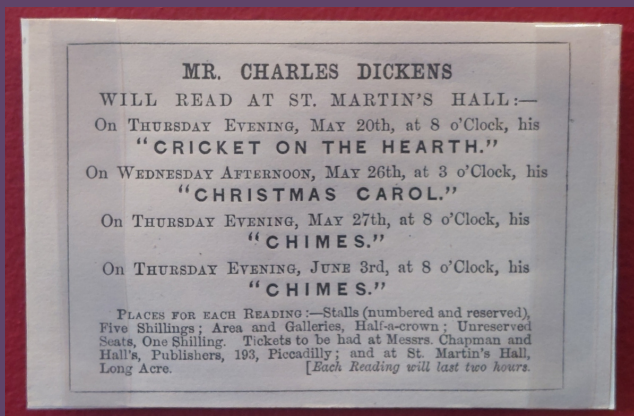
Adapted from "Charles Dickens, man of the theater" by Tara Burghart in the Los Angeles Times, Jan. 1, 2003

THE DICKENS MUSEUM

The Charles Dickens museum in London celebrated its 100th anniversary this year on June 9th, and was free to the public for one day only. It is at 48 Doughty Street where Dickens once lived, and contains relics from throughout Dickens' life. The most famous exhibit is the unfinished painting "Dickens's Dream" by R.W. Buss, which shows Charles Dickens surrounded by the characters he created (including Pip and Miss Havisham).



As part of the celebration, Charles Dickens' descendants held readings of passages of Dickens' works, including *A Christmas Carol* and *Oliver Twist*, much like Charles did in his lifetime. Here are tickets from some Charles' readings, put on display by the museum.



THE DICKENS MUSEUM

One of the artifacts on display is Charles Dickens' desk from late in his life. It was at this desk that Dickens wrote many of his later works, including *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and most relevant to our project, *Great Expectations*. Also on display is a first-edition copy of *Great Expectations*, published in 1861. Most first-edition copies were bought by libraries, and thus were badly damaged after being read and handled so many times. Because of this, very few first edition copies survive.



Dickens' work desk



"Great Expectations"
First Edition

This is only a small sample of what the museum has on display. Information on select exhibits can be found at dickensmuseum.com ♦

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

One hallmark of Charles Dickens' writing is the memorable names he gave his characters. Many of the names were his invention, and often serve as vivid indicators of who the characters are through puns, etymology, or phonetic suggestion. Consider the following.

- **Pumblechook**, a pompous, self-important man with a name that makes your jowls jiggle.
- **Biddy**: a biddy is a hen, and Biddy is a nurturing caregiver, ready to gather people under her wings.
- **Bentley Drummle** is a bent, warped sort of person.
- **Miss Havisham** can be broken up into "Have-is-sham— Dickens' moral reminder that "having" or possessing doesn't bring happiness.
- **Pip**: a pip is a seed. In what way does our main character grow, in context of the ground in which he is planted, how he is tended, etc? What is Pip growing into?

Do you notice anything evocative about these names?



*Pip's Meeting with Magwitch,
Illustration by F. A. Fraser, (1876)*

“A MERE BLACKSMITH”

Historically, the blacksmith was a central and respected figure in the community, often enjoying higher status due to the indispensable nature of his work. Mrs. Joe’s complaints tell us more about her than her husband; the Gargery family would have been far more comfortable than many others in the village.

Blacksmithing required physical strength, precision, and an understanding of metallurgy. Entering the trade required a seven-year apprenticeship. Only after becoming a “journeyman” was a blacksmith allowed to work for pay. To becoming a master blacksmith, they would demonstrate their skill to a local guild or organization, and then were permitted them to open their own forge and train apprentices.



A Victorian Blacksmith's shop, Nicolas Bentley

Pip would have first learned basic tasks like operating the bellows, simple forging tasks like nails and horseshoes, and gradually progressed to more complex items like tools, weapons, and decorative ironwork (which was very popular in Victorian architecture).

“A MERE BLACKSMITH”

Apprenticeships were about more than learning a trade; they were also a means of education and cultural transmission. Apprentices often adopted the social, religious, and cultural practices of their masters. The master blacksmith was a mentor as well as a teacher, responsible for instilling values such as hard work, integrity, and the importance of quality in craftsmanship. The master's reputation was reflected in the quality of the apprentice's work, making their training a matter of



Jim Hobbs' Forge, East Meon, UK

professional pride. As the Industrial Revolution prompted greater urbanization, there was reduced need for village blacksmiths, though many learned to repair the machines that were transforming industry and horses always needed shoeing. However, in Victorian Britain, there

was a nostalgic and romantic view of the blacksmith, and the role was idealized in art and popular culture as a figure of strength, honesty, and traditional values, a symbol of a simpler, bygone era. Writers and poets like Dickens often depicted blacksmiths as noble, stalwart figures, echoing a yearning for a connection to the past. Despite the romanticized image, the reality of blacksmithing during the Victorian era was far from idyllic. Blacksmiths faced long hours of physically demanding work in often harsh and dangerous conditions.♦

Adapted from "The Iconic Village Blacksmith and Forge," ruralhistoria.com.

FAMOUS FACES

Great Expectations has been adapted over and over again. Here are some actors you may recognize from various productions.



BBC Worldwide

PIP - IOAN GRUFFUDD

In the 1999 BBC miniseries. Best known as Mr. Fantastic in *Fantastic Four* (2005) and its sequel, he also played Harold Lowe in *Titanic* (1997).



20th Century Studios

ESTELLA - GWYNETH PALTROW

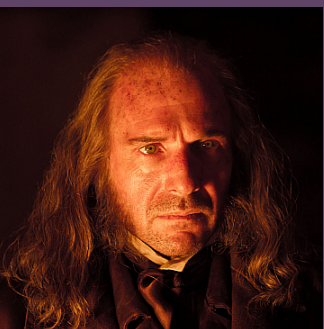
In the 1998 film adaptation. Best known for Pepper Potts in the Marvel films, she also starred in *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), and *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001).



BBC

MISS HAVISHAM - OLIVIA COLMAN

In the 2023 BBC miniseries. She won Best Actress for her role in *The Favorite* (2018), and was nominated for *The Father* (2020), and *The Lost Daughter* (2021).



BBC Films

MAGWITCH - RALPH FIENNES

In the 2012 film adaptation. Best known for Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* films, other roles include *Grand Budapest Hotel*, *Schindler's List*, and *The Lego Batman Movie*.



Walt Disney
Television

JOE GARGERY - JOHN RHYS-DAVIES

In the 1989 Disney Channel miniseries. Best known as Gimli in *The Lord of the Rings* films, or as Sallah in the *Indiana Jones* films.



Cineguild
Productions

HERBERT POCKET - ALEC GUINNESS

In the 1946 film adaptation. Best known as Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars* (1977), he won Best Actor for his role in *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957).



BBC Films

MRS. JOE - SALLY HAWKINS

In the 2012 film adaptation. Known as Mrs. Brown in *Paddington* (2014) and its sequel, Elisa in *The Shape of Water* (2017), and Mrs. Wonka in *Wonka* (2023).



BBC

MR. PUMBLECHOOK - MATT BERRY

In the 2023 BBC Miniseries. Known for the TV shows *What We Do in the Shadows*, *The IT Crowd*, and *Garth Merenghi's Dark Place*, as well as the film *The Wild Robot* (2024).

...and many more, including Ethan Hawke as Pip (1998 film), Helena Bonham Carter as Miss Havisham (2012 film), Robbie Coltrane as Jaggers (2012 film), Vanessa Kirby as Estella (2011 series), and Anthony Hopkins as Magwitch (1989 series).♦

FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is an essential theme of *Great Expectations*. Pip has the opportunity and need to forgive wrongs done to him as well to those he cares about (and forgiving hurts done to those we love can be even more complicated than forgiving our own enemies).

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

“Somehow forgiveness, with love and tolerance, accomplishes miracles that can happen in no other way. The great Atonement was the supreme act of forgiveness... May God help us to be a little kinder, showing forth greater forbearance, to be more forgiving, more willing to walk the second mile, to reach down and lift up those who may have sinned but have brought forth the fruits of repentance, to lay aside old grudges and nurture them no more.”

General Conference, Oct. 2005



What is your experience with forgiveness?

Is there something you are working to let go of right now?

RECONSIDERING THE ENDING

Initially, Dickens concluded the novel with a different ending. However, due to pressure from his publisher and a desire for a more optimistic conclusion, he revised the final chapters to offer a glimmer of hope and redemption. The original ending is as follows:

“One day, two years after his return from the east, I was in England again—in London, and walking along Piccadilly with little Pip—when a servant came running after me to ask would I step back to a lady in a carriage who wished to speak to me. It was a little pony carriage, which the lady was driving; and the lady and I looked sadly enough on one another. “I am greatly changed, I know, but I thought you would like to shake hands with Estella too, Pip. Lift up that pretty child and let me kiss it!” (She supposed the child, I think, to be my child.) I was very glad afterwards to have had the interview; for, in her face and in her voice, and in her touch, she gave me the assurance, that suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham’s teaching, and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be.”

What do you think of this original ending?

MEMORY

Our production is a memory play, a style of production in which the lead character narrates the events by drawing from their own recollections, creating a highly subjective story. Our narrator speaks to the audience with an adult voice, but then enters the action as a child. Our script and abstracted production design reinforce the emotional resonance of memory by essentially inviting the audience into Pip's mind.

Memories are not always concrete, and can have disproportionate emotional weights. Researchers who study memory have observed the phenomenon of “flashbulb memories,” where an individual or group experiences something so vivid (usually a traumatic event) that the moment is recorded in a particularly vivid way, and can impact the way we remember other things, as well. The more we rehearse memories to ourselves, the more powerful they become. But as we emphasize certain qualities of a memory, it can also change over time.

How do you see the above ideas manifested in *Great Expectations*?

For more information, a look behind-the-scenes, and a full plot synopsis, visit 4thwalldramaturgy.byu.edu