



from: <http://charlesdickenspage.com>

Narrative Facade

Master Humphrey's Clock



April 4, 1840 - Dec 4, 1841

Weekly journal written entirely by Dickens. The premise of the journal was that Master Humphrey, along with friends, gathered weekly to read stories which were stored in Master Humphrey's old grandfather clock. Some original sketches brought back characters from *Pickwick*. After initial success, sales slumped and Dickens introduced *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the serialization of which took over the entire publication, sales skyrocketed, reaching 100,000 weekly. The novel begins with Master Humphrey as narrator but as the story continues he mysteriously disappears,



Published in weekly parts Apr 1840 - Feb 1841

Illustrated by [George Cattermole](#) and [Phiz](#), with a single illustration each from Samuel Williams and Daniel Maclise.

This installment novel, published in *Master Humphries Clock*, was so popular that its weekly sales rose to a hundred



thousand. It tells the story of Nelly Trent and her grandfather as they wander the English countryside, north of London, trying to evade Daniel Quilp, probably Dickens' most evil villain. Nell's grandfather has borrowed money from Quilp to support a gambling habit and has lost everything, including the curiosity shop. As the conclusion of the story neared Nell is exhausted from the travel and lack of food. Dickens was inundated with letters begging him to spare Nell's life. With the last installment arriving by ship, crowds in New York shouted from the pier "Is Little Nell Dead?"

The original for Nell is believed to be Dickens' sister-in-law, [Mary Hogarth](#), who died suddenly at age 17 in 1837 and for whom Dickens still grieved.

Principal Characters:

[Nelly Trent](#)

[Nell's Grandfather](#)

[Fred Trent](#)

[Daniel Quilp](#)

[Kit Nubbles](#)

[Dick Swiveller](#)

[The Marchioness](#)

[Sampson Brass](#)

[Sally Brass](#)

[Sophy Wackles](#)

[Mrs Jarley](#)

[Codlin and Short](#)

[The Single Gentleman](#)

reappearing briefly at the end of the novel. [Barnaby Rudge](#) was also published in *Master Humphrey's Clock*.

References in the Text



Dickens' fascination with the theatre and his firm belief that the lower classes must have their amusements lead to a love of [Punch and Judy shows](#). This familiar street entertainment finds its way into *The Old Curiosity Shop* by way of Codlin and Short, a traveling Punch show that Nell and her grandfather meet on their travels.



In describing the journey Nell and her grandfather take through the English countryside Dickens creates a dream landscape in which no place names are used. The village where Nell dies is thought to be [Tong, Shropshire](#), a place Dickens had visited. A wreath is still placed every year outside St. Bartholomew's church at the supposed grave of Little

Death-Bed of Little Nell

Dickens' instructions to George Cattermole for the illustration *The Death-Bed of Little Nell*:



The Death-Bed of Little Nell
George Cattermole

"The child lying dead in the little sleeping room, which is behind the open screen. It is winter-time, so there are no flowers; but upon her breast and pillow, and about her bed, there may be strips of holly and berries, and such free green things. Window overgrown with ivy. The little boy who had that talk with her about angels may be by the bedside, if you like it so; but I think it will be quieter and more peaceful if she is alone. I want it to express the most beautiful repose and tranquility, and to have something of a happy look, if death can... I am breaking my heart over this story, and cannot bear to finish it."

Leaving London

Dickens describes the scenery along the road Nell and her grandfather take on their way out of London.



Damp rotten houses, many to let, many yet building, many half-built and mouldering away- lodgings, where it would be hard to tell which needed pity most, those who let or those who came to take-children, scantily fed and clothed, spread over every street, and sprawling in the dust-

scolding mothers, stamping their slipshod feet with noisy threats upon the pavement-shabby fathers, hurrying with dispirited looks to the occupation which brought them 'daily bread' and little more-mangling-women, washer-women, cobblers, tailors, chandlers, driving their trades in parlours and kitchens and back room and garrets, and sometimes all of them under the same roof-brick-fields skirting gardens paled with staves of old casks, or timber pillaged from houses burnt down, and blackened and blistered by the flames-mounds of dock-weed, nettles, coarse grass and oyster-shells, heaped in rank confusion-small dissenting chapels to teach, with no lack of illustration, the miseries of Earth, and plenty of new churches, erected with a little superfluous wealth, to show the way to Heaven.

At length these streets becoming more straggling yet, dwindled and dwindled away, until there were only small garden patches bordering the road, with many a summer house innocent of paint and built of old timber or some fragments of a boat, green as the tough cabbage-stalks that grew about it, and grottoed at the seams with toad-stools and tight-sticking snails. To these succeeded pert cottages, two and two with plots of ground in front, laid out in angular beds with stiff box borders and narrow paths between, where footstep never strayed to make the gravel rough.

Then came the public-house, freshly painted in green and white, with tea-gardens and a bowling green, spurning its old neighbour with the horse-trough where the waggons stopped; then, fields; and then, some houses, one by one, of

Nell.

[1923 map showing possible routes taken by Nell and her grandfather.](#) From 'A Dickens Atlas' by Albert A. Hopkins and Newbury Frost Read.

Astley's Theatre

Kit takes his mother to Astley's theatre on the Surry side of the Thames on Westminster Bridge Road. Phillip Astley, credited as a pioneer of the modern circus, opened his theatre in 1774. His show featured a ring and displays of horsemanship.

goodly size with lawns, some even with a lodge where dwelt a porter and his wife. Then came a turnpike; then fields again with trees and hay-stacks; then, a hill, and on the top of that, the traveller might stop, and-looking back at old Saint Paul's looming through the smoke, its cross peeping above the cloud (if the day were clear), and glittering in the sun; and casting his eyes upon the Babel out of which it grew until he traced it down to the furthest outposts of the invading army of bricks and mortar whose station lay for the present nearly at his feet-might feel at last that he was clear of London.

Serializing the Novel



Charles Dickens

In his book *The English Novel* Walter Allen describes Dickens as the "great novelist who was also the great entertainer, the greatest entertainer, probably, in the history of fiction." Dickens' genius as entertainer manifest itself in his first novel [The Pickwick Papers](#). Pickwick, a loose collection of the zany adventures of [Samuel Pickwick](#) and his friends, was a departure from the traditional novel and was instantly a smash success. This success happened at a time when huge technological strides were being made in manufacturing and steam travel, helping Dickens' fame to spread worldwide.

Dickens' ability to capture the imagination of his audience, many of them new to fiction due to a rise in literacy during the industrial revolution, was due largely to his amazing power of observation, incredible wit, unforgettable characters, and a command of the English language probably second only to Shakespeare. His fiction provided a voice for the causes and frustrations of the poor and working classes helping to assure popularity across class boundaries.

Another factor contributing to Dickens meteoric rise in popularity was the way in which he and his publishers, [Chapman](#) and [Hall](#), chose to publish his books. All of Dickens major novels were published serially, in monthly (or weekly) installments. A full length novel was out of the price range of most of his readers (a novel cost 31 shillings in 1836, average worker earned 6 to 20 shillings per week) but a monthly installment, 32 pages with 2 illustrations and [advertisements](#), could be sold for a shilling.

Dickens wrote each installment with this type of publication in mind, many of the installments ended with a hook that kept the readers glued to the edge of their Victorian seats wondering what would happen next, thus ensuring the sales of the next installment. This type of arrangement worked perfectly for the workaholic Dickens, whose unbounded energy and inexhaustible supply of imagination enabled him to keep to the tight writing schedule required by serial publication for nearly 35 years, during which he missed only two deadlines: when his [sister-in-law](#) died during the writing of [The Pickwick Papers](#) and [Oliver Twist](#), and his own death in 1870 while writing [The Mystery of Edwin Drood](#).



Pickwick: Cover of the monthly numbers

Later Editions

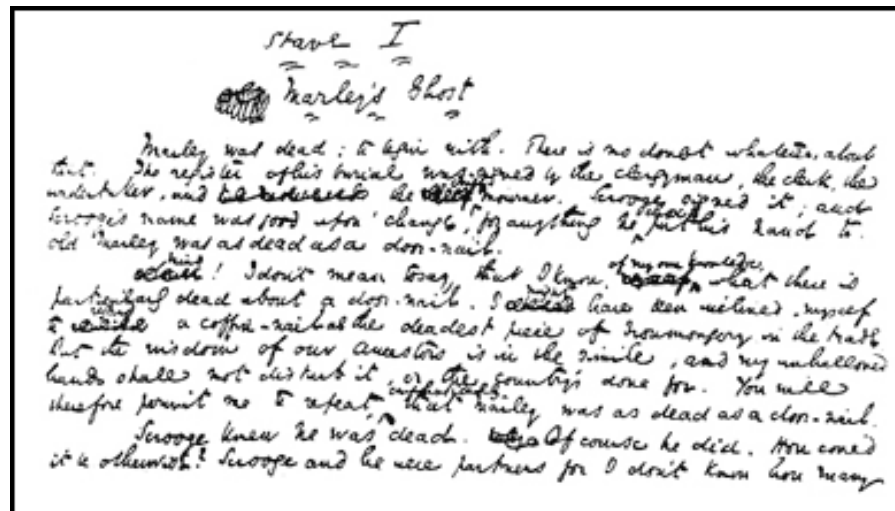
Upon completion of serialization the works were issued as complete novels in one to three volumes with original, and in some instances, additional illustrations. Starting in 1847 the older novels were reissued in what was called the Cheap Edition, these were published in weekly and monthly parts, and then as complete novels. Eventually all of Dickens' novels were reissued in the Cheap Edition. The concept of the Cheap Edition was similar to today's practice of reissuing hardback novels as more affordable paperbacks.

Other editions published during Dickens lifetime include the Library Edition: a high quality set published without illustrations in 1858/59. This set was reissued between 1861 and 1874 with illustrations and was called the Illustrated Library Edition. In 1867 the Charles Dickens Edition was released. This edition featured new prefaces, written by Dickens, who also made minor corrections to the text. Chapman and Hall produced the Peoples Edition in 1865-1867, these were inexpensive monthly installments of the novels aimed at travelers in the very popular bookstalls popping up in railway stations all over Britain.

Dickens' works were also published in America, sometimes simultaneously with the British edition and often with little or no compensation to the author or his publishers due to the lack of an international copyright law. Dickens campaigned unsuccessfully for international copyright during his [first American visit](#) in 1842. An English-American copyright law would not be enacted until 1891.

Dickens novels continue to be published today in popular series like the Oxford Illustrated Edition, which include the original illustrations, and the Penguin English Library's paperback edition.

The British Museum's online exhibition: [Aspects of the Victorian Book](#) explains how everything from mechanized printing presses, expanded railway lines, lower postage prices, and increased literacy all contributed to the publishing bonanza of 19th-century England.



All of Dickens' novels were submitted to the printer in pen-and-ink (and blobs!). The typesetter would have to carefully decipher the sometimes illegible handwriting, written in the passion of the creative moment. The first typewriters came on the market in 1874, four years after Dickens' death. This is a portion of the original manuscript for the opening stave of *A Christmas Carol*.

A Review by Edgar Allen Poe

from: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/poe/dickens.html>

THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP, AND OTHER TALES

By Charles Dickens, With Numerous Illustrations by Cattermole and Browne. Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard.

MASTER HUMPHREY'S CLOCK

By Charles Dickens. (Boz.) With Ninety-one Illustrations by George Cattermole and Hablot Browne. Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard.

WHAT WE here give [the above titles] is the duplicate title, on two separate title-pages, of an octavo volume of three hundred and sixty-two pages. Why this method of nomenclature should have been adopted is more than we can understand- although it arises, perhaps, from a certain confusion and hesitation observable in the whole structure of the book itself. Publishers have an idea, however, (and no doubt they are the best judges in such matters) that a complete work obtains a readier sale than one "to be continued;" and we see plainly that it is with the design of intimating the entireness of the volume now before us, that "The Old Curiosity Shop and other Tales," has been made not only the primary and main title, but the name of the whole publication as indicated by the back. This may be quite fair in trade, but is morally wrong not the less. The volume is only one of a series- only part of a whole; and the title has no right to insinuate otherwise. So obvious is this intention to misguide, that it has led to the absurdity of putting the inclusive, or general, title of the series, as a secondary instead of a primary one. Anybody may see that if the wish had been fairly to represent the plan and extent of the volume, something like this would have been given on a single page-

MASTER HUMPHREY'S CLOCK

By Charles Dickens. Part I. Containing The Old Curiosity Shop, and other tales, with numerous illustrations, &c. &c.

This would have been better for all parties, a good deal more honest, and a vast deal more easily understood. In fact, there is sufficient uncertainty of purpose in the book itself, without resort to mystification in the matter of title. We do not think it altogether impossible that the rumors in respect to the sanity of Mr. Dickens which were so prevalent during the publication of the first numbers of the work, had some slight- some very slight foundation in truth. By this, we mean merely to say that the mind of the author, at the time, might possibly have been struggling with some of those manifold and multiform aberrations by which the nobler order of genius is so frequently beset- but which are still so very far removed from disease.

The Old Curiosity Shop

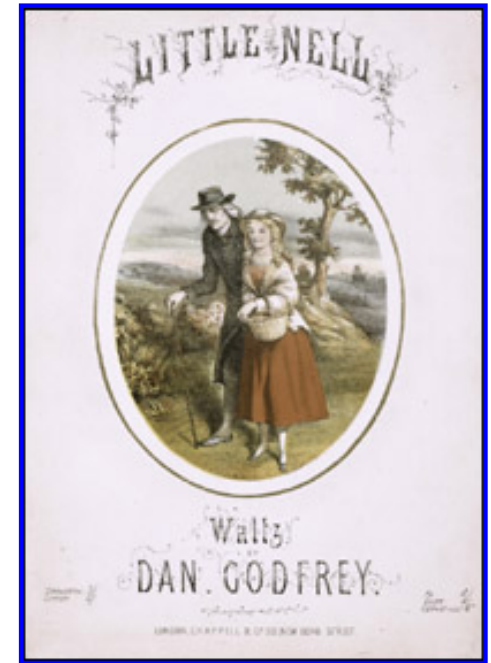
from "Best of Times: The Theatre of Charles Dickens"

<http://www.nypl.org/research/lpa/dickens/curiosity.html>

The Old Curiosity Shop has had a peculiar history. Well-received when first published in 1840-1841, it has since been reviled by those who find it overly sentimental. Little Nell has been variously described by critics as "vulgar," "heroic," "noble" and "a monster with two heads." The American actress Lotta Crabtree had great success playing the dual child roles of Little Nell and the Marchioness from 1866 to 1887 when Miss Crabtree was well past 40. She is represented in this exhibition as the Marchioness fitting Dickens's description of "a small slip-shod girl in a dirty coarse apron...." As a play, *The Old Curiosity Shop* did not successfully survive the 20th century.



In numerous productions spanning 20 years, Lotta Crabtree played the dual role of Little Nell and the Marchioness in *The Old Curiosity Shop*.



The character of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* was so beloved that Victorians trod the dance floor in her name.

Significant and Best-Selling Victorian Novels, 1837-1861

[Philip V. Allingham](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/pva/pva90.html), Contributing Editor, Victorian Web; Faculty of Education, Lakehead University (Canada) (from: <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/pva/pva90.html>)

1837	E. Bulwer Lytton	Ernest Maltravers	_____
	W. H. Ainsworth	Crichton	_____
	Charles Dickens	Oliver Twist	serialised
	W. M.Thackeray	Yellowplush Papers	serialised
	Captain Frederick Maryat	Snarleyyow; or, The Dog Fiend	serialised

1838	E. Bulwer Lytton	Alice, Leila; or, The Siege of Granada	_____
	E. Bulwer Lytton	Calderon the Courtier	_____
	Charles Dickens	Nicholas Nickleby	serialised

1839	W. H. Ainsworth	Jack Sheppard	serialised
	Captain Frederick Maryat	The Phantom Ship	serialised

1840	W. H. Ainsworth	The Tower of London	serialised
	Captain Frederick Maryat	Poor Jack	serialised
	W. M.Thackeray	Catherine	serialised
	W. M.Thackeray	A Shabby Genteel Story	serialised
	W. M.Thackeray	The Bedford Row Conspiracy	serialised

1841	E. Bulwer Lytton	Night and Morning	_____
	W. H. Ainsworth	Guy Fawkes	serialised
	W. H. Ainsworth	Old Saint Paul	serialised
	Charles Dickens	Barnaby Rudge	serialised
	Charles Dickens	The Old Curiosity Shop	serialised

	Captain Frederick Maryat	Joseph Rushmore	serialised
	Harriet Martineau	The Settlers at Home	_____
	Harriet Martineau	Feats on the Fjord	_____
	Harriet Martineau	The Crofton Boys	_____
	W. M.Thackeray	The History of Samuel Titmarsh	serialised

1842	E. Bulwer Lytton	Zanoni	_____
	W. H. Ainsworth	The Miser's Daughter	serialised

1843	W. H. Ainsworth	Windsor Castle	serialised
	Charles Dickens	A Christmas Carol	_____
	E. Bulwer Lytton	The Last of the Barons	_____
	W. M.Thackeray	Fitz-Boodle's Confessions	serialised