


NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION

Charles Dickens

Our Mutual Friend

THE
COMPLETE
CLASSICS

UNABRIDGED

Read by **David Timson**



NAX44212D

1	Book 1 The Cup and the Lip: Chapter 1 On The Look Out	5:18
2	It was not until now that the upper half...	7:05
3	Chapter 2 The Man From Somewhere	6:04
4	But now a fearful circumstance occurs...	5:39
5	The great looking-glass above the sideboard...	6:12
6	'Now my dear Mrs Veneering,' quoth Lady Tippins...	7:46
7	Mortimer proceeds. 'We must now return...'	6:35
8	Chapter 3 Another Man	7:19
9	The wheels rolled on, and rolled down by the Monument...	6:59
10	As he opened the door, in pursuance of a nod from Lightwood...	6:04
11	Mr Inspector had not moved, and had given no order...	6:04
12	She placed her hands in one another on his shoulder...	7:44
13	The case was made interesting to the public...	3:07
14	Chapter 4 The R. Wilfer Family	5:17
15	Mrs Wilfer was, of course, a tall woman and an angular...	6:16
16	Here, Miss Lavinia, from her kneeling situation...	5:26
17	The young lady's lamentations were checked at this point...	6:41
18	This as a neat and happy turn to give the subject...	7:23
19	Chapter 5 Boffin's Bower	6:03
20	Mr Wegg was an observant person...	7:09

21	The wooden Wegg looked at him with a meditative eye...	6:26
22	'Hem! Flattered, sir, I am sure,' said Wegg	6:59
23	Left alone at his stall as the other ambled off...	6:14
24	It was the queerest of rooms, fitted and furnished...	5:53
25	Mrs Boffin's Fashion, as a less inexorable deity...	6:30
26	'Commodius!' gasped Mr Boffin...	1:16
27	Chapter 6 Cut Adrift	5:29
28	Miss Potterson, sole proprietor and manager...	7:03
29	Gaffer was not there, but a pretty strong muster...	8:26
30	But Miss Potterson, as a ready schoolmistress...	6:19
31	The room was quiet, and the lamp burnt on the table.	7:36
32	The white face of the winter day came sluggishly on...	7:24
33	Chapter 7 Mr Wegg Looks After Himself	6:53
34	When he deems Mr Venus's wheels sufficiently lubricated...	5:54
35	'Oh dear me, dear me!' sighs Mr Venus, heavily...	6:08
36	Silas receives one from his hand...	5:03
37	Chapter 8 Mr Boffin In Consultation	5:43
38	Mr Lightwood explained that he came from the proctor's...	6:11
39	'The last time me and Mrs Boffin saw...'	6:33
40	'Your lawyer, Mr Boffin,' returned Lightwood...	5:14

41	But, the worthy Mr Boffin jogged away with a comfortless...	6:14
42	Not very well knowing how to get rid of this applicant...	4:45
43	Chapter 9 Mr and Mrs Boffin In Consultation	6:19
44	These two ignorant and unpolished people...	5:53
45	With a ready patient face and manner...	7:06
46	It appeared, on their drawing up at the family gate...	6:15
47	Finding it rather difficult to pursue the conversation...	6:10
48	However, Bella compensating for all drawbacks by responding...	6:59
49	Chapter 10 A Marriage Contract	6:44
50	'We now come,' says Veneering, 'to the point, the real point...'	6:27
51	Betimes next morning, that horrible old Lady Tippins...	3:32
52	Ceremony performed, register signed...	7:32
53	All over, that is to say, for the time being.	6:19
54	She bursts into tears, declaring herself the wretchedest...	6:10
55	Chapter 11 Podsnappery	7:25
56	So it came to pass that Mr and Mrs Podsnap...	6:03
57	'I was inquiring,' said Mr Podsnap...	6:22
58	And now the haunch of mutton vapour-bath...	8:06
59	While these solemnities were in progress...	5:31
60	In the meantime a stray personage of a meek demeanour...	4:55

61	Simultaneously with this quenching...	5:28
62	Chapter 12 The Sweat Of An Honest Man's Brow	4:46
63	As Lightwood laughed and passed the wine...	4:44
64	It had grown darker as they talked...	5:52
65	'Now,' said Lightwood, 'What's your name?'	5:53
66	'Lawyer Lightwood, take care, you, what I say...'	6:20
67	'But he hadn't,' said Eugene, drawing...	5:46
68	They said little else as they followed...	7:39
69	Chapter 13 Tracking The Bird Of Prey	5:54
70	Two taps were now heard on the outside of the window...	6:55
71	Thereupon he stirred the fire, and sat down...	6:04
72	As the time so passed, this slinking business...	6:15
73	Chapter 14 The Bird Of Prey Brought Down	5:58
74	Some half hour of this work, and Riderhood unshipped...	5:51
75	'Now see,' said Mr Inspector, after mature deliberation...	4:50
76	We could, and we did.	4:35
77	Chapter 15 Two New Servants	7:19
78	'Well! Now, Noddy!' cried Mrs Boffin...	6:12
79	A gloomy house the Bower, with sordid signs on it...	6:52
80	The man of low cunning had, of course, acquired a mastery...	6:22

81	'Thank'ee, Wegg, both for your confidence in me...'	3:41
82	Much surprised, Mr Boffin went up stairs...	6:17
83	Chapter 16 Minders and Re-minders	6:10
84	Mr Boffin dismissed the matter with a nod or two...	5:39
85	It was then perceived to be a small home...	6:20
86	A surprising spirit in this lonely woman after so many years...	6:54
87	Now, greatly to the relief of the visitors...	7:23
88	This piece of business thus put in train...	4:52
89	As he watched her with another covert look...	5:51
90	Chapter 17 A Dismal Swamp	6:50
91	These are the corporate beggars...	6:10
92	Book 2 Birds Of A Feather: Chapter 1 Of An Educational Character	8:58
93	Bradley Headstone, in his decent black coat...	6:17
94	Miss Peecher's favourite pupil, who assisted her...	6:11
95	The boy knocked at a door, and the door promptly opened...	7:29
96	It was difficult to guess the age of this strange creature...	5:18
97	As his uneasy figure went on before them...	6:24
98	The master and the pupil walked on, rapidly and silently.	8:08
99	Chapter 2 Still Educational	5:44
100	'I have nothing to report, Lizzie,' said Eugene...	7:30

101	There was an appearance of openness, trustfulness...	6:28
102	By degrees, as she progressed in this remembrance...	4:31
103	'I wish you had been taken up, and locked up...'	6:43
104	Chapter 3 A Piece Of Work	8:01
105	Meanwhile Twemlow, in an increasing hurry...	5:23
106	Mrs Veneering, during the same eventful hours...	7:11
107	In these inspiring moments, Brewer strikes out an idea...	6:07
108	Then, dinner is had at the Hotel with the legal gentleman...	3:24
109	Chapter 4 Cupid Prompted	4:51
110	'I am sure,' said Miss Podsnap, 'Mr Lammle is like a lover...'	6:04
111	How delightful those interchanges, and the looks...	8:01
112	Young Fledgeby was none of these.	6:46
113	More prompting was necessary. Cupid must be brought up...	4:27
114	Content perforce with this success for the time...	4:57
115	Chapter 5 Mercury Prompting	7:29
116	'Now, look here, Lammle,' said Fascination Fledgeby...	6:53
117	The respected Mr Lammle was a bully...	5:34
118	It was a public holiday, and Fledgeby did not recover...	6:00
119	'You won't say more, I see,' said Fledgeby, looking at him...	6:02
120	Lizzie Hexam and Jenny Wren.	8:45

121	Chapter 6 A Riddle Without An Answer	6:00
122	'Eugene,' said Mortimer, disregarding the light interruption...	6:07
123	He had not reckoned on their seeking his name...	8:49
124	A pause ensued, in which the schoolmaster looked very awkward.	5:27
125	It was a stab that the blood followed...	8:09
126	Chapter 7 In Which A Friendly Move Is Originated	5:54
127	As Mr Venus is irritable...	5:27
128	'And yet, sir,' he continues...	7:22
129	The palm of Silas Wegg descends with a sounding smack...	7:17
130	The articles of the friendly move are then severally recited...	5:58
131	Chapter 8 In Which An Innocent Elopement Occurs	6:06
132	'You never charge me, Miss Wilfer,' said the Secretary...	3:54
133	The family room looked very small and very mean...	6:55
134	Here Bella, deriving no comfort from her charming bonnet...	3:57
135	As she was uninformed respecting the exact locality...	5:59
136	While they were going along to take boat...	8:01
137	'I suppose my dear,' said Pa after dinner...	8:16
138	Chapter 9 In Which The Orphan Makes His Will	8:09
139	Punctual to the time appeared the carriage...	7:31
140	At the Children's Hospital, the gallant steed...	6:06

141	Chapter 10 A Successor	5:26
142	Rokesmith departed on that errand...	6:16
143	The consideration of Mrs Boffin had clothed Mr Sloppy...	4:47
144	Chapter 11 Some Affairs Of The Heart	6:50
145	The discreet Mary Anne resumed her seat...	7:40
146	'Here's a perfectly disinterested person, Lizzie dear,'...	5:58
147	Lizzie Hexam had changed colour when those changes came...	5:48
148	It being Lizzie's regular occupation when they were alone...	8:13
149	Chapter 12 More Birds Of Prey	7:14
150	Taking notice of Pleasant Riderhood at the door...	7:00
151	'I'll tell you why I ask,' pursued the visitor...	7:34
152	At first Riderhood had sat...	7:36
153	'Well? Have you finished?' asked the strange man.	5:56
154	'Captain! Mentioning them unfort'net words of mine...'	4:47
155	Chapter 13 A Solo And A Duet	5:59
156	'On board serving as third mate was George Radfoot.'	6:32
157	'Now I pass to sick and deranged impressions...'	8:03
158	'Now, is it all thought out? All to this time?'	6:00
159	Arriving at the house, he found that Mr and Mrs Boffin were out.	6:05
160	'You take advantage of a hasty word of mine,' said Bella...	6:12

161	Chapter 14 Strong Of Purpose	8:39
162	The Secretary pursued his way, not very much elevated in spirits...	6:29
163	The Secretary felt that there was no gainsaying what was urged...	6:24
164	The Secretary stated to the schoolmaster...	6:54
165	All these proceedings occupied John Rokesmith so much...	6:20
166	Chapter 15 The Whole Case So Far	7:10
167	'I said,' he began, 'when I saw you last...'	6:05
168	'You know what I am going to say. I love you.'	6:10
169	A worse threat than was conveyed in his manner...	5:52
170	Some touch of compunction smote the boy's hardening heart...	8:36
171	They were in the act of emerging into the main thoroughfare...	7:36
172	Chapter 16 An Anniversary Occasion	6:14
173	Mr Lammle, all a-glitter, produces his friend Fledgeby...	7:29
174	'The reference,' proceeds Mortimer, 'which I suppose to be...'	6:51
175	Then Lammle. Too much of him every way...	4:09
176	In the drawing-room, groups form as usual.	8:26
177	Book 3 A Long Lane: Chapter 1 Lodgers In Queer Street	6:49
178	The old man shook his head, gently repudiating the imputation...	6:35
179	The old man, who had never raised his eyes...	6:56
180	They shook hands and Lammle strode out pondering...	7:57

181	With one hand across his breast and the other on the easy chair...	4:43
182	Chapter 2 A Respected Friend In A New Aspect	6:26
183	Thus conversing, and having crossed Westminster Bridge...	6:12
184	‘We take the liberty of coming, my young companion and I...’	6:09
185	Miss Abbey had twice made the experiment of shutting her eyes...	6:36
186	Chapter 3 The Same Respected Friend In More Aspects Than One	6:00
187	Poor Pleasant, fortified with a sip of brandy...	6:23
188	Presently they all return, and wait for him...	2:47
189	Chapter 4 A Happy Return of the Day	6:14
190	‘Now Ma,’ said Bella, reappearing in the kitchen...	6:22
191	However, she persisted in dishing the dinner as well as cooking.	5:57
192	‘Your grandpapa,’ retorted Mrs Wilfer, with an awful look...	5:14
193	The rosy hours were thus beguiled until it was time...	4:41
194	‘Number three, Pa, is a better thing.’	4:21
195	Chapter 5 The Golden Dustman Falls Into Bad Company	6:29
196	The Secretary rose, gathered up his papers and withdrew.	8:03
197	She had begun by this time to be his frequent companion...	6:52
198	Mrs Lammle took the friendliest interest...	7:08
199	On one point connected with the watch she kept on Mr Boffin...	4:47
200	‘The miser?’	5:45

201	Chapter 6 The Golden Dustman Fall Into Worse Companys	7:43
202	At that moment wheels were heard.	5:53
203	'This, sir,' replied Silas, adjusting his spectacles...	8:16
204	Mr Venus, who since his introduction to the French gentleman...	7:05
205	Releasing each other, they crept to the door...	6:14
206	Mr Boffin came down leisurely...	4:12
207	Chapter 7 The Friendly Move Takes Up A Strong Position	6:36
208	'There your expressive countenance speaks indeed!'	6:12
209	With still reluctant hands, and not without several glances...	5:51
210	On this head, Silas Wegg had much to say.	6:08
211	'Ah, dear me, dear me!' exclaimed Wegg with a sigh...	8:12
212	Chapter 8 The End Of A Long Journey	7:02
213	So with the humbler houses in the little street...	6:32
214	She caught up her basket as she spoke...	8:14
215	The morning found her afoot again, but fast declining...	5:43
216	The darkness gone, and a face bending down.	4:48
217	Chapter 9 Somebody Becomes the Subject Of A Prediction	7:01
218	While this discourse was interchanging...	6:26
219	'I shall be happy, Mr Rokesmith,' returned Bella...	7:13
220	So they walked, speaking of the newly filled-up grave...	5:22

221	The wayward, playful, affectionate nature...	6:01
222	The question was so directly at variance with Bella's views...	7:06
223	So the interview terminated with pleasant words...	4:14
224	Chapter 10 Scouts Out	8:17
225	Lightwood was at home when he got to the Chambers...	6:02
226	Lightwood was shaking his head over the air with which...	7:10
227	Making a dignified attempt to gather himself...	7:06
228	'Then soberly and plainly, Mortimer, I goad the schoolmaster...'	7:30
229	Chapter 11 In the Dark	6:34
230	As Bradley passed out at the gate with an undecided foot...	8:06
231	They had walked along the Strand, and into Pall Mall...	5:52
232	Bradley could have hidden a reserved piece of information...	6:10
233	Chapter 12 Meaning Mischief	6:17
234	But seeing that she was turning something in her mind...	7:54
235	It was barely settled when a manly form was seen to pass...	8:34
236	Chapter 13 Give A Dog A Bad Name, And Hang Him	5:22
237	Miss Wren with a fallen countenance sat behind the door...	6:11
238	The chivalrous Twemlow, Knight of the Simple Heart...	7:15
239	With these words, which had the effect of causing...	8:58
240	Chapter 14 Mr Wegg Prepares A Grindstone For Mr Boffin's Nose	6:51

241	The remark seemed rather to abash Mr Venus.	8:02
242	The Golden Dustman seemed about to pursue these questions...	7:56
243	There was a grin upon the ghastly countenance...	8:24
244	'Now, I wonder,' he meditated as he went along...	3:42
245	Chapter 15 The Golden Dustman At His Worst	8:23
246	Here Mrs Boffin broke out a-crying.	6:59
247	'I have borne,' said the Secretary, in a low voice...	6:05
248	'Ask me anything you wish to ask,' returned Rokesmith...	6:17
249	After despatching this second bolt...	6:32
250	After which strong avowal Bella underwent reaction...	6:17
251	Chapter 16 The Feast Of The Three Hobgoblins	7:47
252	To inflict a heavy disappointment on this sweet nature...	8:44
253	It was, as Bella gaily said, like the supper...	5:45
254	Miss Lavvy came out to open the gate...	5:39
255	The cherub not presuming to address so tremendous an object...	5:52
256	Lavinia's engineering having made this crooked opening...	6:11
257	Chapter 17 A Social Chorus	5:38
258	Mr Twemlow's little rooms are modestly furnished...	7:01
259	'Was Mr Fledgeby's advocacy as effectual...'	5:35
260	But, six o'clock in the evening...	8:29

261	Eugene, leaning back in his chair, is observing Mr Podsnap...	3:57
262	Book 4 A Turning: Chapter 1 Setting Traps	5:35
263	The bargeman turned back. Approaching nearer...	5:22
264	Riderhood looked fixedly at him...	6:51
265	'Lock ho! Lock!' It was a light night...	7:24
266	He went into the pelting rain again...	6:48
267	Chapter 2 The Golden Dustman Rises A Little	6:01
268	Several white dints began to come and go...	8:39
269	Mr Lammle rose with an impudent laugh...	6:43
270	Mr Boffin took her down, and saw her driven away...	5:17
271	Chapter 3 The Golden Dustman Sinks Again	5:22
272	Mr Boffin, entering the usual chamber...	8:01
273	Mr Venus's mouth screwed itself up...	8:04
274	At length the document was restored to its place...	6:44
275	Chapter 4 A Runaway Match	6:15
276	Behold Bella tripping along the streets...	6:59
277	A modest little cottage but a bright and a fresh...	7:33
278	With his own hands he afterwards put on the dessert...	5:55
279	Chapter 5 Concerning The Mendicant's Bride	6:36
280	Mrs Wilfer's baleful stare at the young gentleman...	5:35

281	Mr Sampson murmured that this was the sort of thing...	4:12
282	Within a few weeks afterwards, the Mendicant's bride...	6:04
283	The newly-married pair left early...	8:04
284	For a City man, John certainly did appear to care...	6:32
285	While he took his supper, Bella sat by him...	5:55
286	'I am ready for Thirdly,' said John, 'whatever it is.'	3:14
287	Chapter 6 A Cry For Help	6:28
288	Turning again at the water lilies, he saw her coming...	5:53
289	He would have been base indeed to have stood untouched...	6:50
290	The purity with which in these words she expressed...	6:04
291	Eugene Wrayburn went the opposite way...	6:09
292	She merely kept the boat before the stream now...	5:36
293	Chapter 7 Better To Be Abel Than Cain	6:27
294	The formality of spreading a tablecloth...	4:40
295	He was a better follower than Bradley.	7:35
296	The school reopened next day.	4:58
297	Bradley sat looking steadily before him at the vacant air.	6:49
298	Chapter 8 A Few Grains Of Pepper	6:36
299	The quaint little chin met Mr Fledgeby's gaze...	7:53
300	For the terrors undergone by Mr Dolls that evening...	5:35

301	With a gleam of new intelligence in her sharp face...	5:03
302	'Now the door's shut,' said Mr Fledgeby, sitting up...	4:11
303	Chapter 9 Two Places Vacated	7:31
304	'My idea is getting so immense now,' cried Miss Wren...	4:47
305	Now, the bad child having been strictly charged by his parent...	6:14
306	Thither he was brought; the window becoming from within...	6:25
307	After that previous carrying of him in the streets...	6:13
308	Chapter 10 The Dolls' Dressmaker Discovers A Word	4:52
309	'Mortimer.' 'My dear Eugene.'	8:38
310	One afternoon when he had been lying still...	7:31
311	Chapter 11 Effect Is Given To The Dolls' Dressmaker's Discovery	8:58
312	They started directly, in a little carriage...	6:45
313	The reference was to a young man of reserved appearance...	6:15
314	Then the train rattled among the house-tops...	4:54
315	The sun was rising, and his first rays struck into the room...	5:10
316	Chapter 12 The Passing Shadow	8:54
317	When they had dined and were alone, John Rokesmith said...	4:59
318	Mr Inspector, in a dark-blue buttoned-up frock coat...	7:37
319	They alighted at last at the corner of a court...	4:32
320	'Mr Job Potterson,' Mr Inspector continued...	4:38

321	When John came home to dinner next day...	6:34
322	Chapter 13 Showing How The Golden Dustman Helped To Scatter Dust	5:41
323	By a master-stroke of secret arrangement...	6:06
324	Bella caught Mr Boffin's twinkling eye for half an instant...	8:49
325	Bella, who was still on her knees at Mr Boffin's feet...	7:11
326	Chapter 14 Checkmate To The Friendly Move	7:08
327	Mr Wegg, glancing in great dudgeon...	6:05
328	It was a very bad night to which succeeded a very bad morning.	7:49
329	'You are a fool,' said Wegg, with a snap of his fingers...	6:05
330	'Now, scoundrel,' he pursued, 'I am going to finish.'	6:58
331	Chapter 15 What Was Caught In The Traps That Were Set	4:38
332	One winter day when a slight fall of snow...	6:04
333	'Oh! It's in the way of school!' cried Riderhood.	6:37
334	The light was the joint product of a fire and a candle.	6:04
335	Bradley looked at the fire, with a working face...	5:43
336	Not until the late daylight made the window transparent...	5:19
337	Chapter 16 Persons And Things In General	7:35
338	The stately lady, Mrs Wilfer, perceiving her opportunity...	6:53
339	This visit was, as has been said, a grand event.	8:33
340	But the greatest event of all, in the new life of Mr and Mrs John Harmon	8:29

341	Chapter 17 The Voice Of Society	6:12
342	'Now, I am Chairwoman of Committees!' cries Lady Tippins	4:23
343	The fair enslaver having fallen into one of her gentle sleeps...	4:53

Total time: 36:33:57

Charles Dickens

Our Mutual Friend

Dickens wrote *Our Mutual Friend* in 1865, and it was to be his last completed novel. His two previous novels had been hugely successful. Both were set in the past, *A Tale of Two Cities* during the French Revolution of 1789, and *Great Expectations* in the time of Dickens' own childhood, the 1820s. Now Dickens felt it was time to return to a contemporary setting and an examination of the social evils around him. He also wished to satisfy the public's current taste for 'sensation' novels of which his young friend Wilkie Collins was such a master. Collins' *The Woman in White* had been serialised by Dickens in his magazine '*All the Year Round*' from 1859–60.

In *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens continues with the social message he had begun in *Bleak House* in 1853, where he expressed the need for poverty and disease to be eradicated once and for all by improved sanitary conditions. Henry Mayhew's monumental '*London Labour and the London Poor*' had been published in 1861–2, and its gruesome detail of the degrading levels of poverty existing in the metropolis was a revelation to many Londoners. One of Mayhew's articles was on

the dust-contractors who recovered London's refuse, making a considerable fortune in the process. Some dust contractors apparently made between ten and forty thousand pounds a year. Mayhew quotes the official figures of 3,500,000 tons of coal per year being consumed, and implies that if the ashes and cinders weren't removed, London would be overwhelmed with 'dust'. Dickens freely adapted Mayhew's facts into fiction.

In *Our Mutual Friend* the prevailing images are of dust, dirt and rubbish, out of which the poor continue to make a living. The image of rubbish is echoed in the occupations of the lower classes depicted in the novel: Wegg, the seller of ballads full of romantic rubbish no one wants, Jenny Wren the maker of dolls, useless fripperies no one seems to buy, Venus, the articulator of dead bones for no established purpose, and the ultimate occupation that makes something out of nothing; the sifter of other people's cast-offs – the dustman Boffin. By association money itself therefore is presented in the novel as contaminated with dirt and empty pointless activity. Money equals Dust. Those who have money in any quantity are

presented as worthless, indolent, self-obsessed types – the Veneerings, the Podsnaps, Eugene Wrayburn, or young Charley Hexham who only sees in his education a means to escape from poverty and join the economic rat-race. The ethics of the pursuit of money for its own sake was an important question in Victorian London in the 1860s. Materialism appeared to be crippling any form of spiritual or imaginative life. Money-worship was to Dickens a form of death-in-life, and death lies like a heavy pall over this story. From the corpse in the first chapter, through the detailed death of orphan Johnny, by way of those who find life-in-death (John Harmon) to the grim satire of Riderhood's resurrection from drowning, (which leads to another kind of death-in-life,) the novel is never far away from the images of mortality and the inevitable return of mankind to dust. Even the river Thames, which runs through this novel from beginning to end plays a sinister role. Water, usually regarded as a source of life, in this novel is corrupted too by man's abuses, by corpses and the detritus that lives off its pollution, men such as Gaffer Hexham and Riderhood.

Some of the morbid elements in this novel may be accounted for by Dickens' own near encounter with death whilst writing it. Having had a break on the continent to help his nerves, Dickens was involved on his

return journey by train in an accident at Staplehurst in Kent. His train was derailed whilst travelling over a viaduct. Ten passengers were killed and forty seriously injured. Dickens heroically helped to rescue and comfort the injured, and risking his own life recovered the episode of *Our Mutual Friend* he had been writing from the shattered carriage he had been occupying. The memory of the accident was to affect him for the rest of his life, and coincidentally he died on its fifth anniversary.

Amid the wasteland of greed and selfishness that Dickens depicts in this novel there are however pockets of hope – good people like the Jew, Riah, and others of his race, who help Jenny Wren and Lizzie Hexham from no motivation of personal gain, but from the promptings of a noble and generous heart. Dickens was at pains to show Jews in a positive light after receiving hostile reaction from the Jewish community for his exaggerated portrayal of Fagin in *Oliver Twist*.

Finally though it is money that affects the lives of every character in the book, from those who have acquired it like the members of the Veneering circle, where it engenders class snobbery; to those like Betty Higden who have never had money and fear their lack of it will inevitably lead them to the misery of the workhouse.

In Betty Higden's story, Dickens attacks the monstrous injustices of the Victorian Poor Law. His depiction of the fiercely independent Betty fighting to the bitter end against incarceration in the workhouse helped towards a revision of this Act, and as Dickens' friend and biographer John Forster observed in his review of the novel: '*Our Mutual Friend* finishes what *Oliver Twist* began.'

Dickens had supported the creation of the Hospital for Sick Children in 1858, which he called 'a drop of the life-blood of the great compassionate public heart.' The caring tenderness and sympathy shown to the children in the novel when young Johnny is taken into hospital reflected this new enterprise. Dickens dwells on the details of Johnny's hospital care, which may be a surprise for modern readers unaware perhaps that such a compassionate institution was in existence at this time.

The dismemberment of society (with a small 's') through greed and selfishness is mirrored in the imagery of physical dismemberment occurring throughout the novel. Silas Wegg, most obviously, has a missing leg (though it still exists in Mr. Venus' chamber of articulated bones), but also the description of the face of Bradley Headstone is as if separated from his body, during his obsessive hunt after Wrayburn:

'He went by them in the dark like a haggard head suspended in the air: so completely did the force of his expression cancel his figure.' (*Book 3 Chapter 10*)

The narrative style too is fractured and inconsistent, mirroring the constantly shifting society of the Victorian age, and the two opening chapters prepare the reader for the novel's stylistic variety. Chapter 1 set on the river, is dark as it creates a mood of 'sensational' realism; while in Chapter 2 at the Veneering's dinner party the tone is highly ironic satire.

Dickens was under stress when writing *Our Mutual Friend*. His tour of public readings from his works was both physically and mentally tiring, and his secret liaison with the young actress Ellen Ternan, was proving to be emotionally draining. The relationship was not progressing smoothly, and at the age of 52, Dickens' creative impulses were slowing down. Writing a novel was proving to be hard work and it took him more time and effort to plan his many-threaded plot and intricate characterisations. The central plot of a young man wrongly thought to have died by drowning assuming another persona to observe and perhaps influence the effect of his death on the people most affected by it, must have appealed to Dickens enormously. Always one to cloak his life in mystery and

enigma, the necessity of keeping his affair with Ellen a strict secret from his adoring public, led him to subterfuge, lying to all but a few close friends, and the use of false names and hidden rendezvous to sustain the relationship. Ellen, a shadowy figure, seems not to have responded to Dickens' feelings for her as he would have wished. She was, after all, only in her 20s and he was in his 50s. Maybe the romance of Bella Wilfer and Rokesmith in *Our Mutual Friend* reflects the progress, or otherwise, of Dickens' own love-affair. The successful conclusion, with its details of the developing intimacy between Bella and John, represents perhaps

a large dose of wishful thinking on the author's part. Likewise the other romantic thread of the novel where a working-class girl (Lizzie Hexham) is rescued from her poverty and background by a fine gentleman, (Wrayburn) could also be a delightful personal fantasy for Dickens:

'And oh, there are days in this life, worth life and worth death. And oh what a bright old song it is, that oh, 'tis love, 'tis love, 'tis love that makes the world go round!'

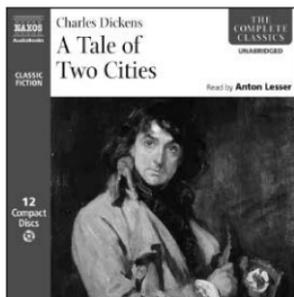
(Book 4 Chapter 4)

Notes by David Timson



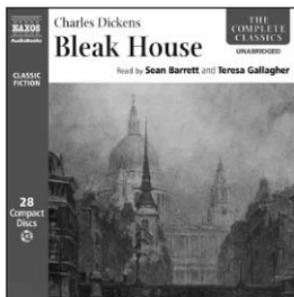
David Timson has made over 1,000 broadcasts for BBC Radio Drama. For Naxos AudioBooks he wrote *The History of the Theatre*, which won an award for most original production from the Spoken Word Publishers Association in 2001. He has also directed for Naxos AudioBooks four Shakespeare plays, including *King Richard III* (with Kenneth Branagh), which won Best Drama Award from the SWPA in 2001. In 2002 he won the Audio of the Year Award for his reading of *A Study in Scarlet*. He also reads *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes I, II, III, IV, V and VI* and *The Return of Sherlock Holmes I, II and III*.

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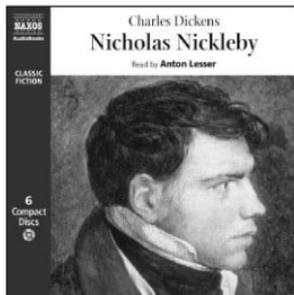
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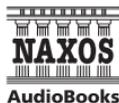
Our Mutual Friend

Read by **David Timson**

In this, his last completed novel, Dickens dissects a society crippled by materialism. Each strata is deeply affected by a greed for money, from those who eke out a meagre living in the slime and mud of the Thames to the upper classes with their gilded ornaments. John Harmon, returning to inherit his father's estate, disappears, believed drowned – but is he? Mistaken identity provides a cloak of anonymity for John to observe Bella Wilfer, whom he must marry to secure his inheritance; if he fails to make his claim Bella's guardians, Mr and Mrs Boffin, stand to inherit all. This is a story rich in disguise and intrigue, at every level, with the Thames, symbol of both life and death, weaving its way through it all.

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