

NAXOS
AudioBooks

Charles Dickens
Bleak House

THE
COMPLETE
CLASSICS

UNABRIDGED

Read by **Sean Barrett** and **Teresa Gallagher**

CLASSIC
FICTION



NAX43112D

1	Chapter 1 In Chancery London. Michaelmas term...	5:23
2	This is the Court of Chancery...	5:22
3	How many people out of the suit Jarndyce...	5:49
4	Chapter 2 In Fashion It is but a glimpse...	6:02
5	How Alexander wept when he had no more worlds...	5:40
6	'If you want to address our people, sir,'	6:02
7	Chapter 3 A Progress I have a great deal of difficulty...	5:52
8	I was in a kind of fright beyond my grief...	4:42
9	It must have been two years afterwards...	5:47
10	He appeared to enjoy beyond everything...	5:46
11	I thought he was very strange...	4:24
12	As I began to know more, I taught more...	5:16
13	But of course I soon considered...	6:40
14	We conversed in a low tone...	3:12
15	Mr Kenge now retired, and Richard with him...	3:46
16	Chapter 4 Telescopic Philanthropy We were to pass the night...	5:03
17	As I found (after pacifying him)...	5:17
18	The girl at the table left off biting her pen...	4:29
19	Soon after seven o'clock we went down to dinner...	6:40
20	Her cousin Jarndyce had written to her...	6:07

21	Chapter 5 A Morning Adventure Although the morning...	4:54
22	'So, cousin,' said the cheerful voice of Richard...	5:23
23	As it was still foggy and dark...	4:58
24	He had by this time led us across the shop...	4:55
25	Her room was clean, but very, very bare.	5:03
26	She stopped to tell us in a whisper...	3:07
27	Before we finally turned out of those lanes...	3:24
28	Chapter 6 Quite at Home The day had brightened...	4:24
29	At Barnet there were other horses waiting for us...	4:49
30	'The little Jellybys,' said Richard, coming to my relief...	5:33
31	The furniture, old-fashioned rather than old...	4:13
32	Our luggage having arrived and being all at hand...	5:12
33	'I covet nothing,' said Mr Skimpole...	5:05
34	Mr Jarndyce patted him on the head with a smile...	5:22
35	He observed us with a genial interest...	5:27
36	As our absence had been long enough already...	4:27
37	It was so delicious to see the clouds...	3:44
38	Chapter 7 The Ghost's Walk While Esther sleeps...	4:34
39	It has rained so hard and rained so long...	5:09
40	Nevertheless, Mrs Rouncewell's son has...	6:03

41	Thus they pass on from room to room...	5:31
42	Rosa draws nearer to the housekeeper.	4:40
43	Chapter 8 Covering a Multitude of Sins It was interesting...	4:41
44	I left them still listening to him when I withdrew...	6:09
45	He walked a little to and fro after saying this...	5:31
46	I really was frightened at the thought...	6:24
47	'You have been visiting, I understand'...	5:44
48	If that dark-visaged eldest boy could look...	4:44
49	Mrs Pardiggle, leading the way...	5:32
50	I hope it is not unkind in me to say...	6:42
51	Chapter 9 Signs and Tokens I don't know how...	5:32
52	I believe Richard's was as frank and generous...	5:36
53	Talking thus, they went upstairs...	7:12
54	To hear him say all this with unimaginable energy...	4:53
55	Well! I was full of business, examining...	4:19
56	All this time Mr Guppy was either planing his forehead...	3:56
57	I told him that he addressed my interest...	3:16
58	Chapter 10 The Law-Writer On the eastern borders...	5:33
59	Guster, really aged three or four and twenty...	4:48
60	Here he is today, quiet at his table.	5:07

61	Mr Snagsby, as a timid man, is accustomed to cough...	5:58
62	'This is where he lives, sir,' says the law-stationer.	4:59
63	Chapter 11 Our Dear Brother A touch on the lawyer's...	5:09
64	He says this, not unfeelingly, while sitting...	6:46
65	The marine-store merchant holds the light...	5:01
66	So the sensation dies off for the time...	5:22
67	Little Swills is waiting for the coroner...	4:46
68	While the coroner buttons his great-coat...	5:12
69	What question this enthusiastic fowl supposes...	3:06
70	Chapter 12 On the Watch It has left off raining...	5:50
71	'I should like to walk a little,' says my Lady...	5:02
72	That evening, in the housekeeper's room...	4:54
73	All the mirrors in the house are brought...	6:45
74	Chesney Wold is quite full anyhow...	5:29
75	As they turn towards the hall-door...	6:13
76	Chapter 13 Esther's Narrative We held many consultations...	6:12
77	He wound up this vehement declaration...	4:37
78	I was sitting in front of the box one night with Ada...	4:22
79	Mr Bayham Badger himself was a pink, fresh-faced...	4:50
80	After dinner, when we ladies retired...	6:07

81	There he was, of course.	3:09
82	'Now, hear me, my dears!'	5:11
83	Chapter 14 Deportment Richard left us...	6:00
84	We were busy with Peepy...	4:53
85	There was a good deal of affection in poor Caddy.	4:51
86	It happened that we had arranged with my guardian...	4:58
87	'Distinguished,' said Mr Turveydrop...	6:29
88	He replied with the high-shouldered bow.	4:40
89	This became so bewildering and suggested...	5:41
90	'Miss Flite,' said Mr Woodcourt...	4:57
91	The old man had come by little and little...	5:50
92	Chapter 15 Bell Yard While we were in London...	5:03
93	'It may be, partly, because I know nothing...'	4:52
94	Mr Skimpole, who had quite forgotten the subject...	5:36
95	We were looking at one another...	4:48
96	I stood at the window with Ada...	6:57
97	The passion and heat in which he was...	5:07
98	His countenance had, perhaps for years...	3:30
99	Chapter 16 Tom-all-Alone's My Lady Dedlock...	5:40
100	Twice lately there has been a crash...	5:00

101	He and Jo listen to the music...	5:09
102	Jo attends closely while the words are being spoken...	2:37
103	The servant shrinks into a corner...	2:59
104	Chapter 17 Esther's Narrative Richard very often...	5:00
105	Ada looked so very anxious now that I asked...	3:04
106	So after he had been a little while with Ada...	3:27
107	But, even Ada, with her loving face...	6:49
108	is was the first time I ever saw him follow Ada...	4:37
109	I sat down and said after a little effort...	4:32
110	I believe – at least I know – that he was not rich.	5:10
111	Chapter 18 Lady Dedlock It was not so easy...	3:49
112	While these affairs were in abeyance...	4:55
113	At the inn we found Mr Boythorn...	5:32
114	When we came into the little village...	5:04
115	The congregation was extremely small...	4:48
116	The service being concluded, Sir Leicester gave...	5:40
117	I always wondered on these occasions...	4:46
118	She seemed to respect him and even to wish...	6:15
119	Chapter 19 Moving On It is the long vacation...	4:34
120	There are offices about the Inns of Court...	5:13

121	Mr Chadband is a large yellow man...	6:36
122	The persecutors denied that there was any...	5:16
123	Enter Mr Guppy, who nods to Mr Snagsby...	4:57
124	Mrs Chadband whispers Mrs Snagsby...	5:49
125	At this threatening stage of the discourse...	3:10
126	Chapter 20 A New Lodger The long vacation...	4:34
127	Jobling looks hungry and also has the appearance...	5:08
128	Mr Jobling is buttoned up closer than...	5:48
129	Mr Guppy comes more fully into the conversation...	5:26
130	Mr Jobling, Mr Guppy, and Mr Smallweed all lean...	5:09
131	The old man still sits, often smacking his dry lips...	4:07
132	On the morrow, in the dusk of evening...	3:31
133	Chapter 21 The Smallweed Family In a rather ill-favoured...	4:53
134	Beside him is a spare cushion with which he is...	4:47
135	Judy, with her brother's wink, shakes her head...	6:23
136	Charley is accordingly introduced...	6:27
137	Mr George sits, with his arms folded...	4:32
138	Mr George, who has been looking first...	5:43
139	'In the first place,' returns Mr George...	5:00
140	The theatre over, Mr George comes across the water...	4:09

141	Chapter 22 Mr Bucket Allegory looks pretty cool...	4:59
142	Mr Snagsby drinks and murmurs...	5:01
143	'I am sure I am much obliged to you... '	5:01
144	As the unseen wretch goes by...	4:53
145	'It's brought into my head, master,'...	5:12
146	A female figure, closely veiled, stands...	5:59
147	Chapter 28 Esther's Narrative We came home...	5:50
148	So ended our conference, which I was very glad...	5:14
149	We were in a solitary place...	5:12
150	'You see, Esther,' said Caddy...	4:23
151	Prince was teaching, of course.	4:46
152	Mr Turveydrop underwent a severe internal struggle...	5:20
153	I thought of the one family so near us...	4:51
154	I was so unprepared for the perfect coolness...	3:08
155	As I rode quietly home at night after the day's bustle...	3:57
156	Chapter 24 An Appeal Case As soon as Richard...	5:02
157	'So much the easier what I have to say,... '	5:49
158	It was strange to me that Richard should not...	4:15
159	His once more reddening through his brown...	5:11
160	To see everything going on so smoothly...	5:09

161	Turning as he spoke and making an easy way...	6:07
162	'Ladies and gentlemen,' said Mr Bucket...	4:59
163	He drew the hand Miss Flite held...	4:42
164	Chapter 25 Mrs Snagsby Sees It All There is disquiet...	5:17
165	He has no respect for Mr Chadband.	5:49
166	It happens that Mr Chadband has a pulpit habit...	4:39
167	The present effect of this flight of oratory...	4:44
168	Mrs Snagsby replies by delivering herself...	3:57
169	Chapter 26 Sharpshooters Wintry morning...	5:19
170	Governor and commander are interchangeable...	5:01
171	Resigning himself to which condition...	5:30
172	Grandfather Smallweed refers to Phil...	5:19
173	When Judy has by these means set him up again...	4:59
174	'My dear friend, he is a lawyer, and a famous one.'	4:35
175	Chapter 27 More Old Soldiers Than One Mr George...	5:34
176	Mr George sits squared in exactly the same attitude...	4:52
177	Mr Smallweed, hearing that this authority...	4:46
178	The trooper, without remarking on this welcome...	4:46
179	Both father and son salute the trooper heartily.	4:36
180	This Mr George does with great discretion...	4:32

181	Chapter 28 The Ironmaster Sir Leicester Dedlock...	6:12
182	Such the guests in the long drawing-room...	5:03
183	Miss Volumnia with a third little scream takes flight...	5:27
184	Sir Leicester snorts a little to hear the law laid down...	5:53
185	The visitor pauses a moment to give my Lady...	4:43
186	Chapter 29 The Young Man Chesney Wold is shut...	5:01
187	The man's mind is not so well balanced...	4:53
188	My Lady turns a little round and says...	5:13
189	A kind of angry smile just dawns upon my Lady's face.	4:30
190	There are diamonds glittering on the hand...	4:15
191	Chapter 30 Esther's Narrative Richard had been gone...	5:07
192	I said I should have thought it hardly possible...	5:49
193	As soon as her papa had tranquillized his mind...	4:51
194	Over and above this Caddy was very anxious...	4:46
195	The next question was how Mrs Jellyby...	4:22
196	Mr Jellyby groaned and laid his head against the wall...	5:15
197	We duly came back to breakfast...	3:09
198	And then Prince took her arm in his and turned...	3:41
199	Chapter 31 Nurse and Patient I had not been at home...	5:06
200	I had no thought that night – none, I am quite sure...	5:50

201	The other woman came hurriedly in as she spoke...	5:56
202	My guardian stopped and looked at him...	4:37
203	Ada being in our room with a cold...	4:24
204	I heard Ada's voice outside, and I hurried to the door...	4:24
205	And Charley did not die.	4:53
206	Chapter 32 The Appointed Time It is night in Lincoln's Inn...	4:59
207	It is no phenomenon that Mr Snagsby should be...	5:23
208	f Mr Snagsby hastens home to save...	5:18
209	Tony again entreats that the subject may be...	4:06
210	The light vivacious tone of fashionable life...	6:32
211	'How did he first come by that idea, though?'	6:34
212	Chapter 33 Interlopers Now do those two gentlemen...	5:12
213	Thus night pursues its leaden course...	5:23
214	Mr Snagsby casts his eye forlornly round the bar,...	6:43
215	While they are so conversing, a hackney-coach...	5:35
216	Mrs Smallweed instantly begins to shake her head...	6:27
217	At last come the coroner and his inquiry...	6:44
218	Chapter 34 A Turn of the Screw 'Now, what,' says Mr George...	5:14
219	The old girl never appears in walking trim...	5:05
220	Mrs Bagnet ceasing, Mr Bagnet removes his hand...	5:01

221	The trooper returns that this is kindly said...	4:58
222	Grandfather Smallweed smiles in a very ugly way...	4:57
223	He vociferates this so loudly that Mr Bagnet...	4:39
224	The lawyer sits down in his easy-chair and stirs the fire.	3:57
225	Boiled beef and greens constitute the day's variety...	4:18
226	Chapter 35 Esther's Narrative I lay ill through several weeks...	5:00
227	How well I remember the pleasant afternoon...	5:59
228	'Is it possible, guardian,' I asked, amazed...	4:53
229	And my guardian put a letter in my hand...	5:34
230	'If you please, miss,' said Charley...	3:49
231	I tried to assure her that this was not so.	4:14
232	I was obliged to confess that I did not quite know...	5:13
233	Chapter 36 Chesney Wold Charley and I did not...	5:04
234	I took care to be up early in the morning...	5:51
235	The air blew as freshly and revivingly upon me...	5:28
236	I raised my mother up, praying and beseeching her...	6:02
237	My mother, who until this time had made no change...	4:53
238	These are the real feelings that I had.	4:18
239	For I saw very well that I could not have...	4:38
240	Chapter 37 Jarndyce and Jarndyce If the secret...	5:19

241	I put my veil up, but not quite.	5:06
242	I began seriously to think that Richard could...	4:46
243	I could almost have believed in the attraction...	4:55
244	'Indeed?' replied Richard, softening.	5:20
245	'Richard,' said I, 'you place great confidence in me...'	4:53
246	As they were to remain with us that day...	6:54
247	His further consideration of the point was prevented...	6:42
248	Chapter 38 A Struggle When our time came...	4:40
249	All this presented the art to me in a singular light...	5:03
250	There was something in the picture of Mr Turveydrop...	5:30
251	I gave him a little time to recover.	4:18
252	I must say for Mr Guppy that the snuffling manner...	4:34
253	Chapter 39 Attorney and Client The name of Mr Vholes...	4:40
254	The respectability of Mr Vholes has even been cited...	3:27
255	'Again nothing done!' says Richard.	4:57
256	Mr Vholes gives it a rap, and it sounds...	7:23
257	Vholes finally adds, by way of rider...	4:30
258	Is Richard a monster in all this...?	4:15
259	Never since it has been a court has it had...	4:56
260	Mr Guppy, slightly nudging his friend...	6:12

261	Chapter 40 National and Domestic England has been...	5:13
262	But the fire of the sun is dying.	5:09
263	Daily the cousins trot through dust...	5:29
264	Volumnia had thought he might have been employed.	4:31
265	'A proposal which, as you correctly informed me...'	4:12
266	Her head concedes it, and Volumnia is enchanted.	4:54
267	Chapter 41 In Mr Tulkinghorn's Room Mr Tulkinghorn arrives	5:41
268	'Sir,' she says, for the moment obliged to set her lips...	5:06
269	He promptly says again, 'Have the goodness... '	5:33
270	She stands looking out at the same stars without a word.	5:48
271	Chapter 42 In Mr Tulkinghorn's Chambers From the verdant...	5:58
272	Mr Tulkinghorn had listened gravely to this...	5:20
273	'Having said this, have you anything else... ?'	5:57
274	Chapter 43 Esther's Narrative It matters little now...	5:10
275	Ada, glancing at me, said she thought it was a pity...	5:00
276	My guardian looked at us with a smile,...	4:57
277	Hearing that his examination (as he called it)...	3:59
278	Ada and I conversed with these young ladies...	4:56
279	The visitor was in the room while it was yet...	6:24
280	Sir Leicester Dedlock coughed...	6:25

281	Chapter 44 The Letter and the Answer My guardian called me...	4:41
282	He took it in his, holding me lightly...	6:38
283	But he did not hint to me that when I had been...	6:38
284	Chapter 45 In Trust One morning when I had done...	5:44
285	It appeared to us that Mr Vholes said...	4:56
286	But when we got into a warm room...	5:47
287	He was in that mood in which I thought it best...	4:43
288	I will not repeat what I said to Richard.	5:05
289	I felt as if he had greater commiseration for me...	5:01
290	Chapter 46 Stop Him! Darkness rests upon Tom-all-Alone's....	5:12
291	A habit in him of speaking to the poor...	4:12
292	Allan Woodcourt pauses to look after him...	6:29
293	Jo looks all round the court again...	2:53
294	'Aye!' says Allan. 'Why, what had you been doing?'	3:05
295	Chapter 47 Jo's Will As Allan Woodcourt and Jo...	5:10
296	Miss Flite, mighty proud of the compliment...	4:41
297	As he puts the question, he becomes aware...	6:05
298	Phil Squod and Jo are sent out immediately...	6:17
299	Mr Snagsby is behind his counter in his grey coat...	6:19
300	The softened stationer deposits another half-crown...	4:33

301	After watching him closely a little while...	4:34
302	Chapter 48 Closing in The place in Lincolnshire...	4:55
303	The pretty face is checked in its flush of pleasure...	5:03
304	Therefore there is not much that Lady Dedlock...	5:05
305	'I beg your pardon,' interposes Mr Rouncewell's...	5:10
306	Sir Leicester considers himself evoked...	5:03
307	'If, sir,' she begins, 'in my knowledge of my secret – '...	5:11
308	She removes her hand, turns her pale face towards him...	3:55
309	A fine night, and a bright large moon...	3:27
310	Has Mr Tulkinghorn been disturbed?	3:30
311	Chapter 49 Dutiful Friendship A great annual occasion...	5:46
312	Quebec and Malta here exclaim, with clapping of hands...	5:55
313	Mr George produces his present, which is greeted with...	7:01
314	These blandishments have entirely won the family heart.	4:32
315	Nothing could be more acceptable to the little circle...	5:26
316	'Now, George,' says Mr Bucket...	5:33
317	Chapter 50 Esther's Narrative It happened that...	4:55
318	I felt in this short conversation...	4:32
319	Then there was old Mr Turveydrop...	3:55
320	I have not counted Mr Woodcourt among our visitors...	4:49

321	As there was a little pause here...	4:22
322	Chapter 51 Enlightened When Mr Woodcourt arrived...	4:56
323	Mr Woodcourt rather sternly rejoined...	5:09
324	Afterwards, when Mr Woodcourt came to reflect...	5:22
325	His hopefulness had long been more painful to me...	5:36
326	Thus the time went on until it became necessary...	6:29
327	Chapter 52 Obstinacy But one other day...	5:35
328	He scarcely seemed to be the prisoner.	4:59
329	'Pray think, once more, Mr George,' said I.	4:45
330	The door had been opened to admit...	5:12
331	For an instant I felt such a shudder as I never felt before...	5:00
332	Chapter 53 The Track Mr Bucket and his fat forefinger...	5:15
333	Not another word does Mr Bucket say...	5:06
334	With that he returns to finish his dinner...	4:58
335	Volumnia gives Mr Bucket to understand...	5:20
336	The cousin, who has been casting sofa-pillows...	4:16
337	The doors are thrown open...	3:53
338	Chapter 54 Springing a Mine Refreshed by sleep...	5:34
339	Sir Leicester, leaning back in his chair...	6:28
340	Sir Leicester sits like a statue...	4:44

341	'You don't happen to know why they killed the pig...?'	6:54
342	Mr Smallweed is quite clear that he had better not.	5:37
343	While this exordium is in hand...	3:08
344	Mr Bucket follows them to the door...	4:57
345	Mademoiselle complies, saying in a concentrated voice...	5:07
346	'I went home, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet...'	5:26
347	Two things are especially observable...	5:17
348	Mademoiselle Hortense, casting an indignant eye...	3:42
349	Chapter 55 Flight Inspector Bucket of the Detective...	5:34
350	All this Mrs Bagnet now relates for the twentieth time...	5:14
351	She can ask, and he can answer...	4:58
352	Mrs Rouncewell, drawing up her stately form...	5:08
353	'Take her, my old friend, and take my gratitude...'	5:27
354	Lady Dedlock raises her without one word...	6:05
355	'What have I to do with that, or what have you?'	6:20
356	Chapter 56 Pursuit Impassive, as behoves its high breeding...	4:57
357	After making a survey of the room...	3:47
358	The velocity and certainty of Mr Bucket's interpretation...	3:46
359	He completes his observations...	6:54
360	Chapter 57 Esther's Narrative I had gone to bed...	5:11

361	He gave me his arm, and the two officers...	5:08
362	He had gone into every late or early public-house...	5:26
363	We were now in front of the house...	4:58
364	We set off again immediately.	4:28
365	After another silence, the husband of the absent woman...	6:07
366	I could eat nothing and could not sleep...	5:16
367	A good endearing creature she was.	5:27
368	Chapter 58 A Wintry Day and Night Still impassive...	4:44
369	And not the least amazing circumstance...	4:41
370	The old housekeeper and her son remain...	5:15
371	He is lying thus, apparently forgetful...	4:59
372	'I was about to add,' he presently goes on...	4:51
373	Overpowered by his exertions, he lays his head back...	5:56
374	An effect of these horrors is that Volumnia finds...	6:19
375	Chapter 59 Esther's Narrative It was three o'clock...	5:26
376	'Now, Miss Summerson,' he said to me...	4:12
377	The last police-officer with whom he had conferred...	4:46
378	As they went out, Mr Bucket made me sit down...	4:48
379	It had been written in portions, at different times.	4:57
380	It was necessary for her mistress to comfort her...	3:19

381	I have the most confused impressions of that walk.	4:09
382	Chapter 60 Perspective I proceed to other passages...	4:28
383	He checked himself in glancing towards the window...	5:17
384	We said no more about it...	5:16
385	The poor soul kissed me with the most troubled look...	5:24
386	'Pardon me,' returned Mr Vholes...	5:27
387	They left my dear girl still sitting at the piano...	5:08
388	Chapter 61 A Discovery The days when I frequented...	4:06
389	I was coming to the point with great difficulty...	5:19
390	'Observe the case, my dear Miss Summerson.'	5:30
391	I was there, as I have mentioned, at all hours.	4:49
392	'Dear Mr Woodcourt,' said I...	4:57
393	Chapter 62 Another Discovery I had not the courage...	4:56
394	A servant came to the door to announce Mr Bucket...	4:33
395	Mr Bucket eyed the old man for a moment...	5:35
396	He unbolted the door, called in the bearers...	6:57
397	Chapter 63 Steel and Iron George's Shooting Gallery...	4:27
398	George, full of the idea of iron...	5:29
399	'My dear George,' returns his brother...	3:41
400	'There it is, brother,' cries the trooper...	4:50

401	Chapter 64 Esther's Narrative Soon after I had...	5:38
402	Because he was so dear, so good, so admirable.	4:57
403	I was cold, and I trembled violently...	5:50
404	What happiness was ours that day...	5:24
405	Mr Jobling said 'Certainly' and withdrew a little...	4:33
406	Chapter 65 Beginning the World The term had commenced...	4:29
407	At this juncture we perceived Mr Kenge...	4:43
408	I would not let him take me to a coach...	3:46
409	My guardian, the picture of a good man, sat down...	5:07
410	Chapter 66 Down in Lincolnshire There is a hush...	5:51
411	Volumnia, growing with the flight of time pinker...	4:59
412	Chapter 67 The Close of Esther's Narrative Full seven...	4:35
413	With the first money we saved at home...	4:38

Total time: 35:15:31

Charles Dickens

Bleak House

' "A dreary name," said the Lord Chancellor...' (Chapter III)

His Lordship is referring to Bleak House – and Dickens himself, perhaps with the Lord Chancellor's opinion in mind, took some time to arrive at this title for his book. This was to be his ninth novel, written at the height of his powers, but it was to be unlike any of his previous novels; it was to be a novel of purpose. Dickens had a message to convey on a grand scale, and there was to be no central character who would dominate the narrative. So, biographical titles like *Oliver Twist* or *David Copperfield* would not be appropriate. Instead, his novel was to reflect the state of England in 1853 – a vast undertaking. For the title Dickens considered that a building central to the plot would serve as a unifying image to the disparate storyline, with its two narrators and conflicting literary styles. Dickens experimented with several possibilities: *Tom-all-Alone's* (the slum dwellings that feature significantly in the plot); *The Ruined House* (with its double meaning of 'house') was

another. Other titles jotted down by Dickens among his working notes for the novel included *The Solitary House* (*that never knew happiness*); *The East Wind*; and *The Ruined House That Got into Chancery and never got out.* He finally settled on *Bleak House* without any explanatory sub-title or additions. This enigmatic title would allow his readers to reflect and apply it as they chose to the contents of the novel, whose projected image of England is indeed in many ways – bleak.

Dickens having completed the ultimate biographical novel in *David Copperfield*, set about writing a biography of the nation in *Bleak House*. As in *David Copperfield* where Mr Micawber, for example, had been a portrait of his indigent father, Dickens once again drew upon his own experiences, family and friends to provide the archetypes for *Bleak House*. This proved to be controversial; the poet and essayist Leigh Hunt for one was deeply offended by his caricature in the person of Harold Skimpole: 'I am constantly being bailed out, like a boat...Somebody always does it for me. I can't do it you know,

for I never have any money; but somebody does it...'(Skimpole in *Bleak House*)

It was an essential part of Dickens's working method to draw on his own experiences and friends whether it offended them or not and in *Bleak House*, drawing upon his own experiences within the legal system as a solicitor's clerk, he attacks 'the Law's delays', particularly in respect of the Chancery Court, where cases could be, and were, argued over for decades. The fictional Jarndyce versus Jarndyce case was based on the real-life Jennings case which was before the court for an amazing ninety years!

Writing in the preface to the first edition of *Bleak House* Dickens tells the reader sharply: 'If I wanted other authorities...I could rain them on these pages to the shame of – a parsimonious public.' He attacks an outmoded system deep-rooted in ancient historical practice that impeded rather than helped humanity, that ultimately destroys what it seeks to assist. A system perpetuated by its workers – the lawyers – for their own benefit, blocking and confusing rather than oiling the wheels of the law.

Likewise another system is scrutinised by Dickens. Aristocratic privilege is firmly in place, as epitomised by Sir Leicester Dedlock,

but Dickens challenges the rights of the old order by introducing Rouncewell, the ironmaster, whose attitude to Sir Leicester reflects the shifting society of the 1850s, knocking at the door of privilege.

Man creates his own systems by which society is controlled and the individual contained; they are not ordained by nature, and as long as they serve mankind they will be valid. Dickens instinctively supported the free will of the individual against any restrictive system of control, indeed it would be the theme of his next novel, *Hard Times*.

The insidious presence of the Law in *Bleak House*, is represented allegorically by the London fog, with which the book opens so atmospherically, getting everywhere and influencing every character in the book from the great and haughty Lady Dedlock to the shabby-genteel, bewildered Miss Flite. It distorts images, obscures and hides. The characters in *Bleak House* are blurred or not what they at first appear to be. The fog too is a symbol of the pervasive contamination that corrupts society: drug addiction (opium was readily available to all); crippling poverty; a hidebound bureaucratic system (epitomised by the Law); the misguided philanthropy of Mrs Jellaby and Mrs Pardiggle, seeking to help those abroad

whilst ignoring the poor at home; and one of Dickens's key themes, small-pox spread through poor sanitary conditions. His message is that it is inertia that encourages disease to spread, and will eventually overwhelm us all. This point is emphasised when Esther succumbs to small-pox. Her physical disfigurement is a reminding presence throughout the remainder of the book. The disease shows no respect for the class system, the virus transferring from paupers to the middle classes alike.

Individual responsibility for one's actions is set forth by Dickens as a start in making any changes to social injustice. The inaction of Lady Dedlock to set things right, has subsequent tragic effects on the lives of Nemo, Jo and Esther. On a larger scale, Dickens implies that if the tensions of an unequal and unjust society are not attended to, society itself may eventually spontaneously combust, as Mr Krook does. Parasites like Skimpole and Turveydrop, and leeches like Smallweed are contrasted with characters who continually work for good, like Jo the crossing sweeper symbolically cleaning the dirty London streets, and the good-hearted Esther, who helps such outcasts as Peepy, Caddy Jellaby and Charley Neckett. Esther's inherent domesticity

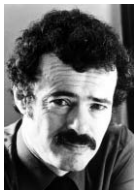
coupled with Jarndyce's use of his money to continually benefit others, make Bleak House anything but bleak. It is a ramshackle, eccentric building, like its owner, that glows like a warm fire at the centre of the novel as a place of refuge and joy.

The story is told by two narrators – a unique feature of Dickens's work. Esther, self-effacingly tells her own story, whilst an anonymous voice unravels the mystery of Lady Dedlock's story. But characters cross into both stories and at times Esther's story is told by the other narrator. This inter-mixing and crossing of conventions produces a complicated plot, at times disconcerting, that was criticised on its first publication as being in 'absolute want of construction.' But Dickens was evolving a new type of novel – he spread his net wide to include a vast range of characters to give a panoramic view of English society from top to bottom, and how the highest and the lowest interact. Such diversity also helped him in the construction of what is essentially a mystery story, a who-dun-it, where characters and plot-strands appear like clues and can just as likely turn out to be red herrings. *Bleak House* could in fact be called the first Detective novel in English Literature, as it pre-dates *The Moonstone* (1868) by Wilkie

Collins, often credited to be the first, by fifteen years. The detective branch of the Metropolitan Police Force had been formed at Scotland Yard, in 1842, and Dickens had interviewed one of the new breed of detectives for his magazine *Household Words*. All the ingredients we associate with the classic fictional detective are in place in the characterisation of Bucket – he is enigmatic, single-minded in his pursuit of the criminal, ruthless and clever. It was a genre that obviously fascinated Dickens as he explored it further in *Our Mutual Friend* and the unfinished *Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

Notes by David Timson

Cover picture: Ludgate Hill, W W Collins in Gilbert, 'Cathedral Cities of England'
courtesy Mary Evans Picture Library



Sean Barrett started acting as a boy on BBC children's television in the days before colour, when it went out live. He grew up through *Z Cars*, *Armchair Theatre*, *Minder* and *Father Ted*. His theatre credits include *Peter Pan* at the old Scala Theatre and Noël Coward's *Suite in 3 Keys* in the West End. Films include *War & Peace*, *Dunkirk* and *A Cry from the Streets*. He was a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company. He also features in *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*, *The Voice of the Buddha* and *Canterbury Tales III* and read the part of Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* and Nakata in *Kafka on the Shore* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Teresa Gallagher has performed in many leading roles in both plays and musicals across the country, London's West End and Broadway. In addition, she is a well-known voice to listeners of BBC Radio Drama. Her work on film includes *The Misadventures of Margaret* and Mike Leigh's *Topsy Turvy*. For Naxos AudioBooks she has recorded the *Biography of Jane Austen* and selections from *The Decameron* by Boccaccio. She has also read *Classic Women's Short Stories*, *Heidi*, *The Treasure Seekers*, *The Wouldbegoods* and *The Story of Jesus* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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